

L'OUTRE-FORET

THE BATTLE OF HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN

JANUARY 1945

OPERATION NORTHWIND

GERMAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE
BY 4 GERMAN DIVISIONS AND
PLANNED BY HITLER HIMSELF

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

by H. Gale McCall

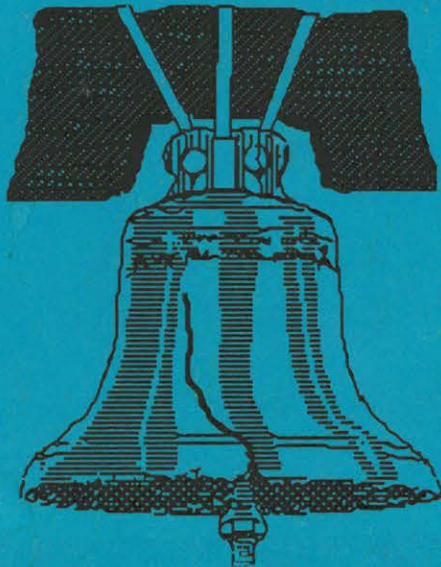
Baldwinsville, New York

for

William (Pete) Zollo (DIED 1992)

Veteran of the 14th Armored Division

A COMPANY - 48th TANK BN.



The Battle of Hatten Rittershoffen

Frontispiece: The present work, edited by the "Circle of History of Northern Alsace" constitutes one work from the series of the magazine "Outre-Forêt" and completing number 42.

This has been edited in honor of the commemorative ceremonies of June 16, 1985.

Two hundred copies were run off numbered 1 to 200 and twenty-five copies marked H.C., this total constituting the original edition.

This book carries the number 40.

Caption to title photograph: HATTEN: March 18, 1945 - In a locale finally liberated, some soldiers from Combat Command A, 14th U.S Armored Division, looking at the battlefield where so many of their men fell in January 1945.

DEDICATION: This edition is dedicated to all those who lived this hell and to their descendents.

LE CONTEXTE DE LA BATAILLE

The Context of the Battle

(Pages 4-9)

Jean-Laurent Vonau

By way of introduction to this special edition, it seemed to us opportune to return to the scene of that terrible battle of Rittershoffen and of Hatten. It has to do with a broader picture: the western front from December '44 to March '45, with, in the background, the hope, the waiting and then the drama and the martyrdom of the population of Northern Alsace. These historical events are little studied even today and they deserve to be saved from being forgotten so that future generations will remember what this apocalyptic vision was.

Those who lived and survived this hell are today fewer and fewer. It is important therefore for a collective memory, for history, to hold the recollections, to bear witness to this tragedy so little known.

Few people recognize the importance of this battle and the murderous fury which the two localities were the victims of in January 1945. It is essential that these events be finally told and analyzed.

Forty years later, may we be permitted to begin this document.

LE RAPPROCHEMENT DU FRONT-OUEST

Bringing Together the Western Front

(June - September '44)

The debarkation in the region of Arromanches June 6, 1944 provoked a second front in Europe. This was the beginning of the Western Front, waited for so much to relieve the Soviet Army upon whom rested for three years the full weight of the war in the East. However, the battle for Normandy did not end until the last days of the month of July 1944.

A second debarkation in Provence (August 15, 1944) forced the German army to withdraw from the south-west of France. In effect, the Allied Armies, going progressively up on one side of the valley of the Rhône (Lyon liberated September 3rd) and progressively on the other side in parallel from the west (Orléans liberated August 17th, Paris August 24th) caught the German soldiers in a pincher movement. The junction between the Allied troops thus cut France into two, effective September 12th at Châtillon-sur-Seine in the region of Dijon.

In the meantime, the British army had made a movement towards the north. The troops of Marshall Montgomery had therefore reached Beauvais August 30th, Brussels September 3rd and Anvers the 4th. As for the XIIth group of the U.S. Army placed under the command of General Bradley, it liberated Verdun September 1st, Mons in Belgium the 3rd, Nancy on the 10th, reaching Aix-la-Chapelle on the following day and finding itself on the evening of September 17th at the gates of Metz.

The successful break-through which came at the end of the month of July had been fully exploited, but it is necessary to examine the other evidence. The closer they approached the border of the Reich, the stronger the enemy's resistance became. Hitler had annexed in 1940 Alsace and part of Lorraine. The integration of these eastern territories gave to the population a status of being assimilated into Germany. This situation produced much suffering for the three departments concerned: The lower Rhine (Bas-Rhin), the High Rhine (Haut-Rhin), and the Moselle, notably in the forced conscription beginning in 1941 of 120,000 men from Alsace-Lorraine of which 40,000 would perish on the Eastern or Italian front.

LES ALLIES EN ALSACE

The Allies In Alsace

November-December 1944

From September 25th to October 5th 1944, the battle of the Vosges unfolded causing heavy losses especially among the French Army of Africa. The rest of the western front stabilized. The advance towards the Rhine was marking time. It was necessary to wait until November 17th for the Second Armored Division under the command of LeClerc to arrive to open a

gap in the German defense and to open up the plain of Alsace. Parts of Rauviller, these units reached La Petite-Pierre on November 21st, Saverne the 22nd and finally Strasbourg on the 23rd. (One day later than in 1918).

In a parallel direction the First French division of De Lattre reached the gap of Belfort. On November 14th it was engaged in a decisive offensive battle which led them on the 19th to the Rhine near Rosenau. On the 20th of November the cities of Belfort and Mulhouse were liberated. Thus from the evening of the 24th all resistance had ceased from Belfort to the Rhine. However there still remained to re-absorb what was called the Colmar pocket.

The progression of the 7th American Army towards the north of Alsace under the orders of General Patch was halted November 23rd on the Brumath-Schwindratzheim line. The situation then degenerated into a fierce artillery duel until December 7th, on which date the offensive was taken up again. This time it allowed the liberation of Mertzwiller and Bischwiller on the 10th and Hagenau alone on the 11th... On the 12th the Americans finally penetrated Outre-Forêt and reached Soultz-sous-Forêts. On the morning of Saturday the 16th the first units entered Wissembourg... The entire north of the province had then been reconquered and they began to concentrate the troops, to reach their reinforcements for the definitive assault: the invasion of Germany through the Palatinat.

To the south of Strasbourg, the French liberated Erstein on November 28th, then Stotzheim and Gerstheim on November 30th. On December 1st it was the turn of Boofzheim and Benfeld to know the joy of victory. But they were stalled in front of Sélestat which could not be definitively retaken until the 15th of December. Finally, at Mulhouse, the city still remained under enemy fire. However Huningue was able to be liberated the first of December, Sierentz and Thann on the 10th of December. However the first attempt to reduce the Colmar pocket ended in defeat.

LA BATAILLE DES ARDENNES

The Battle of the Ardennes

(December - January)

The morning of the 16th of December 1944 the Western Front extended from the mouth of the Meuse to Nimègue, then the Siegfried line (WEST WALL) skirted through Aix-la-Chapelle, Monschau, Echternach, and finally practically followed the layout of the Maginot line until Wissembourg - Lauterbourg. In the upper Rhine there still existed the Colmar pocket.

Hitler then decided to counter-attack, to lead a great offensive with the goal of jeopardizing the chances of an allied victory in the west. He took up again the idea of a "blitzkrieg" and choosing for it the same area as in 1940 : the Ardennes. But history does not always repeat itself. The break-through was to have taken place between Monschau and Echternach, that is to say, along a front of 140 km. The German army was assigned the objective of reaching the Meuse and to retake Anvers and its port. In this case the Allied Armies would be cut in two and then the German High Command estimated that they would be ready to negotiate a separate peace. Then this situation would have allowed Germany to engage all its forces on the Eastern Front in order to better contain the advance of the Soviet Army.

On Saturday the 16th of December, 1944 at 5:30, at the same moment that Wissembourg was liberated, the Ardenne offensive began. Twenty German divisions (of which 7 were armored), 200,000 men attacked the positions defended by only 6 American divisions of which only one was armored. The surprise was total. Thus the progression of the Germans established itself rapidly at first. Some elements of the American army were encircled at Bastogne and they were not able to disengage until the 25th of December. The battle raged and stayed indecisive until January 3-4, 1945.

Following these events, the Allied High Command reconsidered the map of the front. What had happened in the Ardennes could happen again elsewhere... and especially in Alsace. The Colmar pocket could perfectly serve as the bridge-head in order to take the French in the rear and the

7th U.S. army engaged too far ahead to the north of Alsace. As long as the front line of the Ardennes was not controlled, the danger remained very real. Also General Eisenhower decided on a withdrawal towards the Vosges. This order would deliver Alsace once more into the hands of the enemy and they feared reprisals against the civil population. The mayor of Strasbourg, Charles Frey, protested strongly against this plan. General DeGaulle also was worried and gave the order to defend Strasbourg at any cost. Leclerc was put in charge of this delicate mission.

L'OPERATION 'NORDWIND'
Operation "Northwind"
(January 1-January 27)

In order to alleviate the pressure exerted by the American counter-attack in the Ardennes, Hitler launched Operation "Northwind" on December 31st, 1944 at 23:00. Ten German divisions which included two armored divisions took the offensive, hurling themselves from the Palatinat towards the north of Alsace. Their objective: to retake Strasbourg and then establish a link between this 1st German Army and the 19th still trapped in the Colmar pocket.

In the morning of the 1st of January, 1945 the attack began in the Bitche sector in the direction of Wingen-sur-Moder which fell on the 4th. At the same time German shells exploded in Wissembourg. During the night of the 2nd to the 3rd of January the Americans lost touch and withdrew, abandoning their positions near Lauter. This withdrawal brought about the exodus of the civil population which had one objective in mind: to flee; to flee as far as possible in order not to be captured. On January 3rd the American rear guard established itself at Ingolsheim, on the 4th and 5th at Hoffen. The two German divisions supported by the 31st Panzer surged into the salient (the part of the battle line which is closest to the enemy's lines) of Biche. The development of these operations therefore constituted a threat of being surrounded to the American troops now in the triangle of Hoffen - Hatten - Drusenheim.

In effect on January 5th 1945 in the morning a battalion of the 553rd division of the "Volksgradiere" crossed the Rhine and established a bridge-head to the north of Kilkstett and took possession of Gambsheim.

On the next day the 39th German armored division continued the attack from Bienwald. Four divisions, of which two were Panzer, attempted a breakthrough near Haguenau. And this was the beginning of the Battle of Rittershoffen and of Hatten. For the Americans it meant holding their position as long as possible in order to organize their defense on the Moder and to break the offensive in front of this line. The German side hoped to meet up with their units engaged at Gamsheim and then to speed to Strasbourg.

On January 7th to the south of the city the 198th German division and the armored brigade "Feldherrnhalle" also took up the offensive using as a departure base the famous Colmar pocket. These units reached Erstein after five days of bitter fighting.

While in the Rittershoffen and Hatten sector the battle was raging, the Americans nevertheless managed to retake Wingen-sur-Moder on January 7th but they didn't know how to exploit this success. Further to the east in front of the forest of Haguenau the fighting intensified.

On January 17th Stattmatten was retaken by the Germans. They had already reoccupied it on the fifth but had lost it again on January 6th. Thus the liaison between the 39th Corps and the bridge-head at Gamsheim was established. On the 18th they entered Sessenheim. Street fighting took place until January 20th. Next Soufflenheim fell. Now the Americans, still engaged at Rittershoffen and Hatten risked being cut from behind. Still on the 20th of January 400 ~~4~~ Americans, encircled near Reipertswiller, were forced to surrender.

In the night of January 21st a German attack led by the Marbach regiment supported by tanks brought about the encircling of Kilstett and reached La Wantzenau. The Panzers were not more than 13 kilometers from the Place Kleber !...

Now the danger became very real. Also the Americans disengaged their forces from Hatten on January 23rd in order to withdraw on the Moder to Hageunau. On the same day the Germans entered Gumbrechtshoffen... There no longer remained a German salient in the

Alsace stabilized itself on January 27th from along the Moder.

LA SECONDE LIBERATION

The Second Liberation
(February - March 1945)

did the direct menace which still weighed on commander decided on the one hand to reabsorb the the other to destroy the bridge-head at Gamsheim.

Colmar was launched January 20th and brought about victory on February 2nd 1945. The reconquest of the Colmar pocket from the 3rd to the 6th (Munster freed on the Rhine was reached near Chalampé to the north of Gamsheim and Munchhouse were retaken on the 18th of February the end of the Colmar pocket. On January 30th victory at the bridge-head at Gamsheim but this area was not until the first of January.

being eliminated, the Upper-Rhine cleaned out, they were able to reassemble their forces in order to knock out the German invaders from the Outre-Forêt for a second time. Thus the Allied offensive was taken up again by articulating on two axis : on the 13th of March at Haguenau the 7th U.S. Army crossed the Moder and on March 15th at Oberhoffen the 1st French Army launched its attack. The Americans were at Surbourg on the 16th, at Soultz-sous-Forêts on the 18th and at Wissembourg on the 19th. The progress of the French along the Rhine was laborious. On the 16th they reached Schirrhoffen, on the 17th Soufflenheim, Roeschwoog, Sessenheim, on the 18th Seltz, and finally on the 19th Lauterbourg. The nightmare was over. L'Outre-Forêt held the sad privilege of having been liberated twice : in December of '44 and in March of '45.

NORD WIND OR OPERATION'
NORTH WIND.

Reunion & Commemorative
Ceremonies June 16, 1985.

COMMENT EXPLIQUER L'INTENSITY DES COMBATS DANS LE SECTEUR DE RITTERSHOFFEN ET DE HATTEN

How to explain the Intensity of the Battles in the
Sectors of Rittershoffen and Hatten

Certainly we have already underlined that reasons were not lacking on both sides for a face to face contact of great breadth and executed with much violence, much fury. On one hand, it dealt with avoiding being encircled, and on the other with the symbolic retaking of Strasbourg.

But why was the sector of Rittershoffen-Hatten chosen as the field of battle? It seems that the configuration of the terrain was the reason for the strategic interests determined by the respective staffs to engage in combat in this area.

The hills stretching to the north of Hatten in the direction of Aschbach and Buhl were judged favorable by the Germans to conceal the concentration of their troops in the hollows of the valleys and for the establishment of their artillery batteries. That allowed them to spot the American assault and to direct their fire with efficiency. The woods to the south-west of Niederroedern masked from view their armored divisions.

For the Americans their defense rested on the pillboxes of the Maginot line scattered here and there around Hatten, Oberroedern, Rittershoffen and constituting many small forts cast in fortified concrete whose crenels (firing holes) swept through a firing angle oriented precisely to the north and the north-east. Finally the forest of Haguenuau nearby stretching to the south of these localities hid their rear. Meanwhile between the forest and the villages stretched a very flat and bare terrain which constituted both an ideal terrain for maneuvering tanks and for the aiming of adversary fire. ..

Thus each camp found there great assets. From January 3rd on, it was snowing. The bad weather conditions prevented the Americans from fully exploiting their superior air position. And the two armies found themselves practically equal. Good weather did not return until the 22nd of January, that is to say, when the battle was over. Nevertheless it seems

that the Americans profited from some occasional clearings and from time to time risked aerial bombings.

Finally it is necessary to point out that the east of Rittershoffen and the village of Hatten were the epicenters of the battle by reason of their key position and the interminable street fighting which took place there, the theater of operations largely flowed over into this sector. The battle stretched over a radius of 3 to 5 kilometers : Buhl, Oberroedern, Stundwiller and Aschbach were thus to greatly suffer, Niederroedern less so.

LA TRAGEDIE DE LA POPULATION CIVILE

The Tragedy of the Civil Population

The battle took place during a particularly harsh period of the year : winter and thus the population, consisting mainly of the old, women and children, were not able to flee this hell. Able bodied men had already been forcibly drafted into the German army.

This helpless population would live its agony for two weeks crowded into cellars. Two endless weeks, without water, no electricity, often without the necessities of life, with little food, where the simple need to leave to go to the bathroom, to want to go to the barn to milk the cows or to get food was almost equal to suicide. No family was spared: to material losses: houses destroyed, barns burned, animals slaughtered, all this added to the loss of human lives. Upon leaving their shelters they found war atrocities. They then counted their own people, they listed those missing; they went to look for them. They went to the ruins of their neighbors to learn if there were still survivors and most often they discovered only charred bodied, mangled, sometimes scattered around what was once a farm before the carnage. Desolation was everywhere. The streets, the houses had disappeared beneath the accumulation of ruins. Under the debris wounded people were pulled out. The villages were strewn with dead bodies, dead soldiers from both sides, sometimes horribly mutilated... The burned out hulls of tanks were left behind in the courtyards, in the orchards, on the ruined streets... everything was mined, booby-trapped. Hatten and Rittershoffen, leveled to the ground, had become uninhabitable.

The populace was finally evacuated towards neighboring villages less ravaged such as Niederroedern. Young people, almost children, were commandeered to gather up the dead, to pile them on carts drawn by cows, to bring them to a common grave and to throw them in. One inhabitant of Asbach told us that he was compelled to undertake this task of a grave-digger even though he was only 12 years old... He didn't dare touch the rigid bodies. The old men instructed them to pile them up, he said, "like sacks of potatoes" and along with a friend his own age, they drove the team. When they arrived at the grave site, as they were not able to lift the bodies because of lack of strength and fear, they seized a pitch-fork and made the bodies topple over into the ditches dug for that purpose. For several months the boys remained traumatized.

In all locations of Outre-Forêt the definitive liberation brought joy. But Rittershoffen and Hatten remained ghost towns. The scattered population bandaged its wounds while waiting for them to heal, if so much healing is ever able to be effected. **Almost forty years later, they still have not forgotten !**

LES JOURNEES TERRIBLES DU 7 AU

21 JANVIER 1945

The Terrible Days of the 7th

Through the 21st of January

(Page 16-39

Roland Eyermann

Several years ago Mr. Roland Eyermann came to consult us in order to write a report for his last year of college. We then directed him onto this famous battle of Rittershoffen-Hatten which, until this point in time, had not been the object of much research and Mr. Eyermann took the task to heart. He visited about ten families whose members were survivors of those infernal days. He recorded their statements, he blended them with others, and organized them so well that the tapes correspond to several hours of listening, truly living archives! He wrote to the Historical Service of the American Army in Washington which sent him photocopies of journalists' reports. He also consulted German archives on this subject (the Bundearchiv in Koblenz and the Militararchiv in Freiburg). He worked together with the Historical Committee of the Second World War, and even succeeded in making contact with 5 former American soldiers of the 14th U.S. Armored Division engaged in the battle.

All of these efforts allowed him to assemble an important document which constitutes the framework of his memory, and we were anxious to publish large extracts of it. This article therefore presents the day to day military operations, without neglecting the suffering endured by the civil population. It does not pretend to be a complete recital of the events but to be an observation on the research undertaken and which Mr. Eyermann wants to continue by seeking out new sources.

LE REPLI AMERICAIN DU 1er AU 8 JANVIER 1945:
The American Withdrawal from the 1st to the 8th of January

The Raessler and the Bienwald (from the name of the forest where it was regrouped) groups were found along the border between Alsace and the Palatinat. For the WEST Army Corps (Von Rundstedt) and for the Heeresgruppe G (G. Blastowitz), it was necessary to pierce the Wissembourg sector, to push through Soultz-sous-Forêts and Hatten, in order to swoop down on Haguenau, then Saverne. The only possible gap was in this sector. Also, to the left of the Raessler group the 245th Volks-Grenadier-Division was deployed in the direction of Wissembourg. The Americans did not underestimate this offensive and immediately on January 2nd the order was given to the 79th U.S.I.D. ^{U.S. INFANTRY DIVISION} to withdraw during the night of the 2nd to the 3rd to the fortified positions on the Maginot line. This withdrawal was immediately discovered by the Germans, which led the Oberkommando West to order the Heeresg. G to bring the 245th and the Raessler division forward. On the 4th of January the front stretched beyond Wissembourg. At Hatten people saw troops and material pass.. but towards the rear. The Americans were surging back towards Haguenau and the forest. "They did not understand !" they said. "They are retreating! "But no, you will see, we are staying right here." A few people left Hatten, but they were not many!

At Military Stagg headquarters there was concern: Blastowitz estimated that his forces were too weak to take up the battle at Haguenau. They told him that the 7th Fallschirm-Jager-Division would soon be there, with its division and that of Raessler, the 245th as well as that of the 21st Panzer-Division and the 25th Panzer-Grenadier Division (put at his disposition from the 2nd of January), and he would be able to make a strong attack all the more so because General Staedke, head of the Generalstab Obkdo. West, thought that the Americans had insufficient troops at Haguenau!

Finally the 21st Panzer Division arrived on the 5th at 16:00 hours in the region of Wissembourg. It was enroute to Soultz-sous-Forêts. On the 5th of January the front was situated ahead of Rott-Oberhoffen-Riedseltz-Oberseebach-Siegen-Oberlauterbach-Wintzenbac

and Mothern. This front was entrusted to the XXXIX Panzer Corps (which was nothing other than the troops already mentioned: 245th DI - The Raessler group - the Bienwald Group 21st and 25th Panzer-grenadier-Division). Yet the 25th Panzer Division would be engaged according to the development of the situation.

(In the Military Archives of Freiburg all communiques are lacking as well as all documents of schedules from the 6th to the 15th of January of the Obkdo Heeresgruppe G. For the continuation, I was thus obliged to consult the communiqués and schedules of the Obkdo West - which has very few useful items - such as the Journal of Obkdo G. of January 1 - 2nd 1945.)

On January 6th the 245th attacked the Cleebourg-Ingolsheim front where the Americans had a first line of defense. Cleebourg fell in the afternoon, but Ingolsheim resisted. They had to call up the 21st Panzer Unit which did not have any luck. That is why we read in the German communiqué: "the initial weak resistance of the enemy hardened right up to the evening in front of the Maginot Line". At 17:30 hours ^{JAN 6th} the 25th Panzer-Grenadier-Division arrived in the Wissembourg sector.

In the morning of the 7th the sky was overcast and it was snowing ! The troops of the 245th, the 21st Panzer and the Raessler group reached the Maginot Line opposite Ashbach-Stundwiller and Buhl.

The 7th U.S. Army had a lot to do and it was necessary to prepare as quickly as possible. In fact, in addition to the thrust exerted by the XXXIX Panzer Korps to the north of the lower Rhine, the XIVth SS Army crossed the Rhine on January 5th about 10:30 A.M. and this near Seltz and Drusenheim-Gambsheim. They established a bridge-head, which, the Raessler Group, which was established along the Rhine, would certainly try to join up with. The Americans, conscious of the strategic importance of the Rhine plain and of the zone situated to the north of the forest of Haguenau, were in the middle of establishing a second strong position on the Moder. In order to succeed in this task it was necessary to hold the north. Heavy artillery was brought in, troops were prepared because a confrontation was unavoidable.

For the Germans the importance of this zone was enormous : it was the ideal point of departure for leading an attack towards Haguenau-Strasbourg and to repulse the Allied forces beyond the Vosges. They had decided to send a supplemental artillery from the XXXIX Panzer Korps : the Heeres Artillery Abteilung :456 - 457- 1151- and 1152. It was necessary to pack up and leave and the 21st Panzer Unit had to attack and the 25th was to prepare itself to move. In the meantime the military staff that was installed in Hatten withdrew.

Let us look at an anecdote at this point: At the home of the Eisele family, whose father was in the Volkssturm, a young American soldier would come often ; one day at the beginning of January, he said to Mrs. Eisele that if the military staff withdrew he would come to find them. And on that night someone knocked at the Eisele's door and they didn't open it ! We will see what the consequences of this would be on all of the members of the family.

When the 21st launched its first attack on the 7th a little before midnight, on the Aschbach-Hoffen line, it would run into strong resistance from the U.S. infantry and artillery and would be hindered by mines, because the 70th Infantry Division did not lie idle : The 222nd, 313th and the 242nd Infantry Regiments had prepared the terrain, the outposts, the bunkers and the fortifications of the Maginot Line, the road axis and the dominant positions were occupied and well prepared. The axis of passing and the favorable terrain for passage had been mined. The artillery was in position ; the 14th U.S. Armored Division was there, but not yet engaged.

On January 8th it started to snow. The 21st Panzer succeeded in reaching north of Oberroedern, but was not able to force the situation. They ordered the 25th Panzer Gr. Div. to move in the night of the 8-9th into the region of Hatten (without doubt to the north of Niederroeden). The 313th Rgt. I. settled in Hatten : in the fortifications of the Maginot Line , as well as in diverse points of the village.

For the people of Hatten the surprise of the preceding days turned slowly into fear : On Sunday morning as they were coming out of Mass some American soldiers called to some young men and two of them followed them. They gave them a gun and left them at a barrier : when they heard the whistling of one or several grenades they threw everything

down and ran back to their houses. The barrier had been prepared several days earlier and no one was able to enter or leave Hatten without a special permit. They could hear more and more distinctly shooting in the Oberroedern region. On the evening of the 8th several people saw some armed men wearing sheets: they were the German soldiers dressed in outfits white with snow. The first Germans had thus infiltrated Hatten, coming from the north. The first shots broke out in the night of the 8th. Several artillery shells fell : One house burned, torched by one of the shells. The fire would be quickly extinguished.

PUIS L'ENFER SE DECHAINE....LE 8 JANVIER

Then Hell Broke Lose...January 8th

The night was disturbed : gun shots, shells, various movements. In the north-east of Hatten near the Buhl road, a family was awoken by unusual noises; the mother of the family (the father was at Volkssturm) went to the window and when she opened it she heard guns firing : some American soldiers were in position in front of their house, ready to fire. The whole family went down into the cellar not even taking the time to get dressed (they would dress in the cellar): Throughout this whole section of the village it would be almost the identical scene : people noticing the American soldiers ready to shoot and the people went down to their cellars, if they had one, and if not they would entrench themselves in a room. They still didn't know if there would be a battle here : war is not waged in a village where there were numerous civilians : women, children and old people.

However, the fighting increased in intensity. The 21st and the 25th Panzer troops attacked the Stundwiller Zone. In Hatten isolated snipers were at the foot of the foundations and the artillery was not sparing in sending out thousands of shells of all calibers.

In the morning two battalions of the 21st Panzer Unit rushed towards Hatten supported by 10 tanks, but the 315th and the 242nd U.S. Infantry Regiment after a momentary recoil took up again their initial positions about 10:00. In the meantime a fire broke out in Hatten, at the

top of the Coopé : the people from the western part of the village, where the Americans were to be found, were alerted and they went to fight the fire. A witness remembers the scene:

" We arrived at the scene and began throwing buckets of water on sections that were threatening to catch fire. It was very difficult because the water was frozen and we had to go into houses to get water. What surprised me the most was that no one from the lower end of the village was there. Three American soldiers gave me a hand. From time to time I could hear whistling noises, but I didn't pay too much attention to it. Once one of the soldiers collapsed because of the smoke. But when I saw German soldiers who were prisoners pass by, I understood and I returned to my house as quickly as possible. I made everyone go down into the cellar of our house which was situated near the Soultz road. A little while later several U.S. tanks were placed behind my house. Our cellar served as a shelter to numerous American soldiers".

In the middle of Hatten the American troops reassembled their forces because towards 13:00 hours a new German offensive succeeded in encircling the village on three sides : north, south and east. These German troops poured towards Hatten, then split into three groups : the first went towards the north-west point, the second towards the center and the third going around Hatten by the south reached the south-east of Rittershoffen. The first confrontation between the Germans and the Americans at Hatten had just taken place : The Germans wanted to force a passage, but the Americans did not want to and could not afford to lose Hatten at any price. The fighting was furious and in the streets the first German tanks were seen blown up on American mines placed opposite the house of Dr. Martin near the church. The Americans fired on anything that moved, with cannons and anti-tank guns placed along the side of the house. One German tank was hit, burned ; its tank crew escaped but one after another fell to the guns that were firing, even to anti-tank machine-guns. One U.S. group installed themselves in the Baeren, broke down a wall the height of a man, placed a table against this opening ; from this table a 50 machine gun fired continuously on any enemy unit that appeared. One German soldier whose group had been taken apart by a nest of machine-guns took refuge behind the right column of the entrance to the church. The man using the U.S. 50 machine gun would have no respite until that man was dead ! It took more than 30 minutes of uninterrupted firing.

The German artillery who had prepared this spearhead attack in three groups ceased firing but immediately after, the American artillery sent thousands of shells.

Many houses began to burn and starting the 9th of January the occupants of these houses sought refuge in other cellars. In the school, situated not far from the church, the cellar began to fill up : soon more than 100 refugees could be counted. At the beginning, there was enough food for everyone because there were conserves, smoked meat potatoes, vegetables, fruit, cider and pear cider.

9 JANVIER : PERCEE DE LA LIGNE MAGINOT

January 9th The Piercing of the Maginot Line

January 9th cost the life of the first civilian from Hatten : Father Wilhelm was hit by a bullet near the tobacconist shop when he was trying to reach his people. He died in the evening.

Towards 15:00 hours elements of the ~~42~~^{DIVISION}nd U.S. Infantry mounted an attack after a murderous shooting barrage. The German troops fell back, but succeeded in holding onto the eastern part of the village where they received continual reinforcements both in men and munitions. It was this day that the 5th battalion of the 25th Panzer Unit received several flame-thrower tanks.

In the evening of the 9th it could be said that the Germans had succeeded in piercing the Maginot Line and seizing the east of Hatten. The night brought no respite from fighting in Hatten because the two antagonists decided that they would gain territory and not yield any.

As for the inhabitants of Hatten, hiding out in cellars, theirs was scarcely an enviable position: there was no possibility of fleeing (anything that moved was shot) and they made themselves as comfortable as was possible. The most courageous went anyway to get some items of clothing and others even went to feed the cattle and to milk the cows. This milk would be very useful for the children. In order to sleep they lay down (if

, on the ground or on rough planks because
esses. Furthermore soldiers came into the
ver they could find. They did not hesitate to
their places, to smoke and to talk. Among
wounded and the dying. At the point of
s it was not rare to hear a wounded man
could be done because certain death awaited
help of the wounded man ; so people plugged
hear.

ITALION US ENCERCLE DANS HATTEN

10th: A U.S. Battalion is Surrounded in Hatten

January, despite the freezing weather, the fighting
rugal : the Germans threw themselves into a
goal was to consolidate their bridge-head by
eliminating the ... of the Maginot Line. They managed to take the
two fortifications of Hatten south and Hatten north. Using to the fullest this
success they continued the directives of the evening before: to encircle
Hatten and to make a rush towards Rittershoffen. In fact they managed to
block the 1st battalion of the 315th regiment of the U.S. Infantry in Hatten,
but they were not able to eliminate them! As soon as their encircling
movement was initiated, the Americans went to relieve the 2nd battalion
of the 315th U.S. Infantry Regiment of Rittershoffen, joining it to a group of
the 14th U.S. Armored Division and to have them advance on Hatten, in
order to attempt to pierce the German stranglehold. Several assaults were
undertaken, but the losses were very heavy and the results were small.

The troops of the XXXIX Panzer Korps would receive artillery
reinforcements and the 7th Fallschirmjäger Division would proceed from
the north-west of Niederroedern. Another movement was begun, that was
the 10th S.S. Panzer Division which would set out in route on Bischwiller,
via Seltz.

Concerning the tactical operations, we can conclude that the 10th of
January was beneficial to the Germans because they succeeded in isolating
a U.S. battalion in Hatten which was practically encircled ; The Americans

vainly tried to pierce this encirclement, but the resistance of the 21st and the 25th Panzer Divisions as well as the artillery fire and mortars were so strong that Hatten remained in German hands.

In the village the fighting was murderous, each house near the dividing line was the object of concentrated arms fire of all sorts, mortars, anti-tank guns, bazooka fire, machine guns etc... It was a deluge of firing which swept over the American positions and of course, on the people!

A group of people, among them Madame Rose Kremser, with her daughter under her arm, went to seek refuge at her neighbor's house. They had scarcely arrived when a shell exploded at the entrance to the house ! They had to find another shelter; the wounded (only lightly wounded) went with the others. Finally, a house with a cellar; they would be a little squeezed in : 15 people in a small cellar!

An anti-tank cannon received a direct hit and the wounded and dying were transported into a house. The American officer went to look for the grand-mother of the house and to ask her to pray for the dead and the dying ! Ten meters from there an explosion made the walls shake : an American tank was hit and burned ; shots broke out and 20 meters away a German soldier fell, still holding his Panzer-faust.

In the cellar they chanced a glance in the street : scarcely had the air-vent shutter opened when a burst of automatic arms strafed it. The situation was such that in one house the people couldn't take any more : driven mad they left their cellar and they were killed a few steps from their house : shells? grenade? It was not known. The incessant firing from all sorts of weapons , the shells, the mortars and grenades never stopped; often a voice would speak up in the cellar : "*When are they going to stop? My God, when?*" The only answer to these anxious voices was the roar of the shells, the buzzing and the dull shock of the bullets smashing into the walls.

In another cellar, a woman who was visibly at the end of her nerves said to her frightened audience " these &!@& Americans should stay in America to do their filth." In this cellar there was a single American, but like a great number of them, he understood and spoke German; he answered: "Do you think that we are happy to come to die for your dirty border? And if it doesn't please you, you only have to go upstairs." He got

up and left. He was then wounded in the hand from a burst of a shell. This brave woman did not dare say anything else. There were nearly thirty people present.

In the eastern sector of the village which was controlled by the Germans, the first civilians were discovered. Often it was at the last minute, just before throwing a grenade and it was only then that they asked who was there. However very few people were able to leave Hatten.

To satisfy their bodily needs people would profit from a calm, often deceptive moment, for more than one person was either wounded or received a concussion from shells while out of the cellars.

In the evening of the 10th the German artillery concentrated its fire power on the north-east and the north-west section of Hatten. How many dead have there been so far? No one knows. Many Americans, of course, but also Germans and civilians. It was atrocious for there was no aid or very little. The American soldiers had medical stations but they were not sufficient. Also the wounded often had to wait more than a day for proper medical attention. Another atrocity : a stable with more than 400 sheep began to burn; several volunteers went there and freed the sheep, however at least ten were burned alive, without a cry, without moving. The shepherd Hans (from Wurtemberg) was last seen on that evening : No one knew what had become of him!

On the night of the 10th to the morning of the 11th there was a light calm put to use by everyone : Germans, Americans and civilians. Soldiers in the two camps took in fresh supplies, restocked themselves and consolidated their forces; the civilians themselves began to reorganize food, water, medical supplies, bedding. This was only the second or third night that they spent in the cellars, but in the daytime they were there too.

11 JANVIER; LES BLINDES ALLEMANDS ENCERCLENT RITTERSHOFFEN

January 11th, The Armored Cars Surround
Rittershoffen

On January 11th the day broke foggy. Something was going to happen because the German artillery, reinforced since the evening before by the Heeresartillerie-Gruppe, an artillery regiment and a Sturm-Geschütz Brigade, indulged to their heart's content in concentrating their fire on the northern part of Hatten; then it was the attack, one in front of Hatten and Hatten and one heading more towards Rittershoffen where they infiltrated after having taken the North Bunker. Rittershoffen became a second Hatten: the battle took place right on top of the inhabitants burrowed in their cellars. The 3rd battalion of the 315th regiment had to fight hard to contain the German push coming from the north. Parallel to the push, the Germans attacked Hatten from the north and from the south; they succeeded in isolating the 2nd battalion of the 315th U.S. Regiment which had been coming to bring assistance to the 1st battalion isolated in Hatten the on the previous evening. Fighting with unheard of violence broke out in the south-west of Hatten. In view of the unfavorable turn of events the Americans had the Combat Command A of the 14th U.S. Armored Division called in. The Combat Command A left Kuhlendorf and attacked Rittershoffen two-thirds occupied by the German troops of the 21st Panzers. The attack came to a halt 400 meters from Rittershoffen and the German armored division encircled the village. At Hatten the offensive led by parts of the 25th Panzer Division was comprised of 2 infantry battalions and about 15 tanks. The battle raged all day and the Germans would fire some 100 rounds of 88 (flak=Flieger Abwehr Kanone) on the steeple of the church where they believed that some handpicked sharpshooters were posted (they were some , but not only there!). In order to take a house guns, tommy guns, mortars, machine guns, anti-tank guns were used and if something still moved, then artillery was brought in ; when a house was seized it was not for long: the adversary refused to allow the taking of even a small barn, they would counter-attack with almost the same means. It was a real nightmare : to seize a house under a deluge of firearms, to lose one's friends, and all that, only to hold onto the house for a few hours... At

the next counter-attack there would again be as many dead and wounded, then they would withdraw in order to prepare for a counter-counter-offensive and so on. For the meantime they could not even budge, standing close to a wall praying to God that the next round would fall on his buddy, not on himself! Between two offensives they would round up something to eat, drink whatever was available and try to close their eyes, plug up their ears and sleep a little. But it was impossible for they would have to start out all over again, the guns thundering anew, kill as many as possible in order to be able to breath just a little bit...

In the cellars prayers were continued because from hour to hour the fear increased ; in one cellar a shell crossing the floor of the ground floor exploded in a corner; there there had been a wine barrel with an American soldier resting on it : there was nothing left ! Four other American soldiers were wounded, but also two old women, a child and an old man. They looked for some linen that might be still clean and they made bandages. However despite this the cellar was still usable, nothing burned: they could still stay there! There was no need to leave and try to find another shelter, which was becoming very rare.

During the night the battle was able to continue to rage, because the fires from about ten houses were lighting up the battlefield.

12 JANVIER : ATTAQUES ET CONTRE-ATTAQUES DE BLINDES

January 12th: Armored Divisions Attack and Counter-Attack

The 12th of January would bring important modifications in the structure of the German troops: the XXXIX Panzer Korps (21 Pz. Div. + 25th Pz. Gre. Div. + Gruppe Roessler = Gruppe Bienwald + Artillery Regiment zur besonderen Verwendung no. 621) passed to the command of General Kommando LXXXIX Army Corps. Furthermore they added the Abteilung Artillery 628 (MORSER) and 992 (Schwere Feldhaubitze). However the XXXIX Panzer Corps had to yield the 10th SS Panzer Division as well as the 7th Fs. Jg. Div. the Sturm Geschütz Brigade 394 and the Sturm Artillery Brigade 667 to the Heeresgruppe Oberrhein. The LXXXIX A.K. could still use the 7th Fs. Jg. Div. but must give them back if the order came to do so. The Obkdo West sent a Fohrerbefehl which ordered the 7th Fs. Jg. D. and the artillery brigades mentioned above, they were to attack by Roeschwoog towards Drusenheim in order to join with the 553rd V.G.D.

Friday the 12th the German troops continued their attacks on Hatten and Rittershoffen. They had, as we will see further on, to contain and repulse the violent efforts of the Americans but they would remain for the most part the masters of the terrain that they had acquired the evening before. At the end of this day the Germans made an accounting: they had 591 U.S. prisoners, 23 destroyed U.S. tanks, destroyed or seized 10 Pak, 15 mortars. As for their own losses, nothing was announced!

The Americans, conscious of the effort endured by the 79th U.S. Infantry Division whose two battalions were virtually surrounded in Hatten and Rittershoffen, had the units of the 14th Armored Division stationed in the Soultz-Hohwiller-Kuhlendorf intervene.

The Combat Command A pushed its attack on the north, the west and the south of Rittershoffen and towards noon, the entire north of Rittershoffen was relieved of the 21st Panzer troops except the E horn where the Germans strongly occupied the cemetery and the church. In view of this the C.C.B. received the order to attack around 11:15; the tanks and the troops were assembled near the road which leads from Rittershoffen to Leiterswiller (about 1.5 kilometers to the north of Rittershoffen) and would launch their attack on a line parallel to Seltzbach, in a direction north-west, north and north-east of Hatten; This attack meant to relieve the encircled troops at Hatten was very quickly broken up, because the German artillery, posted on the heights of Buhl and further to the rear, concentrated its fire on this movement and light arms and automatic weapons, some elements of the 25th Panzer recently reinforced by the 20th regiment of the 7th Fs. Jg. Division got the better of the American Infantry troops. The Germans had posted some C-8 Flak guns and several American tanks were destroyed in this attack. A counter offensive of the armored sections of the 21st and the 25th Panzer, repulsed and even prevented the C.C.B. from deploying its men in order to carry out the attack.

Meanwhile in Hatten itself in the southwest horn fighting was going on for houses between elements of the 25th Panzer and the 1st and 2nd battalion of the 315th U.S. Regimental Infantry. This fighting started up the evening before and would continue for several days still with all means possible and usable.

The civilians in their cellars waited in desperation for a chance to leave; this opportunity would only be possible at night, because in full daylight no one could move. Tanks lying in wait positioned in a courtyard or in the recess of an alley would not hesitate on firing its cannons on a person (military or civilian) who might cross its range. A German vehicle carrying the emblems of ambulances would be fired upon by American tanks because the distrust was so great that they didn't trust anything; and as an American soldier said to someone from Hatten in bad German: "*Schiessen, dann Fragen*" sic. ("*shoot, then ask*"). In order to try to flee from this hell it was necessary to wait until night when the artillery and the fighting had calmed down. In some of the cellars people no longer had any water and a butcher went up into his store to salvage water frozen in the tub for cooking sausage : everyone had a piece of ice to suck on! At night the soldiers sometimes came to rest in the cellars and the civilians had to make room for them, and if the children cried, they asked the mothers to take their children somewhere else, upstairs, or outside ! Then they would do no matter what : one mother had a package of starch in her lap and her son would play with it : it was cool and it kept him quiet. Others gave their children anything they might have for them to play with and to remain quiet. But very often the children were cold or hungry or couldn't bear sitting or lying down for hours. Certain people stayed for days without being able to really stretch out. Also when the shells were falling nearby, the grenades exploding, one can understand why several lost their heads and escaped from the cellars trying to flee anywhere.

January 12th saw the entry in force of the U.S. armored Troops against Rittershoffen and then Hatten; but they did not manage to break open the encirclement of Hatten, because the German Troops had received major reinforcements both in troops and artillery. However the Americans did succeed in cleaning up 3/4 of Rittershoffen. Bloody combat took place in Hatten where the population was living its third day of terror, suffering and despair.

13 JANVIER : LES AMERICAINS RESAISSENT

January 13th: The Americans Recapture

January 13th the ground was covered with a deep snow cover and both Hatten and Rittershoffen were enveloped in a thick blanket of fog

which lifted in the morning. Fighting had not stopped during the night and from the early glimmer of day the U.S. troops (CGA and the 3rd battalion reinforced with the 315th Regiment) took up the attack again at Rittershoffen: The fighting was very bitter and there were heavy losses on both sides. They bombed the entrenchments of the Germans who responded to artillery fire from Buhl with anti-tank fire and anti-air as well as flame-throwing tanks (4 of these tanks would be destroyed either by anti-tank fire, mines or bazookas).

At the same time the CCB, after having reorganized its forces, threw themselves three times at Hatten by the north trying to spread out towards the north. Their efforts were in vain because the artillery of Buhl inflicted heavy losses and so they had to withdraw.

A third troop : the CCR threw itself against the West of Hatten and in relentless combat succeeded in piercing and establishing a liaison with the surrounded troops in Hatten West. The Germans, having been almost completely driven back at Rittershoffen and not being able to prevent the entry of the CCR in the West of Hatten, would throw themselves into violent counter-attacks in Hatten. This would be a real deluge of steel and fire. The fighting would go from house to house and the dead would be numerous on this day.

In the morning, about 10:00, a witness and his father had gone to milk his cows (in order to have something to nourish the children and the old people) and they tried to feed some of the animals. For the moment the fighting was not too heavy in this section W for the moment. Suddenly a deafening noise arose and all the outbuildings shook; the daughter of this witness ran to him, her face trickling with a greenish-yellow liquid, and yelled : "Father, come quickly, come quickly!" An artillery shell or mortar fire had fallen in the cellar : 4 U.S. soldiers who were resting on a barrel were dead, his wife received shrapnel in the back, his mother was lying on the ground groaning, she received a shot that went through her arm and split it on three sides. They transported the grand-mother into a room on the ground floor where a German soldier was already lying (a medic) and an American soldier. The German medic, hit by a bullet or shrapnel near the spinal column was lucid and was informed of the condition of the old woman. It was less serious than it appeared, but it needed first aid. She would get it because in the evening an American officer looked for all three

of them in order to evacuate them in the armored vehicle to Betschdorf. The little girl who had gone to alert her father was also taken because she had shrapnel in her head. (She had to go more than 6 months without washing her hair, one month without moving. She still retained traces of this wound because the broken bone was never replaced.)

In the middle of the village, in another house, a shell had started a fire; everyone had to flee and find refuge in the Post Office cellar. There were now 40 people in this cellar.

Near the Buhl road a locksmith's shop caught fire. The wife of the proprietor with the help of two men (who had hidden themselves away at the time of the incorporation of the Volkssturm), tried to put it out but the water was frozen ; after about an hour the fire was under control. It would start up again the following day. While this woman was trying to fight the fire she came under fire, by a German soldier (however she was not hit).

At Hatten there was a nurse by the name of Keller. This woman, whom I have not yet been able to interview, devoted herself with great sacrifice to the citizens. She went from house to house holding a white flag despite the gunfire, the shells and the grenades. She did not shrink from any danger and attempted to help the many wounded both civilians and military.

By the finish of the 13th of January the Americans, despite heavy losses, succeeded in cutting off some elements of the 21st Panzer Unit and the 20th Regiment of the 7th Fs. Jg. Division in Rittershoffen, they entered the west of Hatten to bring help to the 1st and the 2nd battalion of the 315th Regiment L. The Germans had, in the meantime, started a withdrawal of their tanks and infantry towards the north-east of Hatten. . Without doubt it was a temporary withdrawal and the next day after a fast reorganization the 25th Panzer and the 20th Regiment Fs. Jg. would continue their efforts against Hatten and Rittershoffen. The night was relatively calm because both groups needed a second breath.

14 JANVIER: QUELQUES CIVILS PEUVENT QUITTER L'ENFER

January 14th: Some Civilians Are Able To Leave This Hell

On January 14th the Germans effectively counter-attacked during the course of the night and succeeded in regaining part of the terrain taken the night before by the CCR. However the American troops managed to cut off the road from Hatten to Rittershoffen, which would lead to some very harsh battles, because the Germans would try by using all means to stem the advance of the CCR troops and the 3rd battalion which was reinforced, the 315th U.S. Infantry Regiment supported by the CCA. Bitter fighting took place, but neither of the two forces present was able to establish a lasting superiority. As soon as one side obtained a local superiority, an enemy counter-attack would snatch it away and so on. This would be a continual movement of advancing, withdrawing, advancing, withdrawing. On this day the artillery was clearly less virulent because the designated targets were often less than 10 meters from their own troops. As the weather was clear enough but very cold, the air force entered into the action as it had in several preceding days. (No official source on air operations was able to be consulted, so I could only find this on eye witnesses.

The German military staff soon realized the intention of the Americans to hold at any price, even to breaking through the Hatten Rittershoffen sector, thus they gave the command to prepare for a major combat position situated on a line passing through Rott - Steinseltz - Riedseltz - Oberseebach - Niederroedern - Kesseldorf (more towards the east, towards the Rhine, it was the sector of the 553rd and the Hoene group which had taken possession of Seltz-Neuhausel and Fort-Louis).

In the village of Hatten a group of S.S. entered into the cellar of the school and asked the people to leave during a momentary calm (or perhaps it was the occasion of the cease-fire of one hour, which many witnesses have spoken to me about, but which I could find no official trace). More than 100 people left this cellar and some German soldiers carried out the helpless ones. These people climbed into trucks and they were transported towards Niederroedern where the people welcomed them. Just before the loading of the trucks, a plane (German or American?) passed and made a bombing run.

In another house on the Buhl road the people fled on the advice of Mademoiselle Keller; on an armored car they piled up the few objects that they still possessed (especially clothes) and they headed for Niederroedern. In passing, a horrible spectacle met their eyes : rigid bodies were piled up near the fortifications of Hatten north and south and in the ditches lay the dead soldiers, hit by shell bursts or mortars. A little before the exit to the village a dead woman was still holding in her arms her daughter, dead also. The people who were fleeing did not have time to feel compassion for the fate of the dead, because everyone felt that death for them was just postponed and only rapid flight could save them from certain death, such as they were seeing under their very eyes. They remembered hearing people and soldiers buried in cellars shouting, groaning and then quiet... Also they would find several cellars covered by the debris of the house where there had been numerous civilians and soldiers from both armies burned alive.

In the middle of the village, in a cellar, about 15 people were huddled waiting. In the back, silent and trying to make themselves as small as possible, two or three American soldiers were burrowing. Suddenly the door opened with a loud noise and the children cried out. The cry of the child halted the hand which was holding a grenade. A helmeted head appeared, a voice asked if any Americans were to be found in the cellar: they were the Germans. The father of the eye-witness replied no. After this the 15 people decided to flee, no matter where, but anything rather than to remain there! This group would be lucky: nothing but minor wounds. However they divided into two : One would flee Hatten and the other would have to stay. The luckiest of the two groups went along the train tracks to the south of Hatten, they ran along this line and they reached Rittershoffen where they were served hot coffee in a cellar. The other group was not able to leave Hatten. Those who reached Rittershoffen would go towards Betschdorf : for them the nightmare was almost over. But there were others...

In another cellar the Eisele family heard 18:00 hours ring. This last ringing of the carillon mixed in with another, more deadly, because it was a shell that was a direct hit on a house that caught fire. The occupants hastened to leave the cellar because the fire was spreading very fast. In the courtyard Mme. Eisele counted her family but could not find the

youngest. The oldest who was 12 years old heard his brother crying out in the cellar and rushed to look for him. They crossed through the flames and the debris without being hurt. Everyone would take refuge in a barn which was almost immediately hit by another shell : the grand-father was killed immediately and the youngest child that he was holding in his arms had his foot severed and the other gashed. The mother was wounded in the back, the daughter received wounds to the head and the feet, only the oldest was unhurt as well as the grand-mother apparently. The latter would leave to look for help but she didn't return. That was when the oldest, showing a great deal of self-control, sought out a small car and got everyone into it. He drove towards the Steck house where a nurse was. Alas, no hope of medical treatment. The wounded were all huddled up by the dozens waiting for treatment which would never come. They turned back and went towards one of the fortifications of Hatten where they tried to give them first aid. Since bandages and other first aid supplies were lacking, the nurse took the relatively clean clothing belonging to the little girl and used it as bandages. A little while later the family found the grand-mother wounded also. A German truck brought the wounded and the oldest child to Landau where there were already a good dozen wounded people of Hatten. The youngest would undergo an amputation of a foot but the other foot was saved. This family would still have to undergo more hardships during the bombing of Landau the 17-18th of March 1945 and especially in March and April when they would take refuge in a German village of the Palatinat (starving) and when the allies occupied this area.

In another house a group of German soldiers called to the owner in order to show him something : the owner joined them and would be used as a shield to check whether there were any Americans in a neighboring house. The poor man was killed by a U.S. bullet full in the forehead. After that a soldier came back to the barn (where the family had taken refuge) and called to the daughter who, with no mistrust, joined him. She was raped and when she tried to flee, the soldier fired two bullets at her point-blank. One would shatter her tibia and the fibula and the other would go through her forearm. This young girl would remain more than 16 months in a hospital, she would undergo several operations in which twice bone was taken out, before she was able to walk a little bit again. She would keep her whole life long the memory of this scene of horror that she had lived through.

In the evening of the 14th one could say that the two antagonists had not succeeded in tipping the advantage to one side or the other. This day had been the theater of very harsh battles where they often found themselves together in one house, Germans and Americans, trying to dislodge the other, but managing only to kill one another and wounding or killing civilians.

One part of the population was able to leave this hell that they had been living for 6 days. The consummation of munitions began to be enormous, because in order to dislodge a sniper, hundreds of bullets were used, dozens of mortar shells, Pak or Flak. Bodies were piling up all over: in the streets, the cellars, the gardens, (or what little remained of them), and the ditches. Some wounded waited more than 48 hours and died for lack of first aid. Many wounded people were lucky in their misfortune in that the cold prevented the wounds from becoming infected. The nurses were more than overworked: they would have to be one hundred times more numerous and have bandages and medicine. On the 14th the Americans thus had opened up a breach in the encirclement of Hatten and they were able to do all this despite the German artillery. Several armored vehicles, brought to the first aid positions (a type of country surgery units) were destroyed or put out of commission. In numerous cases one is able to verify that the German and American soldiers assisted the civilians to the best of their abilities.

15 JANVIER: NOUVELLES ATTAQUES ALLEMANDES

January 15th: New German Attacks

As early as three in the morning the German forces attacked trying to extricate the 21st Panzers who were threatened by being completely cut off from the rest of the troops. This attack permitted the re-establishment of ties between Hatten and Rittershoffen which had been interrupted and prevented the complete encircling of their troops by the American forces. The Germans held Rittershoffen where they were content to consolidate and to defend their positions in the cemetery and the church of this village. In the afternoon the Germans launched several attacks supported by armored vehicles; towards 17:00 hours this attack threatened to overwhelm the 2 battalions of the 315th U.S. Infantry Reg. and the CGR, therefore, the 14th U.S. Armored Battalion sent the tanks of

the 47th battalion which would reestablish the situation by piercing the beginning of the encirclement within the space of one hour. Towards 18:00 hours the situation was stabilized and the German resistance weakened in the evening.

The Americans realized the slackening of the German resistance which showed itself the evening of the 15th. Obkdo of the Heeresgruppe G announced to Obkdo West: "The holding of Hatten-Rittershoffen, which is necessary for the continuation of attacks, is only possible as long as the 7th Fs. Jg. Div. remains engaged. The four combat groups of the 25th Panzers (engaged in Hatten) are so weakened in their strength that the 25th could not be considered as an offensive unit". This information was destined to delay the transfer of the 7th Fs. Jg. Div. to Heeresg. Oberrhein. As a result of this information Obkdo WEST ordered the LXXXIX to be put at the disposition of the 47th VolksGrenadier Division which would move in the morning of the 16th from Germersheim-Landau towards Winden then Hatten. The goal of the 47th was to relieve the 20th Regiment of the 7th Fs. Jg. Div. and the 21st Panzers. Another order was given at 22:45 : On the 16th at 13:30 hours, it was necessary to give all available artillery to prepare the attack terrain of the 21st Panzer. This attack will be the advance of the left German wing toward Koenigsbruck.

The letting up is explained by the German troops being "out of breath" and by a reorganization in view of the next day's planned operations.

In the village it was the same procedure: for an enemy who was firing too much, the artillery was demanded or they used anti-aircraft guns. The very rare person who dared to glance out at the street during a moment of calm could not believe his eyes: the street was no longer a street, it was an un-namable thing formed from a heap of burned beams, splintered stones and above all that, the bodies of soldiers, skeletons of tanks and other vehicles, cattle-- the cattle which had escaped from stables through the gaping holes from shells, or which the owner had set free because it was impossible for him to go and feed them.

**LE 16 JANVIER: LES AMERICANS CEDENT
ENCORE DU TERRAIN**

January 16th: The Americans Give Up More Terrain

On January 16th it was snowing heavily when the Americans mounted their attack. Their goal was to force the enemy to withdraw further towards the north. They were able to get as far as the Hatten-Seltz road behind the train station. It must be noted that these results were obtained thanks to a thick fog (it seems that they also used smoke grenades!). The German reaction to the attack was even quicker. The German artillery was let loose to bombard the whole front from north of Hatten to the north of Rittershoffen. Many tanks were hit and the American advance came to a halt. The artillery fire would also have disastrous effects on certain German sections which were too involved: they also would be hit by this bombardment. This bombardment was to be the prelude to a counter-offensive against Hatten and Rittershoffen. The German assault troops managed to retake the ground lost around the train station. The U.S. troops entered also to the west of Hallen and notably the 47th tank battalion, the 19th armored infantry battalion, a battalion of the 315th infantry and the 94th company of armored reconnaissance had to fight very fiercely. The losses were heavy and for certain sections the battle was often desperate. A counter-attack of the 14th Armored Division was ended before it began because the German artillery (as it had received the order the preceding evening) fired on all masses of any importance. It must be said that the weather had calmed and the visibility had greatly improved from the morning. The 14th U.S. Armored Division was blocked to the north of Rittershoffen, it would move, and several companies reached the south of Hatten-Rittershoffen near the edge of the forest.

The harshest fighting was taking place between the present day Ruisseau street (rue de Ruisseau) and Main Street (rue Principal) and in the train station sector. House fighting was raging. Despite the cold, the men in grey or khaki were sweating due to the effort they were exerting and also because of fear. Because an attack or a counter-attack was strenuous. They would have to run over the debris, and beams charred by machine gun fire, run 5 meters to take shelter behind a block of stone, a wall , or a girder. They would have to duck instinctively when a sharp

whistle of a shell was heard, not stay in one spot longer than 10 seconds (because of concentrated firing), they would have to jump a wall or the remnants of the foundation of a house after having tossed a grenade in order to take possession of a house. They would have to entrench themselves in the safest way possible in the house, be able to fire upon an enemy who could be two steps away, to ask for mortar fire on a neighboring house where shots were coming from, to indicate to others that they were in the house and to prepare for the next advance. This is what the fighting was like that these men lived through; but quite often, they did only part of this because they did not hesitate firing an 88 on the enemy and this was like firing on a fly with a hunting gun. But the most terrible part was the artillery. This artillery was bombing the whole terrain, the salvos coming by 3, 5, 8 etc. ...without respite. The men smiled sadly when a shell missed them. Nothing could take shelter from the shells, not men, not tanks, nor material; houses, cellars nor the animals who were fleeing from these places. How many men were hit directly by a shell? Then there were even worse: phosphorous grenades. The sound was similar to other shells but the effect was terrible: A very small explosion and then there was a flame which resisted all efforts to extinguish it. It was necessary to smother the flame in order to extinguish it. In some cellars it was possible to count the dead because of their shoes, as that was all that remained after such a shell hit.

Obkdo G was pleased this 16th of January because it had attained its goal: to make the Americans believe that a great offensive was going to take place, and the Americans did believe it. All of their artillery was put to work: they bombarded all the spots where German troops could be found --to the north of Hatten, to the east between Hatten and Buhl, and between Hatten and Niederroedern.

Many residents of Hatten died this January 16th, some in cellars, others trying to find either food or water, still others while seeking refuge in another house. The conditions were more than desperate--the food supply was exhausted and there were no replacements for the food. From time to time some one would gather up his courage and would climb out looking for something to drink, but most often they had to be content with sucking on ice. In some cellars there were small cooking stoves but wood was necessary (they had no coal) and wood was outside.

The hygienic conditions were lamentable: no one had washed since the 8th or 9th and no one considered doing so now. For the rest everyone had to manage as best they could at their own risk and peril.

In the S-E and N-E the wounded were evacuated when it was possible and quite often Mlle. Keller had to intervene in order for the most seriously wounded to be evacuated. (There would be about 40 people hospitalized in Landow and almost 15 would die from their wounds).

It was also on this day, I believe, that another drama took place: A young woman who was traumatized by this life of hell, begged her father to let them leave their cellar and flee. She cried and pleaded with her father who did not want to leave the cellar. However, he decided to follow his daughter's request. He would be killed within 100 meters of the cellar, no one else was hurt.

In short, one could conclude that despite the strongly undertaken attempts the Americans yielded ground in Hatten, but they thought that the Germans were in the middle of preparing a major offensive.

The Germans succeeded in gaining ground, but at the price of numerous dead and wounded without taking into consideration the material losses and the consumption of arms and munitions of all kinds. The troops of the LXXXIX Army corps stood firm at Hatten/Rittershoffen and to give new strength to these troops the following were joined to it: the IIInd regiments SS. Geb Jg. (it would not be engaged in our zone), as well as the Heeresartillerty Abteilung 1151 of the 256th VGD Furthermore, the 47th VGD was in route for Hatten. It would arrive near Schleithal late in the night.

To re-invigorate the troops, General Staedke, chief of staff of Obkdo West, suggested (if not ordered) many additional rewards to the men of the battle. He suggested special decorations, special permissions, citations and for some a trip to the rear of the battle lines. He also asked the men to put a special emphasis on sharp shooters and anti-tank guns. One other important detail: January 16th was the last day on which the Wehrmachtbericht began on the Western Front. Beginning on the 17th it would begin on the Russian front.

**17th JANVIER: LES ALLEMANDS TIENNENT
MALGRE LES PERTES**

**January 17th: The Germans Hang On Despite
Their Losses**

January 17th started with good news for the German troops. Some elements of Obkdo LXXXIX (known as Hoehne) had taken Roeschwoog on the 16th toward midnight and were now to be found at Dulhunden waiting to pursue their effort towards the north (Information communicated by Oblt. Damkwort to Heeresg G on the 17th around 8:40AM).

Towards 9:45 AM the 1st battalion of the 315th infantry regiment supported by about 15 tanks attacked Rittershoffen after being grouped to the S.E. of Leitersviller. The German artillery was not able to prevent this gathering because the visibility was very bad, it was snowing.

Beginning the attack the 3rd battalion of the 20th Regiment F.S. Jg (commanded by Von Erdmann) as well as elements of the 21st Panzers asked for artillery support, they would succeed in preventing these troops from entering further in advance of their position. The battle became more and more murderous because the resistance on both sides surprised and irritated each adversary. They no longer hesitated in bombing enemy positions very near to their own positions. Furthermore the superior authorities demanded immediate results in view of the losses and the rate at which munitions were being used up.

The Germans were holding strong but they absolutely needed reinforcements because the fighting troops had lost more than 50% of their initial manpower. Towards 11:00 AM these same troops were assembled as in the morning to the SE of Leiterswiller and despite the German artillery the US attack resumed on Rittershoffen as well as another attack led to the south of Rittershoffen and the SW train station of Hatten. The German armored trucks counter-attacked in the area of the train station coming from the east. Several convoys of US armored trucks were not able to move because the artillery had concentrated its fire on the edge of the forest of Haguenu, situated to the south of Hatten/Rittershoffen. These new failed offensives of the Americans numbered 8 on this day. It seems to me that on that day the Americans used trucks for the first time to bring their infantry to the foot of the foundations. Listen to the story of private Catlett

and corporal Russell:" *We escaped from a burning tank and we played dead for 12 hours. A German approached Russell and took his bracelet watch from him. We left when night fell. We are the only ones to escape from the whole group. Lt. Jones commanded the platoon of 5 tanks and attacked Hatten. He told me the story of this attack ' My platoon was advancing slowly under fire of guns of all calibers. I heard the radio communications of Lt. Sprague who was also progressing towards Hatten. All of a sudden his voice became very weak and it was not until much later that I learned he had been hit. We continued despite everything when my tank was hit by anti-tank fire. I was wounded and before being gathered up to be cared for I turned over the command of the platoon to Sergeant Prieur. I succeeded in seeing our Colonel who immediately promoted this Sergeant to the rank of lieutenant. He would not enjoy this promotion for long"* (Unedited letter of Lt Col H. G. Jones). Indeed this sergeant Prieur had been summoned to General Headquarters in order to be promoted to lieutenant. When he returned to Hatten he was killed point-blank. He had been a lieutenant only an hour....

For the civilians the list of wounded and killed grew from hour to hour. Several families succeeded in leaving Hatten during a brief period of calm--no one was wounded among these 17 fugitives. For the people who remained it was the 9th day of hell and terror. In a cellar, a birthday was celebrated with pieces of celery and beet root accompanied by some potatoes. It was a lovely birthday. In another cellar they were able to evacuate the wounded--they were transported by armored vehicles, the transportation of troops to Betschdorf. In a house to the west of Hatten several American soldiers were resting--a German voice shouted into one of the neighboring houses "*Why don't you give up, you damn Yankees?"* The answer was given by the 7 guns of these 7 Americans and the Germans no doubt understood the answer because he was almost cut in two by the shots. In another house a German soldier advanced towards the door and raised his hands. He wanted to give up. When he entered upon the order of the American soldiers, he jumped to the side and another German appeared and emptied his cartridge clip into the room from where no one would ever come out alive again.

This January 17th saw an increased pressure on the US troops because the Germans were progressing along the Rhine. Hatten had to be swept out.

18 JANVIER: L'ENLISEMENT

January 18th: Bogging Down

January 18th did not bring a great change to Hatten/Rittershoffen. The official communiqués were terse and only by examining the telephone communications and the various notes (Obkd Heer Group) is it possible to understand the development of the operations of this day.

In the night of the 17th to the 18th the 103rd regiment of the 47th VolksGrenadier Division came to put themselves under the command of the 25th Panzer G.D. In the course of a telephone communication between the Oberbefehlshaber Heeresgruppe G and Oberrhein mention was made that in the evening of the 17th patrols saw heavy truck traffic and 12 US tanks from Hatten towards Niederbetschdorf. They were going to Niederbetschdorf loaded and returned empty. One explanation can be given in the sense that the US troops were under equipped in medical supplies as well as men (18 medics and surgeons for more than 700 men) and profiting from the calm after the attacks of the preceding evening, they went to look for the wounded. In an account that can be found in a chronicle of the 14 US Armored Division the identical facts are mentioned there.

In the morning the battles continued in the two villages with no notable change for the antagonists. However, a little before 16:00 the Americans once more launched their troops toward Rittershoffen. They were coming from the SE of Leiterswiller and they attacked the SW and N of Rittershoffen. This attack did not lead to any change because the concentration of German artillery was too strong, the assembling followed by the advance was cancelled and a rapid retreat was ordered (5 tanks were damaged or destroyed) . As the visibility was relatively good the 60 German gun sites, situated somewhat higher, found it child's play to bombard any group or advance. The Americans were doing the same thing but they did not have the advantage of terrain. It was necessary to indicate to them the points to bombard. Besides, we must note that often the German air force intervened when the weather was clear enough and it inflicted many harsh blows on the US troops. The Americans did not have as much air support because the terrain for stationing fighter planes or

bombers was to be found further to the south and linking up was relatively difficult. Furthermore, we must not forget that along the Rhine the Germans had several very dangerous bridge-heads. Herrlisheim was abandoned by the Americans on this day. The German pressure on the right side of the Hagenau forest greatly preoccupied the US military staff. Towards 20:30 Sessenheim would be taken by the German troops who were then exactly 11 Km to the south of Hatten (as the crow flies). If the troops went up to the north they would take the 42nd and 79th US infantry division as well as the 14th US Armored Division in a pincers movement. In the evening fighting began to lose its intensity, but it would be a prelude to a last jump, a last offense, because the Germans wanted to snatch this position away from the Americans and force them to retreat. This night of the 17th and 18th would serve as preparation--Hatten would be bombarded. In a cellar situated in the south-west part there were about 15 people in which despair had changed into almost indifference. Seven US soldiers were resting somehow or another, the other civilians were trying to sleep either sitting up or half-reclining. In the middle of the night a shell went through the window on the ground floor, penetrated the floor, burst through and exploded in the middle of the cellar. The seven soldiers were dead or dying as well as a little girl, and an older woman moaned, a piece of the shell had ripped off her foot. The others were superficially wounded, 4 were not hurt at all. The latter, as soon as they had their wits about them, rushed forward. For the soldiers and the girl there was nothing to be done. The woman cried out and called for help. They tried to make a tourniquet but it would be in vain. She would be in agony for an hour.

They cared for the wounded (if one could call it care) with whatever they could find. They left the dead where they were and went to seek refuge in another place. They found another house whose cellar was relatively solid and lightly occupied. It was only 5 or 6 hours after the explosion of the shell that one person realized that she had been wounded.

January 18th was a day qualified as "RAS". No change occurred on the battlefield of a nature that would modify positions. The German troops prepared to launch themselves full strength against these two locales. The Americans reckoned that the Germans were in the midst of undergoing a weakening toward the SE in order to bring themselves towards the troops engaged in the region of Sessenheim, then Herrlisheim.

The populace of Hatten situated in the German zone were almost entirely evacuated (voluntarily or by force) but those who remained found themselves in the zone situated on both sides of the main road coming from Rittershoffen as well as the south-west section.

**19 JANVIER: ON EST EPUISE DE PART
ET D'AUTRE**

January 19th: Both Sides Are Exhausted

January 19th would begin with an attack of the 1st and 2nd Fs Jg Regiment against the western horn of Hatten. The terrain had been carefully prepared by artillery fire during the night by firing more than 3000 shells. This attack would be seen as pitiable because the resistance of the American troops was such that after more than 7 hours of fighting in the streets and houses the attack would be stopped. In the official communiqué they qualified the resistance of the Americans as "ausserordentlich starke Feindabwehr (translation: "extraordinarily strong defense"). The Americans were able to contain this push by trying to relieve the elements engaged in diversionary attacks such as those on Rittershoffen or south Hatten. As time permitted US planes were able to intervene but the results are not known to me if it was not a "ohne wesentlichen Schaden (translation: "without any remarkable damage"), a traditional formula to inform without informing.

The Americans were then observed concentrating around Rittershoffen and to the south of Hatten. Some movements effectively took place and the first had as its goal to relieve the troops in Hatten (as we saw earlier) and the second was the replenishment of stores for the units engaged as well as a primary step in view of a possible evacuation. This traffic was taking place to the south of the two locales, near the edge of the forest.

On the 19th, a Friday, General Oberst Blastowitz visited the sector and ordered a whole series of measures:

The 47th VGD was to enter immediately the Hatten sector. His 103rd regiment would relieve the III Regiment 20. FS. Jg. at Rittershoffen. His 104th regiment would relieve the other battalions of the 20th regiment Fj in the night of the 19th to the 20th. His 115th regiment would be

stationed, waiting, between Schleithal and Salmbach. His artillery would be sent into the Oberseebach sector (to reinforce the 245th artillery):

- Rittershoffen would be taken in charge by the 25th Panzers
- The ME of the 21st was to leave Rittershoffen with 40 men and 20 armored vehicles. The 21st would be placed between Trimbach and Seltz.
- To get out by any means the 6 tanks which were in Rittershoffen

It is clear that the troops of the 21st and the 25th were sorely afflicted both in their physical and material strength, that the injection of fresh troops was more than necessary. The fact that the chief of operations (I/A) Obkdo Heer. Group attached so much importance to the 6 tanks which were blocked up in Rittershoffen shows us very clearly that these tanks had become a very important item.

A little later a new modification was sent out: the 47th division would take under its' control the whole sector:

The 103rd Regiment would leave Rittershoffen from the 21st to the 22nd and would go towards Buhl from the 22nd to the 23rd of January.

The 104th Regiment would take control of the north of Hatten from the 19th to the 20th.

The 115th Regiment would take control of the south of Hatten from the 21st to the 22nd.

This modification was due to the evaluation of the manpower of the 25th Panzers: 562 men for a regiment semi-engaged.

On the American side the situation was not much better; the 14th U.S. Armored Division. and the 79th U.S. Infantry Division had undergone heavy losses but it seems quite probable that their losses were less than those of the Germans. Losses of men were difficult to establish with certainty because, on the German side very few documents remain and on the American side they told me that such information was not allowed to be given out.

When the "Battle of Hatten" was coming to an end a bomb fell into a cellar where several people from different houses had taken refuge. The sight was heart-rending and the witness who related it to me had tears in her eyes. She (the witness) had to flee twice with her three children, her mother, her brother and his two children. It was the third cellar in which she found herself. When the smoke of the explosion cleared away her brother, her nephew, her daughter, several men and women were dead or dying. The cries rose from all over. The survivors tried to give first aid to the wounded but it was often in vain and that was when a form of anger that approached rage would overcome these people. They didn't want anything from this, they had done nothing to deserve it, however the luck of war was set against them. The witness lived in Strasbourg until 1944 but this family believed that it was best to come to Hatten for refuge, there where nothing ever happens... And they were there, trapped. The survivors would take refuge there where they thought they would find shelter. They did not stay long because this little group decided to take refuge in a shelter situated to the west of Hatten. They stayed there more than 24 hours with nothing before the Germans came.

This day of January 19th was marked by an important turn of the battle of Hatten for I/A Obkdo G informed I/A LXXXIX AK that the attack on Hatten would be halted. This decision rested on the failure of the attack led that day after the artillery preparation of more than an hour. As for the Americans they had satisfied themselves that the 14th Armored Division was incapable of maintaining their positions. Such was the situation the evening of the 19th.

LES DERNIERES COMBATS

The Last Battles

January 20th the Americans were preparing to undertake an attack in the direction of Rittershoffen. Almost 50 tanks waited for the clash which was late in coming. They would decide to push on to Rittershoffen and used as support for this attack about ten tanks. The Germans would have to fight very fiercely around the cemetery and the church at the beginning and then inside these two points.

In Hatten itself the fighting continued but they sensed that the intensity on both sides was weakening. Only the artillery continued sending salvos after salvos. And in the night of the 21st of January an unusual scene came about... a German patrol met up with an American patrol- the latter withdrew without firing!

On January 21st around 11:00 the American troops left Hatten and Rittershoffen under cover of snow and fog. The Germans rapidly occupied these two villages but did not advance any more to the west.

On January 22nd after establishing that the Americans had effectively retreated towards the south-west, the Germans would advance on the east, the west: Kuhlendorf, Betschdorf, Surbourg...

LA BATAILLE DE HATTEN EST FINIE !

The Battle Of Hatten Is Ended!

The last inhabitants of Hatten found by the Germans in the cellars were sent to the shelter of the Maginot Line. They received hot soup. This would be, for many of them, their first real hot meal in several days.

After several days the Germans would make an appeal to able-bodied men to help look for and bury the dead. They looked for any kind of draught animal which was wandering around the village which had become calm, they yoked it up to a cart and they went out looking for the dead. They were everywhere, in the fields, the gardens, the streets, the streams, the ditches, the houses...

One participant told me that they loaded them like sacks of potatoes. They were stiff and when they had gathered up the visible dead they had to scour all over because the snow covered everything. One witness said : *I remember looking for them that morning. I was standing on the cart and every time that a dark mass was discovered, I went to look and it was always a dead body. I found bare feet, the five blacks who were in the tank behind my house and we had to be careful because there were mines. In the tanks it was atrocious. One morning when we were searching for the U.S. dead between Rittershoffen and Hatten I stopped the wagon and said to the others that there was still one in this tank. I went up to it and I prepared to pull the dead man out whose hand was sticking out of the hole.*

I pulled and only the hand came. I stayed there with that hand in mine..."

But, for these men there was also the common ditch that had been dug and where they had to throw their brother, their father, their mother, their child. Rare was the one who had not seen one of his own fall.

83 dead in Hatten, 21 dead in Rittershoffen... That was the reward which the civil population earned in 13 days of combat!

The wounded.. they have not been counted but one out of every two people was wounded. Some are still crippled: artificial limbs, mutilated limbs, diverse scars. In consulting the death records I often found a recording of a death following a court judgement since all the bodies were not able to be found or identified. Think, a cellar full of people in which a phosphorus grenade fell; in a cellar one could say that there were a certain number of people and that only because of the shoes which did not burn due to a lack of oxygen.

All of the families dispersed from Saverne to Landau and also to Seltz. Certain fathers or mothers went more than two months without news of a son or daughter, or mother or father. Is it possible to express in words what these people endured? I leave you to judge.

People could not live in Hatten because out of the 360 houses which made up the major part of Hatten none were spared. About 30 were able to be repaired but in January, to live in a house open to the elements was simply not possible. Each would go to find asylum either at the home of a relative or with friends in the region. The majority of Hatten would find refuge in Betschdorf, Mothorn, Niederroedern and so forth. The people returned to their houses in ruin to try to find some object of significance such as linens, clothing, furniture etc. Some people however left their life at the time of their return. They tripped unexploded mines. A group of people remember having passed through Hohweg covered with snow more than once; at the time of the melting of the snow they found there an unexploded tank mine. In another spot a family had thrown various items out of the window before fleeing. Upon their return the items were covered by a pile of mines. It would take a long time to find and then take away these mines, and other deadly weapons, and it was not rare even now to find some when you dig.

When in March of 1945 the Allied Troops carried out their break-through in the entire western front, Hatten would not be there to welcome its' "liberators". Hatten was bandaging its wounds.

In 1946 when all the inhabitants of Hatten returned there were 834 in number and they were almost all lodged in wooden barracks that the State had furnished. A beautiful show of solidarity would come into play and a good many families would receive clothing and various objects from all over the region and even Switzerland.

BILAN Balance Sheet

German Troops: Besides an enormous quantity of munitions and light arms, one could set their losses at about 1500 to 2000 killed and even more wounded.

The 21st and the 25th Panzers were bled white.

The number of tanks (heavy, light, other armored vehicles) could be counted as more than a hundred. It must be noted that during this period the Germans could not leave a salvageable tank on the battle field. (A good thirty had been recovered and put back in working order).

American Troops: Their loss of men could amount to about 1000 to 1200 soldiers and officers.

They lost about 80 tanks of which about 15 were salvaged. For the Americans the material had less importance than the men: they easily accepted the loss of a tank, but not that of the crew.

The American Forces retreated to the Moder and the German Forces followed them. The winner? You tell me. **There was none !** Americans and Germans killed each other and worse, they led to the deaths of children, women and old people.

On a strategic plan one could consider the Americans as the winners because they delayed the German advance, heavily compromising operation Nordwind and bleeding white the 21st and the 25th Panzers. They themselves had enormous losses, but the outpouring of the German troops on the plain of Alsace towards Haguenau and Strasbourg and the junction of the other forces, having to come through the gap of Saverne was not able to take place. To cut short this commentary I would like to quote the remarks of General Von Manteuffel:

After the defeat in the Ardennes Hitler conducted the war as a "corporal". The end of grandiose plans! One was reduced to the dust of dispersed battles... When I saw the offensive in the Ardennes blocked, I wanted to undertake a general retreat : first from our line of departure, then to the Rhine; but Hitler didn't want to hear anything about it. HE PREFERRED TO SACRIFICE THE MOST IMPORTANT OF HIS ARMIES IN A STERILE BATTLE ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE RHINE !... Von Rundstedt (Commander in chief of the armies of the west) approved this decision. I dare to add that ALSO CHILDREN, WOMEN AND OLD PEOPLE WERE SACRIFICED FOR A CAUSE THAT WAS ALREADY LOST, but every war has and will have its lost causes in advance."

NOTES

(found on page 39)

I would like to thank the people of Hatten who told us their stories and most particularly Madame Dentinger, Madame Drion, Monsieur Charles Drion, Madame Friederich, Monsieur Emile Heimlich, Mademoiselle Marie Klein, Madame Colette Kremser, Monsieur Robert Kremser, Madame Rose Kremser, Monsieur Philippe Kremser, Monsieur Albert Kremser and Mademoiselle Lina Rinckel.

We have also received information through the intermediary of associations of former American soldiers. On the other hand it still remains to find testimony from German soldiers who participated in the battle and notably those who fought in the 21st Panzer Division, the 7th Fallschirm Division and the 47th Volks Grenadier Division. Testimony coming from people engaged in these units would be a great help to me in pursuing my research in this area.

UN CORRESPONDANT DE GUERRE AMERICAIN RACONTE

An American War Correspondant Tells

(pp.42-49)

According to tradition this text is attributed to Captain Joseph Carter, 47th Tank Battalion, 14th Armoured Division. It was written immediately after the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen but the original text in English had been censored and the publication was authorized on February 1st, 1945. Was a rough copy of this text was actually left on the battle field and retrieved later as we wrote in our preceding edition? We have nothing to confirm this. This text circulated in the United States during the war. Unfortunately it was impossible to find Captain Carter again who also wrote later on the history of the 14th Armoured Division.

L'ALLEMAND S'EST ARRETE A HATTEN

The Germans Stop in Hatten

Haguenau is found just twenty-six kilometers to the north of Strasbourg and above Haguenau is the forest. Now in the winter time the woods are black and always damp and cold and on the northern edge of the forest is Haguenau, 16 kilometers to the north-east of the city is the village of Hatten. Or what remains of blood-soaked Hatten.

The Infantrymen who were entrenched in that miserable bridge-head week after week under the bombardments will tell you that Anzio (Italy) was longer than Hatten. But for pure tension, bloody and vicious, hour after hour, day after day, Hatten was more terrible.

The Germans were to be found in the neighboring house, and in the house on the other side of the street, (more than once they were in the cellar and you were on the main floor), and they were on the hills to the north of the village.

When you made a movement the Germans would fire their machine-guns: if you moved again they would fire bazookas and if you were still able to move they called in the artillery corps reinforcements and would locate you as far away as the hills. That had no importance. If you were a man alone, he would open fire with a mortar, if you moved a tank, he would call in bazookas, mortars, tanks, anti-tank fire and the artillery.

If you were a foot-soldier, you would lie down against a wall in a cellar, putting your hope in God that no high explosive charge would land directly on the house, then you would leave for an attack and then repel counter-attacks, again and again. You would fight with mortars and machine-guns, with grenades and rifles, and rifles with bayonets and you called on your own artillery... All that to seize a miserable house, then the Germans counter-attacked.

If you were in a tank you were sitting with your eye glued to the telescope and your foot on the metal trigger... because if you were looking somewhere else you would not have the time to go back to the telescope before the bazookas and the anti-tank fire were upon you.

When this was finished, it was difficult to say what was a street and what was a house, the artillery had blown everything away. Scarcely a single house still had its roof and scarcely a house wall remained. Dead lay in the street and on the earth and in the cellars and in the debris, German soldiers, Americans and civilians. A young girl who tried to escape from her cellar was hit by 15 bullets.

A village situated on a slight incline, perhaps 200 houses, with two main streets 300 meters long and 200 wide.

The Germans stopped at Hatten. They used parachutists aggressive after a long rest in the back of the lines, and the SS somber in their black and clean uniforms, and soldiers coming from a Panzer division who had been rolling across Europe for a long time. And infantry, infantry and more infantry. They intended to break through at Hatten and across the forest to Haguenau, then towards the large plain to Strasbourg.

LES PREPARATIFS POUR L'ATTAQUE

Preparations For The Attack

We started enroute during the night of January 12th, 1945 with a tank battalion. A tank battalion of the 14th armoured division (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James W. Lann from Armory, Mississippi, promoted on the battlefield) minus company B which was still fighting in another engagement near Drusenheim.

About 25 middle-size tanks, thirty tons of armor-plating each one, and 15 light tanks of 16 tons each, assault tanks, recuperator tanks, mortars, rolling kitchens, tank cars, semi-trailers and trailers, trucks for repair, demolition and soldering, jeeps, Company A and C, Company D, the general-quarter's company and the services, the maintenance of the battalion and the medical officers.

Blackout

If you were the driver you would see nothing except the vague outline of fields along the sides, the dark ribbon of the road several meters in front of you, the deep black of the woods. The only lights in the world were the red twin lights on the back of the vehicle preceding you and the indirect lighting of the dials on the dashboard. If you were the leader of the vehicles you would get up from time to time to check out the column... It was too cold to remain standing. You could see the long line of tanks and semi-trailers behind you, crawling like an omen through the darkness, only the black-out lights were scarcely visible. From time to time you hear the roaring noise of a 500 horsepower engine when the driver was changing sides in order to avoid a bad section of the road.

The platoon in charge of quartering, under the command of Lieutenant Tom Anderberg of Hudson, South Dakota, had gone on ahead. He had found a large house for the command post of the battalion and had advanced into the streets, knocking at each door asking for rooms. *Soldaten schlafen hier? Amerikanische Soldaten?* and he found places for all the men to sleep and courtyards to park the tanks.

We entered before dawn, the sky was a faint grey instead of black and the houses of mixed construction, wood and plaster, the roofs covered with red tiles, just under a small rise of land and around a curve in the road.

Anderberg was waiting to show us the command post of the battalion and the houses where we were to sleep, but the tanks remained in the streets because we had to begin our attack at 5:30 A.M.. The tank crew would check them out.

In the darkness you could hear a driver bustling about with his motor, and nearby, the artillery was firing, the dry cracking sound of the

105's sounding as though they were coming from a neighboring street and you could hear the lament and the hollow noise of a bomb burst somewhere but fairly near.

It was simple. For defense we had to attack Hatten with the infantry and chase out the enemy. The infantry had to pass through us and get into defensive position on the upper ground beyond the village.

At the general headquarters Colonel Lann was leaning over the map of operations with Commander Kircher, of Gladstone, Michigan, Lieutenant Paul Willis, the communications officer from Canton, North Carolina checking the radios and Captain Solly A. Spivak from Chicago, furnishing the map. Hatten was just to the north.

A railroad went from east to west, passing several meters to the south of Hatten and continuing to the east. At mid-point between Hatten and us, therefore, to the north of the railroad, was Rittershoffen. Another unit was designated to clean out this village.

The situation then was as follows:

We were to pass to the south of Rittershoffen, along the railroad, we were to pivot to the north and go into Hatten. An infantry battalion was to join up with us, the infantry was to be at the south of the train tracks and us to the north.

The Germans could see us from the high ground to the north of Hatten because the terrain gently sloped upwards starting at the border of the Haguenu forest towards the crest above the Seltzbach river and it was on this crest that the Germans had installed their observation posts. Hatten was just about at the middle of this gentle slope.

From the extreme east of Rittershoffen you could see into Hatten and also could fire into Hatten and the Germans were holding the extreme east of Rittershoffen with the infantry and with two captured American anti-tank cannons of 57 mm.

Captain Harold Persky of Saint Paul, Minnesota, was commanding Company C. At least he commanded it... he was commanding it this morning. It was to be the attack company, and one of its sections,

commanded by Lieutenant Seth Sprague of Hingman, Massachusetts, was to be attached to the infantry battalion in motion to the south of the train tracks. At least Lieutenant Sprague was commanding this section on that morning. Or what there was of the section then.

Company A commanded by Captain Richard Tharpe, of Macon, Georgia, was on reserve. There were also the assault cannons commanded by Robert Harper of Auburn, Nebraska. On reserve was Company D, commanded by Captain Henry Tilden of Weymouth, Massachusetts.

L'ASSAUT

The Assault

Let's follow Lieutenant Sprague.

When the eastern sky turned from grey to a lighter grey, his tanks, directly in front of him, were on the narrow and frozen street of an Alsatian village. On the sides rose houses with steeply pitched roofs, constructed in wood and plaster, dark in dawn. The motor of his tank was running smoothly in neutral gear and he was standing in the turret, the hatch open, muffled up in his combat gear. It was cold.

The radio crackled lightly, then the yellow alarm light came on and he could hear the orders crackling:

"Advance. Advance."

O.K. he said and went to the interior phone. "Advance" he told the driver "advance".

The motor of the tank growled suddenly in his ears and he did not hear the driver put it into gear. The tank lurched a little, then advanced. He heard the familiar scraping which increased, as the steel claws of the caterpillar tracks gripped the hard icy road. The motor growled again and the driver put it into third gear. Sprague's head was on the level of the house windows and he could see the road better in front of him.

Now he is outside the village, following the road along the fields

of a ghostly white and on both sides of the road there are lines of trees. Now he checks out the cross road, his line of departure. There is an icy fog in the air. Visibility is reduced.

He finds the cross road. It is 8:03 A.M.

"Crossed line n^o 1 he says and a voice answers "Roger".

He continues to advance slowly. This will be a grey day, cold, miserable. The fog is settling on the fields, freezing on the ground. It transforms the black of the trees into perfect white.

At 8:50 A.M. he proceeds 800 meters. Crossed line n^o 2.

9:13 A.M.

"Intense enemy artillery fire" he says. "Intense enemy artillery fire".

"Where is it?"

"I don't know" he says. "I can't see. Visibility poor. All that I know is that it is approaching."

The enemy is on the high ground to his left, they are now behind him in Rittershoffen. He is in the tank with the motor growling warmly behind him, grinding and bouncing on the frozen ground. The hatch of his turret is closed now. He can't see the infantry, but he can hear the sharp sound of artillery fire, to the right of him, and he can see craters suddenly appearing in the frozen soil in front of him. He feels the tank lift up sometimes when a shot hits nearby and he can hear the shrapnel pounding furiously against the armoured sides.

He went to the north-east, directly towards Hatten. He is within reach of the anti-tank cannons, but he doesn't see any anti-tank guns. He can imagine the houses of Hatten, the sloped roofs white with fog ... a little village lying on the slope in front of him.

9:30 A.M.

Captain Persky is on the air.

"I can't contact Sprague" he said. "I have lost two tanks from his section".

Lieutenant Francis Marshall of Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania, Company A was sent into the village to assist the infantry. He went towards the east, then towards the north. Meanwhile the bitter fighting continued. At that moment it was clear where the anti-tank guns were firing from; the firing came from the southern border of Hatten and much further away to the east, so that when Marshall turned towards the north the anti-tank cannons were on his right flank.

The American artillery did not remain inactive. As Marshall pointed out the emplacement of the cannons, battery after battery sent its resonant volleys from far behind. Marshall could see the bursts where they fell. Again and again it seemed to him that the anti-tank guns should be wiped out, but, either the Germans were sending in new crews or else they were bringing in new cannons, since the anti-tank guns were firing again.

And all along, towards the east the machine guns were firing on the infantry and the Germans artillery came back again and again and the mortars fell almost without stopping, some men were hit, men were blasted, and some men were lying down on the frozen ground, in an agony without hope, and they could hear the mortars come. And they had a half-smile when they missed.

Also, it is enough to say that Lieutenant Marshall was able to get three of his tanks to penetrate the western border of Hatten, that he went too far to the east and had to return, that he occupied a firing position.

That took him the whole afternoon. And the battle lasted the whole afternoon and all day long men were dying and it is not possible to describe everything that happened. There was an infantry battalion engaged there, just to mention one unit, and each man of this unit could tell you his own story - and a different story - and each man frightened in his own way, and brave in his own way or discouraged in his own way.

Lieutenant Marshall reached the western border of the village with 3 tanks and took up firing positions.

Meanwhile, the rest of Company A, two platoons of medium size tanks, had reached Hatten, one to the west and the other to the south, to support the infantry in the extreme west of the village. The infantry had decided that it was able to hold Hatten and the tanks had returned and had brought more infantry in the rear. Three tanks were left in Hatten for the night and six had been destroyed. The first bloody night in Hatten had begun.

LE 13 JANVIER

January 13th

On the second day the order came "The attack will continue. The Infantry to the extreme west of the village will push through to the east and will clean out Hatten. The tanks will support."

There were German paratroopers and the Panzers, the SS and the Infantry, there were mortars and artillery with observers on the hills.

Thus began the bloody battle by day in Hatten.

The American artillery made preparations, a furious thunder of shells landed without ceasing in the village, then the American infantry left.

They tried to clear their path through the smoking debris and the bitter smell, and the moment that they appeared the German artillery thundered. The German mortars pounded the streets, the machine guns opened fire. In the glacial cold they tried to run and to cling to something; the machine guns blocked the streets and the mortars exploded.

A German tank wanted to advance along one street strewn with debris, crawling over piles of stones and wood and an American tank wanted to advance to meet it. The German tank wanted to stop flush with a street corner and the American tank was waiting just on the other side.

They stayed like that. They tried to move so that they could fire without being hit themselves...to pierce holes with some explosives through the walls of the houses so that they could fire through. Then the other would move to get out of the trajectory.

The two armies dug in facing each other. The section commanders waited for the barrage to end , got out of their tanks to run towards the command post of the infantry in the cellar of a building. Lieutenant Charles Wallace, of Cincinnati, Ohio, wanted to run with the others.

"Lieutenant" said the commander of the infantry "bring your tank over here and fire on this house. The Germans who are in it are blocking us."

And the lieutenant ran once more to his tank.

"Move it" he said to his driver and they got in a firing position. The German bazookas opened fire and the artillery started up again. Wallace fired on the house and bazookas fired from the field. The Germans in the neighboring house stopped their advance.

But the Germans were not able to move any more. Bodies accumulated in the streets. Dead in grey and dead in khaki. Civilians, caught in the battle, were killed when they tried to flee in the streets.

LA NUIT DU 13 AU 14 JANVIER
The Night of the 13th and 14th of January

The most vicious German counter-attack took place this night, just at twilight. First of all, as always, the artillery. Then the rapid silhouettes of the running men, and the infantry called in the artillery and the machine guns sniped interminably during the night. The blazing machine guns glowed until the village became a living hell, and then the artillery started to thunder.

You can hear the calls and the cries through the machine gun fire and the screams of the women trapped in the cellars of a house burning up, a fire lit by the phosphorus shells.

During the day a platoon of Company A had come towards the

village, led by lieutenant Sol Rael from Brooklyn, New York, and Rael had returned. Now into this hell arrived Company C, at the worst moment of the night, led by Captain Persky and you can hear his voice on the radio.

"I don't see anything! I don't see anything!" He said. " The smoke is too thick, the smoke is too thick". Then, as he had just crossed the smoke to penetrate the fire: "Bob, God, there are thousands here. They are everywhere; Johnny, John, there is one now, get him..." and his voice faded into sudden silence. Three tanks of Company C were destroyed.

The German infantry did not pass through. The counter-attacks had been repelled. The infantry positioned itself to stop the minor counter-attacks which continued all night long to put us to the test and the tanks remained to support them.

Beforehand the replenishment of stores had been assured by the semi-trailers, semi-trailer mortars under the command of Lieutenant Willis Harding of Licorn, Nebraska. Now the mortars were firing the whole day long and mounted guard all night long; it was too dangerous for the semi-trailers anyhow.

Captain Robert Potts of Columbia Ohio, sent his replenishment of stores by light tanks.

The first aid corps of the battalion...18 men and two officers to care for 700 men...they went to the field of battle to gather up the wounded, and their jeeps came back with the windshields perforated with bullet holes, and the wounded coming out in semi-trailers and on the tanks towards the first aid post where Captain William Eaton, of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, was working.

LE 15 JANVIER

January 15th

In the morning of January 15th the objective was decided by a limited attack. We had been mauled but it was the same for the Germans. We lost tanks and men, but they did also. A prisoner of war announced that more than a hundred men of his unit had been killed in a single day.

The tension and the fighting continued. The artillery returned again with its interminable howling. The light arms crackled without tiring, and the Germans were in the neighboring houses.

You find yourself on one side of a low wall and the Germans on the other and you try to throw hand grenades over to get them and for the infantry to put in a mortar and to try to send shells through a house to try to hit the one next to it. And the dead bodies lined up in the streets started to get on your nerves, and the tension of always looking through the sight, always waiting, and the artillery coming back again and you know that it is only a question of time before a shell comes to land on the house in which you find yourself. The fighting had attained such a vicious rhythm that they try to aim heavy cannons on a simple house, which resembles trying to kill a fly with a rifle.

CE JOUR ET LES JOURS SUIVANTS...

This Day And The Following Day

"The counter-attacks in the area of Hatten have been repelled" announced the news by telegraph. But they were not talking about artillery fire, nor what was a counter-attack. It tells you nothing about the infantry sergeant (the best leader of the army platoon, by Jove!) at combat for months, and who according to the program was to return behind the lines at 7:30 P.M. to be given the rank of under-lieutenant, nor does it say that he was killed at 3:30 P.M. It doesn't tell you about the death, nor the screams, nor the sweat in the frigid air, not the suffering.

It tells nothing about the hours and hours of interminable waiting in which nothing happened...long hours of 200 minutes, and days and nights of 200 hours, waiting, waiting until finally you want something to happen.

The men could tell you, or the official words of their citations:

"Sergeant William Summers, of Schenectady, New York, Company C, January 18th in Hatten France, about 1400 hours, was maneuvering his tank to get out of the range of an anti-tank cannon. Being thus engaged, He saw a light tank hit and begin to catch on fire. Immediately Summers came to the assistance of the light tank. Upon arrival, he jumped to the ground and helped to evacuate the crew. The driver of the tank that was on fire was wounded and needed help. Summers gave him the necessary treatment, put the wounded man on the rear portion of his own tank and withdrew with him. During all this time Sergeant Summers was entirely exposed to light arms and to mortar fire arriving in heavy concentration."

"On the night of January 13, in Hatten France, the platoon leader, lieutenant was wounded. Sergeant P. Smith of Shreveport, Louisiana, soldier James Barbera of Brooklyn, New York, both from Company A got out of their tank under intense enemy fire and protected the body of the lieutenant with their own bodies while Sergeant Smith administered first-aid. When it became necessary for someone to get on the back of the tank to protect the officer and to prevent him from falling, soldier Barbera volunteered. Not only did Barbera hold the bandages in place all the way, but protected the officer with his own body against light arms fire, mortars and artillery fire; the lieutenant was successfully evacuated. Sergeant Smith returned to his platoon, took over the command, reorganized it and personally made a reconnaissance on foot to find the best route for his tanks. During the course of this reconnaissance he directed the evacuation of an infantry sergeant. This was all accomplished under intense small arms fire and mortars. The success of this mission was largely due to the coolness of Sergeant Smith.

On January 17th in Hatten, France, mechanic John Pitcher of Altoona, Pennsylvania and soldier Richard Duvall of McBain, Michigan, both of Company D were part of a light tank crew which was hit by an 88 shell. The tank caught on fire. Under light arms fire the mechanic Pitcher and

soldier Duvall got out of the tank that was in flames. When they saw that two other members of the crew did not get out, the two men returned to the tank and got out the wounded machine-gunner who was burning. Duvall rolled the flaming body on the ground and laid down on the burning clothes to smother the flames. They were not able to evacuate the fourth man. Having succeeded in putting out the flames, the two men hailed a tank that was passing by and they placed the machine-gunner on the back and laid down there with him under light arms fire until they could reach the safety of a first-aid post. The machine-gunner has a 50% chance of surviving as a result of their action. These men showed unusual courage in the face of great personal danger, saving their "brother in arms".

This is the story of three men. But it is not enough. Lieutenant Earl Allgrim from Buffalo, New York and Sergeant William Fadda of San Leandro, California, both from Headquarters Company could tell you how they went on the battlefield under artillery fire to evacuate a tank.

Sergeant Stephen Ratchuck from Buffalo, New York and mechanic Edgar Vonoo from Utica, New York from Company B could tell you how they went on foot, under artillery fire again and again to repair the tank radios.

Lieutenant Eugene Marsack from Grosspoint, Michigan and soldier Henry Erickson from Brooklyn from Company D could tell you how, during the night of January 17th the Germans hit a semi-trailer loaded with wounded men and how they got out of their tank under this fire, attached the trailer to their tank and pulled it to a safe place.

This is the story of six other men. But the story has not been told. There are thousands of stories. A story for every man. And some of these men are alive and many among them are dead. Perhaps all these stories tell the story of Hatten.... The battle continued that day and the following day...

Company B was coming from Drusenheim with a shortage of tanks since its last battle. Captain Thomas Beaty from Wichita Falls, Texas was commanding. This was taking place on the 15th and that night Lieutenant John Perkins of Amsterdam, New York was killed outside his tank in Hatten. We found a letter that he had written to his wife in pencil not yet mailed. We put a stamp on it and sent it.

Lieutenant Cullis Sears of Lumber City, Georgia, entered the village on that night.

On the 17th Company A was sent to Durrenbach. Captain Tharpe had been wounded and Lieutenant Rael was returned to the hospital. Company B, lacking in tanks ready to roll, had lost lieutenant Perkins.

Company C was lacking in tanks, Captain Persky wounded, Lieutenant Hilbert Jones, from Echo, Wisconsin, wounded. Lieutenant Sprague missing. Lieutenant Sidney Kack, of Brooklyn, wounded. In Company C one officer remained.

The Germans were still in Hatten.

If you climb the charming rolling hills to the south of Hatten you would see the burned out shells of the American tanks scattered there. You would also see the German tanks there and if you wanted to plow your way down to the streets of Hatten, you would see there more wrecks, American.... and German.

The 7th Army decided to retreat. It was only a small distance, but the newspapers announced that the 7th Army had dislodged Von Rundstedt, how it had fought, and fought counter-attacks right up to the last minute, and then when it had thrown its whole weight into the final clash... the 7th was pulled out, it turned and the 7th waited again while it reeled and lost equilibrium.

We left on the 20th.

We withdrew to the south and the west and we abandoned Hatten behind us. We left in the night; the tanks remained to cover the infantry and the line of battalions crawling slowly along the black roads.

Behind was Hatten and behind there had been a battle. Behind there had been interminable infantry barrages and the waiting. Behind there had been the fires and the dead. But also behind us was the broken German offensive.

INTRODUCTION TO PAGE 50

How a woman, without doubt the only one who knew a bit of English at Rittershoffen, was able to obtain in the midst of battle, when the farms were changing hands from hour to hour, when bodies of civilians and soldiers were scattered about the courtyards, when shells were falling all around, when the food supply for the civilians was becoming more and more uncertain, how a young woman was able to persuade a young American soldier armed to the teeth, but totally inexperienced in childcare, to prepare a baby bottle for an infant howling from hunger in the back of a cellar? This is what Madame Anne Franck-Neumann tells us with a great deal of talent who for numerous years has been gathering her remembrances pour a book on "Operation Northwind" (L'Opération Nordwind).

INTRODUCTION TO PAGE 54

General A. Burmeister has authorized us to extract from the work entitled: "Geschichte du 25. Panzergrenadier Division" the following passage which concerns the engagement of this division in Northern Alsace. This book was written from archives and remembrances of former combatants of this unit, survivors of the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen: Mr. Wilhelm Schrode.

The 25th Panzergrenadier Division was formed September 20th, 1944 and in mid-October was placed under the command of Arnold Bormeister, at that time a Colonel. It was made up of very young recruits as well as older men. Only the officers were seasoned soldiers. After four weeks of training it stepped in for the first time to the Western Front from the 10th to the 25th November 1944 in Lorraine, near Thionville (to the north of Metz) where it suffered very heavy losses. Then it was engaged from the 26th to the 27th November 1944 near Sarre-Union and Bitche. Then from the 7th of January on in the sector of Hatten.

It must be emphasized that this 25th Division would be fighting practically without interruption until May 3rd 1945 when the survivors, which were a third of the original strength, surrendered to the American army in the vicinity of Berlin. Its motto was "Furchtios und Treu" (Faithful and without fear).

This article tells of the succession of operations, seen from the German side. The author does not hide the heavy losses endured by the belligerents as well as by the civilians and the ferocity unleashed by the adversaries in facing each other, each hoping to become masters of this "second Stalingrad".

It also does not hide the fact that this "Operation Nordwind", desired by Hitler, was strategically meaningless, scattered those forces which, if mustered, would have, in his eyes, had a chance of reconquering Northern Alsace and even Strasbourg.

An interesting detail: It is through General Burmeister that we learned a fact that until now had not been known: In the middle of the

night of January 26th some Alsacians, enrolled by force into the 35th Panzergrenadier regiment profited from the night and from a movement of withdrawal to pass over, with their artillery, to the American side. (If there are any survivors of this episode would they please make themselves known, we would be very happy to have their accounts of this.)

RETOUR AU PAYS: JUILLET 1945

Return To The Land

(Pages 65-68)

Raymond Auguste Geber

We are presenting below the story of a child of Hatten who had not forgotten his native land and who in July 1945 after its liberation goes back to his village of birth. Having been vaguely informed by the newspapers about the harsh fighting that took place in this sector, he finally discovers the atrocious reality. This poignant story of his emotions speaks out for those who came back and saw again their village: a pile of debris...

In July 1945 I was finally able to visit what remained of Hatten, the village where I was born, once so beautiful and so happy. It looked like a desert out of which emerged the steeple of the destroyed church, a few houses gaping open from the shells, others by machine gun fire and above all masses of ruins in an indescribable disorder. Approaching my village on the road to Seltz I met a childhood friend who recognized me and asked if I wanted to see the condition of the house of my fathers' family of which nothing remained; neither was anything remaining of the house where I was born, where I spent my early childhood.

But nothing prevented me from visiting my birthplace, even at the expense of exposing myself to the dangers which lay about since the village and the surrounding areas had not yet been de-mined. Upon approaching this area I noticed near the grade crossing to the train tracks, an impressive number of helmets with bullet holes in them, a tank turned over in the ditch whose revolving gun turret and artillery were projecting about ten meters beyond the grade crossing as the result of an intensive bombing.

LA RUE PRINCIPALE

The Main Street

When I entered the village from the south a horrible spectacle came to my eyes: the main street strewn with shell-splinters, bombs, cartridge cases, bullets on both sides of the street, piles of wreckage from destroyed houses, roofs with holes caused by large caliber shells, burned and twisted timbers, broken rifles, the gutters filled with all sorts of scattered material, a complete disaster giving you the tragic impression of a true desert where rats and mice were seeking their food by attacking the bodies of the killed soldiers.

A horrible spectacle in this month of July when the summer sun increased the possibility of the outbreak of serious epidemics. There were mines everywhere in the fields, danger was certain in the streets and in the houses, the silence of death hanging over this sinister scene and I heard only the plaintive song of a solitary bird adding to all this its own portion of sadness and solitude. There was no longer a clock which could strike the hour, nor steeples to announce the Angelus, the holidays, or mourning. There were no longer any songs of yesteryear, this pleasant and catchy music of time gone by. There were no longer any interesting conversations between friends since many among them had disappeared. There were no longer any boisterous gatherings in the main street at the time of the spring and fall festivals. There were no longer any animated conversations in the restaurants since they had all disappeared. There were no longer any young or older people who used to walk on Sundays after attending the holy service. There were no longer these happy children who used to amuse themselves by playing ball or making wind-mills work in the ditches. There were no longer those beautiful evenings in the past where the parents and children spent some pleasant moments together. There was nothing left except for a few lonely people, lost in this atrocious misery, seeking to maintain themselves at any cost in order to not leave the impression of a total depopulation of a sacrificed city.

LE CENTRE DU VILLAGE

The Center Of The Village

When I approached the center of the village I was able to discover up close the harmful effects of the terrible battle. The church resembled a skeleton, with no doors or windows, lifting up the remaining part of the steeple like a finger towards the blue sky. The interior was empty and burned by the phosphorus shells. That was where furious fighting took place between the Americans and the Germans, a harsh and bloody battle of machine guns. Under the steeple, some dead soldiers were covered up by bricks and debris from the steeple mixed with what remained of the clock. The choir emptied of its decor, its altar etc. gave me the impression of the Temple of Jerusalem in ruins at the time of its destruction in 70 B.C. In the ancient sacristy there was a golden ciborium in ruins, a discovery that I pointed out to the priest of the area. Around the church, ancient ruined tombs and the rose sandstone cross entirely mutilated.

Right near the church was the beautiful pharmacy of my old friend Dr. Klein, pierced by a shell which had caused serious damage. The old school for boys near-by, was transformed into a ruin and the other schools were in the same state in the Street of Schools, all seriously damaged by the continuous firing. I next visited the kindergarten, a memory of my early childhood: it had also suffered a great deal, but I was able to find again the old stove and the seats which were so familiar to me. The school near the stream had also suffered a lot of damage because, right near-by were the large orchards where the tanks passed coming through from the south and where was still to be found a barrow full of anti-tank mines and lighter mines used to prevent the advance of the assailants. In what remained of the former meat-store "David", at the end of the same street, I found sticks of dynamite ready to be used to blow up the stone bridge, an ancient vestige of a chateau now gone.

I then stopped at the spot where my father's family house stood and tears came to my eyes. One could easily imagine the great suffering experienced in the presence of these disasters.; everything was in ruins, the cellar littered with all sorts of refuse, burned furniture and the rest

destroyed. The brand-new barn (it was built in 1932) also destroyed, leaving the twisted beams visible and the fodder burned as well. The stable where my brother-in-law raised his cows looked like a cracked and burned set of walls . Every animal had disappeared and there was nothing left, nothing, just as in most other houses and farms of the village.

AUTOUR DE LA MAIRIE

Around The Town Hall

The baker's shops in the center no longer existed; nor the doctor's house nor the notary's. The town hall in the grand rue (Main Street) was in a terrible state, the bell-turret knocked down, the roof destroyed, the interior resembled a lifeless hovel. Of the four beautiful Roman columns which used to hold up the balcony only shapeless masses of stone, deeply gouged and completely useless, remained. The balcony itself was seriously damaged. The whole thing had a pitiful appearance.

The archives had been hastily transferred to Betschdorf before the fighting and after a long research it was found to be lacking the Protestant parish register in which was the signature of Elisabeth Frederique Brion (she was the daughter of the pastor of Sessenheim, previously of Niederroedern) who was a god-mother in Hatten, in 1779, and that Johann Wolfgang Goethe had visited when he was doing his studies at the University of Strasbourg and for whom he had composed the famous "Heidenröslein". This register was discovered, after the 1944-45 war in the Departmental Archives in Strasbourg, when it was necessary to re-integrate the Communal Archives of Hatten after the great torment. Fortunately I was able to make a photograph of the document in question.

VUES VERS RITTERSHOFFEN

A View Towards Rittershoffen

Two victims of the fighting were pointed out to me also, temporarily buried under bricks in the gutter of the main street : a man and a child who could not yet be buried since the clearing of the mines had not yet taken place. Elsewhere the wooden shoes of a little girl, near a pile

of beets in a cellar; this little girl had never been found, perhaps she was the one that had been discovered in the gutter. Next to the Town Hall a beautiful private home that once belonged to G. Huckel no longer looked like a house, and it was like that all along the main street of the village in the direction of Rittershoffen, to the west. One house in which bitter fighting took place for three days was the Sucher house. The soldiers fought there with extraordinary fury and it was in this spot that I found the body of a German soldier in uniform, wearing his helmet, half eaten by the rats. A little distance from there a bloody shin of a soldier in a boot lying in undescrivable debris.

Continuing on my road to the end of the village the remains of houses came to my sight, offering a tragic view of the houses in ruins and others shot through on all sides with shells fired in all directions. Near there was found an American tank whose turret had been pierced by bazookas, for all around I discovered unexploded anti-tank shells. It is important to mention here that the village of Rittershoffen, especially the section around the church, the town hall and the schools had been heavily hit and the debris was enormous. I would also like to point out that the two large crosses, one on the road between Hatten and Rittershoffen and the other on the road from Hatten to Niederroedern at some distance from the casemate were completely destroyed.

Upon retracing my steps and going towards the Oberbach (Haut-Ruisseau) with the same desolate scene as on the Unterbach (Bas-Ruisseau) I could only observe the consequences of the harshness of the fighting. The house where I was born was also leveled and you can imagine the sorrow that I experienced when I saw my childhood memories erased, memories which I had faithfully kept in my memory. That was where I had spent my early childhood, that was where I used to play with my neighbors and friends, that was where I knew many happy hours in the family circle surrounded by so much love and tenderness right to the day in which I went to my father's house in the Street of the Schools (Rue du Château), not far from the church.

AU NORD DU VILLAGE
To The North Of The Village
(Page 67)

To the north of the village, near the former tile-factory put to a different use, near the sunken road (la Hohl) an enormous German "Tiger" was still pointing its' artillery on the center of the village. It had been put out of commission but it still hid in its interior numerous shells ready to be fired. A little further on, towards Oberbach a German "Panther", another colossus, but out of commission, pointed towards the west, and in a near-by orchard another tank was to be found upside down and rendered harmless: it had suffered enormous damage. Other tanks were lying around here and there, immobile and silent. Towards Berg and Hohlweg (an elevated part to the north-east of Hatten and along the sunken road merging onto the eastern exit of the village), everywhere there were houses damaged by the shooting. The Spinger house, in particular, resembled a sieve, having received so much damage.

PRES DU CIMITIERE ET DE LA GARE
Near The Cemetery And The Train Station
(Page 67)

On the heavily damaged road across from the cemetery and across from the train station I discovered another tank in the fields which hid in its' turret the chest of a soldier killed during the attack, and unexploded finned shells scattered on the ground. It was also in these regions that the fields had been mined and presented a real danger to the people who were going there to work. Along the forest of Rittershoffen which limited the ban to the south, I was told that a string of mines had been placed there (the mines had been tied to each other by white strips) to stop all counter-attacks during the winter and coming from the south through the forest. The white strips and the mines were imperceptible in case of snow. The casemates which formed the fortified belt of the village to the south, to the east and to the north, had undergone attacks and terrible counter-attacks by the artillery, the planes and the assault tanks. I was told that 45,000 shells were fired on the village and 87 tanks destroyed.

The cemetery, on the route from Hatten to Seltz, some distance from the train grade crossing, was not spared from the fighting. According to reliable witnesses it was the scene of hand-to-hand combat. They didn't even respect the repose of those who were sleeping in peace. I saw with my own eyes common ditches for the soldiers (American and German) killed in the Hatten Hell. I also saw a common ditch for the civil victims of all ages who had died during the harsh and distressing ordeal. But there still remained others in the ruins and they would rejoin the others after the de-mining.

LA RENAISSANCE

The Rebirth

(Page 67)

Part of the inhabitants, evacuated to neighboring villages, had not yet returned because the village, heavily damaged, was not in the position to shelter them. I wandered through my home town with sadness and great emotion. Here and there a childhood friend in mourning and solitude, sometimes a friendly face telling me about his misery and I did my best to console them. I promised to come back often to be with them and to see the new village built.

Mr. Charles Huckel, mayor and Mr. Auguste Mathern, deputy-mayor, began the work with unwearying energy to accelerate both the de-mining and the reconstruction. And when I asked them where was the Hatten of the old days, they answered me: "On the road to Koenigsbruck, there you will find old Hatten, a pile of debris."

There is the result of an atrocious war, there is the sad end of a nightmare !

LES VILLAGES ENVIRONNANTS

Neighboring Villages

Pages 70-72

If Hatten and Rittershoffen were at the center of the battle, it must not be forgotten that it spread out widely onto the neighboring communities which also underwent major destruction. It was especially the villages situated to the north, to the east and to the west, which served as bases for the German troops, which were the most affected. The American artillery, wanting to prevent the concentration of the assault troops, pointed its fire on these support points. Thus the shells fell even on Trimbach and Croettwiller despite its distance of 7 kilometers from the battle.

On the other hand, it does not appear that the locations to the south-west such as Ober and Nieder-Betschdorf, Schwabwiller, Reimerswiller or Kuhlendorf, which made up the rear lines of the Americans, met the same fate. Without doubt, through a lack of ammunition or long-range guns, the German artillery spared them. The pursuit of the German offensive after January 22nd to Haguenau and the Voder was the object of sporadic shooting without any major consequence.

ASCHBACH-OBERRUEDERN-STUNDWILLER

These three localities, combined since July 1st, 1974, constituted since the Middle Ages a bailiwick dependent on the bishop of Spire. That shows how closely their history is bound together. The episode of the fighting of 1945 in no way negates this rule. As far back as 1944 Aschbach had already known tragedy. November 29, 1944, finding out that a refractory person (someone who refused to fight for Germany in W.W. II) was hidden there, the Gestapo burst into the village. The house of Xavier Fix was surrounded. The deserter in question, originally from Seebach, escaped by the kitchen window. Not finding what they were looking for, the German police blamed the proprietor. They were bringing him to the town square as a hostage of the village, but at the moment when he passed in front of the church he was struck by a bullet in the nape of the neck.

At the time of the fighting in January 1945 the three localities underwent American artillery fire, especially phosphorus shells which caused many fires. Aschbach was 60% destroyed. The steeple and the roof of the church were hit as well as the school. They mourned three civil victims: Alphonse Philipps on the 13th of January, Louis Dentinger February 1st and Michel Weissbeck February 5th. The last two were as a result of wounds. Oberroedern, on the other hand, was only 36% destroyed, although the two schools (boys and girls damaged 100%) were reduced to ashes. They also mourned two civil victims: Aloïse Hoffarth on January 11th and Madeleine Kocher, widow of Fechter, on January 20th. Stundwiller was the most damaged. The village was 70% demolished and the list of their victims went to 5 : Jeanne Strasser (14 years old), Joseph Ball (Nearly 80 years old) Marianne Strasser (over 80 years old), Joseph Weissbeck (13 years old) and his mother Reine Weissbeck (about 40 years old). It did not consist of more than about fifteen old houses which all had some damage to them.

Despite the very high rate of destruction, it is to be noted that the number of civil victims proved to be limited. From the beginning the population took shelter in cellars. Then, as one by one the houses were destroyed and became a blazing mass, the occupants took refuge at their neighbors. Thus it also formed a grouping of the population. At Stundwiller the 311 inhabitants were thus found to be concentrated at the end of the battle in three cellars : in the houses of Joseph Isinger, Georges Fischer and finally that of the dairy. The last place was considered particularly safe. It sheltered nearly 120 people who ate the milk and cheese. Nearly 30% of the destroyed houses had been devoured by flames. However the population did not have to suffer from street fighting as did Hatten and Rittershoffen.

After the battle the populace was commandeered to gather up the dead and bury them. In the cemetery at Stundwiller a communal ditch received the bodies of 150 to 200 German soldiers. Individual graves were also dug there. Only three American graves were found. A temporary church was established between Oberroedern and Stundwiller.

by Jean-Laurent Vonau

BUHL
(Page 71)

The American forces seized Buhl December 14th, 1944. They evacuated the village in the first days of January and the Germans returned there in force.

Situated 3 kilometers to the north of Hatten the village of Buhl was both a departure base for the attack of the casemates of the Maginot Line and also an important cross-roads for reinforcements. It was also used as a target by the American artillery during the first hours of the battle. The Air Force bombed it several times. It was Sunday the 14th of January when Buhl received major damage. A bomb fell in front of the Catholic church digging an enormous crater in the road. The Protestant church burned as well as numerous houses. The populace escaped across the fields covered with snow. They found refuge in Siegen and Niederlauterbach. A few men remained in the village to care for the animals left behind.

The village was 66% destroyed. The two churches and about forty of the houses had to be rebuilt. Nothing remained untouched. Seven civilians were killed during these tragic days. January 11th they discovered three dead in the cellar of the Catholic church : Mrs. Marguerite Helleisen-Knoch, mother of the priest, Mrs. Anne-Marie Kieffer-Helleisen, her sister, and her little neice Marie-Thérèse Helleisen. Four other older people were also killed during the bombardment : the widow Julie Kuhnle-Philipps, Edward Ball, the widow Eugénie Warter-Ball and an inhabitant of Rittershoffen the widow Madeleine Voegele-Wurtz. To this list of civil victims must also be added a young woman, 22 years old, Joséphine Clauss, killed at the time of the first liberation in December and Antoine Luck, 73 years old, who exploded a mine in March of 1945.

by Paul Stroh

NIEDERROEDERN

(Page 71)

The Americans had liberated Niederroedern December 13, 1944 with a fight, then advanced as far as Berg and Buchelberg to the Palatinat.

Fearing encirclement during the offensive of the Ardennes, they withdrew to Hatten-Rittershoffen starting January 3rd. The populace, not warned ahead of time, witnessed this retreat with dread and disappointment. Some, who were refractors (refused to fight for the Germans), fled by bicycle in the direction of Saverne. At the same time an official announced that the bridge was going to blow up and they were advised to open their windows to avoid having the glass broken. This makeshift bridge lasted only two weeks.

A period followed when the village was a no-man's land, visited occasionally, however, by patrols of the two adversaries during the night.

Sunday the 7th two German Bren gun carriers advanced as far as the destroyed bridge. The first snow fell during this night. Early in the morning German groups were seen to arrive wearing white camouflage suits, razing the walls, then leaving in the direction of the Gerittmuhl, the forest of Hatten. Other troops installed themselves in the houses, the inhabitants in the cellars. The village was without administration because the Mayor-Ortsgruppenleiter had fled to Germany in December.

The following days tanks were seen to pass by which were crossing the Seltzbach while heavy artillery was taking up their positions at the foot of the hills to the north.

The attack on Hatten was launched on January 11th and from that moment shells rained down on us day as well as night. But in Hatten it must have been hell ; from the 13th on, masses of terrified refugees were seen to come out of the forest . They had abandoned everything and had passed through the middle of the shell bursts. Shells which also made victims in Niederroedern: German soldiers, but also a refugee woman (Fleick) from Hatten who died in the Milleman cellar receiving a direct hit from a shell. She was buried in haste behind a neighboring church in a shell hole.

The German reinforcements continued to approach Hatten : especially the very young inexperienced men who died almost to the last.

The populace, hidden in their cellars, came out occasionally to care for the animals. This was how Joseph Gusching was killed and also a woman refugee from Hatten who was helping him.

The vaulted cellars were more sought after than the others, for example the one in the Jewish school where a dozen civilians were hiding. The cellars of the schools also served to give first aid to the wounded soldiers, of whom one was an American. They were then transported to Landau.

The bridge had been repaired.

January 16th will always remained engraved in the memories of the survivors. In the morning about a hundred American prisoners that had been gathered together in a school were led in three columns in the direction of Germany. It was lucky for them because towards noon thirty four fighter-bombers of their army dropped their bombs on these schools, on the neighboring synagogue packed with ammunitions, buildings were burned and destroyed as well as the barns of the Deuchlers and Millemann's and the houses of the Schopp's, Gusching's and the Knabs'.

The vaulted cellar of the Jewish school resisted ; the exits, blocked by debris were cleared by a following bomb. No civilian perished there, but wounded soldiers like the military medics were killed in a rather large number. Loaded onto a cart they were put in a a common grave in the Protestant cemetery (after 1956 they were placed in the German military cemetery of Niederbronn).

Everywhere could be seen civilians fleeing from the cellars running in all directions, crying, praying, moaning. Some took refuge in the fields, some in the pitted roads. Two hours later when fighter planes once more machine-gunned the village, some civilians running across the fields were killed : the wife of Joseph Heyd, his child and his mother.

But the following weeks they still discovered the bodies of dead soldiers in the woods, among which was one American simply

covered with the branches of a pine tree in the cemetery At the eastern exit of the village a wooden cross marked for years the site of the grave of the Panzergrenadier Bauer. A burned German tank remained for months at the entrance to the rue du Moulin.

The battle of Hatten was finished January 23rd and they could finally leave the cellars after a nightmare of nearly two weeks. The battle had moved on to the Moder, in the region of Haguenau and the front stabilized. German soldiers of the Volkssturm, old fathers of families, peaceful and tired of the war, still remained in these villages, then withdrew around the 18th of March, the day that the 1st French Army liberated the village without fighting. Many German soldiers were then seen to come out of the barn where they had been kept hidden and gave themselves up. For those the war was over. Later the village was declared 33% destroyed.

René Bayer

Caption to photograph on page 72: Niederroedern : the school was destroyed by bombing on January 16th, 1945. It sheltered a makeshift hospital. Wounded and medical personnel were killed in rather large numbers.

LA DISCRIMINATION DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA BATAILLE

Discrimination In The Context Of The Battle

Pages 73-74

Lise M. Pommoi

taken from "The Employment of Negro Troops" by U. Lee
(U.S. Army-WW II)

"If you're white, you're all right : if you're black, git back, git back". This was sung in the United States not so long ago. Europeans began selling African slaves to the United States 400 years ago. It has been estimated that more than 15 million slaves were sold in this way. When the War of Succession began in 1860 about 4.5 million blacks were counted in the United States, the majority were slaves. They lived mostly in the south where they were employed in the cotton , tobacco or sugar cane fields. Few among them knew how to read or write. Their misfortunes have been described in "Uncle Tom's Cabin". The book provoked so much emotion in the North that Abraham Lincoln said to the author, Harriet Beecher Stowe : "So you are the little lady who wrote the book which started this great war."

All the slaves were freed in 1865, shortly after the end of the War of Succession which had the North opposing the South of the country. Several years later the former slaves acquired the right to vote. From 1870 on, in theory, the blacks were equal to the whites. In fact, this was not so. They flocked to the cities where they lived in poor sections, overpopulated, such as Harlem in New York. Their children went to schools that were reserved for blacks. As the educational level was low these children were disadvantaged from the beginning and could not go on to colleges. This led to a high rate of unemployment among the Blacks, which caused the Blacks to commit more offenses than Whites. The situation was even worse in the South : separate schools, separate toilets, separate restaurants, even the cemeteries reflected this segregation. If a Black had to appear in court, he was to be sure of being convicted by a jury composed almost totally of Whites. This was the situation of the Blacks when the Second World War broke out.

827 Anti-tank
battalion all
Blacks except officers

rica sent every able-bodied man to war. They
ed and lacked training. This was even more
k battalions were taken into consideration. The
composed entirely of Blacks, participated in the
ffen. except white officers

left for Europe in November 1944. They had
fight in the Pacific, but their departure had been
ufficient training. Their commander himself was
was "impossible" and that it would be necessary
it was it only the fault of the men? They had
alf years of training in the U.S.A. but under
The men had had eight different commanders,
rganized several times with different equipment.
ot unusual since they corresponded with the
, classified in categories IV and V after having
incapable of adapting. From a mediocre level, no
e rank of N.C.O.'s . In August of '44 the men had
already failed five tests. They were never able to complete their training.
In particular training under indirect fire, necessary for tank destroyers,
was totally neglected. The men seemed incapable of taking care of
communications, reading maps, or even maintaining their vehicles. The
officers were convinced of the incompetence of their N.C.O.'s. They tried to
replace the white N.C.O with Blacks, an unusual occurrence for this period
of time, but the situation was not improved and the Black N.C.O.'s were, in
their turn, replaced by whites who were convinced of the incompetence of
their troops from the beginning. It was in this climate that this unit was
sent to Europe after having been through two court martials, one for a
murder with a meat axe and the other as a result of a shooting.

The debarkation in Marseille was marked with incidents and
accidents caused by the carelessness of the drivers. These incidents
continued all along the road which led from Marseille to Sarrebourg where
they joined the 7th U.S. Army They no longer counted missed departures,
the accidents, accidents caused by excessive speed or lack of oil. When the
vehicles arrived at Sarrebourg not one was in working condition and it was
necessary to send them to the repair shop immediately. Never before had
been seen such an atmosphere of disorganization.

The 827th battalion was attached to the 12th armoured division. They were sent to the front on December 21st to support the 714th tank battalion. The 827th remained in place for three days without taking part in the action, but the officers had to face serious discipline problems. The cannon gunners abandoned their positions to go to look for some firewood to make a fire, despite orders. On January 6th the battalion rejoined Task Force WAHL of the 79th division in the sector of Hatten-Rittershoffen. Before moving out a company officer and an enlisted man exchanged gunfire when the officer tried to quell a riot. The Task Force WAHL, under the orders of Brigadier General George D. Wahl, commanding the 79th division, consisted of the 313th and the 315th infantry regiments, the 222nd infantry regiment of the 42nd division, the Combat Command A of the 14th Armoured Division and the 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The 827th participated in the complete battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen. Judgement is divided as to the subject of their usefulness. It is certain that a certain confusion existed and that the orders were not always clear. Therefore the 813th tank destroyer battalion thought that the 827th had been attached to it while the officers of the 827th thought that they were there only to coordinate their actions. Furthermore the men of the 827th battalion expected to receive their orders directly from their own officers and not the officers of the infantry. It resulted in great confusion and the men fired neither on their own initiative nor on the orders of the officers strange to them. The infantry officers drew the conclusion that the men of the 827th chose their targets. Sometimes they had to look for the men in the cellars when they should have been at their posts. Incidents arose many, many times. Thus once, the men refused to fire on a German tank which was bogged down by the side of the road. The Infantry commander ordered his men to fire on the crew if it did not fire on the tank, but by this time the Germans had been able to get the tank out of the ditch. The tank thus had been able to get out of the ditch and it had disappeared from sight. On January 14th a tank destroyer was parked in a barn where there were mines. It caught on fire. The sergeant ordered the crew to get the machine out before the mines could explode. But the men refused to enter the barn. Under orders of the infantry commander a lieutenant fired at the crew but he missed. Another tank destroyer was brought in to drag the machine in flames from the

barn, but it was too late. In the meantime, the infantrymen had taken the mines out of the barn.

An investigation led by the inspector of the 6th Army Corps revealed an astounding situation. Certain crews accomplished their jobs with courage and efficiency despite their lack of experience. Their bravery was noted even though the entire battle took place under strafing by jets and in support of troops that were themselves disorganized. For example on January 9th Company B of the 827th was dispatched to the area north of Hatten to help halt an enemy attack. Sixteen German tanks were headed for Rittershoffen and fifteen others were going towards Hatten. The men of the 827th destroyed eleven of them. The others had to withdraw. A joint team composed of the 827th and the 813th destroyed nine tanks in Hatten. The next day, the 10th of January they knocked four enemy tanks out of commission. There after in Hatten, a section of company B of the 827th, isolated during the day and only being able to re supply at night, continued to engage in fierce battles, destroying several tanks and enemy vehicles. Another section, under more strenuous urging from its commander and even under threat of arms, were able to accomplish well their mission so that the infantry of the 315th said that they received excellent support of these men.

Despite certain acts of bravery the officers claimed, in the course of an investigation, that their men could never be properly trained, that their reactions would always be slow and that that they couldn't be used as tank destroyers. Despite the esteem that certain officers had for their men the general commander of the 6th Army Corps decided to dissolve the unit and to put the men in other units as, for example, car, truck and ambulance drivers.

The investigation was long but incomplete. All of the officers were not interrogated and none of the soldiers of the 827th were questioned. Meanwhile the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen was over and the 827th was going to rejoin the 12th armoured division engaged in the Colmar pocket.

Generally it is thought that this battalion could have been used more effectively under better direction. The acts of poor discipline cannot be denied, but it is necessary to recognize the exploits accomplished by certain elements. Few veterans remember having met these men except for

Mr. Philip Sturgeon who was at that time the doctor of Combat Command A of the 14th armoured division. According to his recollections the 827th battalion was never made an integral part of the armoured division. It was the first time that American fighters had ever seen black units. Mr. Sturgeon claims that many good things were said about this battalion. One of the wounded that he cared for told him that he had seen a Black seriously wounded (his brain was able to be seen!) continue to maneuver his cannon. It is therefore difficult to place one's faith in the results of a single investigation taking place in difficult conditions, in a period when racial discrimination was still accepted in the United States. What we don't know is whether one of this crew ever received the Bronze Star that he earned for his feats during the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen.

Opinions remain thus divided in the subject of the participation of black troops in the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen. Will the truth ever be known? Testimony is rare and contradictory.

**RITTERSHOFFEN: COMMENT LES HABITANTS ONT
PERÇU LA BATAILLE**

Rittershoffen: How the Inhabitants
Perceived The Battle

by

Lucien Messmer

Pages 75-90

DE LA LIBERATION DU 13 DECEMBRE 1944 AU PREMIER
TIR D'ARTILLERIE SUR RITTERSHOFFEN -
From The Liberation Of The 13th Of December To The First
Artillery Fire On Rittershoffen

The village was liberated the first time by the 7th American Army commanded by General Patch on the 13th of December 1944, and we naïvely thought that everything was now ended for us. The liberation of Rittershoffen practically took place without any major difficulty. The Germans had enrolled at the last minute all able-bodied men in the Volkssturm. They also maintained here and there some isolated marksmen whose mission was to delay the American advance, but the majority of the German troops had already left, destroying everything that resembled a strategic or economic point. A young German soldier remained in Rittershoffen not wanting to give up where he was suddenly afraid of giving being taken prisoner. He was followed and beaten in la Hohl coming from Betschdorf. Some more German soldiers were taken prisoners in the same village.

All the electrical installations had been destroyed, we were without lights. Along with the neighboring people we hoped that the present situation wouldn't last long because, without replenishment of stores, without mail, without a radio, without a newspaper, in short, cut off from the world, it was very disagreeable. More than 5 years of war had, however, accustomed us to many sacrifices, but the day of December 13th 1944 gave us a ray of hope.

The American soldiers, who, at the time of Christmas and New Years holiday, were not very numerous, prepared nevertheless to celebrate Christmas.

Berthe Holtzmann tells that the American soldiers had decorated their Christmas tree and each one had attached to the tree his Christmas card that he had received from home. There was turkey on the menu. On Christmas night when I was singing with the children three soldiers entered and they made us understand that they also knew the hymn "Silent Night".

I realized that we were above all separated by the handicap of language and I was very sorry to find myself powerless to be able to converse with them.

The problem of language was not an obstacle for Anne Franck-Neumann who spoke English. The American soldiers were quick to locate a place where someone could speak their language and soon half the Americans stationed in Rittershoffen made their meeting place this house. Also when Christmas came several were invited by the Franck-Neumann family to share their meal which they did with great pleasure. As a way of thanking them for the kind invitation some American soldiers installed, by means of a generator, electric current to the home of the Franck-Neumann family for Christmas 1944. This was quite an event for that time, especially since everyone in Rittershoffen was without electricity.

Operation Nordwind was launched on January 1st. From the very first days of the month we noticed a German reconnaissance plane in the sky which was flying over us at a low altitude and soon they exploded the first shells in Rittershoffen.

OFFENSIVE ALLEMANDE

The German Offensive

According to the testimony of certain people and in particular Jean Jung and Louis Jung of Rue des Bois, some German soldiers had been seen in Rittershoffen before January 11th, 1945. That is possible, although this advanced date must be taken conditionally. The people especially mentioned the tank battle which took place in the outskirts of Rittershoffen and which they were involuntary witnesses. Next the inhabitants of this section took refuge in the Catholic rectory. The testimony concerning the tank battle is, besides, confirmed by a

newspaper report of the American Army which told of the destruction of three German tanks in Rittershoffen January 9, 1945.

It is therefore possible that the German soldiers that were making up the crew of these destroyed tanks had succeeded in hiding themselves in the houses and that certain patrols had been able to infiltrate Rittershoffen. However the large German attack on Rittershoffen did not take place before January 11, 1945. In issue # 42 of "L'Outre-Forêt" which has an article by Roland Eyer mann which is well documented, advances the date of January 11, 1945 for the German attack on Rittershoffen.

"Art, History, and Leisure Time" of Rittershoffen mentions in the "Brief History" the day of January 11, 1945 : at 6:30 the German attack was launched on Rittershoffen. The northern sectors and the north-east horn were besieged. The rectory, the "garspruch", the school, the Walter bakery and the first houses of Leiterswiller street were in the hands of the Germans. At the time of the clean-up operations three people of the Andler-Grastel family were killed in their cellar. This happened January 11th, 1945.

**CRITERES DE NATURE A MIEUX FAIRE COMPRENDRE LA
DISPROPORTION DES VICTIMES CIVILES DE RITTERSHOFFEN PAR
RAPPORT A HATTEN**

Criteria To Better Understand The Disproportionate Numbers Of
Civil Victims In Rittershoffen in Comparison With Hatten

Several precise facts help us to better understand this disproportion:

The determination shown by the belligerents to retain or reconquer what would only be a little strip of land was identical in the two communities. It is, nevertheless, necessary to note the position of Hatten in respect to the German attack. By comparing the schematic map of Hatten with that of Rittershoffen, we see that the combat zone was clearly more spread out than that of Rittershoffen. Even on equal points of area and number of inhabitants the combat zone of Hatten would have been bigger.

Another element played an equal role in this area. Owing to the fact that extent of the combat zone in Hatten, the terrain occupied by the American troops during the period of the 9th to the 21st of January was rather reduced. But it was proved that even in Hatten the proportion of damage in this sector was less.

In Rittershoffen, for example, the sections situated in the American zone, whether it be from the heights of the "Rittergass", the "Bischgass", the top of "Grossgass" was relatively spared in comparison with other sectors.

It was the same for the neighboring areas held by the Americans: Betschdorf, Schwabwiller, Kuhlendorf, Hohwiller, Leiterswiller, and Hoffen which had little or no damage. From these locations the attacks were made on Hatten and on Rittershoffen. From Betschdorf particularly the American tanks went along the train tracks of Walbourg-Seltz to go towards Hatten.

On the other hand the villages of Oberroedern, Stundwiller, Aschbach, Buhl and Niederroedern who found themselves in the German sector, were always under fire by the Americans.

What would have been the fate of Hatten (85% destroyed) and that of Rittershoffen (82% destroyed) if the Germans had been able to have at their disposal such an arsenal of matériel?

Another event that Rittershoffen did not endure and which had a large influence on the recorded disparity : in the night of the 17th to the 18th of January Hatten underwent heavy bombardment which increased even more the number of dead among the civil population.

Other considerations must also be taken into account: notably the length of the battles. The German attack on Hatten took place on January 9th and on Rittershoffen on the 11th.

But in the field of multiple unknowns in which chance plays a large part, it is useless to try to over-analyze The example of the "Bari" in Rittershoffen is there to remember.

LA PISTE DE CHARS

The Tank Road

The road for the "Panzerstrasse" tanks was well known to the inhabitants of Rittershoffen who had recently used the road from Niederroedern or Buhl. These locations were, at that time, occupied by the Germans. On the contrary, a similar road did not exist in the American sector.

Many people had been evacuated using these roads. Women with babies or young children, invalids or old people were moving on this road towards Niederroedern or Buhl. The others had to go by foot. The driver of the vehicle was not interested in knowing whether, behind, on the seat, people were able to still hold on, if they were on the ground with the recruits. No longer any way to straighten the clothes of the children who were trembling. Occasionally the vehicle slowed down, another time it would speed up, then it would zig-zag. The driver was doing incredible maneuvers to escape from artillery fire.

The itinerary is not easy to establish and as a result cannot be stretched out, most of the people left at night on foot, or were transported by armoured vehicles as far as Niederroedern or Buhl. Most of the people evacuated in these conditions do not remember the road that was taken.

The inhabitants of the southern sector of Rittershoffen left from the present day "Rue des Romains" by Hohl in the direction of Hatten. They went around the village, crossed the "Rue de Stundwiller", then that of Buhl before being able to rejoin the "Essigbusch" (forest situated between Hatten and Niederroedern) and Niederroedern.

There was also the "Panzerstrasse" which went from Talweg to "Füsselsberg" then to Büller, then across the fields and meadows to rejoin the one that left from the Rue des Romains in Rittershoffen. Their meeting point was situated about 4 kilometers away.

Madame Berthe Holtzmann who related with much detail in her testimony the endless travels on the "Panzerstrasse" is not able, either, to situate it with precision.

CAPTION TO PAGE 76: January 15th, 1945: The refugees waiting to be evacuated by the Americans.

CAPTION TO PAGE 78 TOP: Elements of the 20th Regiment of the 7th Fallschirmjager Division in position between Hatten and Rittershoffen.

CAPTION TO PAGE 78 BOTTOM: Niederbetschdorf: January 16, 1945. James T. Hurley camouflaging his M5 A1 tank with white paint.

CAPTION TO PAGE 79 TOP: Niederbetschdorf: January 19, 1945 - Some of the 315th Regiment 79th U.S.I.D. crossing the locale in order to counter-attack in Rittershoffen. From the 10th to the 13th this regiment was encircled in Hatten and Rittershoffen.

CAPTION TO PAGE 79 BOTTOM: Niederbetschdorf: January 19th. An M4 A3 tank of the 14th U.S. B.D. leaving, fresh from its hiding place in order to set out on the road towards Rittershoffen.

EXPLICATIONS CONCERNANT LES EVENEMENTS DU "BARI"

Explanations Concerning The Events Of The "Bari"

It is important to know the circumstances of the death of 13 people from the "Bari" where heart-breaking events took place. The percentage of losses in this small area is particularly high. But what exactly happened? Three people died January 11th as a result of a clean-up operation, by an explosion of a grenade in a cellar, ten other people were killed while fleeing on January 14th, 1945. Life had become so unbearable in the cellar that a brief moment of calm could only encourage the people to leave. That is what they finally did.

Fritz Jaeger was in constant contact with the refugee inhabitants in a neighboring cellar. Thus 27 people fled on that Sunday morning January 14th, 1945. They only had about 100 meters to go in order to leave the village. Some were entering the road of Oberroedern. "This way!!" they were told. It was not a good idea to separate from the others. Furthermore it was not a good idea to choose the north-east of Rittershoffen to flee. Hatten was burning and the other localities visible from the "Bari", through which reinforcements and German provisions were transported, were under American fire.

Furthermore the terrain was mined in spots. Fritz Jaeger had to give a quick glance from "Fiselbari" in that so uninviting and uncertain direction.

Finally the inhabitants of the "Bari" took the direction of Kuhlendorf. In order to reach the road which led to this village they had to skirt Rittershoffen. Naturally they did not know that they had to cross through a combat zone of about 300 meters. The civilian population however, had never been informed. The civilians died without understanding why!

Behind the village, the "Flut". They came under terrible automatic weapons fire and mortars. The people were completely terrified and paralyzed with fear and they burrowed into shell holes. Some remained for a long time crouched in these shelters without daring to leave.

UN SOLDAT AMERICAIN PARTICULIEREMENT MERITANT.

An Especially Deserving American Soldier

The survivors of the "Bari" thus managed to reach a cellar of the "Grossgass". An inhabitant, Berthe Merkling, who had just lost two of her family wanted to recover her mother's wedding ring and the bracelet watch of her sister, both of whom were dead.

She spoke to an American soldier and by gestures she managed to make him understand what she wanted and where the bodies could be found. He quickly understood this person who was in great distress and he was able to carry out the dangerous mission. This beautiful gesture went right to Berthe's heart. This humanitarian gesture deserves to be mentioned.

COMBATS AUTOUR DE L'EGLISE

Fighting Around The Church

The houses and barns around the church were destroyed one by one from the very beginning of the fighting. It was in the interest of the two belligerents to have these buildings disappear since they blocked their view. It was the same with the houses next to the cemetery Heiby and Fischer, which were destroyed when the German troops entered. Walter "Kirchebeck"'s cellar, protected by solid walls, burned for a long time after. The people who were sheltered there, among them being the wounded people Richard Jung, Stéphanie Vogler, and her daughter, had to leave in great haste to take refuge in the Bassler cellar, rue de la gare.

Before reaching this cellar Philomene Walter, who was part of the people who had to leave Walter "Kirchebeck's" cellar, said that "we wanted to take shelter at the Vogler house. The Germans had installed their staff and numerous wounded people were in this cellar. They exploded a smoke bomb to force us to leave, but before leaving I was able to hear a German officer shout: *Da liegen sie herum und draussen verbluten die Kameraden*". And the answer was: *Es hat keinen Zweck, Herr Hauptmann, noch kein*

Meter sind wir vorgekommen. - The German officer ordered : Heraus, heraus. Out! Out! Here they are lying around . Outside our comrades are bleeding to death. It has no purpose Herr Haupman.

The people in the Graff cellar across from the town hall also had to quickly leave the thick walled shelter in order to avoid asphyxiation. The 26 people in this cellar fled into the "Rittergass".

The house of Venus, situated at the far end, almost to the limits of the combat zone and the American sector, was also destroyed. The mother and her children took refuge in the "Garschweg", in the German sector. On the other hand, the houses that were situated behind the church were relatively spared. It should be noted that the Catholic rectory was used as an infirmary by the German troops where numerous wounded soldiers were evacuated. On their part, the Germans also avoided destroying the house of Jacques Goetzmann where the Americans were housing their wounded.

The people who were able to stay in their own houses, near the church, frequently heard machine gun fire from the inside of the building. Dorothy Walter (Wiss Walter) tells us that the 22 Americans in their cellar left in the evening and returned the following morning. A shell had demolished their cellar, they also had to leave their home to take refuge at a relatives' house who was living in "Rittergass", then they went towards Betschdorf.

Lina Lenig tells us that she was among 24 who found refuge in the boiler room of the church from which there was fierce fighting overhead. " We were very happy to be able to leave this building that was coveted by everyone."

LES PERIPETIES D'UNE BATAILLE

The Mishaps Of Battle

What ever happened to Emile Wagner "Gottlieb" and his wife? A total mystery hangs over this disappearance.

The house of Emile Wagner was situated between the Kern forge and the old post office. During the period of the gold rush he went twice to America. Born July 21, 1864 50 years had gone by before the war of 1914-18 broke out and he was over the enrollment age. During the war his duty was to be a rural policeman. He took this duty to heart and performed this duty very seriously.

Emile Wagner and Dorothy Seligman were married October 1, 1918. At the time of these events in 1945 Emile Wagner was more than 80 years old. His hearing wasn't very good but he still got around quite well for his age. His wife, Dorothy, who was twenty years younger, was also in good health. Ever since the end of the battle of January '45 mystery hangs over their disappearance. All suppositions are therefore valid, giving that Emile Wagner spoke English. However the most plausible hypothesis is that their calcinated bodies had been buried under the debris. One thing is certain: they left without leaving a forwarding address.

The shepherd "Hans the Wurtemburgeois" was found in Rittershoffen.

The shepherd "Hans" discovered missing from Hatten on the 10th of January, 1945 was found in Rittershoffen. Philippe Seligman, of Rittershoffen, tells us that the shepherd came to his house at the beginning of the fighting. He was part of the 24 people who had sought refuge in the boiler room of the church. "When we left for the Jura he was still with us."

Joseph Vogler (Kuppenhüter) 77 years old was not found, dead, until the month of April 1945.

Old man Joseph Vogler, born 2/24/1868 was part of the old guard who did not at all want to leave the place. What will happen to our animals if I don't give them food and if everyone leaves? he said. However he was not able to prevent anything, neither the destruction of the houses nor saving the animals and in the final count he had to give his life. It was only in the month of April 1945 that his partially carbonized body was found. His daughter-in-law Mathilde tells us that five of them had left Rittershoffen before the arrival of the Germans and that at first they took refuge in Betschdorf. "My husband and my brother-in-law wanted to return to Rittershoffen to persuade my father-in-law to leave his house. When they arrived at the outskirts of the village they were stopped by the Americans and questioned at length in the village hall in Betschdorf.

TEMOIGNAGES RECUEILLIS A RITTERSHOFFEN (PAGE 85)

Testimony Gathered In Rittershoffen

by Lucien Messmer

Selecting Testimony

Events that we live through are not seen in the same way by everyone. Certainly it has already been 40 years and many people have since gone. If certain facts remain forever engraved in their memory, other details are no longer clear in their mind. All of this requires a great deal of research and time. We must therefore limit our investigation to precise sectors. We want to know exactly what happened to the "Bari" and to gather testimony from other people in this area. Then, before interesting ourselves in the different nerve-centers of Rittershoffen, we wanted, with the assistance of the population, to show a schematic map of the community. This map constitutes, besides, a precise work tool and it allows many things to be explained.

The following testimonies were gathered in the following way: some statements from around the church, from some people charged with gathering up and burying the dead after the battle, a person representing the families who left before the battle. We also listened to the stories of people who witnessed sad events or precise cases, they are regrouped under the title "Fighting around the church" or under "Despair and Confusion". We have tried to have a representative sampling of the population, narratives which reflect on the whole the events lived through by the majority of the inhabitants of Rittershoffen.

**TEMOIGNAGE DE HENRI ANDLER,
MOINS DE 14 ANS EN JANVIER 1945**

Testimony of Henry Adler, Less Than 14 Years Old in January 1945

(Page 85)

I don't remember the exact date, but when the shells stopped falling we were taking refuge in the cellar of the Catholic rectory across from us. We had to crawl to get there. An American soldier made a sign to us to get down while indicating the direction of "Garchweg". In the cellar there were already a lot of people. When the Germans had laid seige to our section, the priest at that time asked us to shout continually "*Zivil*" (civilians). I then heard German soldiers shout "*Unteroffizier Müller hier her*" We were not able to stay long in the rectory because after the arrival of the Germans this building had to above all serve their needs and not those of the civilians.

As a result we found refuge next to Anna Bauer's house. In front, sheltered by the school wall, was a heavy German tank whose cannon was directed towards the Rue des Nains where the Americans were. Furthermore we noticed the noise of shots of a strong caliber and we could smell clearly the odor of the powder because the tank was placed behind a high wall across from our cellar. At each shot everything trembled in the cellar, and furthermore, there was the risk that we would be spotted. Therefore we again changed cellars. The infernal noise of the shots from the cannon were however more bearable in the cellar of Michel Eyer than in the other one. From time to time we ventured out, children of my own age and myself, whether it was by curiosity, whether it was a game, to see what was going on outside. We were not fully conscious of the danger that we were running into outside, especially as there were sharpshooters in the vicinity. The German soldiers stationed in the Catholic rectory did not dare show themselves because of the isolated sharpshooters who were not easy to spot. At night the Germans laid seige to part of the church, and, in daytime, they returned to their point of departure.

In the Eyer cellar the children were cold and above all hungry. They were crying. Their father desperately looked for a cow to milk. One evening we heard the noise of an American patrol that was passing. The

German soldiers who were resting in this cellar immediately ordered everyone to keep silent and to the parents to prevent the children from crying in order to not draw the attention of this patrol who would have to go by again.

Later on we left on a half-track and went towards Niederroedern. When the driver made a false move the vehicle remained caught in a hole. We had to change vehicles. I was able to observe to what point people were at a loss. A young woman had left her baby in its cradle, wedged under a steel bar in the other vehicle. The priest, who was in our group, reminded her of what she had forgotten. We all immediately hastened to the first vehicle to liberate the child. Finally we were able to continue on the road, across the "Büller" for Niederroedern, but we were all very afraid.

Hermine Claus (née Goetzmann) an inhabitant of "Rittergass" at the time.

(Page 85)

We had built an underground shelter covered with plaster, boards, colza straw and earth. We brought along several mattresses, some blankets, a small pail and a lantern. Although primitively sheltered, it represented in our eyes a more sure shelter than the cellar. When the first shells fell, hitting the Protestant parsonage, the church and our house, we all went very quickly to the cellar. We stayed there one night with the American soldiers. The artillery fire then became more and more frequent and our house was hit several times. The soldiers made us understand that they would install themselves in our stable. In our turn we took our baggage constituting mainly clothing and food, before going to our shelter. The underground was situated behind our barn and accessible from "Rittergass" and "Bischgass". Thus it sheltered the inhabitants of both streets.

When we arrived in the shelter several people were already there. At present there were 18 of us installed there. Lodged in the same style we shared our food and Charles Wahl "Bleicher" brought us milk which we drank raw when he was able to milk the cows.

I don't remember the date any more, but one night was particularly agonizing. They were firing without ceasing at the church bell tower and the noise of the vibrating bells was infernal. They fought in the

church and all around until 6 A.M. All night long we heard the crackling of the automatic guns. Suddenly a searing heat invaded our shelter and we were in danger of being asphyxiated. When we left our refuge everything around us was in flames. We released the animals who were in danger of being burned alive but we were not able to save them all and many perished in the heat.

We were, therefore, not able to go back to our shelter and we found refuge in a cellar while waiting to be able to return. Unfortunately when we returned it was damaged as well as the well where we used to get the water.

Then Charles Wahl came whom we were not expecting. He got out of the car quickly, repaired the dry shaft with the help of a metal cord and attached his two cows ready to leave. We loaded ourselves quickly into the car and we left for Betschdorf. The vehicle did not have any brakes but we were able to slow down by using a coal skuttle. Many people from "Rittergass" and Bischgass" had already fled.

Testimony of Richard Jung

(Page 86)

Before the beginning of the fighting around the church the artillery fire was extremely violent and we took refuge in a cellar. We were soon joined by my sister Stéphanie and her 4 children. Suddenly a high caliber shell exploded next to the cellar and the wall fell on us. My sister Stéphanie was wounded on the thigh. I was hit on the spinal column by the fall of the wall. The shock of the explosion also threw little Marie, my sister's daughter, out of the crib wounding her on the head. We took care of our wounds in the stable. Fortunately they turned out to be less serious than we had at first believed.

After having left the stable we took refuge in the cellar of the barn of Walter "Kirchebeck" where we were not able to stay a long time. The barn was burned and once again we had to leave in haste. We quickly crossed the courtyard of the school : we passed in front of the rectory filled with wounded German soldiers, we went up "Garshweg",

crossed through the cemetery and thus reached the cellar of Albert Vonau. When we left the burning barn we were all distraught and each one of us left in a different direction. My sister Stéphanie, the children and some members of the Walter family wanted to seek refuge in the Vogler cellar (the father-in-law of Stéphanie) but the Germans had installed their military staff there and there were wounded soldiers in the cellar. As a result they had to take refuge in the cellar across the way in which about 70 people were assembled. The Germans wanted to use these cellars and ordered us to leave. Able-bodied people walked to Niederroedern; the others were transported there by armored vehicles.

We therefore took the direction of Hatten because my father and I wanted to get to my brother George's house in Hatten. However we were quickly pushed back by the American soldiers. We were nevertheless able to rejoin the road that we had abandoned. We crossed the Stundwiler road, that of Buhl, and through "Essigbusch" we arrived at Niederroedern. There was scarcely any room in this locality and we left once again for Wintzenheim. Later, after our return to Rittershoffen in the beginning of March, we learned of the death of my uncle Léon. After the melting of the snow we also found the body of my sister Rosa who had been mortally wounded January 14th '45 while trying to flee with her family.

Testimony of Paul Messmer

(Page 86)

He tells how and why they left Rittershoffen several hours before the German attack. It was January '45 and the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen was beginning. The artillery thundered and the shells were falling by the thousands on the terrain where the German offensive was being prepared. We had hidden some deserters from the German army. They showed up December 13th, '44, the day of the liberation by the American troops. We thought that this liberation would be final ; however several weeks later the Germans launched a counter-offensive. Also, in order to avoid reprisals from the Gestapo, we left Rittershoffen. I still remember that my mother absolutely did not want to leave the house. It would be better to die here, thinking certainly of the evacuation in 1939.

Two shells had already hit our barn and the pigsty across from our house. Hatten, visible from "Fiselbari" was burning. At the sight of this spectacle, also thinking of what would happen if the Germans returned, she yielded. Finally we left with another neighboring family from the "Bari", Henri Eyer. A brief let-up of firing was taken advantage of in order to flee pushing a small car in front of us loaded with the necessities. Passing in front of Willy Holtzmann's house he shouted good-bye to us in a choked voice. He apparently asked my father who was walking behind what he should do. My father would have advised him to leave. I personally did not witness this conversation.

That was the last memory I have of Willy who died along with his mother a few days later in the battle. Before being able to leave Rittershoffen we had to rest several times. In the evening we were able to reach Betschdorf, then Surbourg, where we spent the night and two days later we were in the Haute-Marne.

Testimony of Frédérique Motz (née Heiby)
(Page 88)

Violent artillery fire preceded the German attack which forced us to take refuge in our cellar. Several of the family were not there. My brothers Albert and Charles were in the Wehrmacht, my older sister Berthe lived in the "Krummgass" where my sister Madeleine was blocked by the sudden intensity of fighting. Another sister Emma was living in the "Rittergass". In the final count there were only four of us when the Germans laid seige to our sector.

The Americans withdrew about 200 meters further. But soon an avalanche of shells fell on us destroying the houses one after another around the church. I suppose that our house and the one across from Joseph Fischer blocked the view of the cemetery and the road to Hatten because the enemy was in a hurry to destroy them.

We then took refuge at the house of Fritz Lenig where there were 6 people in the cellar. Realizing that we had forgotten important items my father took the risk of returning at that time to our completely destroyed house. He also was able to unloose the animals. However we were not able to stay long with Fritz Lenig since his barn had begun to burn. We tried to put out the fire but with our few resources which we had at our disposal and against the phosphorus our efforts were in vain.

Later on we went to the Seligmann cellar situated two houses further towards the train station. There we found not only civilians but also German soldiers. The military did not want us to stay and they lit a smoke bomb to force us to leave. We therefore had to once more leave our shelter and we absolutely did not know where to go. Finally we chose the boiler room of the church which my father knew well since he took care of the heating. Twenty-four of us ran to this new shelter. This refuge turned out later to be not too sure. The debris coming from the shell explosions filtered in through the air vents, blocking the air passages and pouring

down on us without stopping. It was not a question for us of wanting to sleep. We wondered how we were ever going to be able to leave, since a large rock which had fallen from the building blocked the exit door. The next morning, by daylight, we saw a hole in the wall and we were able, through the wreckage, to find fresh air. At the beginning Emma Wolhuter and I took the direction of the Catholic rectory which had been requisitioned by the Germans. We were all frantic and everyone took a different direction. As for us we went towards the "Krummgass" where my older sister Berthe lived and where my other sister Madeleine was. We really didn't have any luck because the shelter of the barn had a hole through it from a shell and everyone was in a hurry to leave. The younger children in the cellar were crying.

As it was impossible to stay as a group since the firing was too intense, we decided to go to the Langerbach's cellar in the "Grossgass", occupied by the Americans. A first attempt to reach the American line was fruitless. Intensive fire forced us to turn back. My father only had a handle in his hands; that was all that remained of the receptacle filled with "Schnapps". A little further on we tried once more to cross. This time we had more luck. We finally reached "Grossgass" by passing through fenced in areas and by threading our way next to the dead animals. From the Langerbach cellar we were directed again to the church and to the cellars of Jacques and Louis Goetzmann. We were disoriented and we did not realize that the danger was greater near the church than towards Kuhlendorf.

Finally however we took this direction. At the exit of the village we saw the body of Fritz Jaeger riddled with bullets and stretched out near his harnessing and a little further on, collapsed in the ditch, the bodies of Berthe Eichenlaub and her daughter Lina while the dog, still alive, watched over them. Later we learned that there were ten dead in the "Bari" on that day, the 14th of January. When we finally arrived at Kuhlendorf my father was interrogated a long time by the Military Police who thought that they had detained a German spy.

The testimony of Berther Simioli (Beck's Berthel)

(Page 89)

Our house, situated at the angle of the streets of the Montagne, the rue Courbe and across from the rue des Nains was found in the zone occupied by the Germans. It was destroyed from the very beginning of the fighting. At the entrance of the rue des Nains the buildings of Fritz Dennler and Charles Goetzmann were also destroyed. The three houses were situated in the field of vision of the two belligerents.

After having spent a short time in our cellar we took refuge in the cellar of Philippe Jaeger "Schütze Philippe" where we were joined by the Georges Andler family. From here a German soldier wanted to hit , with his "Panzerfaust", the American tank sitting in the rue des Nains. The men in the cellar, Philippe Jaeger and Georges Andler, succeeded in dissuading him and making him admit that he should at least wait for the departure of the civilians if he wanted to accomplish that task.

We next took refuge in the Jean Strasser cellar where we could at least stay for some time. There, in the midst of the whistling of the shells and the machine-gun fire , we heard a voice calling for help. It was my grand-mother who lived 200 meters from here, in the rue de la Montagne and who had slipped in the orchard across from us. My mother hurried outside to look for her. More and more people were looking for shelter at the home of Strasser and shooting of light firearms was approaching. Then came a light calm that we all profited from to flee. We crossed the "Hassengass", passing the meadows, the orchards and the fields to arrive at the rue des Romains , in the cellar of Albert Vonau and finally that of Louise Bassler situated on the rue de la Gare. Seventy people had already taken refuge in this cellar. We hoped to be able to find refuge at my uncle's, but this house had been completely destroyed and his family was to be found here in this cellar. The Germans wanted to use this shelter for their wounded and the civilians interfered with this. We therefore left accompanied by many other people.

Philippe Jaeger was also one of those people in flight. He said that they laid down several times. He thought that he had been hit by a shell blast in the vertebral column, but it was only a lump of frozen dirt which struck him in the back. They went in the direction of Hatten, then they circled around the village by the "Essigbusch" until they reached Niederroedern.

N.B. In their statements the witnesses frequently use the little name "Aufname" to designate someone. This shouldn't be taken in the pejorative sense, on the contrary, it is used with the agreement of all of the inhabitants concerned and facilitates the exact designation for them. Many people having the same common name is very frequent in Rittershoffen.

We would like to thank the mayor and the people of Rittershoffen for their assistance in all areas that they offered us. we also would like to address our thanks to the association "Art, History and Leisure" for the furnishing and consultation of the documents as well as the photocopies of affidavits that the association has sent to us.

Testimony of Albert Walter

(Page 90)

Albert Walter was born 04/07/29 and was living in the Rue de la Montagne at the time of the battle.

After heavy artillery preparation the Germans launched their attack on the north of Rittershoffen. The Rue de la Montagne was taken without a great deal of resistance on the part of the Americans. Some Americans who were taken by surprise in our cellar surrendered. Finally the German attack was stopped a few houses further.

Later the fighting was very harsh and the Germans had to ask for reinforcements as their losses were very heavy. Parachute reinforcements arrived accompanied by several tanks of which one Panzer was destroyed in front of our house. The parachutists, for the most part young boys without combat experience, underwent terrible losses, but they were nevertheless able to move the line of fire a little further ahead. There were ten of us in the cellar and we were hungry and thirsty. One evening at the time of an American attack coming from Kuhlendorf and Leiterswiller, our house and the barn burned and we had to escape in haste under mortar fire.

At the crossroad of the "Krummgass" my mother was hit in both legs by machine gun fire and not without difficulty we were able to take shelter at the home of Jean Strasser. I don't remember any longer how much time we spent with him, it was necessary to carry my mother stretched out on a ladder to a first aid post of the German Army which was five houses before our house. She started to have a high fever and her wounds needed immediate treatment. We left by the orchard in the direction of the "Hasengass". It was not easy to pass over the hedges with my mother on a makeshift stretcher and all of this in the midst of an American attack which went from Garsweg in the direction of Georges Studer's house where we were forced to halt because it was impossible to

cross the orchards under American fire. Calm returned towards evening and we were finally able to transport my mother to a first aid post in Georges Wagner's cellar. We had made a complete circle around the village in flames in order to get back to the street that we had left. My mother was cared for by the Germans and driven to Bergzabern, then to Landau where she was hospitalized until the end of the war. My father and I were regrouped with others from the village and taken by a half-track to Niederroedern. We had to stop several times while we were in route because shells were exploding around us. Finally we were able to reach this village by the "Essigbüsch". For several days Niederroedern had to remain under American fire. Later we found refuge in this village which had been damaged but where the welcome of the inhabitants was very warm. I particularly would like to pay tribute to the Louis Singer family for their kindness during our stay. Every crumb of food was shared with us and I have nothing but kind things to say about this poor but generous family.

Through the intermediary of an uncle in Germany I was able to send letters to my mother hospitalized in Landau, but her answers never got to us. It was only on the day that she returned were we sure she was alive.

AUTRES TEMOIGNAGES RECUS

Other Accounts Received

(Page 102)

Mr. Eugène Stoltz, of Eberbach/Seltz says:

I was 16 years old when in '44 the German authorities called me to Wissembourg to be conscripted. I learned on this occasion that I would be forcefully incorporated into the SS Corps. That was therefore going from bad to worse...

Called up along with those of the Volkssturm at the beginning of December and sent to Germany, I found everything in total confusion. Along with three friends I returned to my native Eberbach which was liberated three days later by the Americans.

However, in the night of January 2-3 they left without warning anyone. I therefore set out on the road also and arrived at Betschdorf.

A little while later the battle of Hatten was raging, I was walking in Niederbetschdorf, when two super-fast airplanes (they say that they were jets, very rare at that time) passed above the village, releasing two bombs rather near me. I threw myself into the school basement. That was where I discovered numerous gravely wounded people, all Americans, who were groaning horribly. I had just thrown myself into a U.S. quarantine station!!

Therefore I got out fast. There were only wounded people in that place. The following days they even shot at the dead. I saw other dead that the soldiers were bringing back from the front, laid out in the jeeps and covered with the fabric from the tents. I was told that they were transporting them to Hochfeldon. But wasn't there a military cemetery in this town? I don't know.

Kuhlendorf: Memories from his youth by Jean-Pierre Lang

In Kuhlendorf there had not been any fighting in '45 but there were American dead from shells, there would only be in one farm hit 15 times, apparently by American artillery which was firing too short for Hatten and Rittershoffen. There was only one civilian dead, furthermore it was by accident, it was a young man who was burned trying to fire on a Panzerfaust. Another boy had his fingers blown off by a hand grenade. Kuhlendorf sheltered numerous refugees from Hatten and Rittershoffen and also wounded military during the fighting in the two localities. The first-aid station was found in the courtyard of n^o 18 rue du Village.

Title under picture: The little girl tries not to hear the noise of the war.

Battle of January '45 as seen by Claude Sutter (9 1/2 at the time)

Although 40 years have gone by since that horrible tank battle, I remember perfectly several things that specially marked my childhood mind.

The stay in the cellar, huddled on wine casks, frightened, losing all sense of time...

The calm which followed the hell of fire and the sword; the soldiers showing panic on their faces coming into our refuge. Germans very young and already marked by defeat alternating with the seasoned G.I.'s , sure of their strength...

Then the flight through the neighboring orchards, a Dantesque ballet of soldiers, civilians and animals, each one trying to get control of their own panic.

I was following these disoriented adults, loaded down with suitcases and bags in their hands, jumping from shell holes still smoking to barns smelling of powder and cold smoke. Finally we were stranded near a German combat post which sent us on "Spähwägen", true rolling coffins, but which took us away from that hell.

Long days followed in Niederroedern with our only occupation being to look for food of any kind in order to survive.

Then the exodus towards Betschdorf passing by the two piles of ruins that were Hatten and Rittershoffen, strewn with destroyed material, disemboweled tanks, bodies lying on the ground in grotesque poses. These were weeks of extreme turmoil of our daily life, days of nightmares and disheartenment for the adults, days which aged us young kids by several years.

LE COURAGE DES AMERICAINS A HATTEN

The Courage Of The Americans At Hatten

(Page 104)

by Joseph Varter & James Benzinger, translated by Lise M. Pommois

At 4 in the morning our half-track stopped in the courtyard of a farm and we knew that our attack would start from there. We got out of the vehicle along with all our gear. It did not take long to get the numbness out of our legs and to forget our cramps, and we were ready. But ready for what? To resist a small group of "Boches" who were going to fire off a few rounds before quickly surrendering? Well no, things didn't turn out the way that we had hoped.

Company B got quickly organized and got into formation behind Company A. After a 7 kilometer forced march, it was to be the attack. According to the plans we were supposed to attack coming from the south, Company B to our left. We formed the right flank. We crossed the village of ... in the night and by snowy roads.

L'ECLAIREUR

The Scout

(Page 104)

I was the first scout for my platoon. To my right was Zola Neuman, scout for the light infantry. Jack Conroy, sergeant from the 2nd platoon, was placed between us. We walked for a long time in the dark. We crossed a forest indian-file. Some of us had already gone into the exposed field when machine-gun fire stopped us. However we had not yet reached the place from where the attack was to begin and time was passing. That is why ~~was~~^{we} went back quickly into the woods to go further. The firing came from our left, houses doubtlessly occupied by the Germans.

The attack began at 8:00 hours. Company B was to the right, and the 2nd platoon formed the extreme right flank. We advanced in columns across a vast, exposed field, entirely flat and covered with snow. The tanks brought us their morale support and materiel. A little later the enemy mortars started raining down on us. It was not enough to stop us and we continued to march on Hatten.

DANS LES GOURBIS ALLEMANDS

In The German Huts

Half-way along there were emplacements dug by the Germans. These had without doubt been used as a line of defense. The Germans started firing as soon as we reached these holes in which we had taken refuge. There was no other shelter possible. The Germans used everything that they had at their disposal : mortars, machine-guns, bazooka. Their fire was so precise that the mortars fell in our holes. It was impossible for us to resist, we had too many wounded. Lieutenant Thorn tried to ask for artillery to establish a smoke screen, but the communications were cut off and we did not have any screen. The radio did not work. The fates seemed to conspire against us. The murderous mortar fire became more and more intense and precise. A certain Roy Thompson cared for as many wounded men as possible under enemy fire. We then established barrage fire. Lieutenants Blain and Thorn thought that it would be better for us to reorganize while it was still possible to do it. A 30 FM started firing, then we joined in on the firing. I hit two or three enemy, then my fingers were so frozen that I was not able to reload my gun. We helped the wounded trying to forget about the bullets that were whistling over our heads. How we were able to get out of there, I will never know.

PRETS A REPARTIR

Ready To Move Out

We got reorganized and a line of defense was formed to stop all enemy counter-attacks. We had taken heavy losses, but we were ready to move out when a new strategy was decided upon in the afternoon. In the evening we climbed on board light tanks to go towards Hatten. We gritted our teeth when the enemy tracer bullets burst in front of the tank. We were not upset to get off before arriving in Hatten and we entered the part of the village which was occupied by a single unit of infantry. The shells were falling all around us, but less than in the morning. From now on this unit was no longer isolated and we were able to get fresh supplies. They were happy to see us and we were happy to be there. At least we had a roof to take shelter in for the night.

A platoon occupied a small house. It was a black night and the room was not yet light. We bumped into the chairs and someone even made some plates fall. However the enemy did not respond to our noise. We didn't know where they were to be found, but when I saw a near-by house catch on fire and when I heard machine-gun fire and German voices talking, then I realized that they couldn't be very far away. It was cold and it was impossible to sleep. And we were going to spend several nights like this.

LE TIR S'INTENSIFIE
The Fighting Intensifies

When dawn broke we chose houses and barns as outposts. The noise of the mortar fire and artillery increased with the day and it was necessary to dislodge the sharpshooters who had succeeded in infiltrating during the night. We occupied less than half of Hatten and it only depended on us to hold our positions and even to improve them if possible. All that we occupied was two rows of houses and barns, one on each side of the street. We attacked and we would take one or two houses, then the Germans would counter-attack with their tanks and would chase us out of the houses, either by blowing them up or setting them on fire. They seemed to take pleasure in launching mortar shells on a house, then they would throw an incendiary bomb and the fire would force us to leave.

The Germans harrassed us at night with their bazookas, or by throwing grenades through the windows, or by using flame-throwers. Or else they entered suddenly through the front door firing into the room with their machine-guns. What we feared the most was the mortar fire and the 88 shells. You didn't see them coming and only the "88" announced themselves by their familiar whistling.

Hatten, the friendly village which we had gone through triumphantly and without meeting any resistance one month before became little by little a village in ruins. The intensive hammering of the two antagonists led to the ruin and devastation of the whole village. The

houses and the barns were bombarded and burned one after the other. In the smoking ruins of a house were found little objects which brought back many memories : a broken rifle rising up towards the sky in the midst of the timbers and the charred bricks, a half melted-down and burned bicycle, sitting on a pile of debris (it had been stored in the attic), a stove seemed to be still in functioning condition, but there was no more house.

LA VIEILLE FEMME

The Old Woman

Emotions were overflowing when an old woman with silver hair appeared, with a bent back and dressed in black. She had come out limping from a neighboring cellar and went towards the pile of ashes and bricks. She resembled a wounded pigeon who was returning to its pigeon-house. Crying, she started to search in the ruins. She lifted up one brick after another. I watched her doing this from my observation post from the other side of the street. In my eyes her searching seemed useless. What did she want and had she found it? I will never know because my relief came at that moment and I thought of the chicken that I would be eating for dinner. That meal had been generously offered by the German shots.

L'IMPASSE

Impasse

(Page 105)

At one place on the road was a small curve. This was a "hot point" and also a point in which no one was able to advance. The German tanks were guarding the outside bend of the curve and our men the inside bend. Neither one dared show any more than the mouth of our cannons. At dawn the Germans came with their tanks and their infantry, but our artillery held them in check. At dusk we advanced but the "88"s and the bazookas stopped us at the curve. We did not cease advancing only to withdraw shortly, but we did not yield an inch of ground. One day the fighting was particularly intense. Towards 7:30 the mortar shells started to fall. They fell all around us. My platoon stayed in a first floor room because the cellar was filled with civilians. We managed all right although the house had been hit several times.

Other rooms collapsed and a part of the wall and the cellar were blasted, but the only thing we got was plaster and dirt on our backs. We were observing the barn and this time we noticed a German tank arriving on the right. Unfortunately we didn't have a tank to fire on it.

You had a strange impression when you saw this tank pivot its turret until its cannon was directed right on the building in which we were. Then we were thrown backwards under the effect of the shock as the shell hit the wall and covered us with bricks, dust and slivers. When we then got up and it was once more light in the room, we had the conviction that if they didn't get you this time, they would never get you.

The Germans did not stop coming while Company D was mounting guard. The tank destroyer platoon, reinforced by men coming from other platoons, was the closest to the enemy, but they held their ground and resisted with carbines. Twenty-two men had heroic conduct and held the Tigers in check, while inflicting heavy losses on them. Thanks to them, Hatten was saved. The rest of our company formed a combat line, but the Germans did not succeed in breaking through the tank destroyer barrage,

the attack was broken and the Tigers withdrew. Other houses and other barns were bombarded and burned on that day. There were not many left to take shelter in. It has been said that 2000 shots were fired in one half-hour. The men who had fought at Anzio said that they would have preferred the siege on the beach of Anzio than to be in Hatten. Each day we waited for relief which never came. The constant pounding and the sleepless nights started to weigh us down, but we held, certain that it couldn't get any worse.

One night we were given the orders to abandon at 7:00 A.M. the ruins which had been Hatten. We wanted to leave all this, but not in this way. Each of us felt badly about this departure. We had fought in Hatten for nine days and nine nights and we had seen this Alsatian village become transformed into a pile of debris and smoking ruins. Nothing remained here, if not the spirit of the American soldiers. We did not want to abandon this sacred field of battle where so many of our men had fallen. It seemed that we had lost the war, that we had fought in vain. But it was not for nothing. We had prevented the Germans from invading the plain of Alsace, we had gained precious time. There had been an objective behind all these atrocities, but we did not realize it at the time.

What remained of Hatten on that night? One or two houses still standing but ready to collapse, and piles of bricks. Some beams still on fire threw a strange light over the ruins, and the munitions that were burning broke the silence of the night. The horses and the cows that the shells had chased from their stables were wandering in the streets and the courtyards. The artillery hit them as they mournfully wandered in the streets. Our dead guarded the ruins of Hatten as we left. That was what we left behind us and that is what the Germans found, but the last scene of the act still had to be played.

N.B. This narrative is taken from the newspaper "Beachhead News", a newspaper which is published daily for the troops of the 6th Corps. The contents of this newspaper was confidential and it was forbidden to send issues to the United States. The readers were asked to destroy all papers to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy. This article appeared February 15, 1945. James Benzinger, the author, was a member of Company B, 19th Battalion, 14th Armoured Division.

**VOICI QUELQUES EXTRAITS TIRES DE L'HISTOIRE DU 48E
BATAILLON DE CHARS, 14E DIVISION BLINDEE**

Here Are Some Extracts Taken From The 48th Tank
Battalion, 14th Armored Division
(Page 107)

In battle men learn a new language that does not use words, a language born of fear which twists your stomach, mad and blind fury, relief which makes the security valve jump. The men quickly learn this language. Eleven days suffice. They take the "course" in Rittershoffen, the capital of Hell. There where the eternal fires are fed by the wood from the houses, the barns, the tanks, there where men with black caps throw bodies into the devouring flames...

First we followed the road. Rittershoffen then resembled all the other little villages of Alsace, with the muddy streets, its' straight sidewalks, when there were sidewalks, its' public square, the typically Alsatian faces of the inhabitants who were applauding because the Germans had left. It was pleasant to go through this village which was only a stopping-place on our route to Berlin.

That was when the image changed. Had we been too shrewd? We had accomplished our mission: we had broken the executioner's block, but we had forgotten the guy with the hatchet. We withdrew, the infantry took our place and the Germans infiltrated close to the village, so close that at the beginning of January we were only separated by a single village. The infantry held tight in this village. It was an acceptable ground of defense. They held until the enemy decided to take the two villages. We knew later that the prize did not have any importance. And when the enemy entered the village to make a purchase, first they bought a few pages, then a few chapters and finally the whole book.

The infantry was lacking in experience, it wasn't their fault, of course. Furthermore they had just taken part in other battles. In short, they were an easy prey for the enemy. And then one night the Germans penetrated the Eastern part of Hatten (the other little village). The

headquarters of the battalion was in a cellar near the church in the center of the village. First of all the following morning they seemed to "sweat blood" and then it got better, and then they sweated blood again. And during that night as well as the following day the battalion was isolated, the rest of the regiment pushed back and the Germans also took Rittershoffen.

Company A of the 48th Tank Battalion formed the main element of this battalion. We were on reserve in case of a counter-attack. The men of Company A had been in Kuhlendorf for two days. They were there on the morning in which the Germans entered in force in Hatten after having slid one toe in the night before. That was January 9th and at 9:30 Company A was assembled to the east of Rittershoffen, ready to resist a German attack. This did not transpire, we breathed anew and Company A was sent to Kuhlendorf to watch and wait. The Germans fired again on the infantry and it was just 1300 hours when Captain Ory, commander of Company A, ordered Lieutenant Woodard, head of the infantry, to have his men advance.

This was not a pretty sight to see, men frightened because the German tanks arrived from the south of the village and the German half-tracks came from the north, and no one could stop them. "Captain, there is a German tank here! Just at the top of the hill, it is going around the village." - "Good, good, someone will get it. Where is your headquarters?"

Determination reigned in the cellars, with quite a bit of confusion. The colonel was glued to the phone, his face twisted. The commander was hurrying, the map in his hand. Wounded were lying against the wall, others arriving, no one could take them to a first-aid station. The lights did not illuminate. Captain Ory discovered what he was able, he gave them what he could, and he went back to his post. We had almost lost the captain at that moment. The small detachment of tank destroyers to the west of Hatten was not able to advance. One of the machines was in the middle of the road. "Hey, sergeant, lift up your head, there is a good target to the south, a tank. Go back up the street and you will get it." "But I was already through there." Another tank destroyer did better : he exploded a leading half-track from a distance of 75 meters, as Captain Ory was hurriedly leaving Hatten by the west. Where is that blessed company? "That's the

wrong side, Woodard, the German tanks are on your right. Climb on this ridge and..."

Here is the rest as told by Corporal Mc Grane, radio operator in the tank of Lieutenant Woodard : An assignment was given to us, it was routine. We were part of the reserve. We would perhaps have to counter-attack, but it had been the same for days. The sector was calm, only a few big cannons to the right, far off, rumbled in the silence of the day. Nothing could happen, it was impossible. The peaceful breeze murmured no, it was so calm. The hills said it, they were so solemn ; the trees said it also, they were so quiet. They all lied.

It was friendly country, we knew it. We had crossed it several weeks before, we had crossed the Maginot Line without having encountered any resistance and had advanced to the north, towards the Rhine. To the south stretched the forest, a forest of conifers covered with snow. A valley stretched between the forest and a snowy path which joined the north and the south sectors. Between the Maginot Line and the forest there were two villages, at each end of the road, spared until now from the war, Rittershoffen to the west and Hatten to the east. The country side rippled between the chain of forts to the north and the wooded area to the south.

The morning of the 9th we advanced to take up position to the east of Rittershoffen. We had to protect this village, from what? we were asking ourselves. From V 2's? We were the reserve. We had taken these villages a few weeks before, without resistance. Of course this mission had no importance. They used us like a pack of cards, ordering us to pull back, that was routine, then we had to hurry forward. Go, fast, fast ! A jeep and a reconnaissance car appeared, coming from Hatten. The jeep stopped, an officer got out, the artillery was firing right nearby now. Some tanks to the right, German tanks in the valley, aim at them. Stop your tanks on the right side of the road, you can't miss. Hurry!

German tanks? In the valley? To our right? That was impossible, the front was several kilometers to the east or to the north. Captain Ory must be mistaken, that was our own tanks without doubt, they were protecting our flank. The alarm spread from tank to tank. My platoon took up a position in a spot overlooking the valley. Five gunners and five tank

commanders, five drivers and five men looking at the heavy German tanks gliding along the rail tracks. They were surely our tanks. No! Fire! Gunner, fire!!

That afternoon Company A of the 48th battalion counter-attacked at 17:10, with a platoon on each side of Hatten. Corporal Mc Grane tells:

We went down the slope towards the bottom of the valley, we passed near German tanks which were burning, resembling enormous torches which guided us in the dark. The infantry was walking behind us, five per tank. From time to time the munitions in the tanks on fire exploded and projected hot metal into the air which illuminated the night. It was cold with a penetrating wind. We stamped our feet in the tanks. We were heading east. On our right the forest formed a near-by but invisible wall, melting into the night. We approached our objective. This new line of German life, the road which led from Hatten to Seltz had to be cut. We approached even closer. The air had become calm, the night was inky black, we waited.

A vehicle carefully left Hatten. A tank caught on fire. Then a second and a third. The German vehicle exploded. The scene was strange and ghostly. The cemetery in the background was lit up, the tombstones seemed to watch us. Two other German vehicles "died" near the cemetery that night and the next morning Company A was relieved by parts of the infantry. It returned to Rittershoffen. There was still fourteen hours of this tension for Company A before Company C undertook a very strong attack in its place, hours of sweat and pain, hours where the eyes were troubled and the mind became muddled because man is not made of steel.

The First Platoon of Company A, 48th Tank Battalion received a presidential citation for its action against the enemy at Rittershoffen and Hatten:

The First Platoon, Company A, 48th Tank Battalion is cited for its remarkable action on January 9, 1945 near Hatten, France. Given the order to repel the enemy attack, the 1st platoon, made up of four medium tanks, rapidly moved into position and effectively sustained the allied infantry already partially dominated by enemy armor.

Showing great ability and extraordinary dexterity the platoon engaged in murderous combat against sixteen Mark IV tanks, and without suffering any losses of men nor of equipment, it destroyed six enemy tanks and forced the others to flee. Later on in the course of the same day the first platoon destroyed four enemy tanks in distress that the Germans tried to evacuate.

~~Battalion,~~ PLATOON, The fearless actions, audacious and intrepid, led by the 1st Company A, 48th Tank Battalion, are an example of the highly respected traditions of the armed forces of the United States.

According to the official report concerning the various actions of this 48th Tank Battalion, company A behaved in a remarkable manner during the entire duration of the battle. January 9th, of course, it had to intervene to reestablish the main line of defense to the east of Hatten, then when the Germans had pierced this line and penetrated into the sector held by the 242nd infantry regiment and some elements of the 827th and the 812th anti-tank regiments. Six Mark IV German tanks and a 75 mm. auto-propulsion cannon were destroyed. The enemy's losses were estimated to be 75 men. The same evening, when the visibility was reduced to 50 meters because of the fog, this same company destroyed 2 Mark IV, an auto-propulsion cannon and two vehicles. Then the tanks supported the infantry while the men were digging into their new positions. Next Company A returned to the back of these new front lines. This counter-attack was accomplished by penetrating the enemy lines, in a black and foggy night, an exploit for the tanks.

The next morning, January 10th, the Company had to repel a violent counter-attack which had penetrated the new positions of the 242nd. In spite of the heavy fog, of the total lack of visibility and of the intensity of the enemy fire, the esprit de corps allowed the Company to push back the attack, to reestablish the line of defense and to inflict heavy losses on the enemy, vehicles as well as personnel.

January 11th at 1530 hours Company A with the 68th Infantry Battalion assumed the offensive. The attack was led against the sector of Rittershoffen occupied by the enemy. One hour later the enemy was forced by violent gunfire to withdraw into the village. There still the tank crews

showed remarkable determination. For the first time they were able to penetrate this sector of the village. Thanks to their intervention, the infantry was able to advance and to continue the attack in better conditions. At least fifty Germans were killed on that day. The gunners fired on the buildings occupied by the enemy.

January 12th the Company followed the Infantry into the village and neutralized the enemy patrols.

January 13th towards 2115 hrs. the enemy attacked and, despite the efforts of the American artillery, succeeded in breaking through the positions of the 68th with a Mark IV, two Mark V and a flame-throwing tank. The infantry lost courage at the sight of these flame-throwers which could advance without meeting any resistance. The tanks of the Company, despite their inferiority of numbers, waited until the three enemy vehicles were 100 meters from their positions. Then they fired and the enemy vehicles were destroyed.

January 17th this same company launched an attack against an enemy redoubt in Rittershoffen. this redoubt was defended by two Panzer Grenadier divisions, equipped with two anti-propulsion cannons of 88 mm. The precise aiming of Company A pushed back the enemy and succeeded in gaining terrain.

January 19th the Command Post gave the order to abandon Rittershoffen and for all the forces to withdraw behind the Moder. Beginning at 1500 hrs Company A got into a defensive position and covered the withdrawal of the 14th Armoured Division, of the 315th Infantry Battalion and of the 827th tank destroyers. The operation was achieved on January 20th at 1200 hours without any loss of vehicles. During these twelve days this company had, therefore, played a predominant role during the course of three counter-attacks, two offensive attacks and a defensive action. It destroyed 18 enemy tanks and cannons, 4 various vehicles and brought about the death of 250 enemy soldiers. The heroism, the bravery, the determination and the esprit de corps of these men during the course difficult and hazardous operations, contributed in a large measure, to the success of this battle. Four officers and 95 men had taken part in the action : One officer was killed as well as 22 men.

Other units showed the same courage during this battle, as, for example, the 3rd Battalion of the 313th Infantry Regiment which held a sector of the front for several days and which practically annihilated the infantry of the 21st Panzer division. The stubborn resistance of all of these men, even those who normally are found at the rear, managed to limit the advance of the enemy and to avoid a massive invasion of the plain of Alsace.

But those are only examples. In this battle everyone did his maximum, and it was this "esprit de corps" which made it possible to resist the enemy advance.

QUELQUES RECITS TIRES DE L'HISTOIRE DE LA 14E DIVISION

BLINDEE DU CAPITAINE JOSEPH CARTER

Some Stories Taken From The History Of The 14th Armored

Division by Captain Joseph Carter

(Page 110)

An attack was launched January 12th to regain the land to the west of Hatten and of Rittershoffen and to establish the main line of resistance in this sector. The 62nd managed to advance 1 kilometer. The men, dressed in their olive-green, formed perfect targets which stood out clearly on the white snow of the fields. The German fire mowed them down. A report said: "The men advanced up to the line of departure, leaving the Alsatian villages laughing. That is the last time they were heard to laugh." The Germans waited until the Infantry Battalion showed up and then they opened fire. The wounded fell yelling, and they froze immediately. It was on that day that Captain Ianella disappeared with at least 70 men. They tried to evacuate the captain, but the fire was so intense that he ordered his men to leave him there where he was and to assure their withdrawal. They could only obey him. The men who succeeded in withdrawing had to dig into the ground to establish defensive positions. The ground was so frozen that it took them six hours to dig their holes. But no one could imagine the suffering endured during these icy nights spent in the huts or even in their tanks. The positions were even more difficult to maintain when the Germans sent observation planes and

above all jet planes, a whole new machine at the time.

During this period one of the greatest problems was that of preserving lines of communication, despite the intense pounding and the uninterrupted bombardments. The men took pains day and night to repair the damaged lines without stopping. For them as for others this was a time of fear and danger. Day after day they accomplished their task, without knowing whether they would ever return from their mission. Those who had the firing lines were on alert night and day, ready to fire on the request of the infantry.

The enemy attacks were so violent that they prevented any reconnaissance action on ground. The men therefore only had maps. It was impossible to know where the German anti-tank cannons were in the sector. They didn't even know exactly where the Americans were in Hatten.

The country hospital had been set up in a café in Niederbetschdorf. The personnel was comprised of 18 men under the orders of two officers. The train station to the south of Rittershoffen served as a first-aid post for the wounded that they were able to evacuate out of Hatten. The others had to be cared for in Hatten itself. Captain Carter mentioned a stretcher bearer who suddenly cried out: "Watch out, I'm going to let him fall". Another man said to him: "Why don't you take his two hands?" "I can't", answered the stretcher bearer. "He only has one hand left." The enemy was firing on the vehicles which were evacuating the enemy towards the rear. 40 to 50 men per day were cared for in Niederbetschdorf. The first-aid station in Hatten was hit on January 19th. Two corporals were killed and some patients were wounded. One of the four shells which hit the house fell into the cellar before exploding. Fire broke out. Fortunately all the men were able to escape themselves before the walls caved in. A new first-aid post was established in another cellar to care for the 42 men who had just been wounded. There were no more supplies, no more bandages, no more plasma, everything had been destroyed. The corporals used handkerchiefs, sheets and blankets. The wounded had been imprisoned along with their dead comrades under the heavy beams.

It is impossible to translate into words the suffering endured by the soldiers, American or German, and by the civilians. How to transpose

the screams of the women trapped in the cellars of houses on fire? Those of the children in front of the flame-throwers? At times the cries of distress covered the thundering of the shooting. Can you also really explain the suffering of the men, young and without experience, engaged in a battle without pity where it was sometimes difficult to distinguish friends from enemy (the Germans had gotten a hold of American uniforms), in the cold, the wind and the snow and even more, in an unknown country? All of this is untranslatable.

A whole polemic was engaged in after the war to determine the importance of the American action in Alsace. The War Minister had designated the name: "Campaign in the Ardennes" for the period of December 16, 1944 to January 25, 1945. General Patch asked that they use the name "The Alsace Campaign" for the period of December 19th '44 to January 26, '45. According to him and General Devers, the troops who had participated in the battle of Alsace should have been honored under the same title as those who had fought in the Ardennes. Unfortunately the Minister of War took the following decision:

Although vital, the operation carried out in Alsace by the Allied Forces were part of the operations to the west of the Rhine. Without minimizing the heroic actions of the 7th Army in Alsace, the minister decided that it was not advisable to separate these operations of the campaign which had received the name "Rhineland". Numerous other units could present just as valid reasons for the recognition of their action separately. That is why the Minister of War rejected the demand of Patch. The decision was definitive, despite the numerous protests received on the part of the generals of the soldiers involved in these battles. That is, without doubt, why the battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen has been neglected by the historians, whereas the fierce resistance of the Americans led to the weakening of the enemy forces and the abandoning of the Operation Northwind. Strasbourg was saved, but History does not remember.

RECITS DES VETERANS AMERICAINS

Stories Of American Veterans

(Page 114-118)

E.M. Lynch, K. English, W. Breer, and R.J.Baker, translated by Lise Pommois

E.M. Lynch, Brig. Gen., U.S.A. writes: "Forty years have passed and nevertheless, I still remember the desperate battle of January 1945. It began for us at dawn of the New Year in the snowy woods to the south of Bitche. It finished when we regained the Moder coming from Hatten.

I will never forget the beauty of Alsace and the sorrow that I felt at the sight of so many beautiful villages destroyed. Often I think of those friendly people and of the sadness that I experienced when I saw them fall victims of war. Trips have led me to other places to fight other wars, but there will always remain in my heart a special place for Alsace and its inhabitants. May they now enjoy the lasting peace that they have well deserved !

I have tried to relate as faithfully as possible the last hours that I spent in Hatten. Although one must beware of one's memory ready to play tricks on you, the events of that night still come to my mind with great clarity...".

Here is his story which he translated himself:

"In the movies, the end of important battles are accompanied by fanfares, flags etc... and the heroes, still handsome and smiling, pose with their trophies, but that is only in the movies.

It was in a small hell in Alsace that the end of the battle of Hatten and Rittershoffen took place. Its end was comparable to that of many other battles of history : The charred remains of precious legacies lie strewn on the ground; houses, vestiges of past splendors, lay in ruins. Two villages (whose past was always stamped with battles and successes) crushed beneath the feet of the gods of war. Families and memories, all are dead or dying on the same places as their splendor and vitality of the days of old.

The cannons of war, once so powerful, now lie broken and silent. The vehicles, once mobile, have become carcasses without life, abandoned to the rust of time, materiel of war, once indispensable to the attack and the defense, instrument of life and death necessary to the gladiator, now to the rubbish, their reason for being has been eliminated.

As for the men of war, no glorious march will accompany their last steps, no flag will fly when they leave the battlefield. The smile of victory will not light up their aged faces. Their glazed eyes leave a past which is always going to be present in their future. Their mind floats in ecstasy of having survived, but their heart was heavy with the price that victory cost. While those who witnessed this battle from afar shouted at the victory and rejoiced, those who had taken part of the fighting disappeared quietly in the shadows.

It was snowing on that infamous night of January 20, 1945. I had in the final moments of the battle received an order to remain at a grade crossing to the south of Hatten, and to control the evacuation of our troops from this ravaged village. My unit, the 19th Armoured Infantry Battalion, of the 14th Armored Division, had fought without respite since the first hours of the New Year. In the final act of this bloody tragedy, the survivors finally were going to shelter, out of danger.

Sergeant John Carr, who had just been wounded, was my only companion. The silence which reigned was interrupted from time to time by the noise of muffled steps. Some groups of exhausted men came from nowhere and once identified, returned to the same nothingness. Realizing that they had survived this ordeal, they seemed to leave reluctantly this battle which had cost them so much.

At the train station which was behind us, the last members of our unit were finishing folding up their baggage. We had to accompany them when they were ready to leave. While waiting, we were on the watch in the midst of the shadows which were passing by silently in the night. In front of us, the road which led to the dangers of Hatten, behind us the railroad which led us to the haven of Niederbetschdorf.

Nothing good ever comes during wartime and that was the case for us on that night. An hour went by. More troops coming from Hatten. The snow continued to fall. Another hour passed. Always the steps of the troops. The snow was falling even more beautifully. Finally, convinced that all the units must have returned, I sent John to let the others know that we could go.

He came back with alarming news : there were no more men, vehicles, equipment at the train station. Everyone had left and we were alone.

Upon returning to make one final check, we went towards a block of houses fifty meters from there. Suddenly several silhouettes took form amidst the flakes of snow. As we were not able to distinguish their uniforms, we challenged them and they answered with automatic-pistol fire. We were not alone.

We ran along the length of the train tracks in the direction that our troops had taken. The snow served as a protective screen. Suddenly the crackling stopped. We only heard the panting of our breathing and the beating of our hearts.

Finally safe! But where were we? Suddenly a shadow took form in front of us. It was too big to be a man and too small to be a vehicle. With caution we approached, guns in our hands, towards the unknown object. The objective became clear. We were not able to believe our eyes, but it was a cow, a cow in the middle of all this carnage. She was there, all alone, as though she were waiting for the departure of all the fighters in order to finally find peace.

On the road we saw several American tanks in a field. Many had been destroyed during the battle and their blackened shells served as their coffins; the sentinels, covered with snow, seemed to be dead in place. But something made me stop. I hit on the side of nearest tank with my gun. A scrapping was heard from the inside. A sign of life! Slowly the hatch opened and a massive head appeared. They also had not received the order to retreat. I told them that we were the last two Americans between them and the enemy.

We left together for the rear. To our right, smoke from the fires in Rittershoffen were throwing a red-orange light over the falling snow. Behind us, the white of the snow started to cover the atrocities, witnesses of the cruelty of man. Suddenly we could see the greyish shadow of Niederbetschdorf appear. What a relief! We were safe. Then a shock : the village, in the past, so effervescent, was deserted! A road crusted with ice, blackened by the smoke from innumerable vehicles, that was all that marked the passage of an army.

We followed a well-marked trail of abandoned vehicles. Somewhere in front of us, an armored division, our armored division, battered, suffering a thousand wounds, was going towards shelter and we wanted to join up with it. A little before dawn we were able to see the faint lights of the convoy. We were not alone between friends and enemy. We saw the emblem of the 14th Armoured Division : we were home, we were among our own.

The story does not often tell the human side of a war and too often the personal experiences die with the men who lived them. Our intentions also are lost in the event of the moment. The men meet face to face on the battle field. They fight. Many are wounded, others die. When the sounds of the cannons are silent, the men return home. With them disappear many memories, both good and bad and also the question marks which never will have an answer.

To all the German soldiers who survived Hatten and Rittershoffen the night of January 20th, 1945, this will tell them what happened when we disappeared in the snowy night. If they should ask who were the last men to have broken contact with them, the answer is very simple: two American foot soldiers, wounded, bewildered, exhausted and an Alsatian cow."

N.B. Brigadier General Lynch, whose translation we faithfully reproduce, was at the time the chief sergeant of Company C, 19th Armored Infantry Battalion, 14th Armored Division.

Here is the account of Ken English, member of the 94th Reconnaissance Squadron, 14th Armored Division. He was directing a light tank which bore the number 13.

"In time of war the days go on and men only know if it is day or night. As I learned later, it was January 9, 1945, towards 9 or 10 in the morning - at least it was day. The day started like all the other days : we were in a convoy behind the units of Troop C. Our mission was to discover where the Germans were and how many there were. We penetrated Rittershoffen, coming from the north, passing in front of the church which was to our left and we followed the road almost to the other end of the village, towards the south. That was where we stopped: Troop C had discovered Germans. The commander of our tank, Richard Thacker, passed me the binoculars. I jumped from the tank and ran towards the top of the hill, about 40 meters away. From there I saw Hatten and the forest which stretched behind the village and towards the south. It seemed that Hatten was a little lower than Rittershoffen. To my left was an orchard. After several minutes of observation I was able to see several German tanks leaving the edge of the forest. I went back to my tank to report what I had seen. Thacker said "Let's stop, let's choose a target and fire". We fired six shots, we drew back to take shelter behind a house, we returned to the same spot in order to fire again. Our tank made the same maneuver four times before the Germans were able to find out where the firing was coming from. Then the shells started to rain down on us. It resembled a hail storm in Oklahoma. We repeated our maneuver two more times. We hit and we put out of commission a German tank. How proud we were! We were about to start again when Thacker said : "Let's wait a minute." And fortunately he told us to wait, because 30 seconds later an enemy shell fell at the very spot where we would have been firing from.

At a hundred meters four of our tanks were put in position and had started to fire. What a comfort to see them there and to have their support. We learned later that it was the 1st Platoon of Company A, 48th Tank Battalion. Tank destroyers were a little further on our left. Intense fire. An hour later and the Germans stopped firing, they had to regroup. The 48th Platoon and ourselves stopped firing also and the silence seemed strange. Our tank retreated towards the center of the village and we took a house. Everything was so calm that 3 or 4 G.I.'s took out a game of cards and started to play on the bare floor of the living room. That was when we heard the bomb explode. A solitary enemy plane had released a single bomb at the exit of the village, about 300 meters from "our" house. It had tried to hit a jeep which was entering the village. The driver and a passenger hurried into the ditch and no one was hurt. The jeep was destroyed.

Then nothing happened for two hours. They even distributed the mail. My wife used to write to me often and I received 5 or 6 letters at a time. She talked of Christmas at home, what she was experiencing (she was expecting our first child) and she gave other news. For a moment I forgot the horror of our situation.

Then the firing started up again. We went down into the cellar with the people who lived in the house. The cellar was full of potatoes. I still see myself reading my letters, standing on a pile of potatoes. At the same time I heard the woman scream because the bombardment was continuing and some shells fell quite close. I pitied her because she did not want this war and nevertheless they were participating right in the middle of it. Later I often wondered if that couple had survived the battle. Probably not.

The firing continued sporadically all through the night, and then, a half an hour after dawn, all hell broke loose. Our platoon was ordered to go to the tanks and withdraw. Our driver, Clyde Carlstrom, was the first to reach the tank, He started up the motor. Then our commander came. The moment that he got into the tank he was hit in the neck, probably from shell bursts. Carlstrom said that the only words that Thacker said as he fell were "Oh my God". Fred Brotzman, our gunner, and myself (the loader) jumped in the tank and saw what had happened to Thacker. Carlstrom started the tank in motion. Two hundred meters on the left was a first-aid station where we stopped. We asked a doctor to help us get Thacker out of the tank and to examine him. Thacker was too heavy for Brotzman and me to be able to lift in such a small space. He was tall (more than 1 meter 90) and strong. With the help of the doctor we got him out of the tank. Then we continued on our withdrawal. I remember noticing the intense cold : Thacker's blood froze immediately on the tank floor. Later the next day we learned that Thacker had not survived. He was, without doubt, killed instantly.

We arrived in a village whose name I don't remember. We had crossed through it the night before, coming from Rittershoffen. Our General Headquarters was set up in a café at a crossroads. On one side was the Rittershoffen road and on the other the one to Hatten. I suppose that it led to Hatten, but we never took it. We established our positions along the road

which led to Hatten. The only soldiers who used this road were the signals officers who were going to do repairs. The lines seemed to be always cut. We stayed in this rather peaceful village two or three days, while the battle of Hatten and Rittershoffen became more and more violent. Brotzmann became our commander and Andrew Pirich came to join us as gunner.

It was midnight when we received the order to return to Rittershoffen. The rumor circulated that the Germans were doing everything they could to break through our lines, thanks to their infantry and their tanks which were even equipped with flame-throwers. We stopped 500 meters to the north-west of Rittershoffen. We could hear the roar of the battle which was taking place in Rittershoffen. We had difficulty digging holes in the frozen soil. When we finally managed to dig our hole, they ordered us to return to the village which we had left a few hours earlier. It was dark but the lights from the artillery lit up the night. We stayed in the village several days. We made up the reserve. From time to time a German shell whistled over our heads and we could still hear the sound of the battle to the south. One morning our chaplain was giving a service in the village church. It was quite a small church. Each pew could hold four people. About twenty men attended the service. I have often regretted not making a painting of our group - frozen G.I.'s dirty and exhausted, their steel helmets put on the ground, their guns leaning on the pews.

Then came the general order to retreat. I think it was in the morning of the 20th. The road climbed and our tank slipped on the slippery roads. We had to sand the roads. We were followed by tank battalions and the infantry and the engineers came last. They were to blow up the bridges.

During the war three units of the 14th Armoured Division received Presidential Citations for acts of bravery in Hatten and Rittershoffen. It was the 1st Platoon, Company A, 48th Tank Battalion, Troop C, 94th Reconnaissance regiment and our unit, the 3rd Platoon, Troop E, 94th Reconnaissance. I wonder if we deserved these congratulations more than the others. We were simply there the first and we were able to delay the German offensive long enough to allow the arrival of the reinforcements. But we accomplished our task."

William Breer, who was part of the 3rd Platoon of Troop E adds:

"In what concerns the events which took place January 9th in the morning, I remember certain events that are marked in my memory. One of these events happened immediately after the Germans had withdrawn. I went down the hill where the orchard was and I walked in the direction that the Germans had taken. I discovered a campaign cannon, a very small anti-tank cannon of 57 mm., used by three G.I.'s who were part of our infantry. This cannon had not been very effective against the armored Germans, but the men did not hesitate using it and they were hit by a shell. The three of them lay near their cannon, dead. I also remember a feat accomplished by one of our G.I.'s who had put a German tank out of combat with a bazooka. I don't know exactly when that happened. The soldier had had to approach the enemy very closely because bazookas did not have a far range. I think that this man's name was Dunn. That was really a feat because the German tanks were practically invulnerable, except in a few spots where the armor was thinner.

Later the same day, when the battle had calmed down, Ken spoke about a solitary enemy plane which had released a bomb near "our" house. He thinks that the bomb fell 400 meters away. Personally I think that it was closer. I was in our half-track in the process of cleaning the cannon when I heard the plane come. I raised my eyes and I noticed that it was an American plane, a P-47. That's why I didn't pay any attention and I continued to clean my cannon. A little later I heard the whistling of a bomb. It exploded almost at the same moment and the shock lifted me up. Fortunately no splinters penetrated the armor of the half-track. I would say that the bomb exploded about a hundred meters from the vehicle and a little further from the house. I remember the impressions of the members of our platoon who were inside. One of them was near the sink and he was thrown on the ground, while another was near the entry door. He was winded and was knocked over. Of course, the house shingles disappeared also. It happened that a German pilot had taken an American plane. That happened from time to time.

Another incident that I remember very well happened on that night : as Ken said, we were in the cellar with the owners. From time to time we went to glance over our vehicles. Sporadic fire arose in the night. A shell hit a shed attached to the house and, suddenly, the house was filled with thick, white smoke. They warned us several days before that the Germans could attack us with gas and we had received the order to have

our masks ready. Certain that it was gas we seized our masks and ran to warn our companions on the other side of the street. However we realized that it was a phosphorus bomb and not mustard gas. What a relief.

When we went into this village whose name Ken has forgotten, I remember having gone to look for a drink at the bar. Suddenly I heard a noise. Certain that it was an F.M. I immediately threw myself to the ground. In fact it was a young man with his sled. The blades crunched on the ice and my nerves on edge thought that it was an F.M. That is how exhausted I was."

R.J. Baker, at that time a spotter for the 310th Battalion of the 79th Infantry Division, states in one of his letters that the soldiers of this battalion as well those of the 313th Infantry Regiment had received orders to not wear their coats. In fact the Germans had taken American coats and were wearing them to infiltrate the American lines. Unfortunately this order had not arrived to Mr. Baker, nor his radio operator nor the driver of the jeep. The radio operator was hit by American bullets because he was wearing this coat so necessary in this period of deep cold.

LA VIE A RITTERSHOFFEN APRES LA BATAILLE

Life in Rittershoffen After the Battle

(page 119)

Lucien Messmer

The village was 82% destroyed. A small percentage was able to remain in place after doing some repair work. People became transformed into masons and especially roofers in order to give their house the appearance of being habitable and to be able to lodge other people from Rittershoffen. However, the majority of the population had to take refuge in surrounding villages or with relatives far from Rittershoffen.

Before leaving the village the Germans dynamited the church again, as if it had not suffered enough during the harsh fighting of January '45 when the building was coveted by the two belligerents. Therefore there only remained some stones and some cracked walls. In the middle of these walls, miraculously standing, was the arcade which looked out over the choir and which still bore the inscription "Jesus Christus Gestern Heute und derselbe auch in Ewigkeit" (Hebrews 13)

After the war numerous prisoners were engaged for the complete demolition of the church. The stones were loaded on the train scrap-cars (a line was constructed especially for this), then onto the heavy trucks which went in the direction of the "Huhl". In that immense cavity was the rest of Rittershoffen.

At the head of the community provisionally was Mayor Jacques Goetzmann, who was to remain in charge until September 30, 1945. Beginning October 1st of that year Fritz Franck was elected and took charge of the first magistrate of the village. He was actively assisted by the deputy-mayor, Richard Jung, already holding office under the administration of mayor Goetzmann (a single deputy-mayor at that time). The services of the town-hall were operating first at the home of Charles Vogler, then at the home of Jacques Goetzmann until September 1945, and then at Fritz Franck's until the installation of the town hall in a barracks.

The school, situated behind the church, was repaired and the re-opening in 1945 took place normally.

At the beginning of 1946 the municipal council reached a general agreement to a rough-draft for the setting up and the reconstruction presented by the town-planning board.

However, it was especially with the installation of the Dietsch and Gagneraud enterprises that life started up. They hired right from the start many personnel. Almost all the inhabitants found work there and numerous people from the outskirts were able to work in Rittershoffen.

On the terrain of the "reeg" the first barracks were constructed. The barracks situated on both sides of the road leading to Hatten started then from the cemetery and finished near the cross, at the top of the Vogler garage. Several types of barracks were thus put up. The largest sheltered the church and the school. There were temporary lodgings that could house 3 families or 2 large families. But before being able to live in these barracks, they also had to construct stables, sheds...

As early as the end of 1946 some families were able to move in, but it was during 1947 that almost all the barracks were occupied. Although there was little comfort, the people who lived in this section had a feeling of relief. They especially felt relieved to finally live under a roof that belonged to them.

RITTERSHOFFEN ET HATTEN REMERCIENT..

Rittershoffen and Hatten Thank
(BOTTOM OF PAGE 121)

The people of Rittershoffen thank the inhabitants of the surrounding villages for the warm welcome and the understanding that they received during the tragic events of January 1945.

Thanks to the inhabitants of the villages situated in the American sector where more than half of the population took refuge:

Betschdorf, Schwabwiller, Reimerswiller and Surbourg (on the road to Betschdorf), Kuhlendorf, Hohwiller, Hermerswiller and Soultz-Forêts (on the road to Kuhlendorf), Leiterswiller and Hoffen (on the road to Leiterswiller).

Thanks to the inhabitants of the sector occupied by the German troops where many people went: Buhl, Niederroedern, through which went many inhabitants of Rittershoffen who were not able to find asylum in this place.

Thanks to the inhabitants of Wintzenbach, Croetwiller, Trimbach, Kaidenbourg, Siegen, Oberlauterbach and Niederlauterbach.

CITATIONS AWARDED (PAGE 125-6)

The Secretary of State of the Armed Forces, Max Lejeune on November 11, 1948 awarded the Military Cross (Croix de Guerre) to the places which had experienced the battle. Hatten, Rittershoffen and Aschbach were thus cited by the order of the Division and received the Military Cross with the Silver Star. Buhl and Trimbach (65% damaged) were cited by the order of the Brigade and received the Military Cross with the Bronze Star. The giving of the medals by General De Lattre took place July 14, 1949, Place Kléber, in Strasbourg.

We reproduce below the different citations:

HATTEN

"Truly a martyr city, has paid a heavy tribute to the war. Situated in the middle of the combat zone in 1944-45, on the theater of a gigantic battle of tanks, causing the death of numerous civilians and leading to the destruction of 4/5 of the locality. Despite these terrible wounds, its valliant population applied itself to the reconstruction of the destroyed city with an energy worthy of great praise."

RITTERSHOFFEN

"This martyr city has paid a heavy tribute to the war. Despite its' ruins and the accumulated mourning, its' valliant population had drawn from its own misfortune, the strength and the perseverance necessary to give back to its destroyed city its' past prosperity."

BUHL

"This commune 66% damaged was seriously affected by the battle for Liberation, after having valiantly resisted the efforts of germanization by the invaders. Its population is the proof of the remarkable sang-froid in the midst of battle and deserves to be cited as an example."

TRIMBACH

"Situated at the outskirts of the Maginot Line, Trimbach paid twice a heavy tribute to the war : one hundred eighty buildings either totally or partially destroyed, twelve civilian victims. Despite these heavy wounds, its valliant population still maintained a high morale giving a most beautiful example in the final victory of the Allies."

Aschbach

"This commune, 65% damaged, was situated on the immediate outskirts of the Maginot Line, had to suffer twice from the effects of the war. Evacuated in 1939-40, it underwent heavy bombardment during the course of the battle for Liberation. Its' population knew how, in adversity, to keep calm and courage which brings admiration."

This citation brings with it the Croix de Guerre with the Silver Star.

Paris, November 11, 1948

L'OUTRE-FORET

THE BATTLE OF HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN

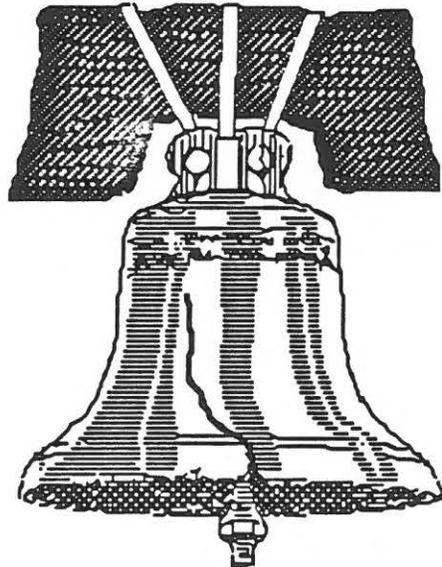
JANUARY 1945

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

**by Trudie Coulter
Plainville, New York**

for

**William (Pete) Zollo
Veteran of the 14th Armored Division**



HATTEN -ITS SAD FATE

Lina Rinckel

Hatten - Strange Peace

The first World War 1914-1918 had been hard on the community of Hatten. 54 of its sons had to sacrifice their lives during the prime of their lives on the battlefields of France, Russia, and other places. Many returned with severe injuries or amputated limbs. Alsace was French again. The men were happy to be able to return home, to resume a normal family life and that there was peace. One hopes that there wouldn't be an outbreak of war again in the near future.

In the fall of 1928 they began to stake out the future Maginot Line. Casements were to be put up in order to prevent enemy invasion. These projects provided lucrative employment for the population. Small farmers tried to make some extra money off the projects. Who would have thought at the time that the Maginot Line would bring about the sad fate of our village.

When the casements were completed troops were transferred there. According to the census 1936, there were 150 soldiers from the 23rd Infantry Regiment in Haguenu.

The partial mobilization of the French army and the movement of troops occurred in August 1938, and when the agreement in Munich was reached, one could breathe easier (we were relieved).

Declaration of War and Evacuation

In August 1939 things looked serious and again young men were recruited. On September 1 it was announced that several villages in the first zone of the Maginot Line - among them Hatten - were to be evacuated immediately. It started on the morning of September 2 with horses or ox-drawn wagons with only about 30 kilos of luggage per person - that is with only the basic necessities, the long, painful journey started. We left

Hatten behind, our houses and all our belongings, the livestock in the barns. After a journey of several days we arrived in Hohengoest where we were well taken care of for four days. On September 9th we were loaded into cattle cars in Marmoutier and the train departed in the direction of Haute-Vienne. There were many complaints during the trip because of the tremendous heat which affected the children. There wasn't enough to drink or eat, and it nearly broke the hearts of the older people to have to leave behind their homeland that way.

On September 11, 1939 we landed in Châteauponsac in Haute-Vienne, where they regarded us as Greeks in the beginning because the telegram of the Prefecture of Limoges had announced to the mayor of Chapeauponsac the arrival of 2,000 refugees from Athens. The adjustment of the 1,100 inhabitants of Hatten was difficult primarily because of the difference in the language; in time everything was straightened out. When the cease fire started in the summer of 1940, the community of Hatten was returned under the German administration in September 1940 in three separate transports. We were glad to find our houses again which had been plundered in part. Only about ten houses had been burned down at that time. Again we were relieved.

Under German Occupation

The compulsory draft of young people into the army commenced in May 1942. 61 lost their lives on Russian or Italian battlefields or they died in captivity far away from home.

The dreary days of November 1944 came along. The American front came closer. The mayor ordered the inhabitants to leave Hatten and move to Oberseebach or Schleital. There was only one answer to the question, what will become of Hatten : "Sodom and Gomorrah". The inhabitants who experienced no hardships of war in 1939 during the evacuation decided to stay in our village. Only about six families crossed the Rhine on December 4, 1944, with their most basic possessions.

Then the cattle had to be delivered to Iffezheim.

On December 9, 1944 all able-bodied men were drafted into the "people's storm". While the older ones had to help the farmers of the region, those up to the class of 1906 were drafted into the army; they had to put in military service, were captured and several did not return.

On December 13, 1944 the first American troops moved into Hatten with a large display of personnel, materials, and tanks they passed by. Hatten did not suffer any damages or casualties, and again one breathed a sigh of relief in the hope that the war is finally over for us. But we were wrong.

The Battle Begins

The retreat of the American army was obvious by January 1, 1945 and on January 3rd it had retreated as far back as Hatten, but we didn't know anything about it. An attempt at escape from the village was no longer possible.

In the night of January 8-9, 1945 the German troops returned. In the morning of January 9th the 25th Armored Infantry Division crossed over the Maginot Line and Hatten for the attack. The first shots were heard and the hits on the houses and roofs ensued. When one of the first barns began to burn in the eastern part, a single woman burst from her house to get help. When she returned she was not allowed to enter the house. German soldiers had moved in and prevented her from entering with guns. She wasn't even allowed to get her packed suitcase. She untied the livestock in the barn so that it wouldn't burn up, but the livestock died in the street anyway. With the coming of dawn, heavy machine gun fire started; the scared inhabitants fled to the cellars, or if they didn't have a cellar, to barns and other shelters. Suddenly heavy tanks appeared everywhere, and one of the worst tank battles was to begin. A reporter of the American tank division wrote : "Anzio lasted longer than Hatten but in regard to being a bloody and treacherous battle, Hatten was the worst." On the German side the report was that Hatten was a second Stalingrad.

And the civilian population? It was January, bitter cold, and the streets were piled high with snow. The poor inhabitants sat huddled together in masses in the cold cellars without enough sustenance, without electric

power, only an oil lamp flickered here and there to offer a little light. Hell had broken loose in the streets, one attack after another came; as soon as someone became visible and it was assumed they were the enemy, the shooting began.

When one of the first houses in the center of the village burned and the inhabitants of the western part were still extinguishing the flames, they wondered that no one from the lower village came to help them. They didn't know that hell had already broken loose there, that many inhabitants had been driven from their cellars because their houses had been burned down, and they had sought refuge in their neighbors' cellars. Americans were in the cellar; Germans were upstairs in the houses. They fought over each house.

Guns went off and grenades exploded in the courtyards and fragmentation bombs crackled in the air; the howling sound of the vaned bombs mingled with the fury of the tanks that were firing at each other. It went like that for twelve days.

Soon Hatten was divided into two camps, the eastern, southern and northern parts were occupied by the Germans, while the western part was held by the Americans until the last day, January 20. With enormous quantities of materials, they shot at the rest of the village or what was left of it; it was hard to tell what was still a street or a house; corpses were lying in the street and in the cellars; they were German and American soldiers, civilians, children, old people, and among them was the livestock and the rubble. The wounded inhabitants were taken away by the Germans to Landau and by the Americans to Bouxwiller, Zabern, etc.

On January 16 the civilians in the German sector had to leave their shelters and flee to Niederoedern, Niederlauterbach, Wintzenbach, etc. Some lost their lives in the process because they were shot at on the way or because they stepped on mines. In the American sector some of the inhabitants could also leave, but the rest had to stay until the end. The outcome was sad: 83 civilians dead. Several examples are worth mentioning:

Several Examples

Along the main street in a cellar 32 meters square with about 5,000 lbs of potatoes and three large barrels of wine, 38 people sought refuge. In two other cellars of the house there were over 20 people. Three members of one family and four other civilians died there. In other cellars, three, four or more people died. In another cellar, all the refugees burned to death. In still another cellar on the main street under a house that they fought over fiercely, more than twenty people sat on the potatoes. There were three deaths in one family and eight injured, among them a young woman who knew that death was imminent. She had been severely injured on January 11. When the house burned, she was carried to a neighbor's cellar, from there to another cellar in town, from there to the basement of a school, from there she was transported by tank to a casement; then she was taken by ambulance to Schaffhausen; there she was transferred to Kandel, then to Bergzabern on January 18, where she received a shot and temporary first aid. On January 19, she was taken to the hospital in Landau and on the 20th, she gave birth to a little girl who died on January 21. On the 22nd, the young woman's leg was amputated.

In a cellar on Weissenburger Street, four members of one family and two others died; a neighbor burned up on his bed. In another cellar, where 26 people sat on beets, the homeowner was killed and the daughters seriously injured. At least 60 people sought refuge in an establishment called Landweg--among them 20 children. The children cried, the injured complained; there wasn't enough to eat--not enough milk and water, and besides it was bitter cold. About 70 people found refuge in the school basement and some were injured.

Also in the vicinity of Buhl, there were several deaths in one family. It would take too long to describe the fate of all the inhabitants and the deaths of the injured who were accommodated in Landau or of those who were treated in the hospitals to Alsace. Each family had its cross to bear; each family could write a book about its tragic experiences.

The End of the Horror

When the battle was over, the dead were buried. Bulldozers had to clear the streets first. The corpses were loaded onto ox drawn wagons and

they were buried in two common graves. Several hundred German and American soldiers were also buried in common graves for the time being, but they were later transferred to military cemeteries. It is impossible to describe the gruesome experiences of the two brave men who buried the corpses that were maimed or burned beyond recognition, while other fellow citizens dug up the common graves.

Hatten was under German administration until March 19, the day on which the Americans freed the village and it became French again.

But there was still the laming fear: which of the fellow citizens would come back from the war, from American or Russian captivity? It turned out that 61 did not return and were buried far away from home. Hatten had lost 10% of its population.

Anyone who did not experience the slaughter of Hatten, cannot imagine what the people of the village had to endure. Hatten had to suffer for Strasbourg.

The Reconstruction

Years passed before the village which had been 85% destroyed was newly constructed and the inhabitants could return.

One can only fervently hope that our village will never experience a similar tragedy and that there will be finally peace on earth.

On November 11, 1948 the man who had been mayor at the time received the "Croix de Guerre avec Etoile d'Argent" for the martyr village of Hatten from Marechal De Lattre De Tassigny in Strasbourg.

**The Old Church of Hatten
Arnold Burmeister**

Memories of January 9, 1945

In the night of this day the 25th Armored Infantry Division moved into its designated position in the woods 2 Km east of Hatten, refreshed with personnel and materials after a short cease-fire.

**Preparation for Attack Against Bastions
on the Maginot Line That Were Occupied by Americans....**

Dark night, dense cloud cover, light frost, thin blanket of snow. We all knew or sensed from the division commander to the many still inexperienced soldiers: We had a difficult battle ahead of us. The highly armed opponent is brave.

But the night passed quickly with the marshalling the units, orientation in the terrain, briefing and giving of orders.

**The Command: Attack with Hatten and Rittershoffen
as the Target.**

At seven o'clock, the unarmored combat unit arrived. Its assignment was to advance toward Rittershoffen across the northern part of Hatten, north of the railway embankment, taking advantage of the darkness and the twilight.

After rapidly advancing in the beginning, the opposition defense fortified itself more and more as the day dawned. In spite of that the unit was successful in penetrating Hatten.

At eleven o'clock the armored unit appeared south of the railway embankment in the direction of the southern part of Hatten. It moved forward rapidly, met with heavy fire from the opposing artillery and tank destroyer, but was able to conquer the bastions of the Maginot Line in spite of heavy losses and reached the southern part of Hatten.

The reports I received of the northern combat unit in Hatten motivated me to go to the northern unit after I had accompanied the armored unit. I met the northern unit at the eastern entrance to Hatten in heavy battle against American attacks. It was successful in fighting off the opponent and advanced into town with renewed effort as far as about 200 meters before the church. The Americans had settled into the cellar of the church for a strong defensive position. In the vicinity of the church the considerable increase in munitions kept the heavy fighting going longer. The church building was hit many times by all types of weapons, among others several were direct hits.

With the onset of darkness, the battle subsided. The division had attained Hatten with the exception of two points of opposition from the Americans, obviously in the cellar of the church and in the southern part of the town but they did not reach Rittershoffen.

The units of the division reorganized themselves and positioned themselves to defend the town for the night. As much as possible the unit was taken care of.

The loss of men and women and weapons were high on both sides. The beautiful old church was a ruin.

When quiet settled in temporarily with the falling of night and the noise of the weapons subsided we knew---Tomorrow war will continue! When, oh when, will all people be able to live together in peace and freedom?

From a Cellar in Rittershoffen

Anne Frank Neumann

Summary

Details of people hiding out in crowded cellars, freezing and hungry are similar to those described by Lina Rinckel in Hatten --Its Sad Fate. The touching account that highlights this article is that a young American soldier, who was occupying a house under which refugees were hiding, helped prepare a bottle of milk for a hungry baby, whose mother appealed to the soldier for help with a limited knowledge of English.

Mission of the 25th Armed Infantry Division in Northern Alsace

On December 23, the Ardenne battle had reached its climax when the 5th tank troop arrived with the 2nd infantry division at Dinant about 5 Km from the Maas. After the weather cleared up the Allied Air Force took command of the airways and stopped the attack. They bombed every German column and flew 6000 missions on just Dec. 24. Along with that, the American resistance on the ground became stronger. From all sides the Allied High Command brought forth reserves and hurled them against the German offensive wedge.

On Dec 28, the GFM (1) Model stopped the offensive.

But Hitler didn't want to accept the failure of the Ardenne offensive and ordered a diversionary attack in northern Alsace in order to wipe out the flank threats to the army group (2) B from the south.

Therefore GFM von Rundstedt had ordered on Dec. 23 to prepare such a diversionary attack through the lower Vogesen. That attack was meant not only to recapture the Zabener Valley but also the connection with the 19th infantry, which was still located at the bridgehead of Colmar west of the Rhine. This infantry was subordinate to the newly formed army of the Upper Rhine under Himmler's command.

Hitler changed this plan, that was to have its focal point at Bitch, and ordered against all strategic considerations of the army the main thrust west of the Vogesen; that was to be combined with the push through the Vogesen. This plan resulted in the lack of a focal point and instead splintered off the few forces and jeopardized the attack right from the start.

On Dec. 27 Hitler made a glowing address to the division commanders which was highlighted by these words:

"Every last effort has to be exerted by the troop in order to succeed with this attack and thereby bring about the turning point of the war"

The order for the diversionary attack followed under the name of "Operation Norwind"

During this discussion, General Burmeister succeeded in describing to Hitler the situation in which the division found itself at the time, with the considerable lack of personnel and materials in such a way that Hitler gave the unusual order to have the necessary reinforcements brought as quickly as possible.

The Advance from January 1 to January 7, 1945

"Operation Norwind" began in the night of January 1, 1945. The first infantry attacked with two units. The XIII SS Korps (3) on the right flank 6 Km southeast of Saargemund with the 36th infantry division (4) and the 17th SS Armored Infantry Division (5) for the thrust over Woelfing through the Maginot Line toward Aachen and Biningen. As early as the second day, the units got hung up in the Maginot Line after some local surprise victories and had to convert to defense.

The left attack unit LXXXIX and LXXX A.K. (6) and five people's infantry divisions (7) made good advances in the wooded terrain of the Vogesen. They succeeded in gaining territory on both of the first two days and in taking Wingen on the Moder, 15 Km south of Bitch without support from the artillery. But they lacked the strength for further penetration onto the flat land near Ingweiler.

From this position, the first army tried on Jan 3 to free the 21st Tank Division (8) and the 25th Armored Infantry Division that was located at Pimasens as a mobile reserve. The latter had been moved up into the area north of Bitch on Jan. 3 and was ready and waiting in the woods there.

Hitler, however, rejected that and ordered the engagement of these divisions east of Weissenburg in Alsace. He justified this new approach on the basis that the path would be free for the tenth army to recapture Strassbourg. Consequently, instead of creating a focal point for the attack, he created a new, a third battleground---again with not enough strength.

There were considerable differences of opinion among the Allies as a result of the new German offensive. On January 1, General Eisenhower had ordered General Devers, Supreme Commander of the Allied Army Group 6, to shorten his position in Northwest Alsace and to safe-guard the Rhine flatlands with reconnaissance and observation forces. This order was politically totally unacceptable for the French. General Juin raised strong objections immediately against not defending Strassbourg and threatened to withdraw the French troops from the high command of General Eisenhower. He warned against the possible German reprisals the inhabitants of Strassbourg would be exposed to in case of another German occupation. In fact, General DeGaulle gave General DeLattre the order to defend Strassbourg with French troops even if the Americans retreated.

On Jan. 3 General Eisenhower and General DeGaulle agreed to a retreat of U.S. troops in North Alsace to the Maginot Line from the lower Vogesen up to the Rhine and to the defense of Strassbourg.

This retreat to the Maginot Line was probably the reason for Hitler's decision to shift the focal point of aggression from the sector of Bitch into Alsace.

On the evening of January 6, the 25th Armored Infantry Division received the order to march across Pirmans-Bergzabern into the area east of Weissenburg when it arrived early in the morning on January 7.

The Americans had already crossed over the border of the German Empire and had broken into the west wall.* On the basis of Eisenhower's order on Dec. 19 to cease all aggression, they had retreated behind the Lauter and now behind the Maginot Line, which the VI U.S. Corps under General Brooks had occupied with the 79th U.S. Infantry Division and part of the 14th U.S. Tank Division. The 42nd U.S. Infantry Division with parts of the 12th U.S. Tank Division were situated on the right flank of the corps east of Haguenau.

* SIEGFREID LINE

The German offensive in Alsace commanded the 39th Tank Corps under the general of the tank troops Decker, who was summoned from the Eastern front. He had the following at his disposal:

- the 21st Tank Division
- the 25th Armored Infantry Division
- the 245th Infantry Division
- the 7th Paratrooper Division

The offensive had already begun two days earlier on Jan. 4 south of Weissenburg. The 245th Infantry Division attacked the American security forces in the forefield of the Maginot Line and pushed them back.

On January 5, the 19th Army Unit entered the fighting and crossed the Rhine 20 Km north of Strassbourg, ran over several small sparsely occupied towns, and formed a bridgehead there which was 10 Km wide from Drusenheim to Rohrweiler and as far as Gamsheim.

On January 6, the German bridgehead on the Rhine was expanded. The 79th U.S. Infantry Division with the Infantry Regiment 314 also attacked the bridgehead on its northern flank and reached the eastern edge of Drusenheim. Farther south at Gamsheim the American offensive was not successful.

On January 7, the 21st Tank Division entered the battle and at Aschbach and Studweiler it pushed the American combat outposts back to the Maginot Line. The 79th U.S. Infantry Division created for this part of its front a unified command in the form of the TF WAHL, consisting of the infantry regiments 313 and 315, Infantry Regiment 242 of the 42nd U.S. Infantry Division and combat group A (CCA) (11) of the 14th U.S. Tank Division as well as a tank destroyer division.

The Americans attacked the Rhine bridgehead unsuccessfully again and in addition brought up from the south the 3rd Algerian Division.

On that day, the 19th Army attacked from the bridgehead at Kolmar toward the north. But it had only one division, the 198th Infantry Division

at its disposal; so this offensive died out after a few initial successes on Jan 12, 25 Km south of Stassbourg. Strassbourg was far in the distance!

The Action at Hatten January 8-21, 1945

On January 8, 1945 the 21st Tank Division lined up to attack on the Maginot Line at Aschbach and was supposed to push through in the direction of Hagenau after breaking through the line. Although there was no substantial bulk work, only individual bunkers, the tank division did not break through! Therefore, the 25th Armored Infantry Division was advanced to Schaffhausen, in order to attack on the left next to the 21st Tank Division.

The division was distributed for the attack as follows:

a) Tank unit (12) under the direction of Lt. Col. Huss, commander of Armored Infantry Regiment 119 with Tank Division 5 reinforced by one flame tank company (14).

- Tank Destroyer Division (15) 25
- 1st Tank Infantry Regiment 119 (16)
- 3rd Pioneer Battalion 25 (17)

b) Fighter unit without tanks under the direction of Lt. Col. Proll, Commander of the Armored Infantry Regiment 35 with:

- Armored Infantry Regiment 35
- 2nd Armored Infantry Regiment 119
- Pioneer Battalion 25 (without 3rd Kp)

On January 9, the division commanded the offensive on the Maginot Line at Hatten with Proll's fighting unit on the first encounter. After the capture of Hatten, Huss's fighting unit was supposed to push through to Rittershoffen on to Hohweiler. General Burmeister himself led the spearhead of the tank fighter unit. The attack of Proll's fighter unit (18) got underway at 7 o'clock from the point of concentration in the woods south of Niederroedern. Already when the troops were emerging from the woods east of Hatten the attack met with heavy enemy artillery and infantry fire. The Maginot bunkers on the eastern fringe of Hatten were taken by the pioneers of battalion 25 (19) in the bunker with the engagement of flame throwers; consequently the 35th Regiment could break into the village about 9 o'clock.

Huss's fighter unit arrived after that at 11 o'clock and also met with heavy artillery and anti-tank fire (20) as they emerged from the woods. Several tanks and armored personnel carriers (21) were hit; so the fighter unit withdrew toward the north. The enemy on the northeast edge of the village was overrun and quite a large number of prisoners were taken. Huss's unit led an offensive farther on in the direction of Rittershoffen, where it encountered more resistance before the village. When it was also hit by heavy flanking fire from Hatten, it forced its way into Hatten from the north and fought its way right through to the church. At that point, Huss's unit had to convert to defense. More than 300 prisoners and a considerable amount of weapons and vehicles were taken. Their own casualties were high, and the enemy still held about a third of the town, the western part.

In the evening, the 21st Tank Division joined up on the right and took over the defense in the northern part of Hatten.

Proll's fighter unit was in the eastern part of Hatten with the 35th Regiment, while the 2nd 119 (25) was in position south of the town and the left flank covered then from Hagenauer Forest.

On January 10, the enemy attacked Hatten several times with the engagement of parts of Infantry Regiment 315 and was repulsed. Heavy artillery fire covered the town. The Americans reinforced their occupation of Rittershoffen also by engaging the first Battalion Infantry Regiment 315.

At midnight, Huss's fighter unit got into position in the northern part of Hatten to continue the offensive on Rittershoffen. The sector in Hatten was given over to Proll's fighter unit. On January 11 at 5 o'clock A.M. the armored tank fighter unit appeared north of Hatten ready to attack. For orientation at night, they relied solely on the fires in Hatten. Ground fog and smoke made orientation more difficult. The enemy shot with artillery unobserved in the direction of the noise of the tanks, and the fighting unit slowly groped its way forward in the darkness. Shortly before dawn, they reached Rittershoffen and the fighting group invaded the village from the north. The Americans were completely surprised but did offer heavy resistance. They pushed their way from house to house until they reached the western edge of town, and then they converted to defense. One third of

the village in the south, however, remained in American hands as in Hatten. There were bitter battles for each individual farmstead. In the afternoon the enemy attacked the village with tanks from CCA/14th U.S. Tank Division several times from Hohweiler and was repulsed.

On account of this position, the streets and paths from Rittershoffen to Hatten were not passable, and all supplies as well as evacuation of the wounded could only be carried out at night.

At the Rhine bridgehead the position had not changed. All American attacks were repulsed and parts of the 12th U.S. Tank Division converted to defense.

On January 12, the Division defended both villages against constant counter thrusts supported by tanks.

On January 13 in the morning, the Americans led an offensive from the west against Hatten with the newly engaged units, the 47th Tank Battalion and the Infantry Battalion 11/315, in order to recapture Hatten and to re-establish the defense of the Maginot Line. The tank offensive that had been conducted to the south around Rittershoffen could be stopped by our anti-tank defense and artillery south of Hatten before the front of the 11/315. The Armored Infantry Regiment 35 repulsed all infantry attacks of the newly engaged American (28) battalion in the village. That resulted in a battle for Hatten that lasted for days and expanded to a battle of material. They fought for each house with tanks and infantry weapons. At the same time, there was heavy artillery fire on Hatten and Rittershoffen. One house after the other was set on fire by the American artillery with incendiary grenades.

The losses of the the active units were very high and the cellars were full of wounded people. Since there were not enough ambulances, in the night all supply vehicles and armored personnel carriers had to be used to transport the wounded.

For the Americans the 14th U.S. Tank Division took over the command of the sector Hatten-Rittershoffen on January 14, supported by the infantry of the 79th U.S. Infantry Division, and engaged the units as follows:

- CCA and III/IR 315 continued the battle in Rittershoffen

- CCR secured the western third in Hatten with II/IR 315
- CCB attacked the roads north and northwest of Hatten in order to cut them off, but it was not successful.

On January 16, the 3rd Paratrooper Regiment 20 arrived in Rittershoffen and relieved parts of the 1st/119, whose infantry (29) now numbered only 35 men. The paratroopers immediately made a raid (30) in the night with the support of five flame tanks and three assault tanks, in order to drive the Americans from the village. But they also failed with the loss of all flame tanks.

Also in Hatten relief came from parts of the 7th FJ-Division (32). There our troops were slowly gaining ground.

On the Rhine bridgehead, the 12th U.S. Tank Division attacked with great energy in order to break into the bridgehead, but did not reach its goal.

• From January 17-19, the battle of material continued with undiminished strength. The Americans threw new forces into the battle because they were under heavy German attack especially in Hatten. The Division could hold its position even though it continued to dwindle more and more!

On the Rhine bridgehead, the German offensive continued to make progress on the right flank and expanded the bridgehead. New towns, among them Roeschwoog and Sessenheim, were occupied. Therefore, the Americans had to make preparations to prevent an attack on Hagenau and placed a tank battalion there in readiness.

According to a combat report from the [?](45th) tank battalion of the 14th U.S. Tank Division, the Americans also found the battle for Hatten and Rittershoffen especially difficult and involving heavy losses.

The tank battalion arrived in the night before January 13 in Betschdorf, 3 Km west of Rittershoffen and steered the attack together with the Infantry Battalion II/315 south past Rittershoffen to Hatten, in order to capture the village completely again and to establish the old HKL (33) east of Hatten. The tank battalion had arrived with two medium and one light

tank corps with the strength of 35 medium and 16 light tanks as well as one assault tank platoon. A medium tank corps was engaged on the Rhine bridgehead and followed two days later.

The tank battalion got caught in heavy tank destroyer fire south of Hatten, and when the tanks wheeled north in order to penetrate Hatten, they were hit in the flank by the tank destroyers, so loss of tanks resulted in the cessation of the tank offensive.

During the local battle that followed and lasted for days, the tanks fought during the day partially in the village and partially they shot at the eastern part that was occupied by the division from firing positions outside the village.

At night, the tanks were pulled out of the village and they transported the wounded out. They also transported munitions, supplies, and infantrymen from Betschdorf to the front.

The German artillery took care of further losses of tanks and after three days several platoons (34) had only one tank. Especially heavy were the losses of officers. Half of the company commanders and the majority of the platoon leaders had dropped out (35).

The local battle got on the Americans' nerves. There were German soldiers all over: in the house next door or on the other side of the street, in the cellar, or in the attic, and they shot at everything that moved with a machine gun, a submachine gun, an anti-tank grenade launcher, or mortar. In addition, there was uninterrupted artillery fire in the part of town occupied by the Americans. It actually happened that a German tank stopped at the corner of a house behind which an American tank was waiting for him. Then the tanks tried to shoot holes into the walls of the house with high explosive shells in order to shoot at each other through the house. There were corpses all over, in the streets, in the rubble of the houses and in the cellars, ---German and American soldiers and also civilians. This writer comes to the conclusion that the battle for "bloody Hatten" was the most difficult and the most severe battle of the 45th tank battalion in this war, worse than the legendary battle at the bridgehead of Anzio in Italy.

On January 20, parts of a people's infantry division arrived as relief. While the first 119 still had to stay as a reserve in Rittershoffen, the rest of the parts of the division were transferred back to Schaffenhäusen.

The American Battalion II/314, which was locked in Drusenheim, was captured during (at) the Rhine bridgehead.

On this day at nightfall, the 6th U.S. Corps began the retreat to a new defensive position along the line Rotbach - Niedermodern - Hagenau-Bischweiler to the Moder. The U.S. Corps considered itself to be forced into this retreat as a result of the heavy losses and unsuccessful battles at Hatten and Rittershoffen and because of the danger of a breakthrough into Hagenau from the Rhine bridgehead.

On January 21, there was hardly a shot. It was noticeably quiet. The air activity was, however, livelier.

The last parts of the division were disengaged out of Rittershoffen in the evening and transferred to Mothern on the Rhine. There the revitalization of the troops with the newly arrived replacement troop (36) was begun immediately; it was practically like a new formation of some of the units.

In the evening, the II/119 had to relieve parts of the 20th Tank Division north of Rittershoffen. The 6th U.S. Corps terminated the retreat to the position on the Moder on this day. The weather turned colder and it began to snow.

The Pursuit as far as Schweighausen and Ohlungen: January 22--27, 1945

On January 22 in the afternoon, the order to advance came. The disengagement of the Americans had just now been determined and the division was supposed to move forward into the area south of Sultz on the road from Weissenburg to Hagenau. While the mobile parts of the division had to start marching immediately, the SPW Battalion (38) I/119 had to follow on foot on the morning of January 23 because of lack of fuel! The march led them through Hatten and Rittershoffen and not until now did the troops have a true picture of how heavily these towns had been demolished.

On January 24, it was determined that the enemy had occupied a new position behind the Moder. Therefore, the division received the order to attack on the same night in rapid pursuit at Neuburg and Schweighausen on the western edge of the Hagenauer Forest and to form a bridgehead across the Moder.

The offensive was launched with Armored Infantry Regiment 35 on the right and Armored Infantry Regiment 119 on the left and commenced at midnight. The offensive was successful with heavy artillery protection, and it was successful in breaking through the position of IR 222 and in forming bridgeheads at Neuburg and Uhrbruck that stretched as far as Uhlweiler, Ohlungen and the western part of Schweifhausen.

On January 25, the enemy began immediately with counter-offensives and the division had to defend the bridgeheads. The Americans reorganized again the TF-WAHL with three infantry battalions and the CCB of the 14th U.S. Tank Division and attacked seven times in the course of the day. They were partially thrown back during the counter-thrust. In spite of that, the Americans were successful in recapturing Schweifhausen and a part of the forest of Ohlungen. In between the attacks there was heavy artillery fire in the bridgehead. The losses were high again.

As a complete surprise, the order came at 11 p.m. to disengage from the enemy at 2 o'clock and to evacuate the Moder bridgehead!

Once again Hitler had intervened and stopped the offensive as it appeared that it could be successful and the first army wanted to move in the LXXXX Army Corps. GFM von Rundstedt protested in vain. The development of the situation in the east, especially in front of Berlin was stronger and forced the Supreme Command to pull all the forces from the west immediately and to transfer them to the east.

In the morning hours of January 26, the division carried out the evacuation as planned. While the disengagement from the enemy could be carried out undisturbed by Regiment 119, the cross-over positions of the Moder were under heavy artillery fire; so the battalions suffered new losses there again.

At Regiment 35 the inhabitants of Alsace, who had been engaged in the action, went over to the Americans with their guns (42). After reaching the northern shore, the members of the regiment moved back into their camps (43) south of Sultz.

At 4 p.m. General Burmeister held an inspection at the Armored Infantry Regiment 119 in Surburg(44) at which he announced that the engagement at the Moder bridgehead had been the last mission of the 25th Armored Infantry Division in the west and that the Division would be transferred sometime in the next few days to the eastern front (45).

On January 27, the Division marched off in the evening and reached the area around Germersheim on the following day. There the entrainment at various railroad stations began still that same evening with a destination of Kustrin on the Oder.

In their mission in Alsace, the new 25th Armored Infantry Division again did not reach their objective, Strassbourg. Again the disposition of forces from the Supreme Command was not strong enough; on top of that, instead of one thrust two offensives had been launched, none of which succeeded.

The Division held its own heroically in the battles in Alsace and the names Hatten and Rittershoffen will always recall that.

Captain Wekenmann, the commander of the first battalion of the Armored Infantry Regiment 35 was awarded the Knight's Cross on February 5 for the Hatten offensive.

But all the brave action is in vain when all the conditions of the forces on land and in the air have changed to the point that no promising operations are possible any more.

A Tank Infantryman Tells a Story

Ernst Glemm

Introduction: In the course of this winter, Mr Glemm from Neustadt (Palatinate) visited the "Cercle d'Historie d' Alsace du Nord" with a war buddy from Lothringen.

This visit was very significant to the Cercle because Mr. Glemm, 33 years old at the time participated in the battles in Hatten in January 1945 as NCO of the 21st Tank Division.

What he told about was taped, and we have tried to select and write down the most important parts of the conversation.

At the beginning of January, we moved toward Edenkoben in the Palatinate with ten tanks as part of Operation Northwind, where we, the first Tank Infantry Company were supposed to refresh our teams. We ended up as 110 men under the leadership of First Lieutenant Brehnbruck, a great guy. The soldiers were very young; some of them were 16-18 years old.

We started marching toward the south, on the 5th or 6th of January, I cannot remember exactly, we came to Aschbach and had already experienced heavy losses. We had already lost close to 60 men. The tank infantry followed the tanks; I was company troop leader and had laid down on top of a tank. We encountered heavy fire, so I said "Lieutenant, sir, we have to get out of here; what good is it for us to be here; we've already had 60 casualties?" He replied "I am waiting for the word to assemble, the captain is so stubborn. Come down from that tank". So I had to get down from the tank. I said: "Sir, it is all the same where I croak, on top of that tank or down here" That was the way we felt.

We came to a bar near Aschback, in which there were wounded people. I was sitting on a munitions crate at the entrance; a grenade came flying and six to eight men simply disappeared.

Then our company came to Hatten and it happened to be at the intersection by the church. There was a house on the corner where we set up our command post. There were civilians in the cellar. The Americans shot phosphorous grenades at everything which moved. Down in the cellar there was a lame woman. I finally carried her out, then she was taken to a bunk on the Maginot Line. On the 16th of January I was injured on my left foot, it was my third injury; on August 16, on October 16 and on January 16. The 16th seems to be my unlucky day.

Nearby was the "Green Villa" which was occupied by American sharpshooters. One of our messengers, 18 years old, was wounded by them. He was lying there and we could not help him. We stuck out a helmet and a red cross flag, the Americans shot at everything. The boy finally died and we moved him away on a tarpaulin. One woman scolded me because we didn't come and get the boy right away. So I said to the platoon sergeant: "What do they know what we're going through?"

A woman was walking in the street with a cart, in which she had her child and her belongings. A shower of grenades came and she ran away leaving the child sitting in the cart. A German tank came along and threatened to run over the cart. Others got the child out of the cart and then I went out and got the utensils and money for safe keeping. The cart was run over by the tank.

What kind of mood were we in? I can only say what I saw in our ridiculous company. We did our duty. I didn't believe in it. There was no enthusiasm left. I said to myself: "If you don't do your duty, you'll get bumped off, so you have to play along" One could see it wasn't working, we couldn't fight against the whole world, so I asked myself how can I get out of it the best way?

The relationship with the population? There were signs on the houses saying "Civilians live here". Only the inhabitants could have written that. They didn't want any soldiers.

The Americans?--- Those guys had everything. We hardly had any planes. When the Americans came we had a holiday. Then the fighter-bombers came and interfered. We didn't have any white camouflage suits, only coats and helmets. We, the tank infantry, had only MG 42 machine guns.

At one time a short cease fire was organized with the Americans, at that time a part of the civilian population could be evacuated.

I stayed in Hatten in spite of my injury, when our division pushed into the Hagenau Forest, I still had to go along. The First Lieutenant didn't want me to leave. Then I did get 14 days off, in the meantime the division was taken back and transferred to the east.

General Arnold Burmeister Answers.....

Now about the question of the strengths and losses:

At the battles for Bitsch and the bulwarks of the Maginot Line there (Schiesseck, etc) . In November and December 1944, the Division had already suffered considerable losses through American air power and strong artillery. At the end of December, a discussion took place at Hitler's headquarters in the Palatinate, at which I announced the condition of my Division and the need for new forces. Surprisingly, he discharged my reports with the order that the Division should receive the necessary personnel and material reinforcements immediately. Consequently, the Division began the attack on Hatten on September 1, 1945 with the strength of about 16,000 men total. It was short one battalion of an armored infantry regiment. The hard battles which followed until the end of January brought heavy losses to all parts of the Division, since the Americans after all had far superior units in number and weapons and fought courageously. Only their Air Force was frequently out of action because of weather conditions which worked in our favor. I cannot produce objective figures on the loss of personnel.

Since the Division did not have a "front line reporter" with camera or television at this disposal, I have enclosed only one photo from this era. It was taken on February 1945 in the east on the Oder front. The awarding of the Knight's Cross to Captain Weckenmann I Pz Gr. Rgt 35 and NCO Weigand, reconnaissance patrol leader. Both distinguished themselves in the Hatten offensive.

I myself led as the last commander from October '44 to the bitter end at the beginning of May 1945 where I capitulated independently in Mecklenburg region Schwein as opposed to two American divisions.

Consequently, the greatly diminished unit with what was left was saved from Russian imprisonment. If this war could have led to lasting peace in Europe for all time, it would have been a consolation. But what is going on on the other side of the Elbe is extremely alarming. What crimes Hitler committed with the European peoples is going on in the east in an undiminished way. It is shocking!

I'm sorry that these lines do not offer a satisfactory answer to your question. I tried to comply with your wishes according to my knowlege and conscience. To us who were soldiers then and had the experience of meeting the citizens of U. in Hatten it will always remain a meaningful experience in the sense of "reconciliation over graves, rubble and ashes"

Sincerely

Arnold Burmeister

Rittershoffen

A thousand devils were hunting
And all hell was breaking loose
Faith and hope had failed us,
We lay shivering in the cellar,
Like poor animals.
In straw that was scattered and moist,
Sleepless and paralyzed with fear and shock,
Listening through the night and dawn
For the next bomb--was it meant for us?

No stone was left standing,
There was only the glow of flames,
That lit the night and revealed the horror.
The animals screaming,
Their stables ablaze, unprotected,
Yawning under splinter, shells and snow.

Days and nights passed.
We crouched, numb with cold and dirt.
House and yard, our animals,
Our village, homeland and bread and our dignity
All burnt, dead, and gone.

Finally we came out.
A proud officer telling us triumphantly:
"The battle is won, you can leave the cellar".
To go where? Where? But no one asked.

No one asked.
There was nothing left for us in the cold, the night and the pain.
The house was in ruins, and grey misery,
Dirty rags wrapped around freezing legs,
Animal corpses, smoking stables and excrement,
Black and white bodies of fallen soldiers,

Debris blocking roads, stones,
Beams, shell casings, dead tanks--no bread,
And crystal-hard, sparkling, cruel snow.

Anne Frank-Neumann

In January of 1945, 13 people of "Bari" died in an area of barely 100 meters, and several others were more or less severely injured.

In January of 1945, 43 people lived in the houses numbered 203 to 213. Nine of these had already fled when the German offensive began on January 11, and a few others were in the army. This left 34 persons living on the upper area of "Bari".

Such a large number of dead and wounded among the civilian population calls for an explanation, especially since it included three old soldiers who had fought in 1914-18. One of these men died during the fight on January 14th, 1945, and another was injured. Why was the percentage of civilian fatalities so high?

Six witnesses of "Bari" gave their accounts of the sad events.

Andler, Helene, Goetzman, Madeleine, born Jaeger,

This is January 1945, in one week Helene Andler will be 20 years old. They have been in their basement for several days. She knows that she won't be able to celebrate her birthday but she had not expected such a tragedy.

There were seven members of our family in the basement, she says. On January 11, we heard a terrible crash. We were paralyzed with fear and a heavy cloud of smoke blinded us. After a few seconds we regained our senses and a horrible scene emerged. My brother Charles, my sister Berthe and one of her children, Henri, lay dead; another daughter of Berthe, Hermine was injured. My father and the eldest son of Berthe and I escaped this bloodbath.

My other sister, Lina, lived with her family ca. 300 meters from here, but when my father went to notify her, he too was shot at and his right leg was injured.

The German soldiers placed the bodies of Charles, Berthe and Henri in the stable. A few days later we were taken to Niederroedern in a German

armored car. Then we were sent to Wissembourg. It was a great relief for us. The injuries that my father and Hermine had suffered were fortunately not serious.

Several days later we were able to go to Hermerswiller, where one of my brother lived and then we continued in the the direction of Rittershoffen. We wanted to know what had happened to our dead whom we had left behind. We were told that they had been buried one day before our arrival.

We found Rittershoffen, after the battle, a horrible sight to behold. Our house, as well as the whole street, was reduced to rubble and ashes. However, we were able to find shelter with a relative, Henri Jaeger, living in Rittergass, whose house was only slightly damaged. We stayed there until we could move into the barracks.

Mrs Goetzmann, Madeleine, born Jaeger--"Schuetze Lenel".:

When the first shells hit, we fled into the basement. There were six of us. We hoped it would only be for a short time. We were able to go upstairs from time to time to get something to eat and drink. In the beginning, my mother ventured into the stable to milk the cows. However, three days later, our basement was heavily damaged and we had to flee.

We found shelter in Georges Wagner's basement. There were already several families there.

We stayed there until we were able to leave this hell.

My brother Fritz was the negotiator between us and the people in another basement and then we made a quick decision. There were 27 of us who fled, hoping to be safer with greater numbers. We decided to move by travelling around the village.

In the middle of our group shells exploded between us. The bullets were going by our ears. I cannot recall the moments now.

4 persons from my family were dead and my father was shot in the right arm.

I had in my hand a package of clothes. One piece of clothing which we found in the trees had been there a long time.

We escaped from the basement of Birkenkopf into the high grass and went to the house of Joseph Ball. We hoped that a few from the family would come to us. Many people took shelter in bomb craters, but we could not go back and find out about them.

We found out that four from my family were dead, my mother, my brother Fritz, my sister-in-law Huguette, and little Claude died on January 14th. It was a day that we will never forget.

In the cellar of the Joseph Ball house, were about 50 persons, who talked about their bad experience. We were hungry and thirsty until the end of the battle.

Then I went with the people from the "Bari" to my husband's house in Bisch Gass.

Frau Merkling Berthe born Eichenlaub

We 4 were in the cellar when the Jaeger family with 5 people escaped to us with the things that they needed. We were 3 to 4 days in the cellar. In the beginning we had little to eat or drink, then my brother Fritz was able to go out and milk. We helped each other in the cellar. Not far upstairs, we could hear machine gun fire and a grenade exploded in the house. Near us every thing was in flames. A S.S. soldier told us, "Now you must go".

On January 14th, 1945 we waited for a moment to escape. We went in a wagon in a round about way, in search for Kuhlendorf. Behind the village we came under fire. Many of us were injured, some were killed.

At this moment, I cannot remember every thing that happened. We had taken shelter in a shell hole. Everyone frightened and ran in all directions. My mother and sister Lina were badly wounded: they were so strong that they reached the road to Kuhlendorf and died there in the gutter at the side of the road. We took shelter in the cellars of Birkenkopf and later of Joseph Ball.

In the cellar at Birkenkopf I talked to an American soldier and begged him to go out into the road and get my mother's ring and my sister Lina's wristwatch for me. He did, and I never knew his name. If he still lives and remembers, he will know what I am talking about. I have the highest respect for this brave human being.

Frau Stumpf Berthe born Merkling

Our house was destroyed by the first shell to hit it, and we escaped to the cellar of Georges Wagner. We had bread in the oven which we took out along with other things that we needed.

In Georges Wagner's cellar, the Germans had a hospital station, to shelter the wounded soldiers. We could tell from their looks, that we should not be there. The military doctor told the wounded soldiers to go up stairs, as the shooting went from bad to worse, it was like Hell.

Jaeger Fritz, talked to people in another cellar and soon a wagon and horses arrived with two women and we loaded our belongings and got into the wagon. Fighting was on between Rittershoffen and Oberroedern and we were undecided if we should go right or left. We chose to go left around the village and here we came under heavy shell fire.

We had hoped to escape this Hell, but we could not turn back. My mother was among the 7 people killed.

Again we started for the Kuhlendorf road and still being shelled we took shelter again in a shell hole and 3 more were killed. We then made our way to the high grass.

Frau Schaff Anna born Jaeger

Our house is at the beginning of the village, the first left from Leiterswiller. American soldiers moved into our house and we went into the cellar to avoid machine gun fire. The Americans told us we could not stay because the house would be a target and they were right. Later we found out the Germans did attack and destroy it. We went to the Eichlenlaub cellar and we stayed for a few days. The Americans fell back and it was quiet for a while. Then the Germans came down our street and the Americans came back to engage them in battle. Everything was ablaze and we did not have a roof over our heads. It was then that we had to resolve our minds and escape behind the lines. On January 14, 1945 we put a few important things in the wagon and left in a hurry to go behind the village. There we came upon another fight. There were shells and grenades all around us, we had dead after dead. The blood of my girl friend, Lina, was on me.

The wagon and horses were crazy and instead of going to Kuhlendorf they went left to Gross Gass where many people were dead. The result was 10 dead and many were wounded.

We escaped to the cellar of Joseph Ball in Gross Gass and stayed there for a few days. Later we went to Kuhlendorf and then went to Hohwiller.

Frau Meyer Marie Therèse born Meyer

Marie Therèsè in the fight was not even 4 years old. She heard from her mother about the things that happened.

Marie Therèsè was badly wounded on her head. Even today, she has a scar on her left cheek. Her mother was also wounded on her head.

They came from Hohwiller in an American Red Cross wagon. At Saverne, her uncle was wounded on his leg, and was many hours in a grenade hole. I remembered this well. He, at that time, was 6 years old.

Jaeger Claude told us before he died " Jeannel, be sure and don't forget me". His mother was at this time dead.

Her mother-in-law, Louise, 47 years old and her brother-in-law, Willy at the age of 23 were killed in the fight. Then they say "you shall see that"

They go over fields and grass, over graves up and down. In a short time we lost everything that was on the motorbike . I must hold the kids so they don't fall down from the bike. Airplanes flew over us. Light flares make the heavens bright.

We rode behind Hatten when it was in flames and came then to "Essigbush". There schrapnel hit the motor and we must wait for help. Much time was lost before someone towed us away. Finally, it goes further. We must go through a bomb hole.

The vehicle that towed us away before went nicely through the crater, but the rope broke and we rolled backwards into the hole again. The driver swore but this did not help. And again 1 hour passes before we can go on.

About two hours in the night we came from the forest into Niederroderm. There were many days that we were cold and without food, but the worst was over. Thank God we are alive. It was terrible what we went through.

After the battle in January 1945, all of the men around Rittershoffen searched for the dead. The witness Jaeger Henri and Eisele Jules and Goetzmann Robert are talking about what they saw.

Toolmaker, Henri Jaeger was born in Rittershoffen, August 6, 1901. After the battle they told him to search for the dead and bury them. I came back to Rittershoffen from the Volkstrum in Helmsheim (Phalz) on February 14th, 1945. The snow was melting but the terrible picture of Rittershoffen after the battle is always before my eyes.

Our house was partially destroyed, but able to be repaired. In general, the village was totally destroyed. Everything was mixed up. Dead soldiers and animals were in the debris. Disabled tanks and all kinds of war material interfered with the finding and burial of the dead.

Three companies were used in the search and burial work. One company was used to find and carry away the bodies. The second, the one I was in, was burying, and the rest of the people were working in a cemetery. To protect ourselves from the odor and sickness we used lime to cover the dead. From a cellar they brought a cow and a wounded calf and a half burned pig. In searching we could not go to far because of the mines. The coming of spring made our life a little easier as we repaired our house.

Eisele Jules born 8/20/1904 (Reported)

I came to Rittershoffen with the Volkstrum from Soultz-Sous-Foret. There was an air raid alarm and I escaped with many comrades. I was home only a short time when we had an air raid and we went into the cellar.

We were 6 persons, 23 of us adults and 3 children. We knew we could not stay here very long because of the increased artillery firing. Two homes away stood a sturdier cellar where we took cover. In the Bassler cellar were 70 scared people, together, waiting for the end of the battle which seemed to never end. Grenades and shells exploded all around us but the walls were strong, we would be safe for a few days, but the German soldiers put us out. Then the cellar was only for the soldiers.

Many of us escaped to Neiderroedern. This was a dangerous journey with the children over the snowy fields, to the forest "Essigbusch" and on to Neiderroedern. Many times we must lie in the fields on the way to the village. We left there and went to Ober Lauterbach, where we stayed a few days. The people were very good to us.

A few days after the battle was over, we went back to the villages of Rittershoffen and Hatten , to find destruction, misery, distress and many dead. They ordered me to help bury the bodies. We were only a few that must do this terrible job.

One is for the American soldiers and the other is for the German soldiers. Some bodies could not be identified. I cannot understand how the Military Police could identify one body from another. The dead soldiers were later taken to a Military Cemetery. The civilian dead were buried in their family plot.

...two common graves were...

Willy was behind and that's why he was free from military service. He and his mother lived 200 meters from Berthe Holtzmann. That is why they could not be together in the cellar. The woman with the 3 children told us the sad experience from the fight and how they escaped in the night to Niederroedern.

A few days before the big battle, shells were fired over us. Large and small pieces of shrapnel made holes in the roof. We heard that the war was only a short distance away from us. People remembered what happened to them in 1939, so nobody wanted to go and leave their belongings.

Suddenly a shell exploded on the house of Emile Schwab, but thank God nobody was hurt. The house had little damage. The neighbor escaped to the cellar of the barn with the 3 children. The walls were thick and stable. 10 people would be able to stay here for a few days.

From time to time we were able to get a little food for us and the animals, but it was very dangerous to go out.

Suddenly we heard soldiers above us, searching for American soldiers. We called the German soldiers and told them there was no one in here other than 4 women and 6 children, but they did not believe us and shot thru the cracks at us. The bullets went over our heads, but nobody was wounded. We heard a heavy machine gun being put into place for use, then we heard them firing the gun. Behind our barn were many dead and wounded. One of the men outside the barn screamed "My leg is gone". Another hollered for a tourniquet. "Is anybody there?". We heard a bomb explode, we wanted to escape now but the stones from the wall were against the door and we could not open it.

In the cellar we had our slippers on and our shoes were outside on the steps, everyone knows what we should do in this horrible situation, but at this frightful time we left everything behind, like money, documents and shoes.

When we came out the whole barn was in flames. The house was totally destroyed. A German soldier told us " Quick, quick come here to us beside the wall. Not far from here is a cellar where there are people"

We could only stay there a few hours. Then tanks fired from behind the barn. A shell hit a pile of ammunition and it exploded into the air. We must now go out into the street but we do not know where to go. Everyone had a white cloth in their hand, but an American soldier on the corner kept shooting and wounded an escaping woman in the knee. Thanks to a miracle we were not injured.

We searched again for shelter in the darkness but we could not find any nor could we find any people. We went through a stubble field until we found a big straw pile and crawled into it. The children cried. Later a man found us and took us to "Breifbot's cellar" where many people were. I found above the steps a small place. It was cold and no door could be closed. The back of the house had been damaged.

From Georges every one of us received a glass of cider. He had been hit in the nose with a small piece of shrapnel and his nose swelled up. He told us that he was very lucky, for the shrapnel had gone right through his bed. We stayed with him for only a short while.

The noise of the battle was awful, but where could we go in the night? We tried to go to Kuhlendorf. We went around the village and came upon a group of German soldiers with white snow shirts on. One of them grabbed my arm and asked me in Elsassich language "Madam, we want to go to toward the Strassbourg soldiers." I said to him "I want to go to Kuhlendorf". He answered "You cannot go any further" This soldier was a real guardian

angel. We found out later that my mother-in-law, and my brother-in-law, here for a few hours, had been killed.

We had a rest among the soldiers and warmed our feet because we had been in wet slippers for a long time. Then the soldiers took us to the "Bari" so we could leave Rittershoffen. The soldiers told us there was a wagon and a driver in the street who would take us there.

Our oldest (10 years) son went out first. In the meanwhile a grenade went off near him and blew him into the field. He was unconscious and soldiers brought him back. He was not wounded, only scared.

Now we went in the wagon (this was the food supply wagon). We had to give them our word that nothing in the wagon would fall out. Now begins the outdoor trip. In my mind as I recall, I asked the driver in what direction he was going. He answered me "The tanks road". I said "Where is it?"

Goetzmann Robert Erblicite AM 10:10:1905 DAS LICHT DER WELT
Robert Goetzmann at 10/10/1905 first saw the light of the world.

Our home is in the beginning of Grossgasse, from the direction of Kuhlendorf. It was at the end of the battle, only for the Americans. Here was the headquarters for the tank group. Just before the fight, thousands of grenades flew over us. The artillery fire came near to us, so we escaped quickly to the cellar. In a short time some neighbors escaped to our cellar. In front of the street we had rape and potatoes piled up. Behind the cellar were 16 persons. We had a small oven, mattresses, blankets and a little to eat and drink. We heard grenades and machine guns in action.

In one short break of the battle we went out looking to provide food and I gave the cows a bundle of hay. A neighbor, Graf Charles, was milking the cow, but after a few days it became impossible because the stable and the barn were badly demolished and the livestock had died or been killed.

After the battle they ordered me to search for bodies and take them to the cemetery. There were only a few of us to do this terrible job, because at any moment we could be exploded by a mine. We have no more wagon or horses. People from Betschdorf helped us with our terrible job, and so we were able to transport the bodies. The cold weather prevented stench and sickness. The body of Heydt Rose could not be found until after the snow melted. In our kitchen the military police had the personal belongings of the dead German soldiers drying out before they sent it to their families. Our home was not totally damaged, so this we could repair, but few people from Rittershoffen could repair or live in their houses.

The Battle of Rittershoffen

January 1945

The grandmother and the uncle of Alfred Hotzmann were killed in the battle. He alone was covered with earth. At the time the young boy was 10 1/2 years old and he remembers well how this happened. His story is worth putting on paper.

The snow was deep at this time
The village was in the most beautiful winter clothes
It was the end and the beginning of the years
Every one thought the war was finished
When suddenly for the end of day
In the village the fear from the first shot
Quickly they gathered a few things together
To put in a secure place
The shells were exploding in many places
No one could be outside
For fright and cold shake for big and small
Grenades exploded around
They shoot, shoot from all sides around
Like they lost their minds
Big tanks riding in
Soldiers holler: The enemy must go!
What stands up must be over run
The whole village must be burning up
Smoke and dust to prevent observation
You could not see the daylight
Nothing more was to see
The tethered animals wailed
They shoot, shoot yet always
From all corners, from all craters
In the rubble and ash was the whole village
And nobody wanted to give up
In ruins was the home of God
Nobody could understand this

Chimneys were seen in the heavens
Many deaths were sorrowful
In Kugelhagen the people ran away

To find a peaceful place
They ran into the field with distress
Several to overcome the deaths
This was the battle of Rittershoffen
Hoping that it will never occur again

Alfred Holtzmann