

IN THE FLICKERING NIGHT BARRAGE WHICH PRECEDED THE CROSSING OF THE ROER, THE FLASHES OF EXPLODING SHELLS LIGHT UP A PILLAR OF WHITE-PHOSPHORUS SMOKE

THE ALLIES DRIVE FOR THE RHINE

Since December the U. S. First and Ninth Armies had been building up strength behind the swollen little Roer River. On Feb. 23 they let it go with a stunning night barrage (*above and below*). The Germans at the river were quickly overpowered. Beyond the river the rigid framework of their Rhineland defense began to break down. A week after the first gun had been fired at the Roer, the Ninth had arrived at the Rhine opposite Dusseldorf. The men of the Ninth exchanged shots with the Germans on the other side.

Lieut. General William H. Simpson, commander of the Ninth (*see cover*), had been waiting for this drive to the Rhine. If the river was to be crossed by his army, the smooth crossing of the Roer was a battle rehearsal. For weeks the muddy little stream had been an obsession with the men of the Ninth. They prepared and planned to cross it early in February, in coordination with drives by the Canadians and General Patton's Third Army. But on the eve of the crossing the Germans opened the gates in the big

earth dams of the upper Roer, partly flooding the cabbage land of the lower valley. General Simpson was forced to postpone the crossing while his engineers calculated when it would be possible.

The engineers, watching the flood diminish, told the general the crossing could be made on Feb. 23. The Ninth began to get ready again. The men and tanks and portable sections of pontoon bridges moved up to the river. At 2:45 A.M. the barrage began and a smokescreen drifted over river to cover the crossing.

UNDERNEATH STRIATED LINES OF TRACER SHELLS, SMOKE GENERATORS ON THE WEST BANK OF THE ROER MAKE A LOW WHITE CLOUD TO HIDE THE MEN CROSSING THE RIVER

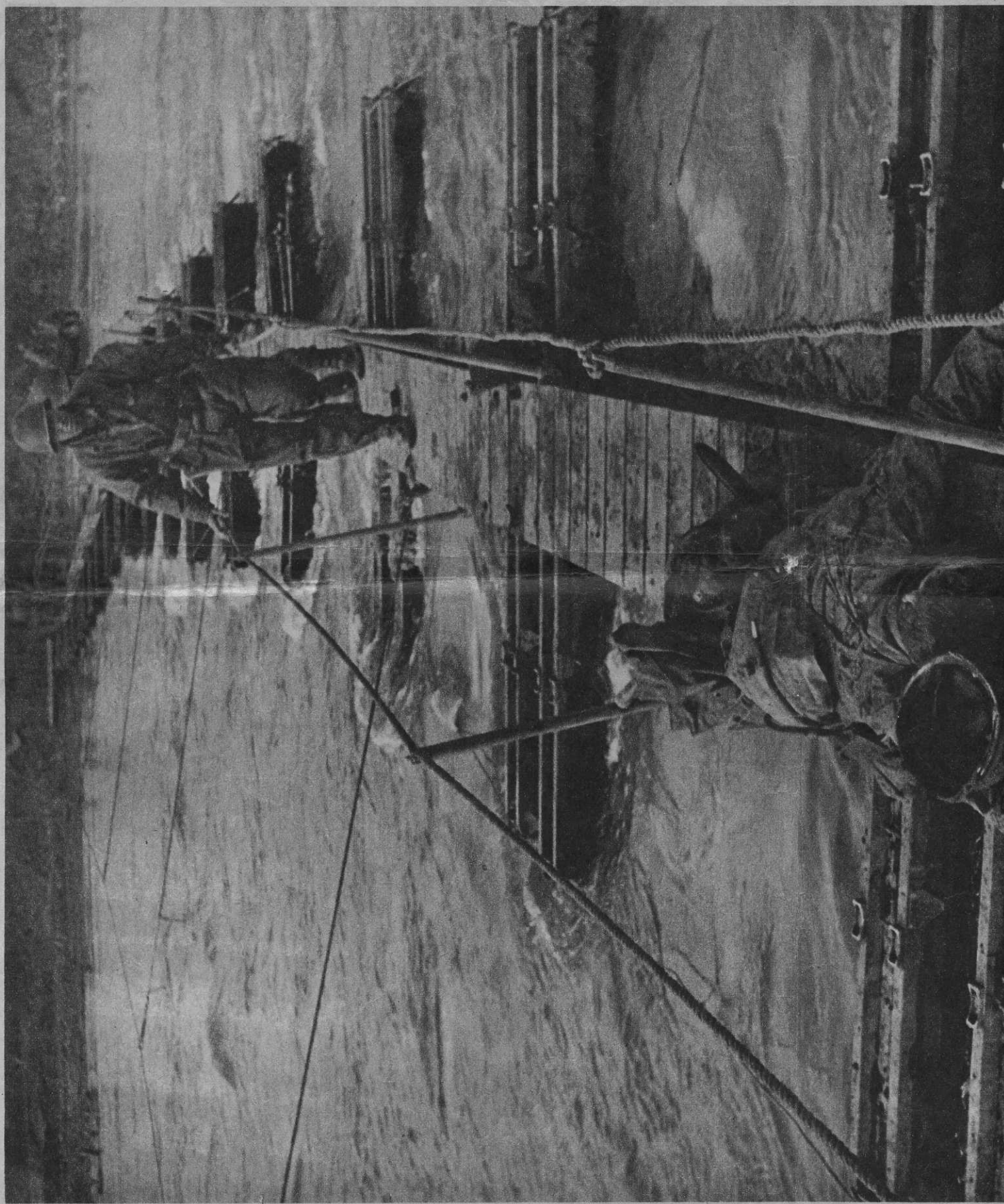




AS THE MORNING SUN SHINES THROUGH THE OPEN ROOF OF A HOUSE IN JÜLICH, NINTH ARMY INFANTRYMEN DASH ACROSS ROER UNDER GERMAN MORTAR AND MACHINE-GUN FIRE.

THE U.S. BREAKTHROUGH BEGINS WITH THE CROSSING OF THE ROER

The Ninth Army's crossing of the Roer was a short, violent struggle against the Germans and the river. Forty-five minutes after the night barrage had begun, assault boats and amphibious tractors started across in a great wave. In some of the boats were combat engineers, ferrying cables to moor their pontoon bridges in mid-stream. It was an excruciating few hours for the engineers. The flood had lessened but the current was still swift and strong. Runaway boats and pontoons careened





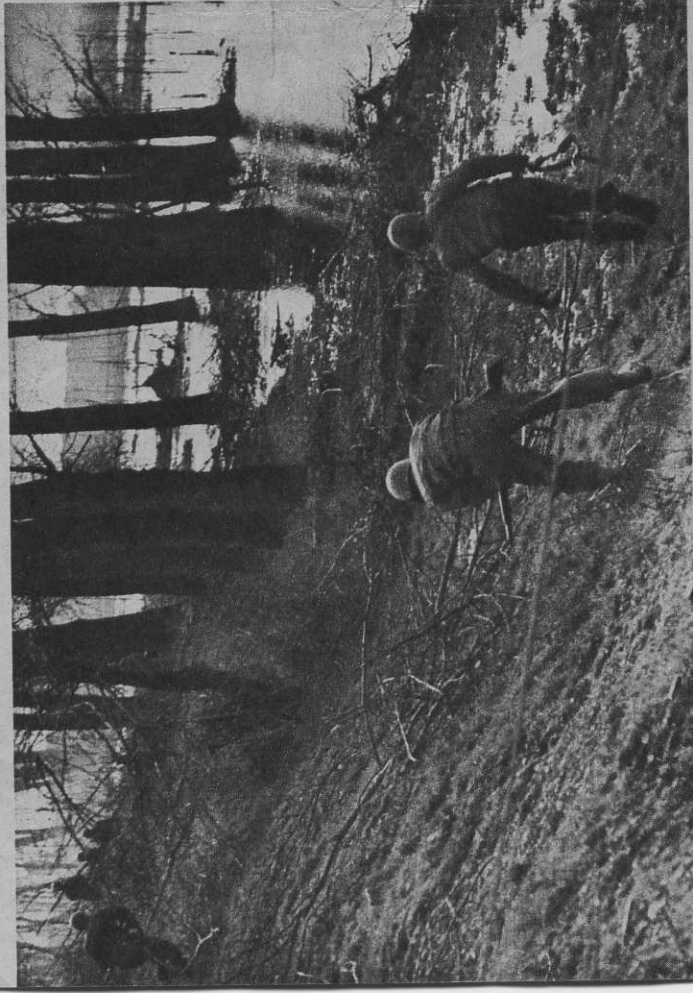
ON ANOTHER ROER FOOTBRIDGE LIES THE BODY OF AN AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO WAS HIT BY GERMAN MORTAR-SHELL FRAGMENTS WHEN HE WAS ONLY 50 FEET FROM EAST BANK

downstream, crashing into bridges as they were being built. As the work went on the Germans kept up a blind but deadly machine-gun and mortar barrage through the smokescreen. But in spite of difficulties there were two footbridges across the Roer in the morning. Later the engineers put in bigger bridges for trucks and tanks.

The hardest crossing on the Ninth Army front was made by the veteran 29th Division at Jülich, which appears on the far side of the river on the opposite page.

The wreckage along the Roer at Jülich was reminiscent of Normandy. All of Jülich except the ancient moated citadel was taken by afternoon, freeing the 29th to join the power drive across the Cologne plain. But even after the entry into Jülich, the crossings of the Roer were places of danger. The Germans still had the river under observation and shelled it heavily. The little bridge above and the dead soldier on it were principals in a grisly little drama which is unfolded on the following pages.

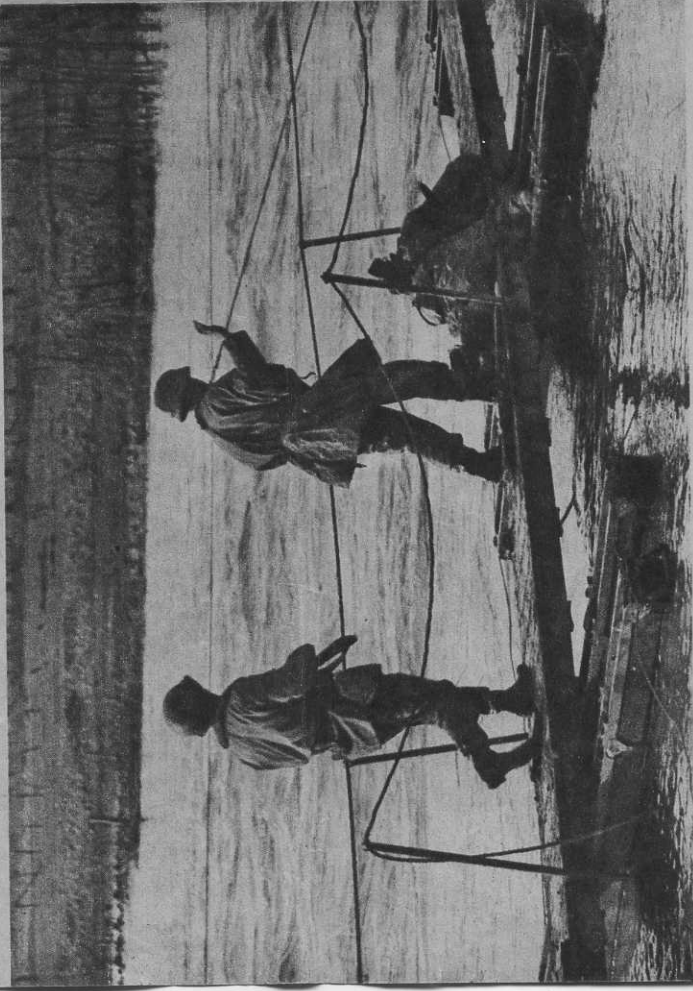
LIFE PHOTOGRAPHER GEORGE SILK RECORDS GRIM LITTLE INCIDENT



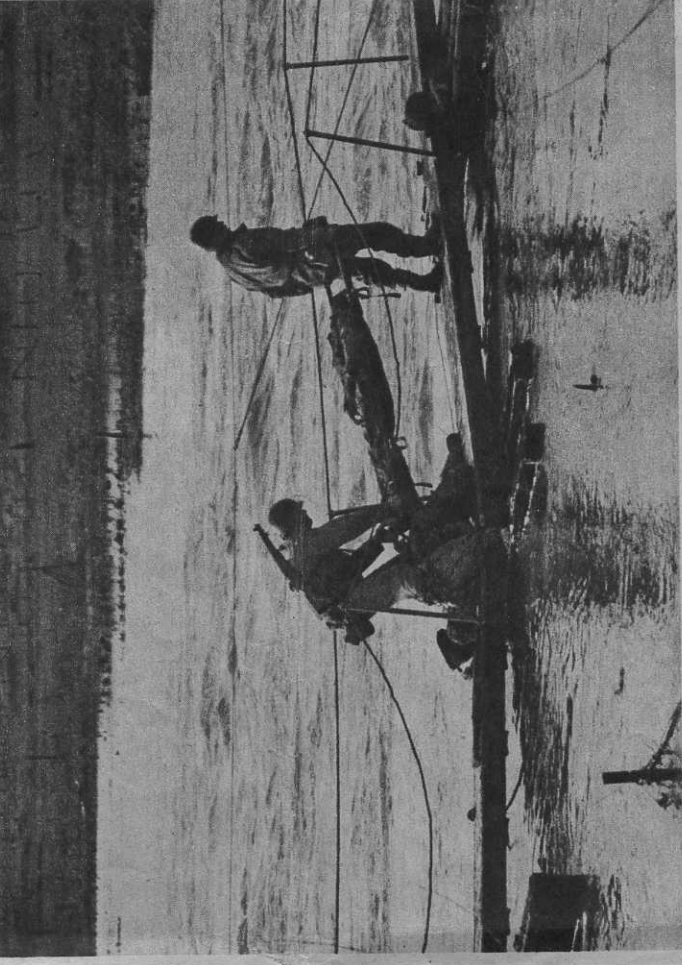
1 On the east bank of the Roer, engineers edge toward a little pocket of Germans left behind by the main advance. The Germans were sniping at the engineers on the bridge.



2 Some of the Germans walk out holding their handkerchiefs as white flags. The others, still undecided about surrendering, were killed when they fired a few halfhearted shots at the engineers.



5 Walking across the bridge under guard, one of the prisoners hesitates as he picks his way over the body of the dead American shown in the picture on the preceding page.



6 Stretcher-bearers bringing back one of the men wounded in the grenade explosion step carefully over the body. While they were crossing mortar shells began to fall in the water around them.

