



# 179

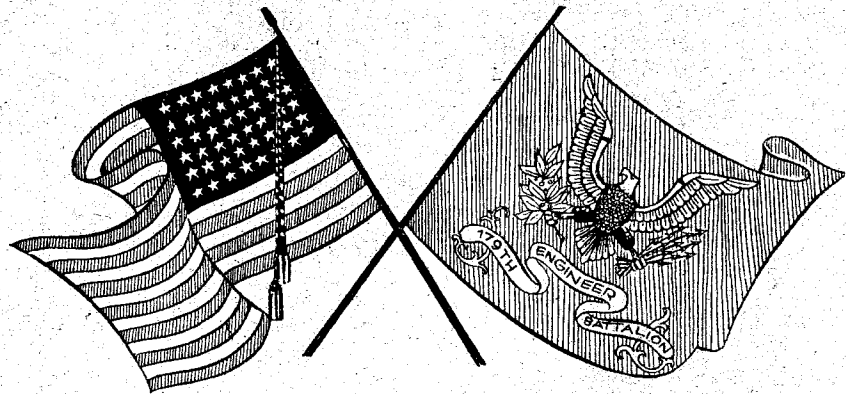
ENGR. COMBAT BN.



BATTALION HISTORY

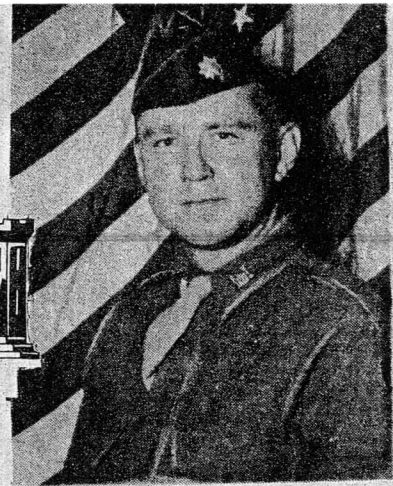
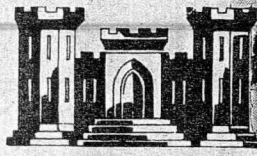


**PASSED BY AEF FIELD CENCOR  
FOR MAILING HOME**



**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
THOSE MEN WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES  
IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY.**





Lt. Col. Freeman C. Steele

## OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 179th ENGR. C. BN.:



Lt. Col.  
O.L. Robinson

It has been a privilege to command you during the latter part of our great struggle against the German Armies. During this period we have been called upon to perform every task in the book for Combat Engineers. We have not failed once. The Army we have been a part of have been able to carry on with the knowledge that the engineers would get the work done, and get the supplies and reinforcements rolling forward to them. Even under the most difficult conditions - floods, enemy fire, mines, every known obstacle - you have performed in a superior manner. It has been a pleasure to command you.

*Freeman C. Steele*

FREEMAN C. STEELE  
Lt. Col., 179th Engr. C. Bn.  
Commanding

Major J. C. Forsyth





## FROM ACTIVATION TO NORMANDY

On July 23, 1943 the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion was activated at Fort Devens, Massachusetts under the command of Major Charles A. Pfeffer, the cadre of 40 officers and 69 enlisted men were at work preparing for the fillers. The first group of 300 arrived in August 26 from Fort Dix, N. J. By September the battalion strength was up to 523 enlisted men.

The period of basic training was marred by one accident when Major Pfeffer was injured by a demolition charge set off during the construction of a bridge at Bondsville by "A" Co. When he was transferred to the Westover Field Station Hospital, Major James C. Forsyth assumed command of the battalion.

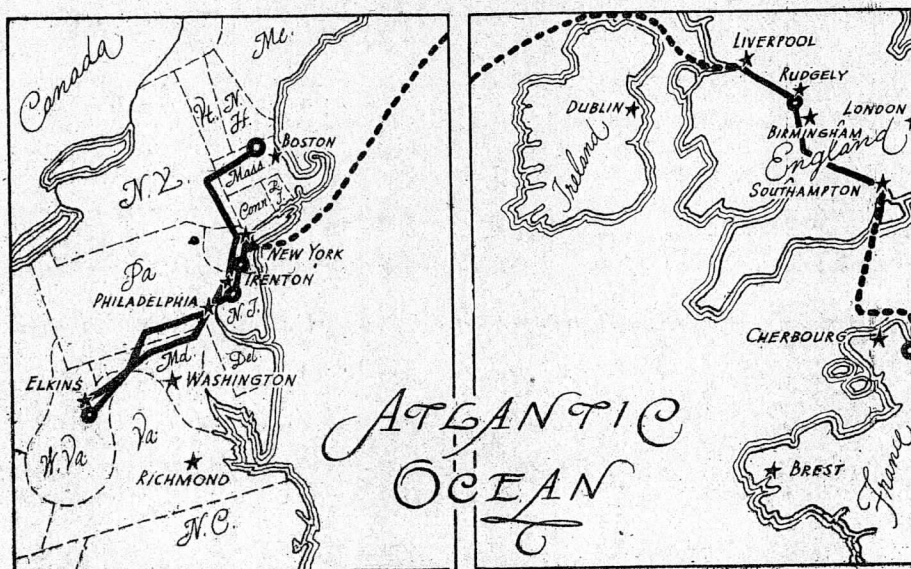
After training tests conducted early in December by XIII Corps, the battalion went to work at the post, building and improving the firing ranges and constructing a mock village to be used in street fighting training.

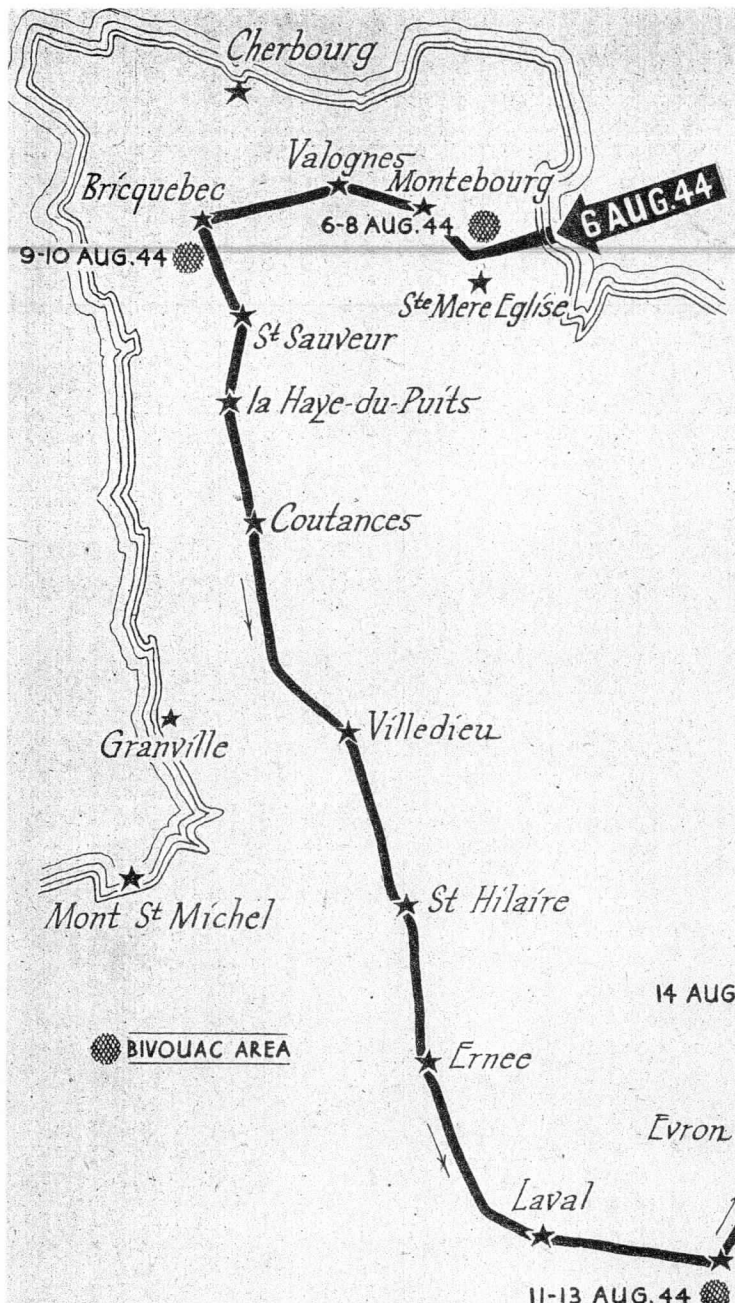
On the 10th of February 1944, the 179th entrained for the West Virginia Maneuver area at Elkins. A base camp was set up at Alpena, where for a month we performed service functions in the area. On the 17th of March we moved to Thomas to participate in maneuvers with the 35th Infantry Division. Shortly thereafter we were ordered to a new station and on the 28th left by motor convoy for Fort Dix. There the battalion spent a busy four weeks completing its training, turning in equipment, bringing records up to date and preparing for the trip across. On May 14th Lt. Col. O. H. Robinson assumed command of the battalion.

When "D" day in Europe came, on June 6th, the battalion was engaged in the construction of a narrow gauge railroad at Dix. Finally on the 16th of June we arrived at Camp Kilmer, NYPOE, the final step before embarking on the 1st of July.

Fifteen days later, after a quiet, calm trip across the Atlantic, the battalion landed at Liverpool, England and entrained to Blithfield Hall, Rudgeley, Staffordshire, England.

The stay in England was a short one however. After drawing new equipment, we left for the Southampton Marshalling area on August 3, two days later the battalion embarked for France.





## D + 61 OMAHA BEACH NORMANDY

On D + 61 at 1645 in the afternoon of August 6, 1944, the first units of the 179th Engineer Combat Battalion, Headquarters and Service Company and the Medical Detachment, landed at Omaha Beach on the French Normandy Coast. "A" and "B" Companies, on the transport "Clinton Kelly" debarked on the 8th of August and "C" Company on the Liberty Ship "John S. Elliot" came ashore the same day.

At the time the entire Normandy peninsula was in Allied hands. Caen, Cherbourg and St. Lo had already fallen. The new U.S. Third Army, under Lt. General George S. Patton was continuing the southern advance, having taken Rennes, Capital of Brittany, on the 3rd of August. One Third Army Corps had been dispatched into the Brittany peninsula to clean up the area, while the other two headed east. On 7 August, they took Laval and were on their way to Le Mans, drawing a huge half-circle around German forces in the North. After debarking, the battalion moved a few miles

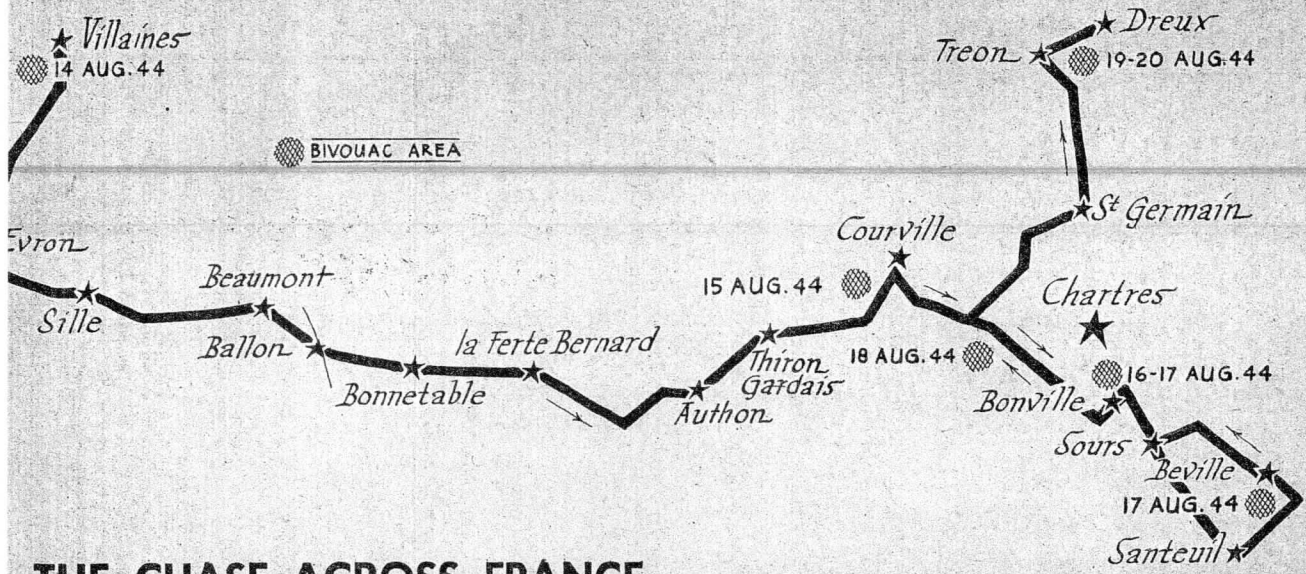
inland to a transient camp where we reorganized and on the 10th of August, the 179th went to their first bivouac area in France, 2 miles south of Bricquebec. The following day, in a 135 mile convoy from the Normandy peninsula through the hedgerow country, the battalion arrived at French Combat Zone + 1, near St. Jean Sur Erve. On the 12th, in an effort to catch up to the fast moving XX Corps of the 3d Army, the battalion moved at night to near Villaines.

On August 14th, the 179th was attached to combat command "B" of the 7th Armored Division. We were now up with the advance units, a position we relinquished at infrequent times for short periods for the next 10 months, until V-E day. Working well in advance of the Armor, and under enemy fire, "B" Company built a ford in Courville, and the battalion was credited with being the first friendly troops in town. "A" company, placed in direct support of C. C. A. in their attack at Chartres, worked as infantry. Company "C" with the second task force of C. C. A. cleared a minefield along a road leading into the bitterly disputed city.

On the 16th, after having sent a patrol through Chartres, "A" Company was again committed as infantry, taking 80 prisoners, the battalions first. "B" company, assigned the mission of protecting forward artillery outposts lost 3 killed, 5 wounded and 3 missing when enemy fire pinned them down in a ditch until early the following morning. Moving with C. C. B. convoy, Company "C" was given the job of cleaning snipers and a machine gun nest out of the woods near Bonville. In the action 2 were killed and 7 wounded. In a move to Gasville, "A" company suffered her first casualties when three men were slightly wounded by grenade fragments, but the company took 70 more prisoners.







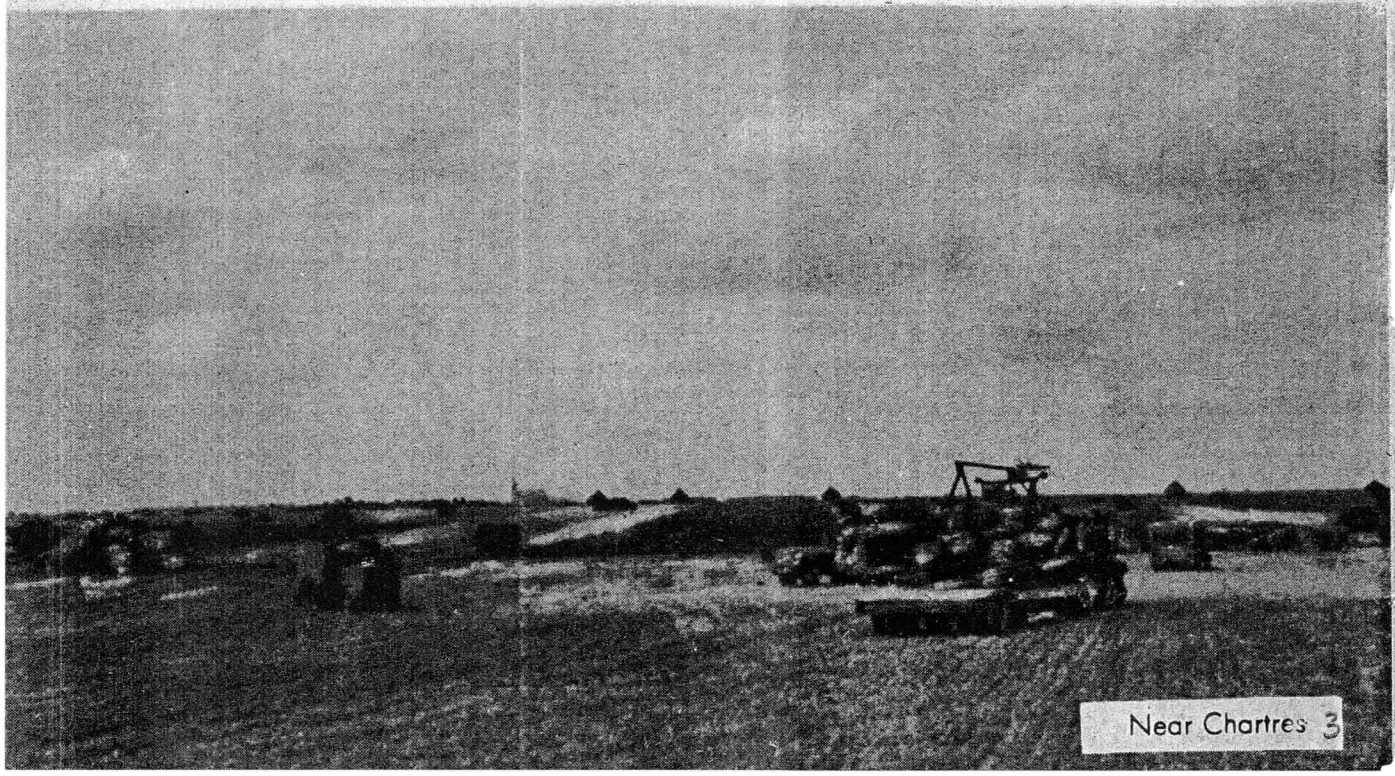
## THE CHASE ACROSS FRANCE

On the 21st of August we were still in support of the 7th Armored when their advance had been stopped by the enemy blowing all bridges across the Seine in our zone. It was decided that an assault crossing would be made in the vicinity of Ponthierry. After reconnaissance, two sites were selected near Tilly and the 179th was assigned the task of operating the assault boats. Company "A" with one platoon of Company "B" attached, was responsible for the operation of the boats at the north site.

Company "C", with one platoon of "B" Company was to cross at the south site. The assault crossing, the first of six the 179th was to make was made successfully at both sites after intense air and artillery preparation. When "A" Company returned to the

assembly area, an "88" scored a direct hit on a squad truck, killing 5 and wounding 3. Meanwhile at the "C" Company site, the initial assault wave crossed with no opposition, but the following waves were subjected to sniper fire and two killed. Then, despite observed enemy fire, the H & S and "C" Company dozers went to work preparing the far and near shore approaches for the treadway bridges under construction, speeding the work and enabling heavy weapons and tanks needed to reinforce the initial waves of infantry to cross.

The battalion reformed the next morning near Melun and after bivouacing near Fontainebleau, crossed the Seine near Monterau on the 27th of August. On that date too, we were placed in direct support of the 90th Infantry Division.



Near Chartres 3

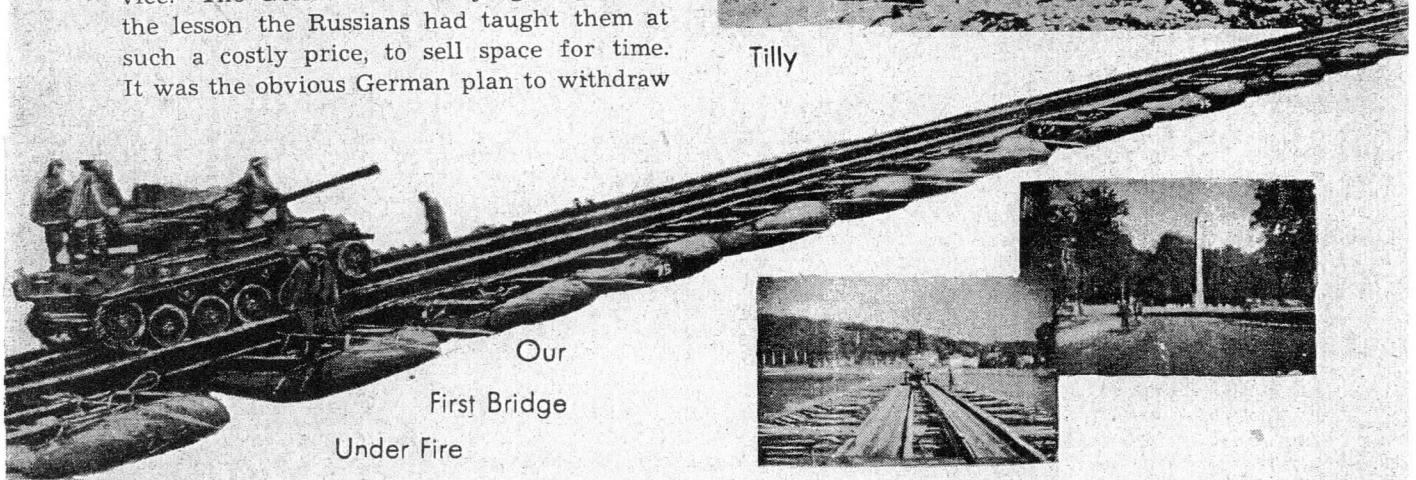


# ACROSS THE SEINE

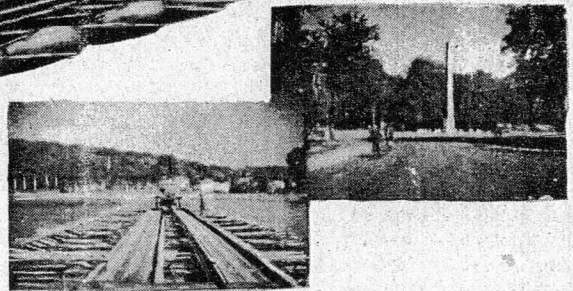
This had been a period of wide-open warfare for the Allies, a period of vigorous pursuit. Resistance had disintegrated so that many divisions were acting almost entirely on their own. In an effort to catch up to the retreating Germans, infantry was shuttled across country on any vehicles available. Tanks, half-tracks and trucks were pressed into service. The Germans were trying to practice the lesson the Russians had taught them at such a costly price, to sell space for time. It was the obvious German plan to withdraw



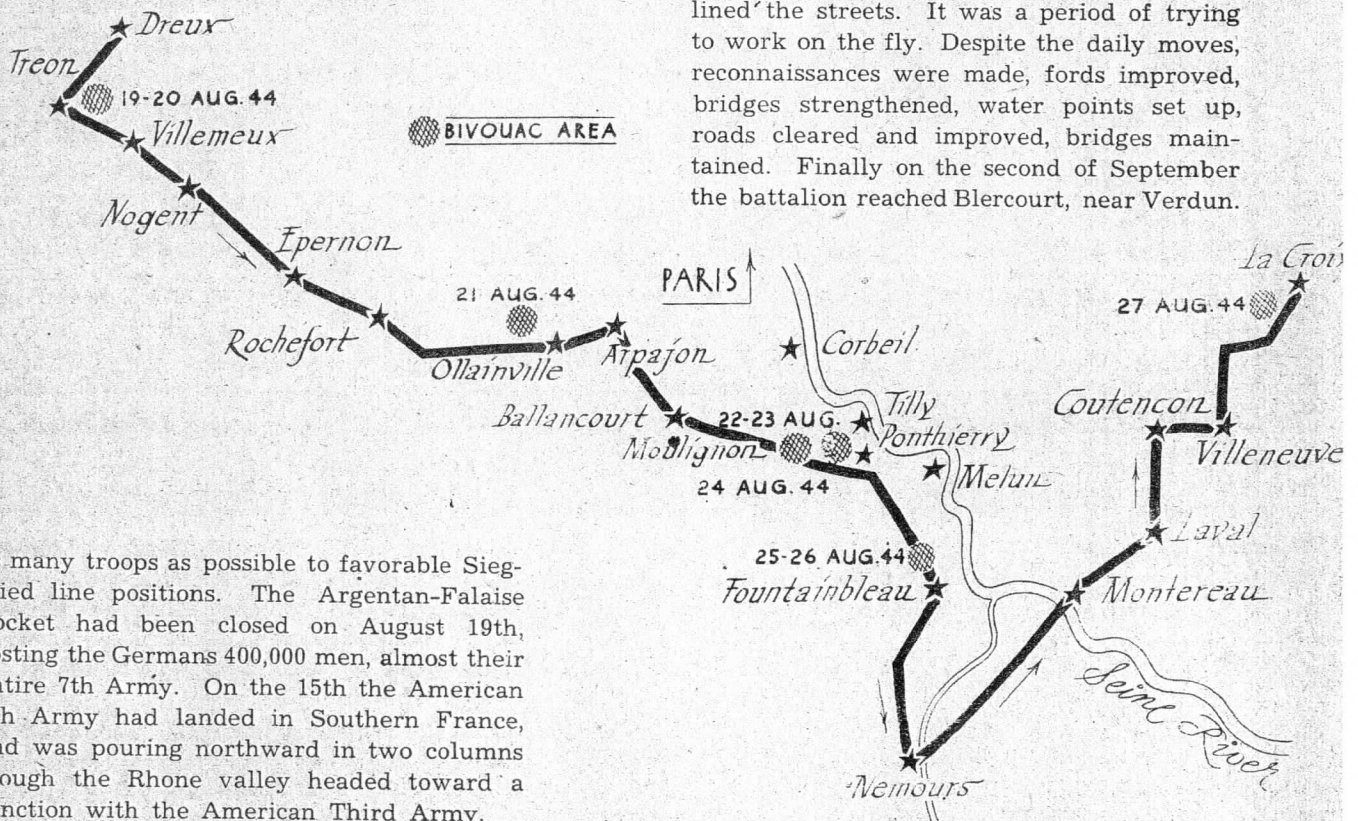
Tilly



Our  
First Bridge  
Under Fire



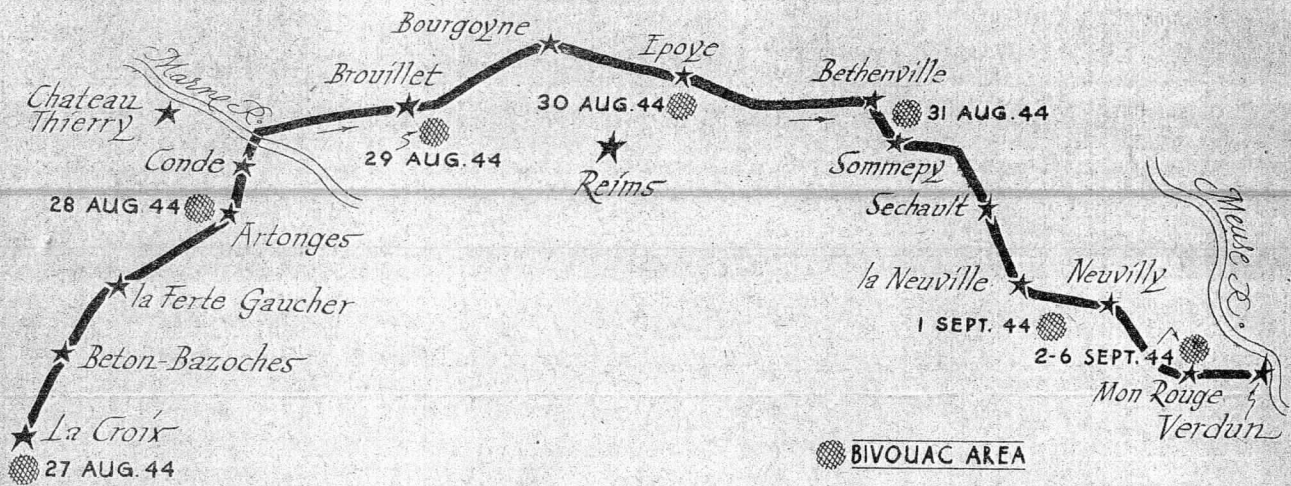
through newly liberated French cities and towns, where hysterically cheering civilians lined the streets. It was a period of trying to work on the fly. Despite the daily moves, reconnaissances were made, fords improved, bridges strengthened, water points set up, roads cleared and improved, bridges maintained. Finally on the second of September the battalion reached Blercourt, near Verdun.



as many troops as possible to favorable Siegfried line positions. The Argentan-Falaise pocket had been closed on August 19th, costing the Germans 400,000 men, almost their entire 7th Army. On the 15th the American 7th Army had landed in Southern France, and was pouring northward in two columns through the Rhone valley headed toward a junction with the American Third Army.

For the 179th, this too had been a period of constant moves, of triumphant convoys,





## FROM LACROIX TO VERDUN

The rapid Allied advance had left behind isolated enemy pockets that had to be cleared out before the advance could continue. In the XX Corps sector, on the north flank of the Third Army, the 90th Infantry division was moving more slowly northeast out of Verdun to make contact with the 1st Army at Thionville.

This general slowing down and cleaning up process gave us our first prolonged rest at Blercourt. Four days later, however, on the 7th of September we moved to Boncourt and from there to Anoux the next day. Company "B" had one platoon maintaining the Bailey bridge at Verdun, one platoon of Company "C" was repairing the railroad yards in the city. On the 9th Company "A"

established and manned road blocks on the left flank of the 90th Division while the other two companies conducted a road and bridge reconnaissance of the area. Our next move was to Treux. Company "A" was still maintaining the blocks, "B" company cleared mines from a ford in Auboué. In rapid succession we moved to Angevillers, to an area near Briey and finally went into bivouac on the 15th of September 2 miles south of Moinville where "A" company was attached to task Force Randolph with the mission of establishing and defending road blocks in the vicinity of St. Marie.

The first platoon of "C" Company built two 50' spans of double single Bailey across the Orne River at Auboué.

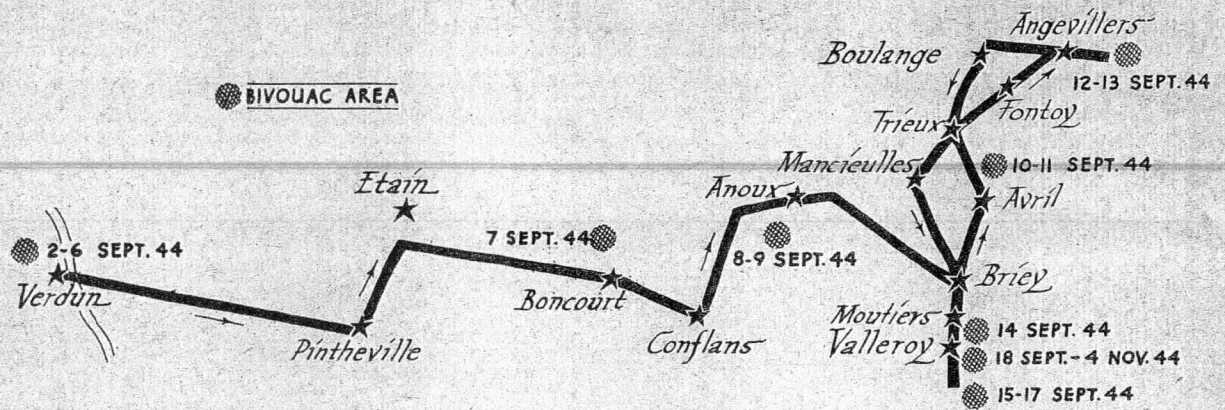


## THE MEDICS

Much has already been written about the men who wear the Red Cross Armband. But the history of the 179th would be incomplete without a word of mention and appreciation for the Medics. Unarmed, their brassards a blazing target on the battlefield, they went with the forward elements. On river crossing sites, at work areas, they stood beside the men eternally, on hand to treat the wounded. They suffered their casualties, killed while working on wounded. In belatedly awarding them the "Combat Medics Badge" Congress has recently shown an appreciation of their efforts that we have long felt.







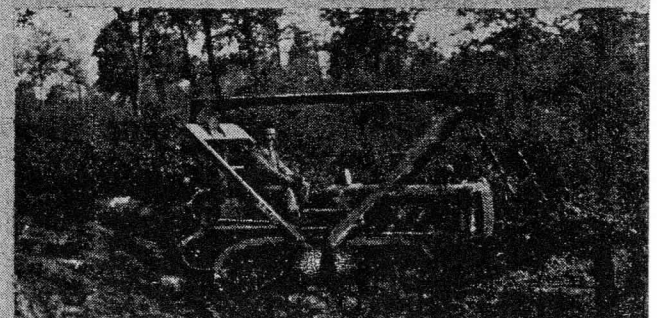
## VALLEROY AND THE FIRST BREAK

On the 18th the battalion moved into nine buildings at Valleroy, their home until November 4th. The chase was over and the war had settled down to a war of attrition. During the time spent at Valleroy, the line companies rotated defense of road blocks and holding an outpost line with Task Force Randolph at St. Marie and St. Privat, just outside of Amanvillers one of the forts in the Metz chain. Hutments were built for various units of the 90th Division, artillery emplacements were dug and training in Bailey and Treadway bridge construction conducted.

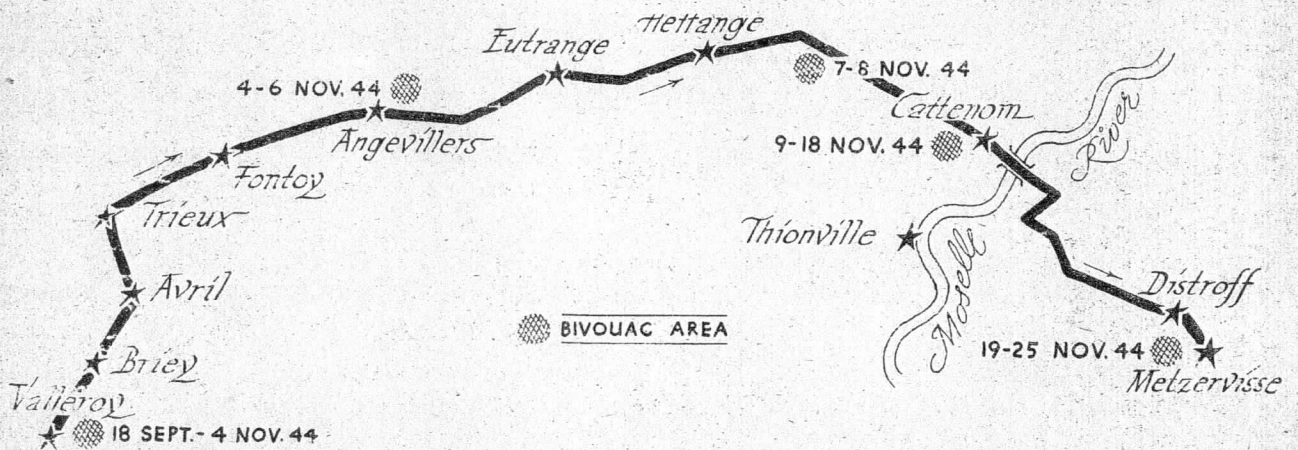
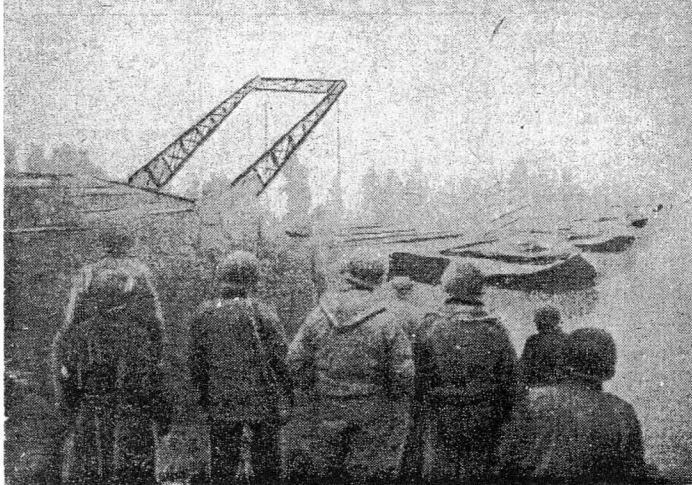
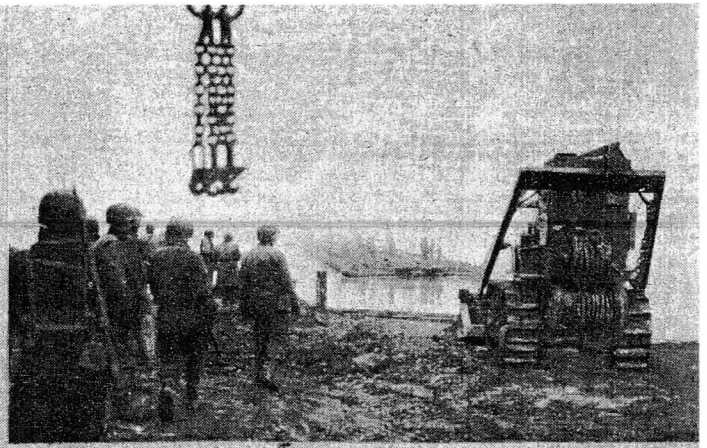
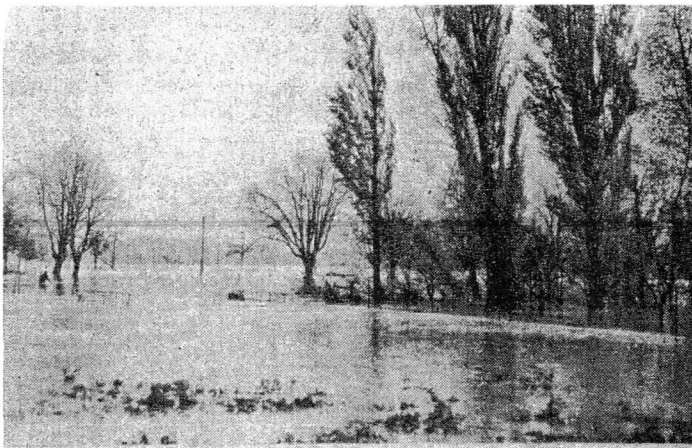
By November 4th the Third Army was prepared to turn the Moselle River line and take Metz in frontal assault. The 179th was assigned the mission of crossing the 357th and the 358th Regiments at Cattenom, under the nose of Fort Koenigsmacher, and

of constructing a treadway bridge across the Moselle. The crossing was made on the 9th, when the river was flooded for a quarter of a mile each side of its banks. After the assault waves were over, a ferry was constructed and badly needed supplies were carried across. On the 13th of November Company "B" under cover of smoke constructed a 630 foot treadway bridge. Later in conjunction with the 180th Engineers a floating Bailey of the same length was built. "B" company removed approximately 5,000 mines in the vicinity of the bridge, suffering 0.0 casualties.

The battalion, less "C" company who were to maintain the bridge, moved to Metzervisse on the 19th where "A" and "B" companies maintained roads in the division zone and destroyed pillboxes in the area.







## THE MOSELLE OPERATION

On the 26th the battalion moved to Veckring where we were kept working at top speed. In their retreat from the Moselle the Germans had let no opportunity go by to delay our advance. We cleared mines and roads in the division zone, built a 40 foot class 40 wooden trestle bridge, bridged anti-tank ditches with treadway, filled craters, built an 80 foot double single bailey bridge, class 40.

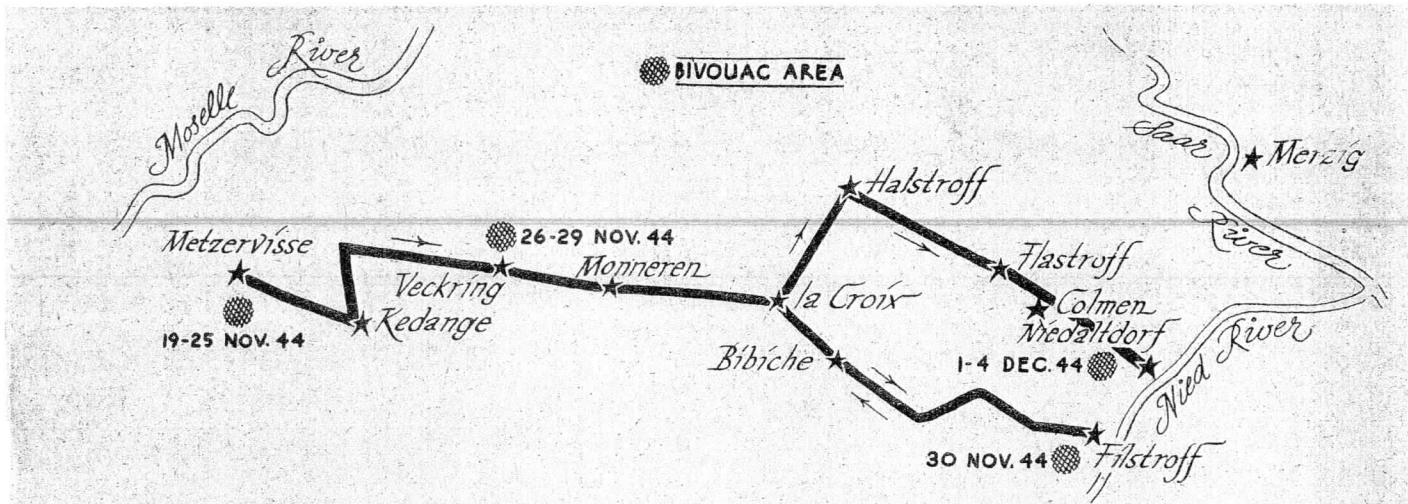
We arrived at Filstroff on November 30th where we conducted a reconnaissance in

advance of the infantry lines for possible crossing sites at the Saar River.

The battalion moved to Niedaltdorf on the 1st of December, where "B" Company constructed a 180 foot double triple Bailey bridge, the longest unsupported Bailey in the E.T.O.

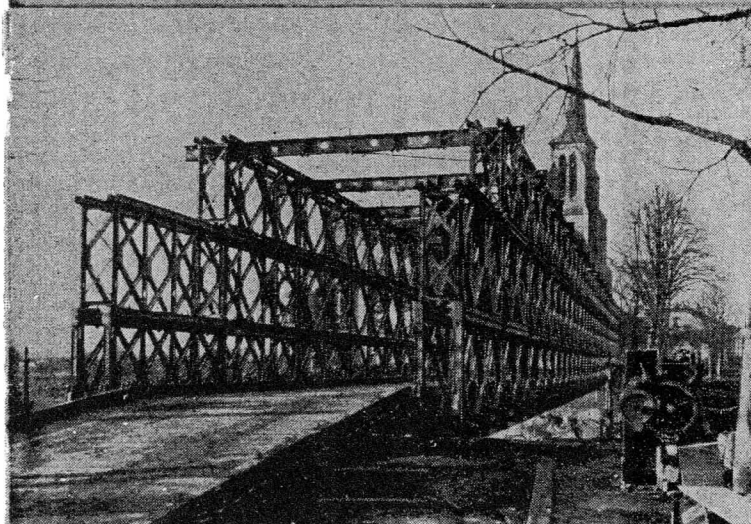
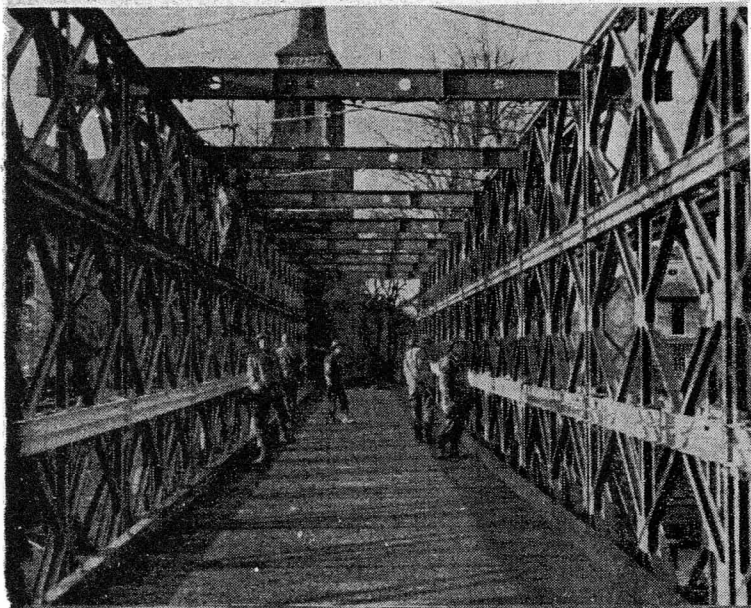
To open the road between Niedaltdorf and Filstroff, "A" company built a class 40 double single Bailey. Among the long lists of jobs the battalion performed in this period were





sweeping mines for the 195th Field Artillery Group and 69th Signal Battalion, maintaining and repairing roads and bridges in our area of responsibility, constructing an 80 foot class

40 Bailey south of Niedaltdorf, doing demolition work for the 1139th Engineer Combat Group and constructing an 80 foot double single Bailey Bridge south of Coleman.



## THE FIRST STEP IN GERMANY

On December 5th we were given the mission of crossing the 357th Infantry of the 90th Division over the Saar. After the crossing we were to construct an infantry support bridge or an M-2 Treadway.

Company "A" took the 1st battalion across at Rehlingen on the morning of the 6th. The first platoon remained at the site to ferry supplies and evacuate wounded. The following day an attempt was made to construct a ferry, but enemy fire was too heavy.

Under the cover of smoke a 5 ponton assault boat raft was finally built. The next two days were spent salvaging equipment. On the 12th the first platoon laid 80 yards of corduroy road, the second cutting the timbers, while the third platoon operated the ferry.

Meanwhile "B" company crossed the lead companies of the 2nd battalion on the morning of December 6th at a site just east of

Company B's

Pride and Joy

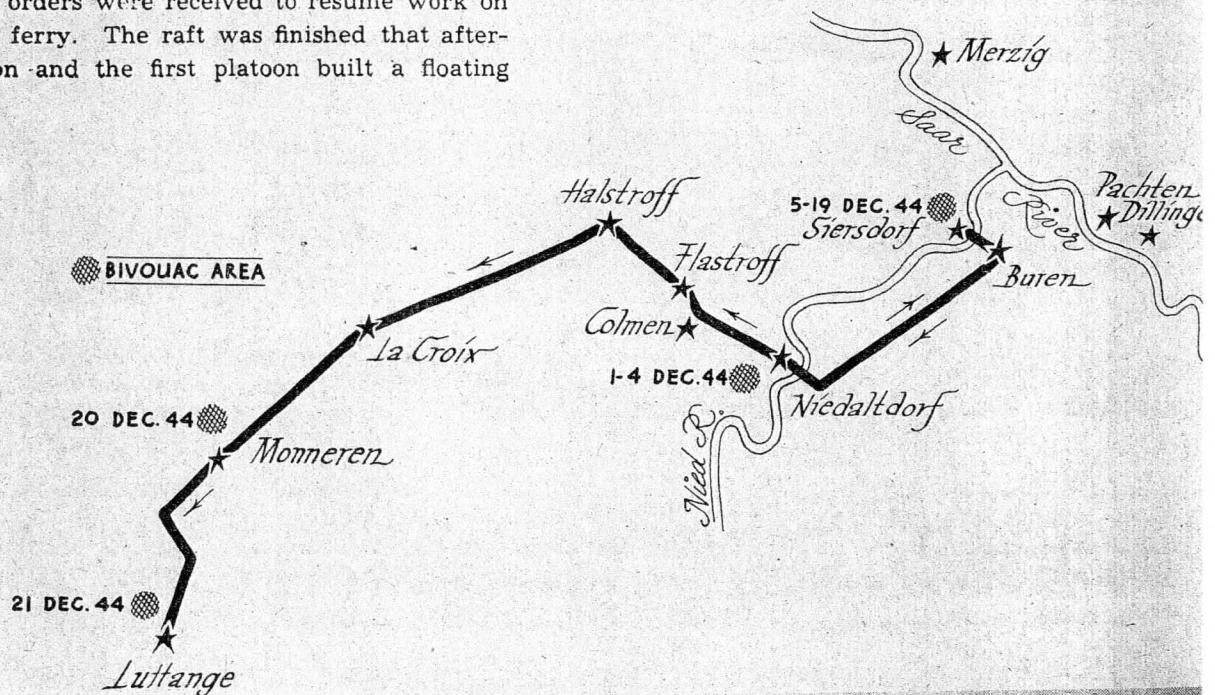


## THE SIEGFRIED LINE AND THE SAAR RIVER

Itzbach. Because of the swift current, almost half the boats were swamped and drifted into the blown railroad bridge. By the time the reserve company went across, the site was under heavy fire and the last remaining boats could not be returned to the near shore. The boat crews found that they could crawl back across on debris from the blown bridge, so the assault boats that had drifted down against the bridge were fastened together and planks were used to fashion an improvised footbridge enabling the remaining troops to cross. With the second platoon inflating floats, the first tried to build a treadway bridge, but work was stopped when high velocity fire forced the platoon from the site. On the 7th the first platoon laid 115 feet of treadway near Wallerfangen to be used as a road from the highway to the river. On the 8th orders were received to resume work on the ferry. The raft was finished that afternoon and the first platoon built a floating

ramp at the original site. On the 11th, two more trail ferries were constructed and ferrying continued every night until the end of the operation. We were successful in crossing the first tanks and TDs onto the enemy site of the river.

"C" Company had the mission of taking the 3d battalion across when a heavy artillery barrage hit the site. Most of the battalion was already over. The second platoon attempted to prepare approaches for the proposed bridge, but was forced from the area by artillery. The platoons alternated operating the boats until the company was relieved



Ferrying On The Saar





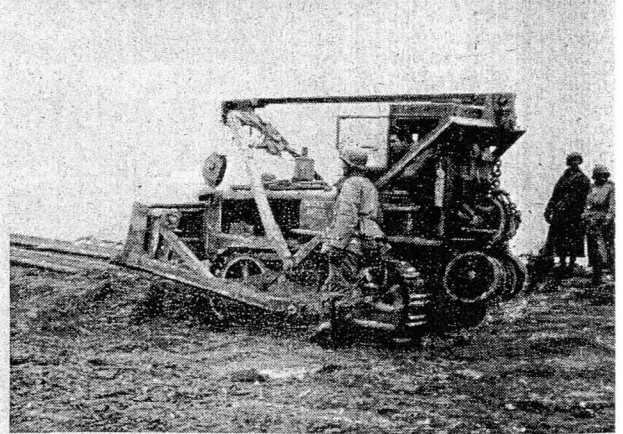
## Just Before The Bulge

on the 8th and placed on maintenance of the approach roads to the river. On the 12th of December, the company cut logs and constructed corduroy approaches on both sides of the Saar.

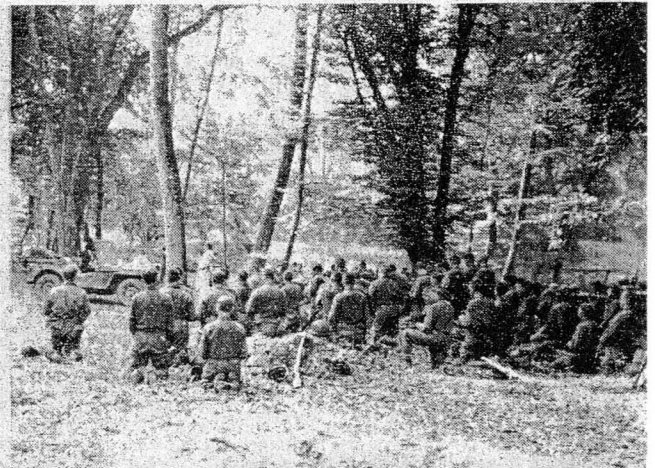
On December 11th Lt. Col. Robinson was transferred to the 1139th Group and Lt. Col. Freeman C. Steele assumed command of the battalion.

We continued operating the ferries but their approaches needed maintenance and repair. Six thousand logs were cut and ferried across to construct 555 yards of corduroy road. A shell landing on the hillside where "B" Company was at work killed one and wounded seven. One "C" company man was also killed.

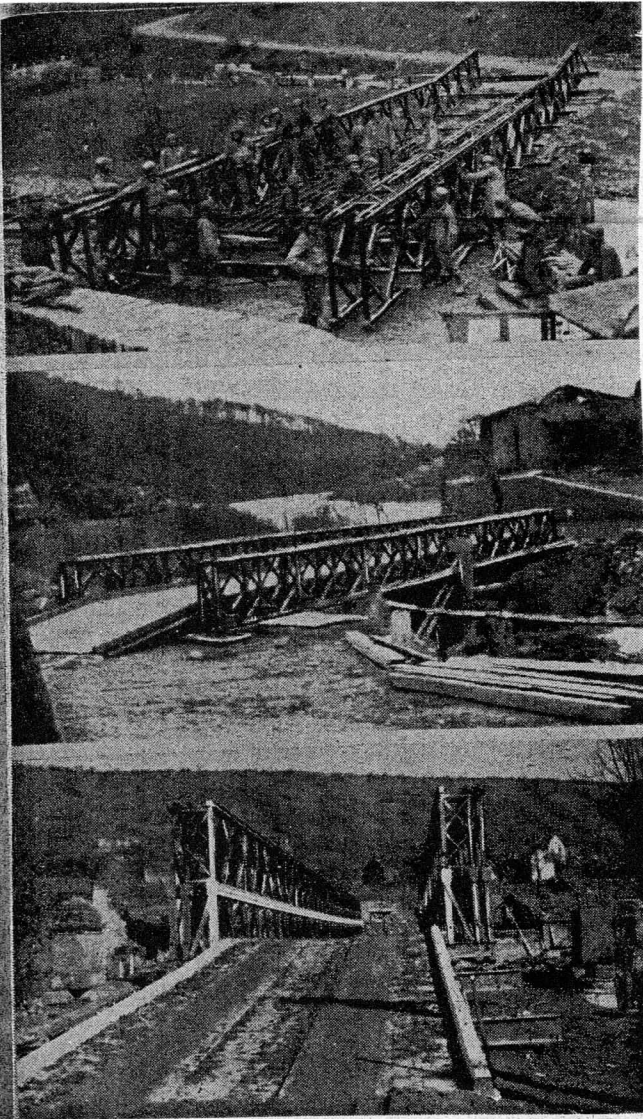
Overcoming stubborn resistance, the 90th had pushed its way through the Siegfried Line town of Dillingen, when orders came to pull back to the west bank of the Saar. The German counter-offensive had been unleashed in the north on December 16th. It was a heart-breaking move for the infantry men who had paid so bitterly for the town, but it was a necessary move to avoid overexposing the allied flank south of the Bulge. On the 20th of December the battalion left Siersdorf and moved back through Monneren to Luttange.



## God Was Dear To Us Even In Battle



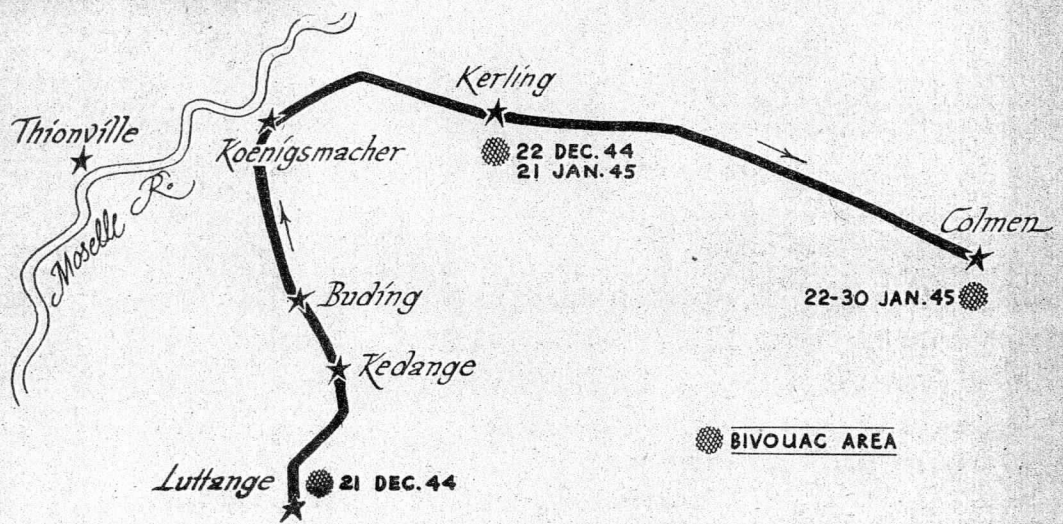




## BARRIER ZONES

On the 22d of December the battalion arrived at Kerling, a small shell-torn village where the 179th was to spend Christmas and New Years Day. When first we arrived in Kerling, the battle of the Ardennes was going well for the Germans. They had broken through the allied lines in an area extending from just south of Monschau in Germany south to near Wiltz in Luxembourg. As part of the over-all plan to prevent any further spread of the break-through, the 179th was assigned the mission of preparing two barrier zones, Bands "B" and "C". Company "B" and "C" installed a total of 108 blocks using 24758 pounds of explosives, 1940 mines and 12481 man hours. In addition, the battalion:

1. Replaced a Bailey bridge with a fixed bridge North of Filstroff.
2. Built approach roads to and placed treading on a floating Bailey at Uckange.
3. Filled craters south of Coleman with 800 cubic yards of earth.
4. Installed fixed bridge, 65 feet long just north of Coleman.
5. Maintained and provided security for bridges in our area.
6. Maintained XX Corps Headquarters utilities.



7. Sanded and maintained roads in our area of responsibility.
8. Cleared minefields on the east bank of the Moselle in the vicinity of Uckange.
9. Fitted 3 trucks with snowplow attachments and cleared roads in our area.
10. Replaced a Bailey with a fixed bridge northeast of Coleman.
11. Instructed French Army units in the operation of the 30 cal. machine gun.

Finally, on the 21st of January the battalion moved to Coleman. "B" Company was placed in direct support of the 43d cavalry and "C" company with the 3d cavalry. They were both engaged in patrolling and checking road blocks in the forward "A" zone. Company "A" took over all the roads in the battalion area of responsibility and also guarded German civilians in Niedaltdorf and Hemmersdorf.



6-19 FEB. 45



Mersch

Luxembourg



Roussy



Kerling

Koenigsmacher  
31 JAN-5 FEB 45

Elzange

Thionville

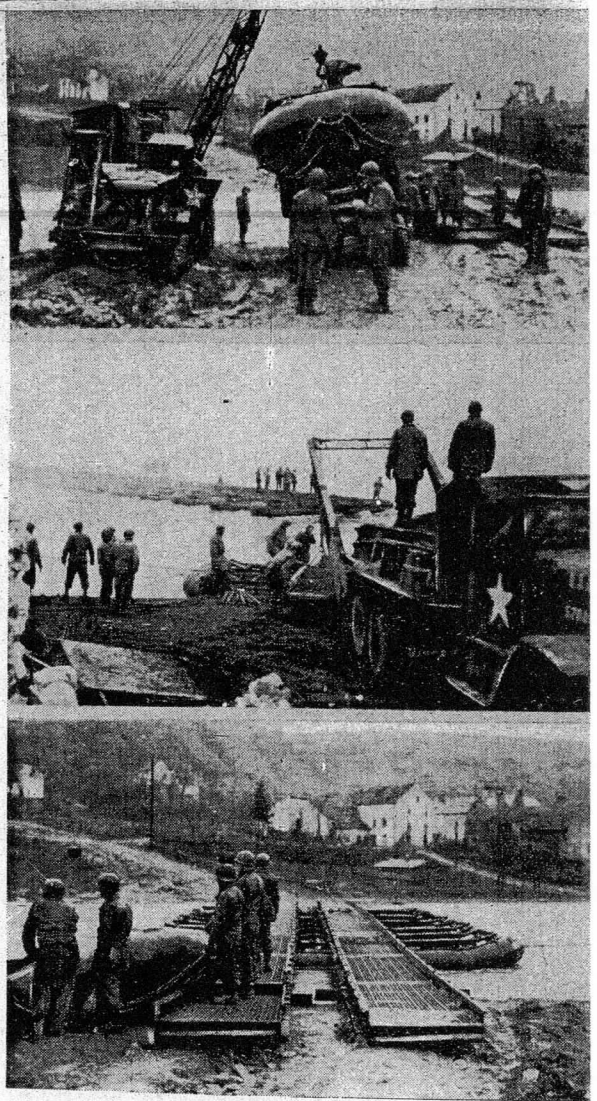
Colmen

22-30 JAN. 45

BIVOUAC AREA

# ACROSS THE SAAR AND THROUGH THE SIEGFRIED LINE

The battalion moved into French Maginot Line barracks near Elzange, where we conducted familiarization runs on the road blocks and maintained bridges and roads in our area of responsibility. On the 6th of February we were relieved of attachment to XX Corps. We moved to Diekirch, Luxembourg and were attached to the 1135th Engineer Combat Group which was in direct support of the 80th Infantry Division. The battalions primary mission was to construct a treadway bridge across the Our river in the vicinity of Wallendorf, Germany with a secondary mission of constructing a Bailey across the Gay River south of Wallendorf to link two regimental bridgeheads. Company "C" was attached to the 150th Combat Battalion for the assault crossing & construction of a foot bridge and infantry support bridge.



On the 7th the order was given to construct the treadway bridge, but flooded conditions and enemy fire kept us off the work site for the next three days and three nights.

Company "A" was given the mission of making a daylight assault crossing under the cover of smoke, but enemy fire destroyed the first boat at the site. Again at night, another crossing was attempted but was prevented by flares and artillery concentrations.

"C" Company was returned to battalion control on the 10th of February and that night succeeded in getting a cable across. By this time the infantry had cleaned out the town of Wallendorf and taken the high ground east of the river.

The next day two platoons of "B" company succeeded in constructing the M-2 Treadway

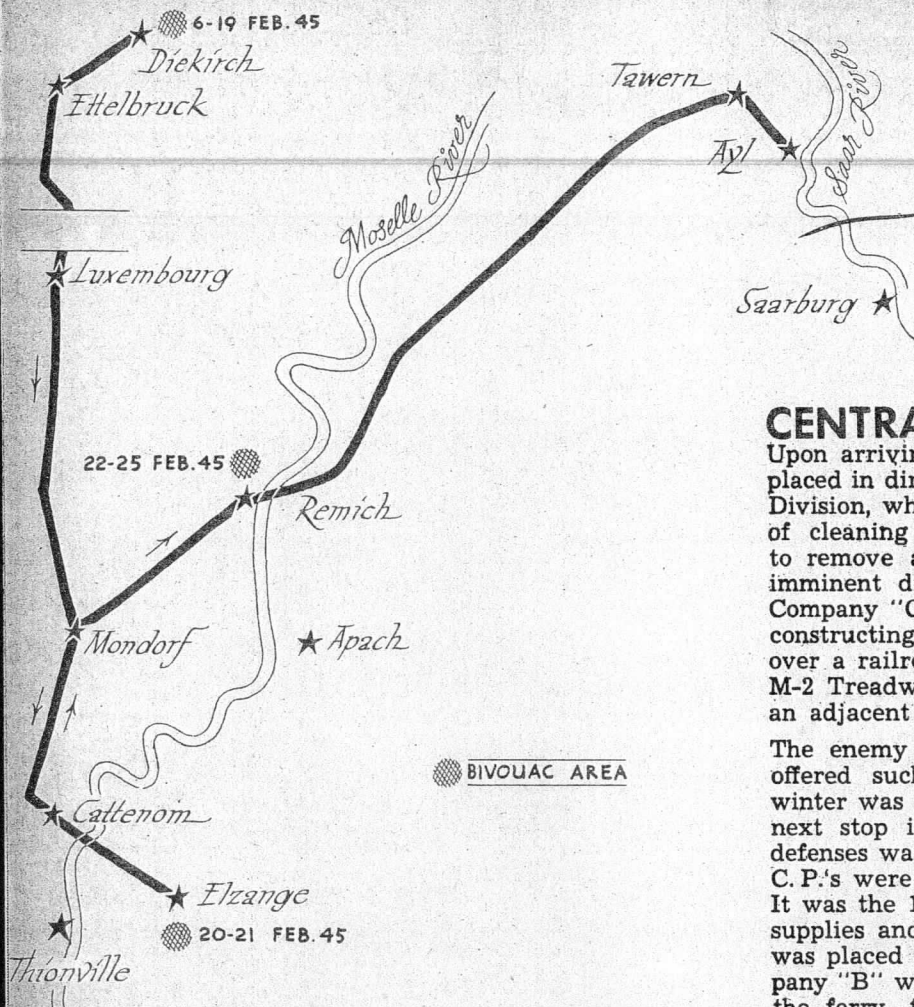
bridge despite sporadic enemy fire. During the night, the water continued to rise and by morning it was necessary to add more sections to the bridge.

On the afternoon of February 12th "A" Company constructed a 150 Bailey on a site adjacent to the Treadway Bridge and during the night of the same day the first platoon of "B" Company put a 70' Bailey Bridge across the Gay River. The entire operation cost the battalion two killed and two wounded.

On the 19th of February we were detached from XII Corps and reattached to XX Corps and the 1139th Engineer Combat Group, returning through Luxembourg to Elzange, France.

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## CENTRAL GERMANY

Upon arriving at Elzange, the battalion was placed in direct support of the 10th Armored Division, who had been assigned the mission of cleaning out the Saar-Moselle triangle to remove any threat to the flanks of the imminent drive in the North to the Rhine. Company "C" was immediately put to work constructing a 60 foot double single Bailey over a railroad near Remich and a 456 foot M-2 Treadway bridge across the Moselle at an adjacent point.

The enemy salient in the triangle that had offered such bitter resistance during the winter was cleaned out in three days and the next stop in cracking the Siegfried Line defenses was a crossing of the Saar. Forward C. P.'s were set up at Tawern, then at Ayl. It was the 179th's job to ferry badly needed supplies and reinforcements. Company "A" was placed in direct support of C.C.A. Company "B" with C.C.B. In trying to construct the ferry, the men met with some of the most intense enemy fire yet encountered. A testimony to the conditions under which they worked lies in the fact that 94 floats were needed to put a 5 float raft in the

# Comme

During the 281 days of incessant and victorious combat, your penetrations have advanced further in less time than any other army in history. You have fought your way across 24 major river and innumerable lesser streams. You have liberated or conquered more than 82,000 square miles of territory, including 1500 cities and towns, and some 12,000 inhabited place. Prior to the termination of active hostilities you had captured in battle 956,000 enemy soldiers and killed or wounded at least 500,000 other. France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, and Czechoslovakia bear witness to your exploits.

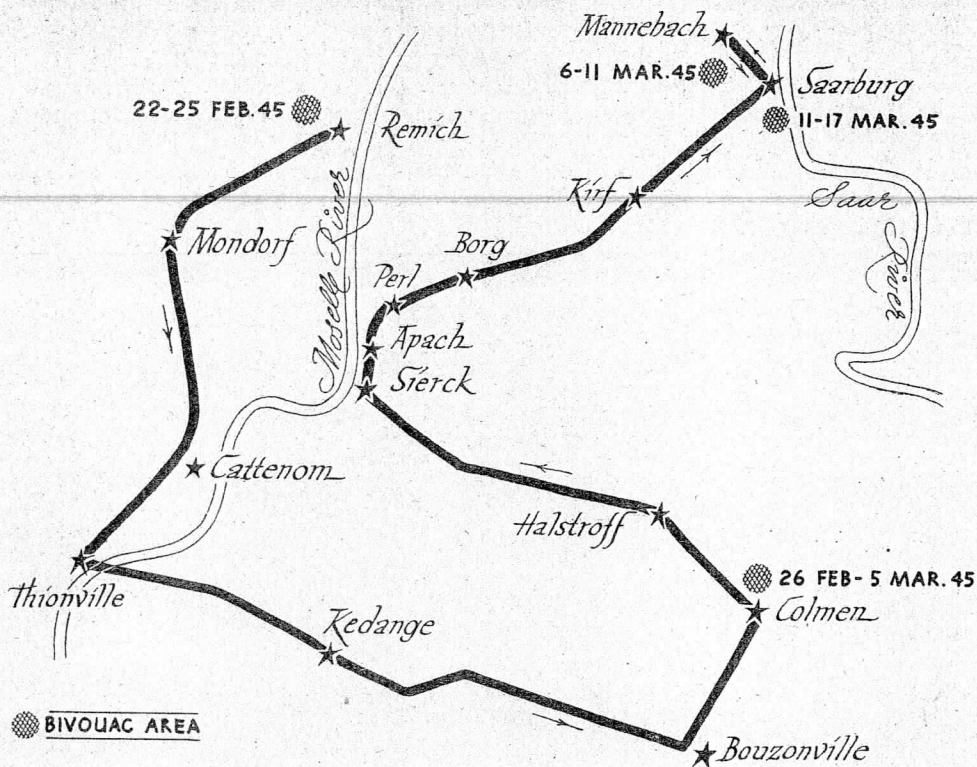
**G. S. PATTON JR.**  
GENERAL

Over countless rivers and tank ditches in flooded Lorraine you constructed and maintained innumerable bridges. You cleared and reconditioned thousands of miles of road. Your work in the recent operation in Belgium and Luxembourg has been equally outstanding and accomplished under still more intolerable conditions of weather and terrain.

Each and every officer and man of the Third Army Engineer units is hereby highly commended for the superior manner in which his tasks have been performed.

**G. S. PATTON JR.**  
GENERAL





water. On the 25th of February the 179th was relieved of the Saar River crossing operation for a badly needed rest period.

Upon being relieved of the Saar River operation, the battalion moved back to Coleman, France. On February 26th the battalion was relieved of attachment to the 1139th Engineer Combat Group and attached to the 1152d Group. The line companies were placed on road maintenance in the battalion area of responsibility with two squads of "B" Company guarding German civilians in Niedaltdorf and Hemmersdorf. During the spring flood stages of the Moselle River, floa-

ting bailey bridges at Uckange, Thionville and Cattenom had been severed and some sections of the bridge sunk by ice. Platoons from each of the line companies engaged in salvage operations when the water receded and were successful in saving a great part of the sunken material.

On the 5th of March the 179th was once again reattached to the 1139th Group. The following day we moved to Monnebach and assumed responsibility for the roads.

Again on the 11th we were placed in direct support of the 80th Infantry Division and set up the battalion C. P. at Saarburg.

## Recommendations

Words cannot express my appreciation of the untiring devotion to duty, the fighting spirit, the effective teamwork, the skillful performance and the will to conquer displayed by the officers, warrant officers and enlisted men of the XX Corps.

I thank each officer and man of the command for his part in this operation. I have full confidence that each will continue to perform in such manner as to merit the confidence of the Chief of Staff of the Army and our Army Commander have indicated.

**WALTON H. WALKER**  
Lt. General, United States Army  
Commanding

Congratulations on the capture of Metz and the splendid advance your Corps are making in spite of floods and mud and bitter enemy resistance. My very personal congratulations to Eddy and Walker on the grand show their troops are putting on toward bringing this war to a triumphant conclusion.

**GEORGE C. MARSHALL**  
General, U. S. Army  
Chief of Staff