



STORY OF THE 320TH INFANTRY

THESE UNITS, FORMING
COMBAT TEAM 320TH,
HELPED MAKE THIS STORY:
216th Field Artillery Battalion
654th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company C
737th Tank Battalion, Company C
60th Engineers, Company C
110th Medical Battalion, Company C
IPW Team
CIC Team
AMG
Red Cross Charlie

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A salute to the infantry – the God-damned infantry as they like to call themselves. I loved the infantry because they were the underdogs. They were the mud-rain-frost-and-wind boys. They had no comforts, and they even learned to live without the necessities. And in the end they were the guys without whom the Battle . . . could not have been won.

—Ernie Pyle in “Here Is Your War”

(photo)

This is not a formal history. This is a story of soldiers, informal as the foxholes in which they lived. It is a record of men who for ten months and in five countries fought the best that Germany could offer. It is a record of men who never surrendered a position or failed to take an objective. And it is recorded for those who made it: the men of THE 320TH INFANTRY.

Col. B. A. Byrne,
Commanding

STORY OF THE 320TH

The road ahead of them could not be seen by the infantrymen riding the tanks. Dust threshed up by the clanking treads and roaring exhausts covered them and choked them and blinded them.

But the road climbed straight. Straight to the high wooded ridge, then turned and steeply twisted north alongside the hill to Mortain.

Emplaced on high ground and seeing the rescue route plainly were Panzer troops and Nazis of the “Der Fuhrer” and “Deutschland” Regiments of the 2nd SS das Reich Division.

Marshal Rommel, in his desperate counteroffensive to reach Avranches on the sea – thus cutting off the Yanks fanning out in the Brittany Peninsula – definitely wasn’t using a scrub team.

Already these Hitler fanatics had wrested Mortain from the Americans. In the forest to the east they had encircled and were now for the fifth day trying to club to the death a gallant battalion of the 30th Division’s 120th Infantry. The chaplain and most of the medics had been captured. Planes had dropped medical and other necessities, but much of it had fallen to the Germans. Artillery had shot in supplies, but containers had smashed. Heroic Yanks were dying for lack of blood plasma, the wounds of others were gangrenous.

These GIs could not be let down. This was neither the time nor the chance for tactical fencing. The “Lost Battalion” had to be rescued, the German threat to the Yank breakthrough smashed, at any cost.

Thus on the bright, hot afternoon of **August 10, 1944**, with magnificent daring, doughboy-laden tanks spearheading the 320th Regiment’s attack barreled up the road directly into the powerful positions of the Wehrmacht’s elite.

Out of 55 tanks 31 were knocked out in a few hours of furious fighting.

But the Nazi grip on the Mortain redoubt was cracked.

In the bloody and confused struggle which continued on throughout the night and next day many units of the regiment themselves became lost or surrounded, the attack disorganized.

During the following night, under the flares of the Luftwaffe, the remaining men of the 1st and 3rd Bns. were reorganized, combined. At dawn the infantrymen, without the aid of armor, stormed Mortain and the crest of the ridge, seizing both. The Lost Battalion was rescued, its wounded cared for by all the medical resources of the regiment.

The Battle of Mortain, the most dramatic in the 320th’s combat record, exemplifies the regiment’s relentless style of fighting, the driving power that has been used with four armies in five countries and has been called upon continuously from Normandy through Bastogne to the east bank of the Elbe. The 320th and her superb comrade regiments, the 134th and 137th, form a division – the 35th (Santa Fe) Division – whose record of achievement in the European campaigns ranks with the best.

Dry Runs: California To Normandy

The 320th was activated at Camp San Luis Obispo, Cal., on Jan. 28, 1943. Formed from a cadre of the 131st Inf. sent from Fort Brady, Mich., and from men transferred from the 134th and 137th, the 320th became the youngest third of the triangular, streamlined 35th Division. The outfit suffered growing pains in its training and organization, at Obispo and at Camp Rucker, Ala., where it arrived April 1.

In the latter camp frequent long hikes with full packs weren't enjoyed during the torrid Southern summer. Whenever fighting became strenuous in the ETO, however, the boys began to put in a good word for Rucker. Still, always there would be one Joe in a breeze group to declare: "No, by Gawd! I'd sooner be here."

On Nov. 1, 1943, 17 days before the division left for extremely rigorous maneuvers in Tennessee, Col. Bernard A. Byrne became the regiment's commander.

The son and grandson of Regular Army officers, Col. Byrne was born in Cincinnati, O. (his parents were merely passing through), in Oct., 1898.

He is six feet one and half inches tall and weighs only 133 pounds.

"I'm probably the Army's thinnest officer," he laughs.

The colonel keeps his blond hair so closely-cropped that it's no hazard to the lighted cigarette which he places behind an ear when talking and writing simultaneously, an incredible habit he acquired while studying art prior to entering West Point in 1917.

Colonel Byrne has spent 26 years in the Infantry. In 1923 he was assigned to the Hawaiian Division. Except for intervals in the States where he either studied or taught communications he stayed in Hawaii for most of the period up until May, 1941. From that date until he took command of the 320th he directed the Communications School at Fort Benning. An authority on communications, he has contributed to every GI manual on the subject.

He says his hobbies are spearfishing, painting, carpentry, storytelling, and raising children. Characteristically, he deprecates his role in winning the Legion of Honor, the Silver Star, and the Bronze Star with two Oak Leaf Clusters since leading the regiment in combat.

"How did I win them?" he answers. "I don't know. But I do know that I have some good doughboys."

* * *

At pine-treed Camp Butner, N. C., where the unit came from maneuvers in late January 1944 and was readied for shipment overseas, 320th Joe had his most carefree period. PXs and movie theaters were numerous, the pass policy liberal, Raleigh and Durham pleasant places, and Southern belles as amenable as that Spring's weather.

A few weeks before entraining for Camp Kilmer, N. J., the colors of the 320th Infantry of World War I were presented to its namesake in a formal ceremony and parade reviewed by Maj. Gen. Paul W. Baade, 35th Division Commanding General, who expressed his faith to the assembled men that they would add new luster to the standard. A few days later the regiment was reviewed by Under Secretary of War Patterson and Senator Truman, the latter a member of the 35th Div. In World War I.

The four-day processing at Kilmer over, most soldiers had a chance to visit nearby New York City, have a final American fling, or visit friends or families.

On the afternoon of May 11, 1944, the unit moved on trains to Hoboken, then ferried across the Hudson, the Great White Thrones and Grand Canyons of Lower Manhattan silhouetted in the twilight, a symbol of the power and greatness of America, a power and greatness produced by a democratic way of life which fascists had declared outdated and decadent.

Boys from every state sweated that night as they lugged their staggering load up the gangplank, down iron stairs to a bunk-crowded deck-to become salt water soldiers for 14 days. The large, easy-riding "Edmund B. Alexander" was a prize of the last war. As the "S S Amerika" it had been built and operated by Germany.

Sailing the next morning the ship became part of a mighty, irresistible convoy. Sea and weather were bland throughout the voyage to Liverpool. Few soldiers became seasick though some guys thought they were headed for San Pedro to guard Hollywood from the Japs.

From Liverpool the regiment traveled by train through the gracious countryside of Southern England to Exeter, arriving May 27, 1944. The men were billeted at Topsham and Higher Barracks in Exeter, and at the By-pass camp nearby.

Except for essential preparations, the ensuing period was one of waiting and close-order drill. Passes were allowed nearly every night and on week-ends. 320th Joe liked the English and their ways, their pubs and their dancehalls, more than he professed. Even if the fish-and-chips spots did close at 10:30 he still could sit outdoors and read the papers until near midnight.

In the bombed-out sectors of the town he saw for the first time first hand what the Nazis had done, and he talked with the dispossessed who had been bombed from their homes. Several times Joe himself was routed from his bunk. The war, for which he had trained so long, was on his doorstep. Yet still it seemed remote.

D-Day came. In reading the "Stars and Stripes" and the English dailies he rooted for the doughs in Normandy, and wondered when the 320th would be needed.

On a day of rain the regiment, assembled at Higher Barracks, was visited by Generals Eisenhower and Patton, and Ike spoke briefly, told the men he liked soldiers, said he would see them on the Rhine. He walked among the ranks, talked with dumbfounded GIs.

"Where are you from?" Ike asked Pfc. Reginald W. Lockhart of the I & R platoon.

"Long Beach, California, sir," Lockhart replied very sharp, rain and sweat dripping from him.

"Well, there isn't any sunshine over there where you're going either," Ike said. "But then, you're not going to be swimming."

* * *

Before they were alerted the men learned they were in the Third Army – already becoming famous because of Nazi broadcasts that Patton was being saved for the all-out blow.

The regiment left Exeter by train on July 3, 1944, and arrived in the marshalling area at Plymouth a few hours later. 320th Joe was given a partial payment in French francs, and that night he dubbed his shoes in gas protective ointment.

That night when he wrote his letter home, he was tense.

Next morning – July 4 – the unit boarded ships in the bay. The voyage across the channel began on the 5th. On July 6 – D-Day plus 30 – the men (except for the drivers who landed with their vehicles later) were carried in launches and LCTs to a point on the barrage-ballooned Omaha Beach near Isigny, and 320th Joe got his feet wet jumping onto the French shore.

Evidence of the initial invasion struggle was seen in wrecked ships, crumbled pillboxes, an American cemetery above the beach. Joe became excited, exhilarated, realizing he was becoming a part of one of the most momentous epics in the world's history – the invasion of Hitler's "Fortress Europa."

In green pastures above the sea he changed socks, ate a K ration. Then he began a hard hike to a bivouac south of Treviers, and before darkness fell the soldiers who watched him pass, the enemy in a PW enclosure, and the houses and hedges of Normandy filled him with wonder.

That night while on guard Joe smoked a cigarette with extreme caution. Concealed in a hedgerow and keeping very quiet and peering intently at dark forms in the adjoining field, he heard overhead the peculiarly sinister drone of Nazi planes. He saw muzzle blasts flickering the horizon. Rumbling back from the front like continuous thunderclapping came the ominous boom of big guns in bombardment and counterbombardment.

The war seemed remote again next day when Joe and his pals drank cider at a farmhouse, learned to speak "oui" and "non" and "mademoiselle" almost fluently. That night, his slit trench dug alongside, he slept in a pup tent. It was the last time. During the night of the 9th Joe snatched his sleep deep in a foxhole, nothing in front of him but the enemy.

July 9 – 19: 10 Days – Or 10 Years?

"Where's the front?" Joe yelled.

The GIs watching the 320th footsloggers filing along the road at healthy intervals returned the kidding.

"Straight ahead!" they laughed. "You C A W N ' T miss it."

You C A W N ' T miss it. The irony, the grim humor of the phrase reverberated in Joe's mind. This going to the front was hard to believe, to feel. Somehow, he had doubted he ever would.

You C A W N ' T miss it.

Joe was in high spirits, relaxed. The threat of rain had gone and the hiking was pleasant. French men, women, and kids came out with glasses and pitchers of "cidre." The road wound through several ghost villages and Joe was charmed by the quaint style of the houses and buildings. He believed there would be one more night at least before he got into the front line.

He was tired by the time he had reached the assembly area west of St. Claire Sur L'Elle. There he began digging in earnestly, and the feeling of war's remoteness from him personally had vanished forever. Shells already had caused casualties, among them S/Sgt. John T. Wazowicy, Sgt. Martin P. Berth, and Pfc. George R. McBride.

When his slit trench was just about finished, his back aching, word came down to get ready.

The shock of learning there wouldn't be another night behind the front line wore off in the rush of preparation. Then Joe steeled his mind. Whatever was to happen, he was ready.

* * *

The relief by the 320th of the 175th Inf., 29th Div., began at dark and continued through the night, the men taking over the well-built, more than two-weeks' old foxholes of the Yanks they relieved. By morning the 320th occupied the 175th's L-shaped defensive line extending across the north slopes of **Hill 108** and west across the road leading to Le Mesnil Rouxelin, then running north to the vicinity of La Riviere.

At 6:00 p.m. on July 10th Field Order No. 1 was issued at the regimental Command Post by Colonel Byrne. The order called for an attack the following morning and an advance to the north bank of the Vire River just west of St. Lo.

The Vire, some eight miles distant, was not reached until August 1. In the ensuing daily attacks between the 11th and the 19th, when the regiment took up a defensive line until the 27th, 3,000 yards were gained.

It was in wresting this yardage out of one of the most intricate and stubborn defense systems in Normandy that the 320th was tempered.

This struggle has been described as being as fierce in its own way as the battle for the beaches on D-Day. Its heartbreaking, unrewarding slugging is summed up in a report sent from the 2nd Bn. CP through regiment to higher headquarters and there picked up by correspondents: "Advanced three hedgerows."

And that night, perhaps, it would be necessary to withdraw from two of them.

The initial L-shaped line made maneuver difficult. The tactical plan included bringing the right flank, which ran north-south, flush with the left flank, running east-west. The 1st Bn., operating initially on the right, was continually confronted with the problem of executing a turning movement while attacking a very tough salient. The 2nd Bn. (later relieved by the 3rd) on the left flank, also met the stiffest resistance and any gain of ground created a threat of losing contact with the right battalion.

Troops deployed for their first attack in the darkness before dawn of July 11th. As H-hour approached, their nearby cannon and artillery rocked the earth. The tremendous, spectacular blasting and crackling of these batteries caused 320th Joe almost to believe, as he gulped the hot coffee handed him, that he was witnessing a war movie which had very elaborate sound effects.

The barrage lifted. Mortars coughed, machine guns rapped, 320th Joe took off along the treed hedgerows, paradoxical natural barricades which gave huge advantage to the Nazi defenders, but afforded protection and concealment for Joe too.

Day after day – or year after year – Joe attacked. Buddies and leaders were wounded or killed. Rumors, some monstrous, were rife. “The 88s are zeroed in on the radio. Chuck the damned thing!” “It’s murder, we haven’t a chance.” “There’s snipers everywhere.” “All the rest of the company have been wiped out.” “We’re surrounded.” “It’ll take us ten years to make those Krauts stop fighting.”

Joe’s resolve often wavered. He had moments of panic. The loud bopping of the German machine gun, the woodpecker burp of the Schmiesser machine pistol, the defiant report of the sniper’s rifle held terror enough.

But what was most terrifying of all was the whistling shriek of the incoming freight. Its soundtrack, tapering like a set of rails, started as a small point of noise and roared down the roadbed always expanding and always headed straight for Joe, Joe holding his breath to see if it was this one that had his bill of lading and only knowing that it hadn’t when it wrecked itself in a crescendo of blast and shock, its acrid burnt powder filling his nostrils, its unbelievably great explosive power lingering in his memory and suggesting shattering annihilation.

Often – and particularly on July 13th and 14th – these freight trains poured in as if funneled through a Herculean fire hose containing all the tracks in the Chicago yards, all tracks headed for the hole where Joe pressed himself down harder and harder into the alien Norman earth.

Again and again Joe had to steel his mind, calm his heart. He attacked and attacked, maneuvering to the left, hand-carrying to the right, but always struggling Forward.

Greenness was sloughed; fear froze over, Joe became a canny veteran. But sometimes he got mad too.

Pfc. Robert F. Powell of Logansport, Ind., an L Company scout, saw his squad sergeant killed by a sniper’s bullet. Powell became a deadly sniper hunter. He stalked them, killed four. Three were concealed in trees.

“Seeing them fall gave me a lot of satisfaction,” he said.

T/Sgt. Irvin F. Conley of Zona, W. Va., was awarded the DSC for his gallantry on the 13th. When his K Company platoon became pinned down by machine gun fire, he worked his way to the nearest emplacement, shot his M-1 until it jammed, then continued his one-man assault with hand grenades, including several of the enemy’s which he threw back before they exploded.

Reaching the hedgerow behind which the Germans were dug in, he leaped through it and right into the nest, killing those of the crew who were still alive with the butt of his rifle.

Although Conley had been wounded in the leg, he carried the machine gun back to his platoon and continued to lead his men in the attack. On Aug. 10, at Mortain, Conley was killed.

Patrols of Company G, commanded by Capt. Melvin V. Fritts of Fort Valley, Ga., were aggressive. Twice they accompanied tank destroyers of the 654th on combat missions, gaining information which contributed materially to the capture of several German strongpoints.

A German counterattack beat back and disorganized units of the 3rd Bn. and threatened the entire sector. Capt. Albert C. Frederickson of Chicago, 2/Lt. James R. F. Woods of Palo Alto, Cal., and Capt. Victor H. English of Portland, Ore., rallied and reorganized the units, stymied the enemy thrust.

A platoon of Company C was surrounded for two days. Capt. Charles W. Baer of Frederick, Md., repeatedly infiltrated to his men, advising and reassuring them and each time guiding several of them back. During the second night the remaining men were withdrawn safely.

1/Lt. Glen Mooney of Ozark, Mo., led his K Company platoon behind a Nazi strongpoint. When the enemy's fire halted the advance, Mooney crawled forward alone, firing his carbine. Then, throwing grenades into foxholes and into a machine gun nest, he liquidated the entire position. Seven Germans surrendered to him.

* * *

On July 19th, St. Lo fell. 3,000 yards had been won. Enemy small arms and much ammunition had been seized, 120 prisoners – Germans, Russians, Poles – taken.

Casualties were among the heaviest the 320th was ever to suffer. Fortunately, in this hedgerow terrain litterbearers seldom had to carry casualties more than two fields before reaching a vehicle, and the average time required to get a wounded soldier through an aid station and to a collecting station was 22 minutes.

Respect for GIs of the medical detachment, directed by Major Lloyd A. Smith of Balaton, Minn., became profound. Time after time after time a medical aid man risked his life to care for a fighting comrade. The ordeal that tried these soldiers was in some ways doubly hard. They had more than gunfire to steel themselves against.

S/Sgt. John E. (Indian Chief) Snyder of Irving, N. Y., whose hulking swart presence has imparted confidence to the 1st Bn. Joe on all of his battlefields, declared that the death on July of 1/Lt. Louis G. Xintas of Baltimore, a D Company machine gun platoon leader, nearly cracked him.

“I knew him so well and liked him so much,” Chief related. “For a while that day I thought I was washed up.”

The Vire: Foretaste Of Victory

On July 19, the 35th Division (which fought as a part of the First Army until it was transferred back to the Third after Mortain) was ordered to occupy the entire XIX Corps front. By motor and foot the 320th moved to an assembly area around La Fossardiere. During the evening and night the 175th and 115th Regiments were relieved, and the 320th, supported by four battalions of light and medium artillery in addition to its regular attached 216th Field Artillery Battalion, took up the defensive line established along the St. Lo – Bayeux Highway.

A day of rain (July 20-21) gave Joe his only drenching in Normandy, a land he'll always remember as sunny and warm, where even at night a raincoat could keep him from becoming too cold.

Until July 27th the unit was engaged in active patrolling and in eliminating a German salient between the two frontline battalions.

The epic 2,500-bomber airstrike of July 25th, which softened up the Krauts behind the St. Lo-Marigny Road in preparation for the breakthrough, was witnessed by the men and inspired them with optimism. And in rare copies of the "Stars & Stripes" they read of the German generals' plot against Hitler, of the huge sweep of the Red Army. Jubilant Joes predicted the war's end in 10 days.

In coordination with units on the right and left, the 320th on July 27th began a succession of attacks to the south in pursuit of the 8th and 9th Paratroop Regiments. The Germans fought skillful delaying actions from positions excellently suited for such tactics.

The attack started at 3 p. m., the objective being the stream running east to west from St. Pierre-le Semilly to a point just south of La Monterie. The 3rd Bn., meeting moderate resistance, attained the objective that evening. The 1st Bn., held up by heavy mortar fire, required artillery support to advance.

Resuming the attack the next morning the 3rd met similar opposition until evening. Then, in a fire fight, a company of Germans was surrounded. About 30 Germans were taken prisoner. The 1st Bn., although it reached its initial objective, met stiff resistance and could not keep pace.

On July 29th a mile advance was made before noon, the division objective attained. After a pause for coordination the unit attacked again at 5 o'clock with Torigni-sur-Vire the goal. The 3rd Bn. was severely shelled just south of La Chapelle Du Fest, and the excellent enemy artillery observation prevented an advance next morning. The 1st also suffered from heavy mortar and machine gun fire and an attack in the afternoon failed to gain much ground.

A tank attack was stopped by mined roads and swampy terrain. A coordinated attack by the regiment at 6 o'clock also was fruitless. Smoke and high explosive shells were effectively delivered on the commanding church tower at St. Armand, but other Nazi observation posts were numerous.

During the night the enemy withdrew. The coordinated attack by the division next morning was slowed up initially only by mines and booby traps.

Torigni-sur-Vire was taken on July 31. The 3rd Bn. flanked the town from north and east, the 2nd approached from the north and the 1st entered the town from the northwest along the St. Lo road. The Germans shelled the town as the Yanks entered.

Heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire slowed the advance next day, but that night the doughs attacked in pitch darkness. The Germans had again withdrawn and after a perilous and memorable five-mile advance the Yanks reached the Vire River. On Aug. 2, the 3rd Bn. won a bridgehead across the stream. The two other battalions, crossing during the night, seized the high ground beyond.

Day and night fighting continued until August 5th, when the 320th was pinched out by division to the right and left after it had reached the main highway leading west from the city of Vire. The regiment then moved to an assembly area near La Queriére. During the night of August 6th, while the regiment rolled west and then south through the bomb-battered and burning city of St. Hilaire, 320th Joe had his first chance in days to sleep and to recover from his exhaustion.

* * *

The first days of combat are always the longest – and the most poignant, memorable, and gawdawful – in a soldier's life. Terrain, weather, trivialities – everything concerned with the period in which he undergoes his baptism of fire – burns into his heart and brain, some things confusedly, some things graphically, but all things unforgettably.

To reinforcements who joined the 320th at Gremecey Forest after the rat race across France, or at Metz before Bastogne, Lorraine with its rains and bog or the fir-forested battlefields of Luxembourg and Belgium with the cold and snow and beauty will in retrospect always evoke an emotion skin to nostalgia. The slightest image, remembered, releases a swarm of associations, stinging the heart with wounder and terror and thanksgiving, with pathos and loss.

To a vet of St. Lo a remembrance of juiceless unripe apples, abandoned combat packs, a jug of the white-lightning Calvados, a dead GI sill standing behind a hedgerow, Spring onions plucked gingerly from a booby-trapped garden, a ransacked peasant's bedroom, a bevy of bees kibitzing over a can of 10-in1 jelly, may cause the complete picture of Normandy to unreel in his mind. Again he will see vividly the dense green foliage of the hedges; the bright petite fields and orchards checkering Purple Heart Hill; the sunken roads, foxhole-ridden.

Or perchance he'll recall a green-uniformed, blackened Jerry carcass, a great barrel of cider in a cool barn, the fried spuds of the first hot chow, the swim in the Vire, the fourth foxhole dug in rocky ground in one day, the first clean clothing, a bloated and putrid dead horse, and again the Normandy drama will enact itself swiftly. He'll jump off in the attack. He'll hear the burp guns and the 88s and the startling mysterious sounds of the endless night vigils. He'll watch the wind-whipped Red Cross flag as the litterbearing jeep carrying his wounded comrade disappears down the road.

Liberation: Mortain To Gremecey Forest

On August 7th while in an assembly area near St. Brice the 320th, in division reserve, was placed on a 30-minute alert while her sister regiments attacked east toward Mortain to secure the Mortain Road. On the afternoon of August 9th the 320th began its attack on the division's left along the main road from St. Hilaire to Mortain.

The armor used in the rescue dash was that of the 737th Tank Battalion. Infantrymen of C Company rode the tanks, with doughboys of B Company in immediate support.

It took guts to stay put like perched ducks while the armor rammed through the hail of artillery, Nebelwerfer, anti-tank, machine gun, and sniper fire. S/Sgt. Julius E. Cardell of Social Circle, Ga., and Pfc. James E. Buckner of Nebo, N. C., and Troy E. Stricklen, Jr., of Sutton, Mass, rode their tank 600 yards into the Nazi lines. They then dismounted, deployed and protected it until soldiers farther behind could reorganize and fight their way up.

The attack carried to the outskirts of Mortain, then ebbed back, and a chaotic, bloody struggle ensued until and even after the Lost Battalion had been rescued on the morning of August 12th.

Lt. Col. William F. Northam of Columbia City, Ind., regimental executive officer and a graduate of West Point, was sent by Colonel Byrne on August 11th to try to restore the situation. With the aid of the 1st Bn. commander, Major William G. Gillis of Cameron, Texas, who was also a West Point graduate, the depleted 1st and 3rd Battalions were reorganized and combined into one command of approximately battalion strength and the successful attack of August 12th launched. Mortain was recaptured, the Nazis driven far beyond it.

Illustrative of the Mortain fighting was the ambush suffered by a platoon of Anti-Tank Company. 2/Lt. Warren F. Prescott of San Francisco, ordered to move his platoon 400 yards to the front, reconnoitered the route, returned and led the men forward. Half the way up, when the lead vehicle was in front of one concealed machine gun and the last vehicle in front of another, the enemy opened up.

Many men were immediately wounded and the platoon had little chance. But those who could, fought. Pfc. Carl Ash of St. Louis, leaped from his truck and ran along the hedgerow behind which the Germans were hiding. He yelled curses at them and poured a stream of lead at them with his pistol, distracting them and giving his buddies a chance to organize.

Prescott pumped his carbine at the Nazis, clip after clip, until killed. Sgt. Paul Clevenger of Marion, Ind., resisted until riddled with 24 bullets. Captured twice in the melee he succeeded both times in killing his captors and fighting on. The 24th slug rendered him unconscious, but later he recovered and crawled to safety.

A platoon of K Company was cut off and decimated and those who remained, captured. Some of those captured escaped days later. Pfc. Jerome A. Morabito of Punxsutawney, Pa., who was to become a regimental MP, was one of them. On the seventh night's march after his capture, Morabito and an officer of another division, made a dash for liberty during an artillery barrage. After many close calls they succeeded in reaching Canadian lines.

The wounded of the Lost Battalion were in pitiable shape. Pvt. Murray H. Watnoffsky of the Bronx, a 2nd Bn. medic, discovered a wounded soldier pinned down in a ditch under a huge stone which had been rolled on him by a shell burst.

"Someone had given him water but had been unable to lift the boulder," Watnoffsky related. "Four of us just managed to remove it. Seeing him lying there was a horrible shock, and his smile in greeting us melted our hearts. 'Hello,' he said. 'Well, I guess I'll be all right now. Got a smoke, please?'"

* * *

By 6 o'clock on the morning of August 13th the 320th had been relieved. That afternoon and night the unit moved to an assembly area south of Le Mans, the first large living French city 320th Joe had seen.

The French people lining the route gave him cheers – "Vive l'Amérique!" – and flowers, champagne, fruit, eggs. In turn Joe gave them units of his K rations: cigarettes, candy – corned pork loaf. Joe told himself and his pals that never before had he seen so many beautiful girls. Nine out of every ten were knockouts, Joe raved, his starved eyes feasting.

The profound, tearful joy of the French people in being liberated from Nazi slavery was contagious. Joe realized for the first time to the tips of his toes the worthwhileness of the fight he was waging.

The 35th Division was restored to the Third Army, and given the dual mission of spearheading the right wing of Patton's army and protecting the whole invasion force from attack by German armies in the south.

Until the end of September, when lack of supplies and stiffened German resistance ended the Santa Fe smash through France in the Greamecey Forest beyond Nancy, the 320th rolled forward and mopped up, rolled forward and mopped up. The weather was marvelous, the war almost a bucket of champagne.

The regiment took the towns of Chateaudun (Aug. 16-17), Janville (Aug. 19), Pithiviers (Aug. 21), Courtenay (Aug. 25), Troyes (Aug. 28), Bar-sur-Seine (Aug. 30), Joinville (Sept. 3), and numerous smaller localities. Together with her sister regiments the 320th liberated the city of Montargis, (Aug. 24) and established a bridgehead across the Moselle (Sept. 13). Pushing north across the streams and canals in the season's first rains and against bitter opposition the 320th cut the main highway leading east from Nancy to Germany and pursued the Nazis into the wooded and rough terrain beyond. Throughout the drive men of the FFI (French Forces of the Interior) were of invaluable help to the Yanks.

In the liberation of Chateaudun the regiment performed its first field manual type maneuver. The unit arrived in the area and began deploying early on August 16 over open rolling ground much of which was littered with unexploded shells from an ammunition dump which had been hit by Allied planes sometime previously. The town was defended by troops assigned to protect a large airport in the vicinity.

The regiment advanced as if on maneuvers, the 1st Bn. on the left, the 2nd on the right, and the 3rd in reserve. At about 8:30 the Germans began shooting from the town and an intense scrap ensued on the outskirts. The mortar platoons of D and H Companies had marked success in destroying the enemy's machine gun, mortar, and anti-aircraft gun positions. Five Tiger tanks ground out to do battle. All five were knocked out.

During the evening the 3rd Bn. secured the nearby town of Cloyes, and by noon the next day all Germans in the Chateaudun area had been killed, captured, or routed, and the townspeople began barbering the women who had trucked with the Nazis.

On August 30 the regiment reached the Seine River, seizing a bridge intact. At Bar-sur-Seine 320th men saw for the first time the evil, infantile vandalism of the Nazis. Before retreating from the town the frustrated Nazis had gone about smashing shop windows, breaking everything breakable.

On Sept. 13 the regiment (minus the 2nd Bn. which was fighting bitter battles with the 4th Armored Division) crossed the Moselle after the 137th Inf. The 1st Bn. began an attack to clear the high ground north and east of the bridge. This sharp fighting in which the Germans used tanks and antitank guns was watched from the battalion OP by General Patton.

As the Germans were driven from their positions the Third Army commander, pleased at the tactics employed, grinned.

“Just like at Fort Benning,” he said.

But the Jerries poured in a lot of big lead during this scrap, as Pfc. Charles J. Rose of Scranton, Pa., could testify. Three times in three hours 88s blasted him clean out of his hole.

* * *

The regiment’s most savage fight during this period occurred at Dombasle on **September 15** in the crossing of the Rhine-Marne Canal and the Sanon River. Across the water barriers a fresh enemy battalion had taken up formidable positions in houses and on hills.

1/Lt. Raymond A. Braffitt of Waterotwn, Mass., 1st Bn. Intelligence officer (killed in action several days later), captured an unblown bridge with one jeep and one machine gun. When foot elements attempted to cross, deadly fire drove them back. An attempt to wade across at another point also was thwarted by the effective fire.

Finally, infantrymen of Company C secured a bridgehead by crossing in boats found in the canal. During the day’s fighting Major Gillis, directing his Battalion’s assault, several times waded and swam the streams. Sgt. Walter Newman of Detroit, a cherubic 1st Bn. cook who later became Cannon Company’s mess sergeant, forsook his pots and pans and hitched a ride to the canal with 1/Lt. Arthur E. Christiansen of Mattapan, Mass., battalion communications officer. There he unjammed an abandoned light machine gun and with its fire silenced an enemy strongpoint. A little later he picked up an M1 and helped capture 21 Krauts.

“Riflemen have a tough job,” explained Newman, who frequently went AWOL to the front. “I thought maybe I could help ‘em out.”

By six in the evening the German positions had been overrun, a large number of the enemy killed or captured.

The following day the 3rd Bn., supported by tanks of the 737th and TDs of the 654th, seized Buissoncourt after a rough fight climaxed by a bayonet charge whose participants remember the action as something out of Hollywood.

The I & R platoon, had encountered resistance early on September 16th in the town of Haraucourt. Company I attacked and cleared the town. The 3rd Bn. then advanced on Buissoncourt several kilometers distant in a formation of companies in the order I, K, and L. A German battalion held strong positions in the brick-and-stone buildings of the ancient town and along the road to the north.

A ridge in front of the town was attained and an OP established on it but in advancing further I and K Companies became pinned odwn by murderous artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire. A withdrawal or a further advance threatened heavy casualties as there was practically no cover.

From exposed positions on the forward side of the hill I Company’s weapons platoon under T/Sgt. Saul Joseph of Chicago fired 26 boxes of machine gun ammunition and 850 rounds of 60mm mortar, and it was effectively supported by M Company’s heavy machine guns and mortars. But all attempts to break the deadlock, including an envelopment around the town’s left flank by K Company, failed.

At this point Lt. Col. Joseph D. Alexander ordered L Company into its bayonet charge. 1/Lt. Leo Thomas, executive officer of the company, brought two platoons up through the I Company positions. Supported by overhead fire from the tanks and TDs, the mortars and machine guns, the L Company footsloggers, followed by I Company's reserve platoon dashed 300 yards to the German positions, running, firing, and yelling simultaneously.

"This time it was the Krauts' turn to be pinned down," related T/Sgt. Raymond Sneade of Worcester, Mass., who was awarded the Silver Star for wiping out one of the machine gun nests. "Very few of our men were hit because all but one or two of the Germans were forced down in their holes. When we got to their positions most surrendered but some had to be stuck. And about forty of them took off through a cornfield on their hands and knees. A few shots into their rumps made them change their minds."

The battalion commander and eight of his staff were among the prisoners taken.

Lt. Col. Joseph D. (GI George) Alexander of Chicago, who became the 3rd Bn.'s commander on Sept. 5, was born in Chicago in 1902. Enlisting as a private in the National Guard (131st Inf.) in 1920, he held a captaincy when inducted into Federal service in March, 1941. The short, chubby, warm-hearted commander was a sales manager in civilian life. He attended Fort Benning's Infantry School in 1929-30 and again in 1941. He landed in France with the 137th and was wounded while fighting with that regiment. Upon returning to the division from the hospital, the colonel was assigned to the 320th.

From Sept. 19 to 26 the regiment was attached to the 4th Armored Div. The 2nd and 3rd Bns. Held defensive positions in the areas of Rechicourt and Jovrecourt while the 1st Bn. was near Fresnes-en-Saulnois. Strong German counterattacks with tanks were repelled.

* * *

During these last rainy days of September, when shells were strictly rationed, the 320th was committed to clear Gremecey Forest of the enemy. Savage opposition was encountered and the infantrymen received some of the most severe and accurate shelling of the war.

On September 27th the 1st Bn. attacked and seized the high ground south of Gremecey and was then attached to the 137th. On September 28th the rest of the 320th moved to an area northwest of Gremecey to assist the 137th. The next morning the 3rd Bn., attacking to regain positions on the north and east edges of the forest, encountered great difficulty. Tanks aided the doughboys in wiping out some of the pockets. The forest edge was reached and contact established with the 134th.

The 1st Bn. on September 30th continued its attack designed to clear the portion of the forest extending to the east. It received extremely heavy artillery and 120mm mortar fire. Many casualties were suffered but ground was gained. The 2nd Bn., ordered to move from its assembly area and attack from a line of departure in the vicinity of Hill 282 with the support of Cannon Company, was hit by massed light and medium artillery fire – one of the most concentrated barrages ever laid down by the Germans.

On Oct. 1, in coordination with the 6th Armored Div., the regiment attacked to secure the eastern edge of the forest. Restrictions on the use of artillery were lifted for the operation. After a sharp fight the forest was at last cleared.

The Nazis killed T/5 Harold J. (Doc) Lange of Chicago, a B Company aid man whose almost fanatical desire to help his “boys” had made his performance from St. Lo to Gremecey one of almost continuous heroism. But the Nazis could not kill the memory of his good works. Lange and his gallantry have become legendary.

Short, slope-shouldered, awkward, and well in his thirties, Doc had been a beloved laughing-stock in the States where he was attached to C Company. He was afflicted with a lisp and the lisp became a stutter when he was excited. During a drill or a hike he was always out of step. His trousers bagged like Sad Sacks’ and his spectacles seemed always about to slide off his nose. His boys ribbed but respected him, for Doc neglected looking after himself until the last Joe had been cared for, the last blister bandaged.

Stories of his self-sacrificing zeal are innumerable. In Normandy Doc’s boys scrawled their names on a piece



Lt. Col.
William F. Northam
Regimental Executive
Officer

(photo) Lt. Col. William F. Northam, Regimental Executive Officer



Lt. Col.
William Walton
Commander
First Battalion

(photo) Lt. Col. William Walton, Commander First Battalion

(MAP) HERE IS YOUR STORY



(photo) Lt. Col. Warren T. Hannum Jr.,
 Commander Second Battalion

(photo) Lt. Col. Joseph D. Alexander,
 Commander Third Battalion

of paper: they wanted their aid man's bravery officially recognized. The day after he was killed he was to have been presented the Silver Star for an action on July 12 when he crawled through a hedgerow and into a machine gun swept field and administered first aid to and then evacuated a wounded rifleman.

On the day Lange was killed he went forward against the advice of his platoon officer into open terrain in the face of artillery, mortar, machine gun and sniper fire that had caused many casualties. His brassards could be seen plainly by the enemy machine gunners. But as he knelt by a wounded man, Nazi machine gunners gave Doc a burst. Soldiers saw him pick himself up, continue his work. But the Nazis didn't like that.

Next day Lange's body, riddled by machine gun bullets, was found among the dead, many of whom wore first aid dressings which Doc had applied.

Another soldier who gave his life in this fierce forest fighting was Sgt. James A. Burzo of Brooklyn. When his L Company platoon was ambushed from the front and both flanks Burzo pushed forward alone to engage the Nazis in their positions. A machine gun mortally wounded him but he continued the assault. Throwing a grenade at the spitting gun he closed with the crew, killing four and routing the remainder before he collapsed from loss of blood.

Major Gillis, 1st Bn. CO, was killed on September 30th while at the Battalion OP. And on the same day the regimental CP at Bioncourt was shelled while a group of commanders – five generals, four full colonels, and many officers of lesser rank – were holding a conference on operations. Colonel Byrne's guests included Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, 12th Corps commander; Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffney, 3rd Army chief-of-staff; Maj. Gen. Robert W. Grow, 6th Armored commander; Maj. Gen. Paul W. Baade, 35th Division commander; Brig. Gen. Edmund C. Sebree, 35th Division assistant commander; Col. Maddrey A. Solomon, 35th Division chief-of-staff; Col. Robert Sears, 137th Infantry commander; and Col. Butler B. Miltonberger, 134th Infantry commander.

One shell exploded in the gateway of the house, knocked down the entrance door, smashed the windows. There were casualties, both killed and wounded.

In early October, while occupying defensive positions in Gremecey Forest, the troops were issued winter clothing. Trucks hauled some of the men into Nancy where they had a chance to shower and see the town. The beginning of an unprecedented rainy season – an autumn precipitation greater than any recorded in 200 years – caused all units that could to quarter in houses. Most of the Lorraine villages near the front were deserted and obtaining a house was a simple matter. Some troops were able to set themselves up regally, utilizing beds and chinaware. Home made meals (even to pie and cake) were prepared. But most of the rifle company doughs were confined to their foxholes 23 hours a day by the rain and the shells.

The regiment was relieved from the defensive positions it had established on the farther edge of Gremecey Forest and was moved back (Oct. 24) to positions in reserve, the 3rd and 2nd Bns. displacing to the woods west of Brin-sur-Seille and the 1st Bn. to a position near the town of Gremecey.

Lorraine: A Wet Hell

On Nov. 6 Colonel Byrne issued Field Order No. 29. As part of the Third Army's Saar drive the 320th was to move to a line of departure in the northwest portion of Gremecey Forest and at six o'clock on the morning of Nov. 8 pass through the 134th Regiment to assault the western edge of the Chateau-Salins Forest and the town of Fresnes.

The attack had to be launched against thoroughly prepared defensive positions. All roads and open spaces were thoroughly strewn with mines. There were barbed wire entanglements and well-established fire lanes for automatic weapons. The Nazis had excellent observation for the employment of mortars and artillery. Their infantry was supported by armor.

From midnight until five o'clock in the morning of November 8th, the doughs slogged through the rain and mud to the jumping-off point. At eight o'clock, after an hour's artillery preparation, the already tired and sleepy soldiers were sent into the attack as planned, the 3rd Bn. attacking the town of Fresnes and the 2nd Bn. attacking across the open area from the eastern edge of Gremecey Forest towards the German positions in the western edge of Chateau-Salins Forest.

During the day the 3rd Bn., aided by tanks which suffered heavy losses at the outset, seized and held two-thirds of Fresnes. Fighting continued throughout the night and by ten o'clock on November 9th Fresnes was completely in Yank hands and a number of prisoners had been taken.

The 2nd Bn. managed to cross the open area and enter the edge of Chateau-Salins Forest, with G Company on the left, F Company on the right, and E Company following. The Germans then opened up with heavy artillery and mortar fire and fire from cannon in the forest plus enfilading machine gun and small arms fire. Both F and E Companies were thrown out of the woods with heavy losses.

A second assault in the afternoon also was repelled. The two companies took up positions along a railroad cut while G Company clung on at the edge of the forest.

The 1st Bn. moved up to block the space between the two attacking battalions and on November 9th was committed to attack the northern half of the forest's western edge while the 2nd continued its assault on the southern half. Gains were made after heartbreaking fighting.

The 2nd Bn. was hit hardest. Pinned down by enemy fire, exhausted men would fall to sleep where they lay in the mud and water, bullets singing above them.

In this harrowing assault the men were inspired by their battalion commander, Lt. Col. Warren T. Hannum Jr., and their operations officer, Capt. Robert B. Tobin of Pilot Point, Texas, who directed the action from the front and slept in foxholes alongside the riflemen.

Lithe, 28-year-old Colonel Hannum, whom many of his men consider to be the spitting image of Harry Hopkins, joined the 320th and assumed command of the 2nd Bn. on Aug. 28 at Troyes. The son of a general (now retired) he graduated from West Point in 1938. He had chosen the infantry at the academy and after tours of duty in Hawaii and at

Fort Bragg, N. C., he attended Fort Benning's Infantry School. Before coming overseas he also had paratroop training.

On November 10th, the 3rd Bn. having relieved the 2nd, the attack was resumed. In the evening the Germans assaulted the B Company positions from the rear, overrunning the CP and killing the company commander, Capt. Frank W. Gardner of Arlington, Mass. Only the swift descent of darkness in the thick forest enabled others to escape.

Shortly after noon on November 12th the regimental objective, the eastern edge of the forest, was reached. Next day the 320th was relieved.

* * *

On November 17th the unit displaced to the vicinity of Morhange and next morning continued the drive. By November 25th 320th infantrymen had seized Bermering, Virming, Linstroff, Francaltroff, Erstroff, Grening, Petit Tenquin, Petit Rohrbach, Nelling, Insming, Uberkinger, Kappelkinger, Hazenbourg, Ventzwiller.

On November 27th the regiment moved 25 miles to Pontpierre and vicinity, there enjoying its first rest since being committed on July 9. On Dec. 1 and 2 the unit returned to the same sector and continued the drive toward the German border.

During the period Nov. 8 – 25 (little more than two weeks) the 320th suffered severe casualties. Fortunately, the number wounded vastly exceeded the number killed, and many of the hundreds evacuated were suffering from trench foot.

“I consider the action at Chateau-Salins and Fresnes the hardest we have ever had,” declares Colonel Byrne. “Not only was the enemy's resistance as stubborn, and his positions as strong, as at any other place, but the weather was the worst with which we have ever had to contend.”

Rain and mud and sleet, hampering all operations during the entire period, made the doughboy's lot almost insufferable. Overcoats, sleeping bags, Arctics were of little or no comfort to the frontline men. Few would risk carrying them in an attack, for a rifleman's life often depends on his traveling light. Some men would not even burden themselves with a raincoat. Overshoes picked up mud, slipped and squeaked in it, and water seeped in through the tops anyway because of the streams and knee-deep puddles which had to be forded. For days men had no opportunity of drying themselves and the cold and the wet inevitably caused many cases of exposure and trenchfoot (frostbite).

In the first three days of the attack the infantrymen had tank support, but this support was cut to a minimum as a result of losses sustained on the first day and by the conditions of terrain. For the rest of the period there was no tank support.

In the advance through the Chateau-Salins Forest almost every round of enemy artillery and mortar fire resulted in a tree burst equivalent to well-placed time fire. From this the advancing Yanks had little or no protection. But the Germans in their dugouts and pillboxes had good protection from Yank shellfire.

Because of the short period of daylight many operations had to be concluded or carried out in the pitch black of the rainy nights. At times the supply and communication lines were cut by infiltrating or bypassed enemy troops.

In the operation for the towns in open country the flooded low ground and enemy demolitions obstructed the supplying of the advanced elements. Particularly in the first

days neither ambulances nor medical jeeps could get near the wounded. The litter-haul was long and backbreaking. The time required to get a casualty through an aid station and to the collecting station was some six times that in Normandy.

Toward the end of this period the fighting became more deft. Company A wrested the town of Uberkinger from under the claws of German armor in a surprise dawn attack across a flooded stream which the Nazis considered an unassailable moat. Tanks and half-tracks were knocked out or repelled by doughs firing bazookas and throwing gasoline-filled bottles.

1/Lt. Charles W. Bell of Valentine, Texas, the 21-year-old company commander, personally led the attack and he it was who worked in the icy stream, sparkplugging the construction of a footbridge.

Frontline men call a conspicuous hero – an officer or an enlisted man who, while not quite itching to fight, is brave and bold to the verge of rashness – a “cowboy.” Charles Bell, was evacuated and then transferred to a training unit after suffering concussion from a shell explosion shortly before the unit crossed the Blies River into Germany, was one of the 320th's greatest cowboys.

Among the officially recorded exploits of the slight, blond, and boyish Texan was his action on Sept. 24. Misdirected fire from our own artillery began falling in on the hastily prepared A Company positions. Bell, then a platoon leader, left the comparative safety of his dugout and sprinted for the nearest radio 500 yards away and across the terrain being shelled. Ten 240mm shells burst around him as he ran, and a fragment from one of them wounded him and knocked him down. He got up, dashed on, succeeded in stopping the shelling.

Back in Normandy he (Charles Bell) reconnoitered a crossing of the Vire ahead of his platoon. A group of Germans dismounted from a half-track 25 yards from him. Bell opened up with his carbine, killing two and wounding several. When the Nazis returned fire and then charged him with fixed bayonets he jumped into the river. Swimming on his back he continued to fire at them, thus covering the withdrawal of his scouts. He reached the opposite bank without being hit. After informing the company commander of the situation, Bell returned to his pinned-down platoon, led it to safety.

A few of the other 320th cowboys are Capt. Clifford M. Head of Little Rock, Ark., - F and G; S/Sgt. Robert H. Baker of Saranac Lake, N. Y., - K.; 1/Lt. James Alfieri of Buffalo, - D; Pfc. Harry (The Wanderer) Smith of Wicasset, Me., - K; and battlefield commissioned 2/Lt. Lamoine E. Heiman of Eau Claire, Wis., - A.

On Dec. 4 the 320th resumed its Lorraine push capturing Diderfing and Bettring; then, crossing the Maderbach River, the unit on December 5th and 6th cleared Halving, Ballering, Grundviller, Heckenransbach, Hambach, Siltzheim; and Zetting and Wittring on the west bank of the Saar. All bridges across the Saar were found blown.

The three battalions attacked abreast on December 8th. The 1st and 2nd Bns. on the left were rowed across the river and canal in assault boats manned by men of Company C, 60th Engineers. The predawn attack took the Nazis off guard and many were killed like trapped rats in their zig-zag, barbwire-protected trenches and in their pillboxes by the automatic fire and hand grenades of the doughs.

Shooting his light machine gun from his hip, Sgt. Clyde V. Manning of Oceania, Cal., protected the engineers putting in a treadway in the 2nd Bn.'s sector from the fire of a bunch of Nazis entrenched on the hillside.

“Altogether he must have shot for an hour and a half,” Manning’s platoon sergeant said. “He mowed them down when they tried to climb out of the upper ends of the trenches. When it was all over there were only about forty Krauts left who could surrender and most of them were bloodied up.”

Capt. Charles F. Guilford of Dearborn, B Company CO, led his men forward to expand their narrow bridgehead. The Nazis launched a counterattack spearheaded by two tanks and 10 half-tracks. Guilford was forced to withdraw his men to the protection of the bank. Accompanied by the communications sergeant, Edward H. Doster of the Bronx, the captain then went forward 300 yards, established an OP, directed artillery fire on the armor. The counterattack was broken up.

In the following few days the unit advanced against stiff resistance to seize Bliesbruck on the Blies River. On the afternoon of December 12th two B Company men, S/Sgts. Elvin C. Hammonds of Clinton, Mo., and James W. Johnson of Clifton, Va., forded the stream and walked on to cross the boundary line – the first 320th Joes to step on the “sacred soil.”

Despite angry opposition the unit had captured three German towns – Nieder Gailbach, Gersheim, and Renheim – before being relieved on the 21st to be shifted into the Ardennes to help stem and then throw back Marshal Rundstedt’s winter counteroffensive.

Bastogne: A White Hell

Christmas Eve and Day were spent in barracks at Metz, the boys enjoying Turkey and trimmings. During the previous few days hundreds of reinforcements joined the regiment. They were immediately to receive their baptism of fire in one of the most arduous battles of the war – the Bastogne Bulge.

For 24 days – Dec. 26 to Jan. 19 – 320th infantrymen, first in Luxembourg around Harlange 10 miles from Bastogne and then in Belgium in and around Bastogne itself, endured the rigors of sub-freezing weather. Some men never had a chance to spend a single hour at a fire or within a heated room in all that time.

During the 32-hour period from 10 a. m. Dec. 26 to 6 p. m. Dec. 27, Combat Team 320th moved approximately 85 miles through three countries – France, Belgium, Luxembourg – attacked across the bridgeless and swift Sure River, advanced four miles, seized three towns – Boulaide, Baschleiden, Flebour – captured 35 Germans – and all without a single casualty. This achievement of the regiment was featured by the Associated Press in a story to the States depicting the “miraculous mobility” of General Patton’s switch to the endangered sector.

Without waiting for the completion of a treadway bridge, Lts. Henry O. Tietjens of Carrolton, Mo., and George W. Byerly of Lima, O., 2nd Bn. supply and A & P officers, got four jeeploads of hot chow to their men across the Sure, some of whom had swum the icy stream. They did it by using jerricans, rocks, and planks to fill in the gaps on a poorly

demolished bridge high above the water. This risky exploit typifies the spirit in which the regimental supply services have backed the frontline men from St. Lo to the Elbe.

Until Jan. 7 the regiment (minus the 1st Bn. which reinforced her sister regiments fighting on the left) fought fiercely for possession of the woods approaching Harlange. The doughboys were supported by the 216th, 219th, and 179th Field Artillery Bns., the 3rd Chemical Bn., and the unit's own Cannon Company. These outfits laid down an unprecedented volume of fire, Lt. Col. Kenneth H. Reed's 216th alone firing 2,538 rounds and Capt. Robert Eckstrom's Cannon Company more than 1,000 rounds on Jan. 3 in helping repel two counterattacks.

Before daylight on January 4th the 3rd Bn. attacked in fog and through deep snow, clearing heavily wooded areas of the Germans after intense fighting in which 10 machine gun positions and one mortar emplacement were overrun, 88 Nazis captured and about 100 killed.

The 2nd Bn, with tank support, captured Fuhrman Farm and seized four buildings on the edge of Harlange. Late in the day the tanks withdrew and a Kraut counterattack spearheaded by armor forced the doughs to withdraw. On the morning of January 5th the 2nd Bn. repelled an enemy counterattack which was supported by Tigers and half-tracks. But the Germans received reinforcements and reformed to launch a second assault which forced the Yanks to withdraw 100 yards to the woods where tanks could not enter.

Savage fighting continued until the battalions were pulled out to an assembly area preparatory to moving by motor to Bastogne for attachment to the 6th Armored Division.

The unit's first action in the new sector was that of the 2nd Bn. which wiped out a German counterattack launched by 80 men. Only a captured four escaped death. The terrain prevented the removal of these slain Nazis for several days and their bodies froze in the snow in the grotesque positions in which they had fallen.

The 3rd Bn. attacked on January 13th against fanatical opposition from infantryman and armor. Ground gained initially had to be given up when the supporting tanks were destroyed by enemy fire as each approached an effective assault position. Next day, following a successful air strike, the 1st and 2nd Bns. attacked and seized their objective.

* * *

This terrible period in which foxholes were walled with ice, water froze in canteens, and medics carried blood plasma under their armpits, was not without its beauty. Shimmering, crystalline snow clung delicately on branches and bushes and communication wire. On many brilliantly sunny days the sky was bluer than the Carribean Sea. Overhead, American planes enroute to Germany were an inspiring spectacle. Like invisible needles pulling fuzzy white threads through the azure sky, fighter escorts trailed vapor at an arctic height. Then came the bombers in wedge formation, glinting in the bright blue firmament like tiny crosses of mother-of-pearl.

In this "white jungle" close-quarter fighting in the winter-bound fir forests, soldiers on both sides sometimes had sluggish reactions. T/Sgt. Arthur E. McLaughlin of Black Rock, Ark., an E Company platoon sergeant, set off at dark to contact G Company. He encountered some soldiers digging into the frozen ground.

“G Company?” he asked, although even before he spoke he had realized they were Krauts.

“Nix!” one of the Krauts replied – and continued chipping at the ground.

McLaughlin pivoted slowly, slowly trudged off through the snow. He was well back to his own positions before the Nazis opened up on him.

1/Lt. William W. Dodge of Perry, Mo., returning with a G Company patrol reported to Captain Head that there were a number of Germans asleep in their foxholes but clicking their boots together because of the cold.

“Good!” exclaimed the CO. “Let’s go throw in some hand grenades, warm ‘em up.”

The mission was a complete success, although one of the grenades tossed into a hole rolled on top of a Nazi without exploding (it may have been too cold) and the Nazi went on sleeping and clicking his heels. The second grenade, no dud, warmed up the Hitlerite forever.

* * *

The town of Oubourcy, four miles northeast of Bastogne, was seized on Jan. 15 after an all-day scrap in which Company A markedly distinguished itself. Before daybreak the doughs advanced across a mile of open terrain to the town.

An enemy outpost fired on T/Sgt. William A. Fried of Lexington, Ill., a platoon guide. A squad under S/Sgt. Samuel S. Graham of Newark rushed the post and killed the three Germans manning it. Pfc. Charles P. Briner of Henry, Ill., crawled around a haystack, captured a machine gun and two gunners. While Pfc. Joseph J. Caleca of Detroit captured a 75mm anti-tank gun by killing one Kraut and taking two prisoner, his comrades seized the first four houses and the enemy in them.

Wires were observed running from the fifth house. Pfc. John D. Beal of Gates Center, Kansas, dashed through a terrific fire now laid down by the aroused Nazis, killed the guard in front of the building, cut the wires.

“The battalion CO had his CP in that cellar,” related Capt. Norman C. Carey of Springfield, O., A Company’s commander. “Thus we deadened the brain of the Nazi octopus first, then destroyed the tentacles one by one.”

Upon the arrival of the supporting tanks, Carey ran out under fire to direct them, coordinating their attack with that of his doughs. The Nazis had orders to resist to the last man and the Yank riflemen needed to throw more than 150 grenades into the tank-shelled houses.

By mid-afternoon Oubourcy had been cleared. Eight officers – the entire battalion staff – had been killed or captured. In all, 123 of the enemy were taken prisoner, and 38 killed. A Company – which was at one-third strength – had one man killed and five wounded.

Lt. Col. William Walton of Newton, Kansas, 1st Bn. CO who directed the assault on Oubourcy, joined the 320th in October, 1943. Big-framed, imperturbable, and with an imposing presence that belies his youth (he’s only 33), the Kansan was a service station operator in civilian life. He joined the National Guard in 1933 as a private but was a

second lieutenant at the time of induction into Federal service (Dec. 1940) as a member of the 137th Infantry.

After the death of Major Gillis, Walton, who had been battalion operations officer and executive officer, temporarily assumed command in the grade of captain but was soon promoted to major. When Lt. Col. James T. Walker was wounded on Nov. 18, Walton again took over the command. He received his silver leaves in the latter part of December.

On Jan. 18, after taking the town of Michamps and cutting the Bourcy-Longvilly highway, the 320th was relieved. Next day it displaced to Metz.

The unit expected a 10-day break. But on January 22nd it was ordered to prepare for a movement to join the 7th Army in Alsace. A counteroffensive threatened in that sector. On January 24th the regiment took over defensive positions in the Vosges Mountains, thickening the front.

While in Alsace the doughboys were issued shoe-pacs. But these rubber boots proved of no value, for on January 30th, by motor and rail (40 hommes et 8 chevaux), the regiment started its 300-mile journey to join the 9th Army. In Holland (where the unit spent several days), and in Germany, the weather was Springlike. But most of the boys had toes that still tingled from the Bastogne ordeal.

Task Force Byrne: Blitzkrieg

On Feb. 4 the regiment relieved a British outfit in defensive positions just west of the Roer River. The infantrymen engaged in patrolling and in improving their positions until February 23rd, when an attack was initiated to clear the west bank. Then, in several days of fighting, Oberbruck, Kranzes, Schanz, and Kuppen were taken, the Nazis chased across the Roer.

Task Force Byrne, consisting of the 320th (motorized); the 216th FA Bn.; the 275 self propelled Field Artillery Battalion; Co. C, 654th TD Bn.; Co. C, 60th Engineers; Co. C, 110th Medical Bn.; and the Negro 784th Tank Bn., was formed on February 28th. That afternoon the task force crossed the Roer at the Hilfarth bridgehead and advanced nine miles.

Next morning, March 1, Task Force Byrne really took off. Alexander's 3rd Bn. spearheaded the smash. Doughs of Company K, commanded by Capt. Homer W. Kurtz of Troy, Ill., plus one platoon of I Company, mounted the tanks.

In a shootin'-tootin' 23-mile northward slash the Siegfried Line defenses were rolled up from the rear, 16 sizeable German towns captured, and the important Dutch city of Venlo on the Maas River liberated.

Tankers shot up everything suspicious-looking; and the rear of the column, approaching Venlo around midnight under enemy shellfire, had its route lit up by burning haystacks as well as pillboxes.

With the aid of the deliriously happy Hollanders of Venlo, the Nazis in the city were routed and those attempting to hide ferreted out, but German shells continued to splatter within the city during the night.

The blitz continued 15 miles northeast into Germany the next day, with Straelen and Nieukirk seized, Sevelen entered, and more hundreds of prisoners taken by both forward and rear elements.

But it wasn't all a joyride. And in the bloody hours of slugging, tankmen and infantrymen won each other's praise for skill and guts.

"One of my men had a bullet hole in his left leg and his right leg was almost blown off by an anti-tank shell," declared battlefield-commissioned 2/Lt. Royal A. Offer of Omaha, platoon leader of the doughs riding the lead tanks. "Yet he kept on shooting. He killed three soldiers manning the anti-tank gun and forced the officer to surrender.

"Another of my men, a staff sergeant, though he had four slugs in him, three in his chest and one in his stomach, kept his squad together, helping two of his men who were hit and he himself refusing to get off the tank. This was in Straelen where the road had been cut off behind us. The wounded couldn't be evacuated for three hours. These two soldiers, still full of spirit, inspired everyone who saw them."

The Company I platoon and the Negro tankers who attacked Sevelen at night were isolated from the rest of the column when the Germans blew up a bridge after they had crossed. In house-to-house fighting the men had largely cleared the town by morning when more tanks and men could join them. Sevelen was secured despite the deadly observed fire from mortars and artillery just outside the town.

Stacks of Nazi propaganda leaflets – unshot and unshipped and still moist from the printing presses – were found. Addressed to men of the Santa Fe and decorated with the division patch, the leaflets warned the Yanks that the Roer Valley defenses were "impregnable."

* * *

The 2nd Bn. captured Oermten on March 3, and on March 4th the 1st and 2nd Bns. pushed two and a half miles through hardened resistance. Until March 10th, when Task Force Byrne was dissolved, the Nazis opposed the advance with fanaticism, firing everything in their books at the doughs and tankers. But slowly the Nazi Wesel bridgehead – their only remaining hold west of the Rhine – was shrunk. Kamperbruck, Kamp, Hogenhof, Saalhof, Alspry, Schmetshof, Millingen, Huck, and Drupt were seized.

Mostly it was brutal, nerve-wracking going. One crew sallied into battle manning their third new tank in a week. This relentlessness was effective. 2nd Bn., though sustaining heavy losses, captured 300 prisoners in two days of fighting at Millingen. And there were clean-cut strokes, like the perfectly timed action at Hillmanshoff by a platoon of F Company led by battlefield commissioned 2/Lt Vivian G. Palmore of Mattoax, Va.

"We didn't have a casualty," related Palmore. "The Kraut positions were in two big houses completely surrounded by a thick hedge and we had to cross 1000 yards of open ground covered by their two 88s.

"Our artillery poured in a 10-minute barrage, pinning them down. Then our tanks smashed up to within 100 yards, letting loose with everything they had, and then we ran out in front of the tanks laying down a terrific marching fire. The Krauts just couldn't get started."

A load of Nazis trying to escape in one of the trucks were riddled by the combined fire of four BARs wielded by Sgt. Joseph C. Anzalone of Independence, La., and Pfc. Joseph J. Madanski of Painseville, O., Howard E. Kroeger of Blackduck, Minn., and William T. Brewer of Rockmart, Ga.

The assault was started at dusk and the scrap at the German positions took place in a pall of smoke from one of the houses which had been set afire and from the burning town of Drupt being attacked by Company C.

“We were still killing or capturing Heinies after nine o’clock,” declared S/Sgt. Glenn E. Metcalf of Huntington, Ind. “They were last-ditch Nazis and they didn’t like being taken. But we got about forty of them alive. I never before saw so many Krauts concentrated in so small an area.”

In ten days Task Force Byrne had captured approximately fifteen hundred prisoners.

Ruhr Pocket, Elbe Bridgehead: Germany Kuput

While the Ninth Army mounted its power to smash across the Rhine, the 320th billeted (March 12-26) in the vicinity of Venlo, Holland, for rest and rehabilitation. One-day passes allowed the men several visits to Brussels, exciting Shangri-La capital of Belgium.

The Rhine was crossed at the Wesel bridgehead (March 26) and the unit assembled in the vicinity of Letkampshof on the north side of the Ruhr pocket in which more than 300,000 German soldiers were encircled.

Attacking southward against opposition that was stern despite the dilution of the Wehrmacht by the Volkssturm, the regiment cut the Autobahn, rolled on into an industrialized, Pittsburgh-like terrain. The cities of Bottrop and Sterkrade were taken and by April 1 the Germans had been driven back of the Emscher and Rheine-Herne Canals near Dortmund.

The ability of even a handful of last-ditchers to delay the inevitable was shown by the tough two-day fight 100 Nazis put up before they could be cleared from the slag pile, shafts and buildings of the Prosper coal mine.

During this period Capt. William N. McCormick of East Orange, N. J., and his military government staff had their hands full in establishing new civil administrations in the many conquered towns and in taking care of thousands of PWs, slave workers, and displaced persons of all nationalities. Dramatic and amusing incidents happened ten a minute in the AMG office. But the prize one, perhaps, concerned the substantial German farmer who came to lodge a protest.

“Since you Americans came here,” he complained, “the Russians and Poles on my farm won’t work as hard and as long as they did before. What are you going to do about it?”

* * *

Defensive positions were held until April 10th, but the doughboys engaged in active patrolling. One K Company patrol, led by 2/Lt. Omer D. Whitwell of McKinney, Tex., and guided by two Russians, one of whom stuck a knife between the shoulder

blades of an over-inquisitive Nazi sentry, mingled undetected with the people and soldiers on the streets of Schalke, observed the bacchanal parties going on in the houses, and brought back with them the last of the nine sentries they had to pass.

The 320th was attached to the 75th Division and again went into attack on April 11th and 12th, clearing Holthausen and reaching the outskirts of Dortmund at the time the advance was halted and the regiment pulled out for another job 250 miles farther into Germany.

Attached to the 83rd Division the 320th on April 15th forced a crossing of the Saale River, an Elbe tributary. The doughs expanded and then held their bridgehead between the two streams, enabling the 83rd to construct a second pontoon bridge across the Elbe. In this manner the 9th Army foothold beyond the last water barrier separating the Yanks from the Russians and Victory was secured.

Grosse Rosenberg, Kleine Rosenberg, Trabitz, Gottesgnaden, Breitenhagen and Schmitz fell to the 320th in this fighting. The Krauts continued resisting stubbornly, and even launched counterattacks in which 320th men were surrounded and captured.

The six 105s of Cannon Company, whose stubby snouts were kissed by doughboys rescued at Mortain, liberated 23 men of I Company who had been taken prisoner. A platoon led by 1/Lt. Harold E. Ganzel of Menasha, Wis., was captured at dawn of April 16th while holding an outpost in a large barn. Outnumbered by the Germans who assaulted the Yank positions with Panzerfausts, hand grenades, and a miniature flame thrower which set the barn's hay on fire, the doughs had no alternative but to surrender.

The Germans were sighted by 2/Lt. Kleber Trigg of Bastrop, Texas, from Cannon Company's observation post 500 yards back. Trigg called for battery fire and 10 direct hits on the barn were made. Men were seen to run out, hands overhead, and it was thought the Krauts wanted to throw in the sponge. A German civilian was dispatched to the barn under a white flag to instruct the enemy soldiers to come in or be blasted to bits.

The German returned with the information that the men with upraised hands were American prisoners and that the Nazis were forcing them to stand there to prevent further firing.

Trigg then observed the Germans starting to march the Americans across a field to the rear. He ordered fire laid just over their heads. Then, the range lowered, the shells dropped in closer and closer to the Germans and their prisoners.

This breathless bit of sharpshooting worked. The Germans were driven back into the barn. An agreement was then made and the Yanks were freed.

2/Lt. Winfred D. Young of Joplin, Mo., and S/Sgt. James F. Wasson of Dennis, Kan., were also captured during this fighting. The two H Company men dismounted from their jeep to investigate German equipment scattered along an embankment. They walked up the embankment and directly into a Nazi machine gun nest.

Two of the German crew marched the Yanks back single file through a woods, with one German leading and the other in the rear. The Americans plotted in English. Then, at an auspicious moment, they turned on their captors. Using their steel helmets, they bashed the Nazis senseless, made their escape.

On April 18th and 19th the 320th crossed the Truman Bridge to occupy defensive positions east of the Elbe near Zerbst, easternmost town to be taken by the Ninth Army.

The Nazis were now in the last throes of a hopeless but desperate resistance. Luftwaffe bombers attempted on three nights to destroy the Truman Bridge at Barby. In this bombing one man from regimental Headquarters Company was killed, two wounded.

The Germans also tried to blow up the bridge by sending a seven-man squad of Naval Swimmers down the river with powerful demolitions. The swift current foiled the venture and one of the swimmers was captured by Pfc. Oswald D'Amadio of Bellville, N. J., and Erwin J. Danielack of Milwaukee, Company A doughs manning an outpost near the river.

This screwball Nazi was dressed in a tight-fitting rubber suit with a wool camouflage hood. His face was blackened and he was equipped with a pistol, knife, and waterproof watch.

The riflemen, seeing him emerge from the water and flit from tree to tree, opened fire, then captured him.

“We thought it was the Batman come to life,” said D'Amadio.

“Or a man from Mars,” added Danielack.

On April 21 the regiment was relieved. Though the men did not know it at the time, the European war for them was over. On April 25th the unit took over an occupational area in the vicinity of Hanover. The men were in these positions on V-E Day, May 9, 1945, the Victory in Europe Day they had fought so long and hard and well to bring about.

The 320th still is writing its story. Further chapters – perhaps combat chapters – will be written. In any event, men of the 320th, their esprit de corps tempered by the tragedy and the misery, the adventures and the gay times of the past year, will be bound to carry their record ever “FORWARD.”

IN MEMORIUM

In this long and agonizing trek from St. Lo through Bastogne to beyond the Elbe River hundreds of 320th soldiers have fallen, their blood soaking into the dust, or the mud, or the snow.

This brief and inadequate story of the regiment is dedicated to those of the fallen who never rose again, and to those who have been maimed in body or spirit for life.

There is a lasting monument to these glorious comrades in the hearts of those of us who remain. Let us fight in the time to come for a greater monument to them – an enduring peace, a peace which will make their supreme sacrifice for their country even more sacred.

AUTOGRAPHS

PRESIDENTIAL CITATION:

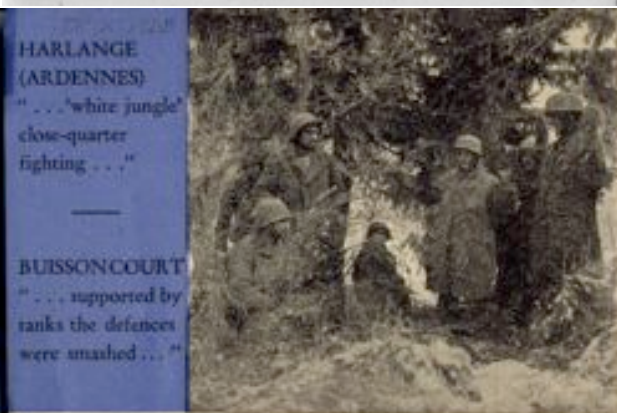
The First Battalion, 320th Infantry, and the 737th Tank Battalion have been cited by President Truman for the rescue of the Lost Battalion, of the 30th Div., at Mortain.

PHOTO SPACE



BASTOGNE
" . . . foxholes
were walled
with ice . . . "

TORIGNI-
SUR-VIRE
" . . . HE shells
were effectively
delivered . . . "



HARLANGE
(ARDENNES)
" . . . 'white jungle'
close-quarter
fighting . . . "

BUISSONCOURT
" . . . supported by
tanks the defences
were smashed . . . "



DOMBASSE
" . . . many
prisoners were
taken . . . "

BASTOGNE
" . . . A White
Hell . . . "



JUNE 1945

NAME

DATE ENLISTED

DATE ASSIGNED TO 320TH INFANTRY

BATTLE ACTIONS

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