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HELLCATS

12th

ARMORED DIVISION



RODERICK R. ALLEN
MAJOR GENERAL U.S.A.
COMMANDING

OPERATIONS of the 12TH ARMORED DIVISION

5 DECEMBER 1944 to 5 MAY 1945

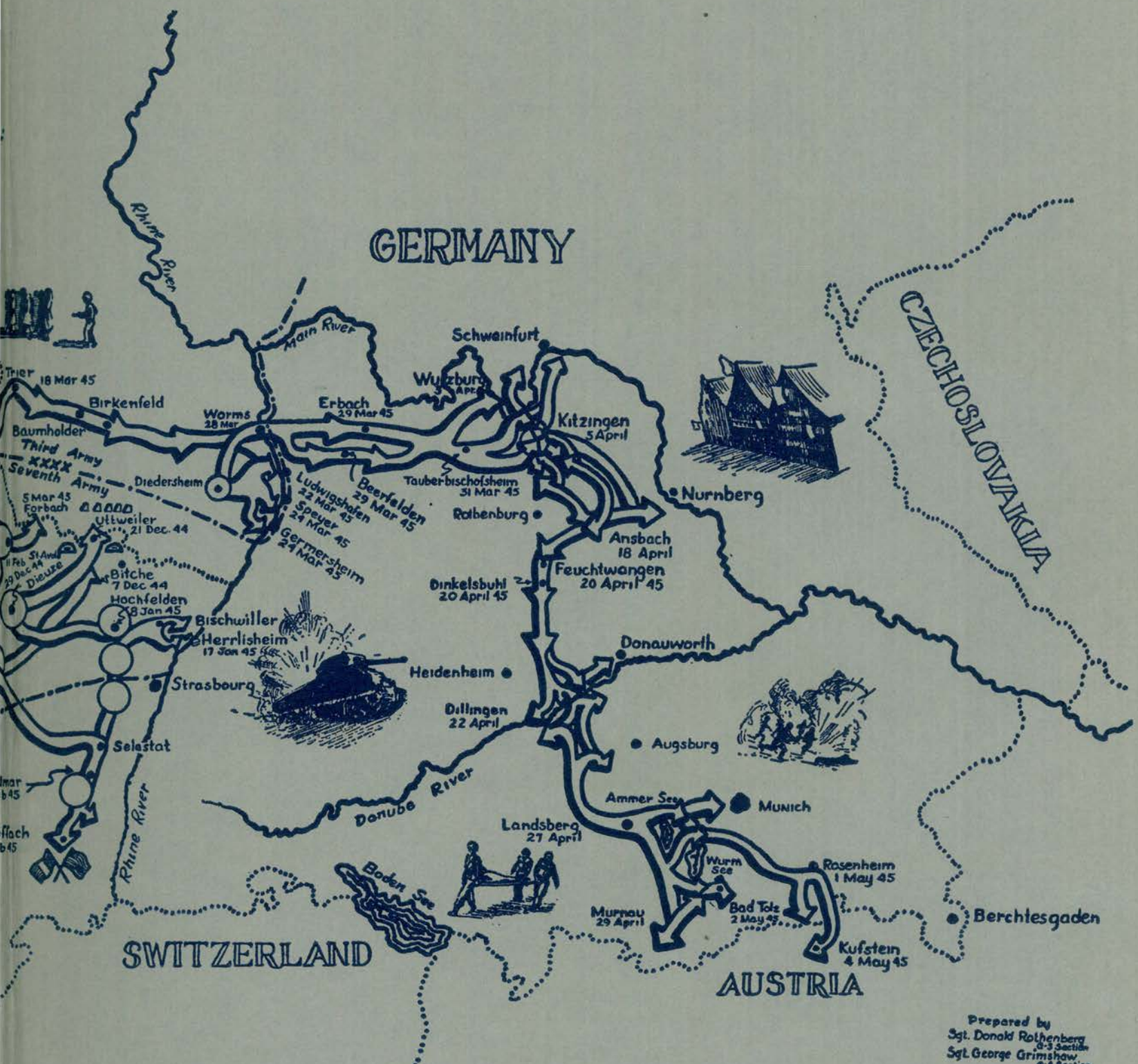
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G-3 INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SECTION

Scale 1 : 1,500,000 or 23.67 miles to the inch

0 8 16 25 50 75 100 125 150 MILES

LEGEND

Enemy Contact Points
Assembly Points
Army Boundries
National Bdrys
Rivers



Prepared by
Sgt. Donald Rothenberg
G-3 Section
Sgt. George Grimshaw
G-2 Section


12
HELLCATS

THE HELLCATS IN WORLD WAR II

A

HISTORY OF THE

UNITED STATES

TWELFTH ARMORED DIVISION



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15 SEPTEMBER, 1942–17 DECEMBER, 1945

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THIS book is respectfully dedicated to our comrades who didn't come back. Their courage and loyalty gave us the freedom we are now enjoying.

"I am the resurrection and the life saith the Lord. He that believeth in Me, 'tho he be dead, yet shall he live . . ."

Each of us who returned left a part of our lives in the scarred fields of France, Germany and Austria. We shall cherish forever our common bond with the white crosses.

"Oh death, where is thy sting—oh, grave, where is thy victory?"

These citizen soldiers asked no quarter and gave none. They fought their best. They died as heroes. As God's finger touched them, they slept.

"The journey he is on now is likewise into unknown territory—but there is no enemy there . . . . ."



It would be impossible to tell the full story of the deeds and heroism of men of the 12th Armored Division during their five months of unflagging combat against the Germans. Every officer and enlisted man in the division performed heroically in forming a combat team feared by our enemies and respected by our allies.

Many of our comrades were left along the way, from the Maginot Line to Austria. To the memory of those who gave their lives that the enemy in Europe might be defeated, let us dedicate these pages. May those gallant dead live here as they will live forever in the hearts of those who fought beside them.

We know not what we shall be called upon to do in the future, but we do know that, whatever our mission may be, it will be accomplished with the same magnificent fighting spirit which has given this division a record of achievement equalled by few. Nothing can stop us; little can delay us.

RODERICK R. ALLEN
Major General, Commanding

Draft of Charter

We, members and ex-members of the Twelfth Armored Division, hereby mutually agree to unite and associate ourselves as an association, and for such purpose we hereby make, execute and adopt the following articles:

Art. 1. The name of this association shall be **"THE HELLCATS"**.

Art. 2. The period of the existence and the duration of the life of this association shall be perpetual.

Art. 3. The principal office of this association shall be the domicile or office address of the duly elected Secretary or at such other place as is or may be decided by the Executive Council.

Art. 4. The seal of this association shall be THE HELLCAT.

Art. 5. The objects and purpose of this Association shall be:

a. To unite fraternally and for mutual benefit, protection, improvement and association of members and former members of the Twelfth Armored Division.

b. To foster and cultivate the social, educational, and business relations of the members; to broaden their interests in the pursuit of their occupations and professions; and to improve their standards of officiency and productivity.

c. To encourage among the members closer personal acquaintance and a friendly spirit of mutual cooperation.

d. To gather, receive and disseminate such information as may seem helpful to the members; to interchange ideas in rendering mutual assistance and to provide helpful vocational advice and guidance.

e. To forward and promote the general welfare and prosperity of the members and to improve by any and all lawful and honorable means their status and condition.

f. To encourage the promotion and establishment of subsidiary local groups of the Twelfth Armored Division to improve, maintain and conduct club and recreational facilities and reading rooms for the members and their friends.

g. To invest or reinvest surplus funds in such securities or properties as the Executive Council may from time determine.

h. To publish and circulate any publication or periodical decided upon by the Executive Council.

i. To assist in any other matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the members and for the highest order of American citizenship.

Art. 6. The business and prudantial affairs of this association shall be managed and controlled by the Executive Council.

Art. 7. The annual convention of the association will be arranged and planned by the Executive Council. The vote in the election of officers and council shall be by ballot, and the election may be conducted in such manner and form as may be provided by the by-laws. The officers and council will hold their offices for one year and until their successors are elected.

Art. 8. These articles may be changed, altered or amendet at any meeting of fhe Executive Council, and approved by the majority of the members present at the following convention.

Art. 9. The names and places of residence and business of all members will be published in a directory to be published annually or as directed by the Executive Council.

Art. 10. The annual dues for the first year will be one dollar ($ 1.00) thereafter the dues or subscription will be at such rate as determined by the Executive Council.

Art. 11. The fellowing officers will be elected by a majority vote of the members present, and shall serve for one year, or until the next election:

a. President.

b. Vice-President. There shall be three vice presidents; one shall be an officer or ex-officer and the other two shall be enlisted or ex-enlisted men.

c. Treasurer.

d. Secretary.

e. Executive Council. Each battalion and separate company or similar unit shall elect one representative to serve on the executive council; he may be either commissioned or enlisted, or ex-commissioned or enlisted.

Art. 12. **Duties:**

a. **President** - The President shall preside at all meetings of the executive council, and shall act as temporary chairman at, and call to order all meetings at conventions. He shall have general management of the affairs of the association and perform all the duties incidental to his office.

b. **Vice-Presidents** - The vice president shall assist the president in the performance of his duties, and in his absence or incapacity, perform the duties of that officer. The president shall designate them as first assistant, second assistant, and third assistant.

c. **Treasurer.** The treasurer shall have the care and custody of all the funds and securities of the association, and deposit the same in the name of the association in such bank or banks as the executive council may elect; he shall sign all checks, drafts, notes and orders for the payment of bills; he shall have his books ready for audit by the executive council or board appointed by them at any reasonable time; he shall give such bonds for the faithful performances of his duties as the executive council may determine.

d. **Secretary.** The secretary shall keep the minutes of the executive council, and also the minutes of the meetings at conventions; he shall attend to the giving and serving of all notices and announcements of the association; he shall have charge of such books and papers as may be directed by the executive council; he shall attend to such correspondence as may be assigned to him, and perform all the duties incidental to hisoffice. He shall also keep a record of all members of the association, their place of residence and business, and any other incidental information.

c. **Executive Council.** The executive council may adopt such rules and regulations for the conduct of their meetings and management of the affairs and activities of the association as they deem proper, and not inconsistent with the desires and wishes of the majority of the members of the association. The executive council hall meet whenever called together by the president upon due notice given to each member of said council. On the written request of any member of the executive council, the secretary shall call a special meeting. A quorum of two thirds of the members of the executive council is necessary for any meeting. The first meeting of the Executive Council will be held on 15 September 1945 at Heidenheim, Germany to determine where and when the first business meeting of the council will be held in United States.

Art. 13. It is agreed that all permanent employees of the association shall be disabled veterans and members of the association.

Art. 14. It is also agreed that the association can only be dissolved by a majority vote in person or by proxy.

Art. 15. No financial obligations will be incurred in excess of material reserves.

Art. 16. In order to be eligible for membership in the association, one must have been a bona fide member of the division for at least one day between the date of activation and deactivation.

THE HELLCATS

Wham! A German 88 answers from direction of pillbox; the shell landed only three yards from the Sherman—but the smart Hellcat tanker was already down the hatch.



IN ACTION!

Up and at 'em—and one more pillbox falls under the attack of the Hellcats





A HISTORY OF THE 12TH ARMORED DIVISION

Speed and devastating striking power, coupled with the gallant deeds and heroism of its personnel, wrote a glorious history for the 12th Armored "Hellcat" Division during its five months of constant combat against the enemy in Europe in World War II. "Speed" was its password to Fortress Europe.

Its activation on September 15, 1942, maneuvers, camp training, the boat trip over, the cold days of England, and the first hectic days of France—during those days the Hellcats gradually acquired the fighting spirit and esprit de corps that were to make the 12th one of the fastest striking, most feared divisions on the Western Front.

Highlights of the Hellcats' brilliant record, established during 151 fighting days when elements of the Division were in action continuously, were:

"Bloody Herrlisheim," a little town north of Strasbourg, where the Hellcats paid a terrific price for combat seasoning, being pitted against a numerically superior and well entrenched enemy, who eventually withdrew still puzzled by the tenacity of what he called the "Suicide Division."

Colmar, where the swiftness and adroitness of the 12th enabled it to snap the steel trap on the Colmar pocket, routing the Germans from their last stronghold in French territory.

Rhineland, when the Hellcats, as the "Mystery Division" in General Patton's Third Army, made their sensational dash from Trier to the Rhine across the Saar Palatinate in three days and nights.

Crossing the Rhine, when the Hellcats, after maintaining a blistering pace and catching the Germans flat-footed, crossed the historic river March 28, 1945.

Dillingen, where an armored force swept into the town with guns blazing, routed more than 1,000 disorganized defenders, shot up a retreating mechanized column, surged onto an all-important bridge, captured a handful of demolition men, and drove other Nazis away before the span could be blown.

Starnberg to Pfraundorf, when the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion established what is believed to be a ground force record for movement through enemy territory as it traveled the 60 miles between these two towns in less than nine hours.

Austria, which saw the end of a lightning thrust that carried the Hellcats from the Rhine to the Austrian border in 37 days in their last combat movement of the war.

While those are the highlights of the Hellcats' record, there were many other heroic deeds and daring accomplishments of both units and individuals in the 12th Armored Division. All combined, they stamped the Hellcats as an outfit that nothing could stop, a truly great fighting division.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

One of the first steps toward the organization of the 12th Armored was taken on July 6, 1942, when General Staff Corps officers selected for the Division began a one-month course of instruction at the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

This started the ball rolling, and cadre personnel soon arrived at the newly constructed Camp Campbell, straddling the Tennessee-Kentucky line. Receiving, housing, reclassifying, and organizing incoming personnel kept the cadres busy. The small neighboring towns of Clarksville, Tennessee, and Hopkinsville, Kentucky, offered little in the way of amusements. The next two months were highlighted by the first formal guard mount on August 17, the pre-activation training course, planning the obstacle course and dummy grenade courts, a 14-lecture orientation program, the extra-curriculum activity of picking a "name" for the division, and seemingly endless schools at night for officers.

ACTIVATION

The preliminaries culminated in the big event on September 15, 1942, for on that date the world at large and the U. S. Army in particular, recognized the 12th Armored as a full-fledged force, Major General Carlos Brewer, presided over the ceremony. Guests at the activation included Governor Keen Johnson of Kentucky.

The 12th Armored Division, at the time of its activation, consisted of the following elements:

Headquarters, 12th Armored Division
Headquarters Company, 12th Armored Division
43rd Armored Regiment
44th Armored Regiment
56th Armored Infantry Regiment
92nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion
119th Armored Engineer Battalion
493rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion
494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
495th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
82nd Armored Medical Battalion
Supply Battalion, 12th Armored Division
Headquarters, 12th Armored Division Trains
Headquarters Company, 12th Armored Division Trains
152nd Armored Signal Company
Service Company, 12th Armored Division

General Brewer, a Kentuckian and first commander of the division, soon started the intensive training program that he was to supervise until the 12th left for overseas two years later.

TRAINING

With filler replacements beginning to arrive on October 24, the Mobilization Training Program started on November 10. In the months that followed, the all-important "order of the day" was the welding of the various components into one efficiently functioning division, and the personnel buckled down to study this art of armored warfare.

It was during this period that the name "Hellcats," which was to be made famous and to be feared by the enemy on the battlefields of Europe, was selected by the division in a contest open to all personnel. The name was formally adopted on February 1, 1943.

Training was hard and oftentimes monotonous. The Kentucky weather was continually playing tricks. Camp Campbell was probably the only training camp in the world where a man could sink down in mud to his neck and still get dust blown in his eyes. Endless road marches, both by leg power and motor, helped keep men and machines in shape. "First echelon maintenance" was a favorite expression of commanders. Training was interspersed with a well patronized sports program. The parade ground served admirably for baseball. The Hellcat boxing team won laurels far and wide, and two members won fame in the National Golden Gloves tournament in Chicago.

On April 1, 1943, the 56th Armored Infantry Regiment and attached personnel, totaling 3,000 men, were sent on a special mission to guard the train trip of President Roosevelt. They covered the area from Tullahoma, Tennessee, to the Mississippi River. A super-radio net kept the doughs in touch with each other.

An indication of the courage that was to win many honors for Hellcats on the battlefields of Eu-

Fall of 1942—laying the groundwork for the 12th Armored Division



R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-D

HEADQUARTERS 12TH ARMORED DIVISION
Camp Campbell, Kentucky

September 15, 1942

GENERAL ORDERS)
:
NUMBER.....1)

SECTION I - ACTIVATION: PIC ltr Hq AGF, July 6, 1942, Subject: "Activation of 12th Armored Division", file 320.2/9 (Armd Force) (R) GNOPN (7-6-42) as amended, and auth Sect II, GO 54, Hq Armd Force, Sept 2, 1942 the 12th Armored Division, to consist of the elements listed below, is activated this date:

Headquarters, 12th Armored Division
Headquarters Company, 12th Armored Division
43rd Armored Regiment
44th Armored Regiment
56th Armored Infantry Regiment
92nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion
119th Armored Engineer Battalion
493rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion
494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
495th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
82nd Armored Medical Battalion
Supply Battalion, 12th Armored Division
Headquarters, 12th Armored Division Trains
Headquarters Company, 12th Armored Division Trains
152nd Armored Signal Company
Service Company, 12th Armored Division

SECTION II - ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND: Having reported for duty in compliance with Par 1, SO 223, War Department, August 19, 1942, and under authority contained in Par 6, AR 600-20, December 20, 1940, the undersigned hereby assumes command of the 12th Armored Division.

SECTION III - COMMAND, GENERAL, SPECIAL, AND PERSONAL STAFF: Announcement is made of the following Commanders, General, Special, and Personal Staff Officers:

Commanding General: Major General CARLOS BREWER, 03539, USA
Chief of Staff: Colonel JOHN L. RYAN, JR., 016451, GSC
Asst. Chief of Staff, G-1: Major HUGH MAIR, 0175082, GSC
Asst. Chief of Staff, G-2: Lt Col NEIL S. EDMOND, 06806, GSC
Asst. Chief of Staff, G-3: Lt Col RICHARD B. EVANS, 015217, GSC
Asst. Chief of Staff, G-4: Lt Col CHARLES F. HOWARD, 017270, GSC
Combat Command "A" - Brig Gen THOMAS J. CAMP, 016033, USA
Combat Command "B" - Brig Gen HOWARD L. PECKHAM, 012058, USA
Artillery Commander - Col BERNARD F. LUEBBERMANN, 015621, FA
Trains Commander - Col JOHN P. SCOTT, 08254, Cav
Adjutant General - Major EDWIN M. CONNELL, 0378900, AGD
Inspector General - Lt Col CECIL R. HILL, 0243924, IGD
Surgeon - Lt Col JONATHAN M. RIGDON, 017981, MC
Dental Surgeon - Major CLIFFORD C. PHEANIS, 0231502, DC
Veterinarian - Captain ELMER L. METCALFE, 0346597, VC
Quartermaster - Major TRAVIS T. BROWN, 019574, QMC
Finance Officer - Captain JOHN E. KIRK, 0359341, FD
Provost Marshal and
Headquarters Commandant - Captain WELDON M. MILLER, 0291139, CMP
Chemical Warfare Officer - Captain JULIEN D. SAKS, 0312729, CWS
Signal Officer - Major CARL H. STURIES, 017192, SC
Chaplain - Captain SILAS E. DECKER, 020104
Judge Advocate - Lt Col DAVID HOTTENSTEIN, 015056, JAGD
Aides to Major General BREWER - 1st Lt LAWSON W. TURNER, 0454216, Inf
2nd Lt CHARLES C. CLAYTON, 0446021, Inf
Aides to Brig General CAMP - Captain WILL H. KELLEY, 0363919, Cav
1st Lt WILLIAM F. MURRAY, 0396585, FA

Carlos Brewer

CARLOS BREWER,
Major General, U.S.A.
Commanding.

R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-D



Routine marches thru the snow—typical training winter of 1942

rope was recognized on April 5, when First Sergeant John J. Desmoni, Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 43rd Armored Regiment, was awarded the Soldier's Medal for heroism in rescuing an officer from drowning on March 12 in Little West Fork Creek, Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

In April the Hellcats scored two "firsts"—the first formal retreat formation was held on April 25 and the first overnight division exercise began on April 27.

Following the transfer of the IV Armored Corps, including the Hellcats, on July 15, from the Armored Command to the Second Army, the Hellcats took part in a IV Armored Corps two-day problem on the Camp Campbell reservation July 16-17.

High spots of August were two exercises readying the division for the coming Tennessee maneuvers. The first was a five-day "river crossing" exercise staged on the Cumberland. The second was a four-day field exercise involving air-ground training staged on the reservation. At the conclusion of both, the general feeling was summarized in the expression that "combat couldn't be that goddam bad."

The division was on maneuvers when its first anniversary rolled around on September 15. No one shed any tears at leaving the dust of Camp Campbell behind.

MANEUVERS

On September 3, long columns of tanks, half-tracks, peeps, trucks, and command cars began to snake out of Kentucky toward the crowded Tennessee maneuver area. Division strength was 961 officers, 53 warrant officers, and 12,030 enlisted men. The Division CP was established at Horn Springs, near Lebanon, Tennessee.

Maneuvers lasted from September 6 to November 1. They included eight operations, and the Hellcats, celebrating their first anniversary among their baptism of maneuver experience, battled difficult tasks, severe weather, and adverse terrain to gain a reputation as a swift, rugged outfit.

The two armies. "Blue" and "Red," did not always confine battling to the maneuver area. Nashville's teeming streets served as the Saturday night battleground. Trying to find a hotel bed or a decent meal in those days was practically impossible. Often the Hellcats stayed in their assigned areas over week-ends and played poker, read, or slept, rather than brave overcrowded Nashville.

The Hellcats came out of the maneuvers in fine shape, with an undamaged reputation, something many a division couldn't claim. Everyone agreed that the problems ended at a good time—in the fall. The Hellcats had only pity for the division which was to succeed them for maneuvers during the winter months. It was already getting cold in October.

About November 12, the division closed the Tennessee maneuver chapter of its history and turned to the future, which included the immediate problems of a sweeping reorganization of the division and moving to a new home station.

REORGANIZATION

The division went under the knife at its new station, Camp Barkley, Texas—an operation designed to make it a better fighting machine. Most striking innovation was the elimination of regimental organizations, for which were substituted three tank and three armored infantry battalions of increased size.

Battalions were made self-sustaining. The supply battalion was eliminated, while the reconnaissance battalion was replaced by a squadron of mechanized cavalry. As a result of these changes, new unit designations were established, and some units and personnel were transferred from the regiments. This was the new line-up:

The 43rd and 44th Armored Regiments became the 43rd, 44th, 23rd, 714th, and 779th Tank Battalions. The 43rd, 44th, and 23rd Tank Battalions remained as part of the division, while the 714th went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and the 779th went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, as separate tank battalions.

The 56th Armored Infantry Regiment became the 56th, 66th, and 17th Armored Infantry Battalions.

The Maintenance Battalion became the 134th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion.

The 92nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion became the 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized.

The Supply Battalion was transferred intact to the Second Army, and the Division Service Company was disbanded.

A Reserve Command, a band, and a Military Police Platoon were established.

Part of the 119th Armored Engineer Battalion was redesignated as a separate Treadway Bridge Company, which was relieved from the division.

NEW HOME STATION

The citizens of West Texas said the weather was very strange for November, the month in which the division took over Camp Barkley from the 11th Armored Division. When it wasn't raining, it was getting ready to do so. Everyone agreed that rain was fine, except when one had to be out in it. Texans who were members of the division took a terrific ribbing from their friends about the Texas weather.

The Texans, however, always had an excuse, and any comment would elicit new tales of Texas weather, or Texas exploits. One doughboy from Waco, Texas, became vociferous so often about his state that a buddy from Nebraska invited the Waco private to go home on furlough to Nebraska with him and look over a good state. Since maneuvers were over and furloughs were to be had for the asking, the Waco man went.

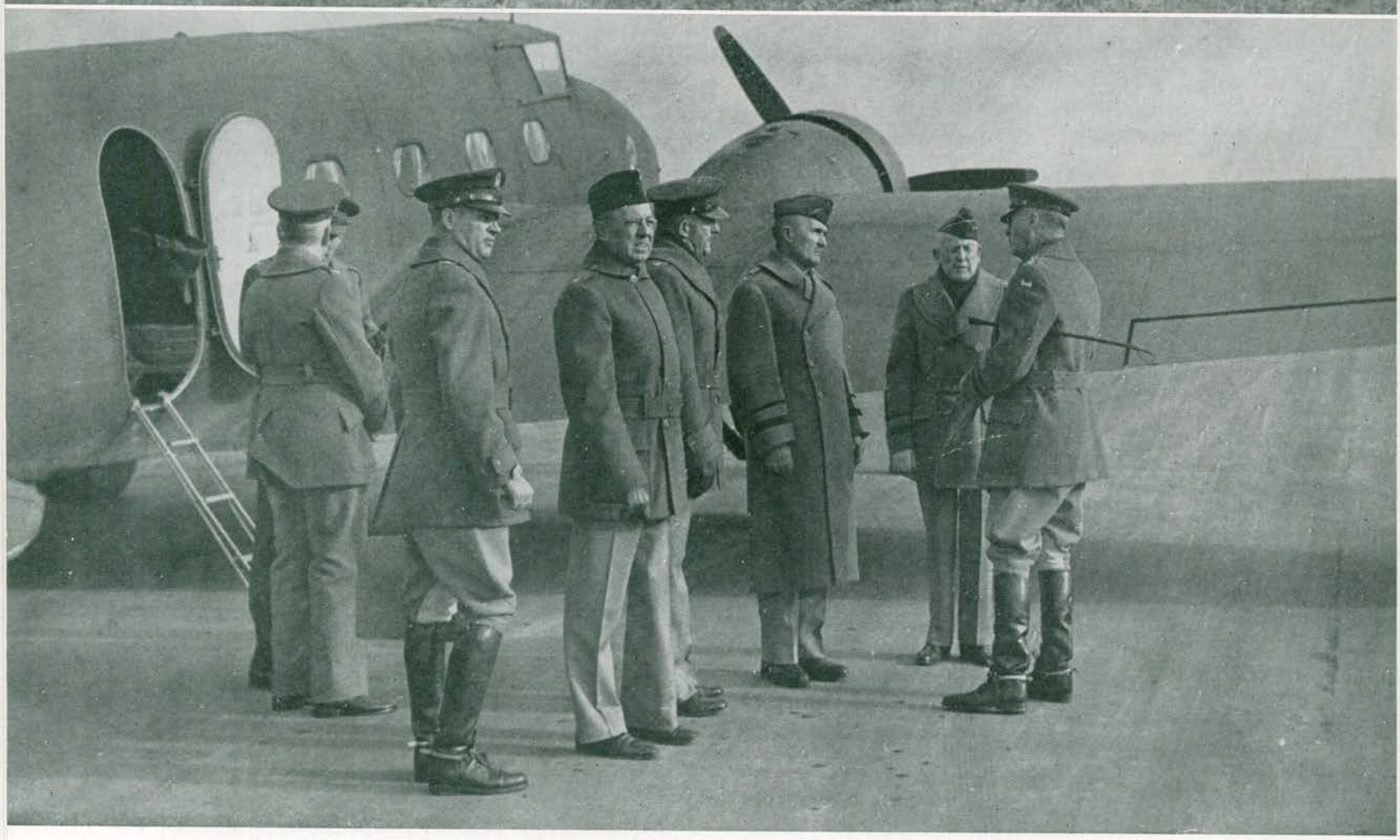
Upon arrival in Omaha, the Texan was shown all the sights but had nothing good to say about anything, except that "Texas has a larger or better one." The Nebraskan became provoked and decided to fix the Texan. He put six snapping turtles in the Texan's bed and was present when the Texan turned down his sheets. The Waco private exclaimed, "What's going on?" The Nebraskan calmly replied, "Those are Nebraskan bed bugs." "Well, well," said the Texas, adjusting his glasses for a better look, "the little critters just been born, ain't they?"

A division dismounted review on December 31 brought the year 1943 to a close for the Hellcats.

Assembly of troops—Camp Campbell, Kentucky







Inspections by Big Brass were frequent

★





Top: Retreat ceremony at Camp Barkley, Texas
Bottom: First Echelon Maintenance was a daily duty

1944

Occasional field problems now began to grow more frequent. Thirty-mile marches were the order of the day. The infantry will long remember one such march, performed in a howling sleet storm which iced all roads and made marching a treacherous task. The wind lashed faces and the sleet froze eyelids together. Again came the cry, "Combat could never be like this."

Night problems in attack and defense appeared on the menu more and more. February saw all units on weekly night maneuvers on the reservation. Special emphasis was placed on night driving, night scouting and patrolling, night infiltration and night raiding.

Contingents of Hellcats were sent to Fort Bliss, Texas, for intensive training in anti-aircraft firing. During all this time the division kept filling overseas calls for officers and men. When a soldier went to his bunk at night, he could never be sure his bunk mate didn't have orders to catch a boat at some port of embarkation. A continued reshuffling was in process. Hordes of men from other units would arrive to become Hellcats as experienced men packed their barracks bags for "secret assignments."

It wasn't all work and no play. Trips to nearby Abilene, Big Springs, Fort Worth, Dallas, and San Angelo attracted many Hellcats. The division's special services section came up with top-notch revues, dances, and even a rodeo to add to the off-hour pleasures. USO facilities in Abilene were always well patronized. The large number of attractive Abilene girls helped to make the town more enjoyable. Here again was a small town which nearly burst its seams on week-ends. Shows, cafes, hotels were always jammed. And, alas, the damn town was dry! Not a liquor store in the whole county, the Hellcats learned to their great sorrow.

On March 8, the 44th Tank Battalion was relieved from assignment to the 12th and transferred to a port of embarkation for overseas duty. The hole was patched capably by the 714th Tank Battalion, transferred to the 12th from Fort Jackson, South Carolina. It was a homecoming for the 714th, as it had been formed from Hellcat personnel, the 3rd Battalion of the 44th Armored Regiment, after the Tennessee maneuvers.

Early spring saw complicated firing problems on the reservation. Mock villages were attacked to gain knowledge of fighting in towns and villages. In June the division was tested by the War Department—or at least partially so. Just as everything was going great guns, Corps Headquarters decided the time was ripe for a garrison inspection. Because the inspection team was quite miffed at the appearance of the divisional area, the division was ordered to return from the all-important test and to "tidy up." If words could have killed, the whole of Corps Headquarters would have been buried that night—without military honors. Earmarking themselves "the Mop and Broom Brigade," the men spent many tiring hours cleaning the dust from between the cracks of barracks floors.

Nevertheless, another opportunity presented itself for the Hellcats to show their stuff, and on July 7 the division was on its way to Camp Bowie, Texas, for a re-test. This time the division literally "left no stone unturned" and emerged from the test with flying colors.

READY TO GO

Upon their return to Camp Barkley on July 16th, the men resumed their garrison duties and wondered "when is this going to end?" On July 20 a readiness date was received. Disposition of dependents, allotments, wills, insurance, and other provisions to protect and care for loved ones now became the order of the day.

During this period the division was buried beneath crates and boxes designed to house the equipment for an overseas trip. Other signs forecasting the impending overseas shipment were soon entered on the division's journal. On July 28, hospital patients were transferred out of the division; on August 8, movement orders came from Washington, and the telltale cancellation of all leaves and furloughs followed on August 12.

Major General Carlos Brewer, who had commanded the division and directed its training ever since its activation, was honored by a Division Review on August 15, 1944, the day before he relinquished command of the Hellcats to Major General Douglass T. Greene, who assumed command the next day.

An advance detachment of Hellcats left Camp Barkley for Camp Shanks, New York, under the command of Brigadier General Riley F. Ennis, who had just been presented his general's star in a special ceremony on August 25.

Security was the keynote of all preparations. Extreme precaution was taken regarding mail. Officers already had received training in mail censorship, a function which they began to perform upon arrival at the Port of Embarkation.

All divisional shoulder patches were removed, all markings on vehicles were painted over, and the division took on a neuter gender. Hellcats weren't supposed to know where they were going, where they had been, or who they were.

A three-day train trip to Shanks took the Hellcats through the South, the Midwest, into Canada, through West Point, New York, and finally to Camp Shanks. A standing joke on this trip was for one Hellcat to tell another that, during his military career, he "had gone through West Point . . . on a train." Small fortunes were won and lost on card

and dice games on the trip. The first train arrived at Camp Shanks on September 8, and by September 13 the whole division had arrived.

Physical examinations, seemingly endless inspections of equipment, talks on how to escape German prison camps, exhibits of captured enemy equipment all came fast and furious. All during this period, the division theoretically had no name. It did have a number, and woe to the man who let it slip that he was a member of the 12th Armored Division. Twelve-hour passes to New York City could be had occasionally, a life-saver in this nightmarish routine. These short passes probably were the result of a school of thought which held that a man can't get too drunk on a mere 12-hour pass, especially since he must spend a hour going and coming. That theory, however, was shot to hell the first night.

Within a week after its arrival at Camp Shanks, the 12th Armored saw the transfer of its second commanding general, General Greene, who was ordered to Washington on September 17.

September 19 was a day of double meaning for the Hellcats, for on that date the last train departed for the Port of Embarkation, and Major General Roderick R. Allen assumed command of the division. Most Hellcats will remember, not the two mentioned events, but the fact that everything they owned had to be carried on their back for about a mile from the train to the waiting ferry. Hernias cracked right and left, but the Hellcats were on their way.

The ships were of all shapes and sizes, from Liberties to big passenger liners like the EMPRESS OF AUSTRALIA, capable of carrying 5,000 troops, plus equipment. To the rousing strains of "Over There," Hellcats, munching on Red Cross doughnuts, struggled in single file up the gangplank. "EGGHEAD," someone read from the passenger list. "John J.," someone retorted to gain his admittance to the gangplank. Hellcats were herded through the narrow companion ways down into the hole and heaved into cots three high. Gas mask, overcoat, dispatch case, musette bag, carbine, duffel bag—what a relief it was to wriggle from that load. It was hot, and the Hellcats awaited their sailing with anxiety. Few of them came on deck to throw the "Lady of Liberty" a farewell kiss. For security reasons it was necessary to remain below decks until the ship cleared New York harbor.

Days at sea were fairly uneventful, except for a few cases of seasickness. The convoy flagship was the GENERAL TASKER H. BLISS. Around it, at thousand-yard intervals in four long columns, were numerous freighters, transports, and tankers. Far out on the watery horizon were the destroyer escorts, a reassuring sight in those days of increased U-boat activity and sinkings.

For eleven days Hellcats watched with interest the formations of the convoy change at the Commodore's signal. Sunny afternoons found the decks crowded with troops—letter writers, readers, medicine-ball players, music lovers listening to recordings, and just plain sun-lovers looking wistfully out to sea. Hellcats found sitting or sleeping upon their life jackets got a good chewing out from their superiors. Squeaky voices would come over the ship's microphones: "Sweepers, man your brooms . . ." or "All troops in 6 Dog form mess line on starboard deck," or, "First sitting for officers' mess." For approximately eleven days Hellcats worked in the gun tubs as emergency guncrews, swept decks, got sick and recovered, played cards, shot dice, pulled guard, slept and ate. The chow was none too good on most ships, especially the British vessels.

After crossing the 30th Meridian and entering the European Theater of Operations on September 27, the division arrived at the Liverpool and Southhampton areas. Most of the Hellcats boarded trains for a quiet ride through the lovely green English countryside to the vicinity of Hungerford. Others went to Chilbolton. General Allen and his two aides joined the division on October 5, and the division moved by motor to Tidworth Bararcks, in southern England, near Salisbury and Andover. Tidworth was known as the spawning ground of American armored divisions. Most of them had been based there before the Normandy landings.

The Hellcats' advance party, which had been near Cherbourg, France, was recalled to England. It brought word that France was "shot to hell," and that the country was cold and muddy, but—members of the party had discovered a new drink called Calvados.

Tidworth was strictly no bed of roses. The infantry, under Col. John Evans, was quartered in tents on a muddy plain. Much of Col. Gildart's artillery was on "Windmill Hill," which was aptly named. Rumors were flying throughout this period in Hellcat history. It was the concensus of opinion among the men that Cherbourg was filled up with too large a volume of supplies and too many troops, therefore the Hellcats had been diverted to England until the jam was eased. However, all of the division's vehicles had gone to France, where General Patton had quickly requisitioned them. High sources said the division would draw its vehicles in England and would be ready to sail for France within six weeks.

Vehicles and other supplies began to pour in from large warehouses scattered over the English countryside. Peeps, 6x6's, half-tracks, and M-7's began to roll into Tidworth with regularity. They were immediately checked and made combat serviceable. Above all, the sight of Ford tank motors brought

great delight to all and especially to motor sergeants and drivers who well remembered the old radial motors.

Gradually life at Tidworth became more comfortable. The acquisition of stoves warmed the tents, which previously had been uncomfortably cold in the raw English climate. The only requirement necessary for enough coal or wood to provide a warm evening of reading or letter writing was a moonlight requisition on the mess hall's fuel supply.

Frequent forty-eight hour passes to London gave Hellcats an opportunity to check all the rumors they had heard concerning after-dark activity at Picadilly Circus. All rumors proved to be true! Such trips acquainted Hellcats with English pounds, shillings, pence, and unchilled beer. Occasional trips to nearby Andover and Salisbury helped the weeks to fly by. Even the censors were too busy with their newly found duties to complain above a young roar.

The new commanding general bucked up the Hellcats with a fighting lecture which ended with a ringing "Kill the b.....ds!" Warning orders for the division's move to France were received on October 30; and, on November 9, General Allen and his staff, besides personnel of the Forward Echelon and Division Headquarters Company, departed for the marshalling area by motor transportation, preparatory to the departure for the continent.

The rest of the division left by motor and train for Dorchester, for Weymouth and for Southhampton to board LST's and other craft for the Channel crossing. The big rumor at this time was that the Hellcat Division was slated to be a member of Lt. General Simpson's Ninth Army. Orders assigning the division to the Ninth Army came through on November 13, from 12th Army Group. Meanwhile, the boats were plowing through the choppy Channel to Le Havre, where the Hellcats first saw a town that had come under the sights of Allied bombing planes. The rubble of Le Havre's harbor brought a sharp realization to the Hellcats that war is hell for civilians, too. As the LST's came in to disgorge their troops, the score of the Army-Notre Dame football game was announced; Army had walloped the Fighting Irish 52 to 0.

By November 17, all units of the division, except elements of the 134th Ordnance Battalion and the 119th Engineer Battalion, were established in their bivouac areas in and around the village of Auffay, France, and by November 22 the entire division was in bivouac in that general area.

Few Hellcats will forget the ride by truck from Le Havre to the Auffay area. A three to ten-hour wait for trucks at Le Havre gave the Hellcats time to looked over the bombed-out city. Frenchmen approached the groups and asked for cigarettes. Only one French girl appeared during the entire waiting period, so French learned in American schoolrooms was thrown instead at the multitude of kids who wanted "ceegareets pour papa."

Hellcats learned that not all Frenchmen regarded them as heroes when one aged Le Havre resident cursed them in very understandable English for allowing Allied planes to bomb his city just because there were a couple of thousand German soldiers in it.

The ride by truck to the bivouac area seemed to take hours. A bitter cold wind and rain made matters worse. "Bivouac areas" turned out to be just that—big fields. Pup tents sprang up like magic. Straw was requisitioned from nearby French farmhouses to make the ground more endurable. The next day marked the start of a campaign to requisition barns, spare bedrooms, homes, empty buildings, etc., in which to house the Hellcats. The wet ground was popular with no one.

Many lasting friendships were made between Hellcats and the French citizens of the Auffay area. The "Frogs," though very few people called them that in World War II, were simple, thrifty, and shrewd farmers. They were tied to the land and loved the life. Delicious cider and wine came from their apple and grape orchards. Many a Hellcat was invited to share a drink of Calvados with French friends.

A warning order to be ready to move in the near future was received by the division on November 25, the same day on which three Germans were taken prisoner by the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion near Aumay. These Krauts were part of the large number of ex-Wehrmacht soldiers who had donned civilian dress and were trying to make their way back to Germany after having been bypassed by fast-moving Allied forces.

On November 27, the division was released from the Ninth Army and assigned to the Seventh Army, commanded by Lt. General Alexander Patch, as part of the Sixth Army Group. This move came as a big surprise to everyone, since an advance party of officers already had journeyed to the front to observe combat techniques and tactics with the 2nd Armored Division, a part of the Ninth Army. Furthermore, an advance detachment already was in Maastricht, Holland, to prepare for the 12th arrival there.

Notwithstanding these facts, two days later the approach to combat, via Soissons and Laimont, was made—not towards the Ninth Army, but towards the Seventh Army—to Luneville. The movement from the Auffay area to Luneville constituted one of the longest motor marches the Hellcats had experienced—over 300 miles. But roads were good, and the Hellcats were getting a tourist's view of World War I battlefields at Soissons, Verdun, and Rheims, besides an opportunity to whistle at lovely French girls.



Luneville—in peacetimes

A sobering thought was provided, however, by the large number of knocked-out U. S. Army tanks and vehicles that were visible alongside the roads. Everyone kept a weather eye trained on the sky as a precaution against a swift German fighter-bomber getting in the first blow at the Hellcats' solar plexus.

At 2030, December 2, the division column closed in the assigned area at Luneville and billeted in former French Army barracks. A close inspection of both men and equipment was immediately ordered. The front lines were awfully near. Luneville had been the scene of one of the largest tank battles of the war, and the fields outside the town were littered with burned-out tank hulks, both German and American.

General Allen received, and passed on to the troops, a commendation from the Commanding General, OISE section, on the superior performance of convoy operation from Auffay to Luneville.

At one minute after midnight, December 5, the 12th was officially assigned to the XV Corps; and on the same day, orders were received to move from Luneville to Kirrberg. Exceptions to this move were the 12th's three armored field artillery battalions—the 493rd and 494th went to an area near Drulingen to support the 44th Infantry Division, and the 495th moved to the vicinity of Le Petite Pierre to support the 100th Infantry Division.

The first taste of Jerry was provided by a single Kraut plane which strafed an artillery column on the way up from Luneville. The pilot, however, scored only close misses. On the journey to the front, Hellcats began to see dead German soldiers beside the roads, a sight which was to become so familiar in later months that little thought would be given to it.

Hellcats soon learned what driving under blackout conditions meant. Up to a point approximately three to five miles from the front lines, all vehicular traffic was restricted to the use of "cat eyes" only —those tiny slivers of white in the headlights. Vehicles had to follow each other very closely in order not to get lost.

Credit for sending the Hellcats' first message to the Wehrmacht went to the Number 2 Gun section, Battery "A," 493rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion. This message was the first shot fired in combat by the 12th Armored. This round was fired



Allied Air might by-passed this German Cathedral

at 1638 nours, December 5, 1944, from a position near Weisslingen, France, in reinforcing the fires of the 217th Field Artillery Battalion. That first night of combat was one of tension and horror for the artillery "combat virgins." Butterflies were in every stomach. The deadly chant of enemy artillery fire was heard all night as the Krauts returned the Hellcats' first message. Mud, rain, and then snow made everyone miserable. Foxholes quickly filled with slimy mud. Tanks and trailers bogged down, roads were impassable, wire communications went out, and the blackest of blackouts was in its full flower. At last, the Hellcats were pitted against the "Supermen." It was a good thing for them, however, that the Wehrmacht didn't know how much the Hellcats were worried and confused during those first hectic nights on the front.

On December 6, Rear Echelon and units of CCB and CCR moved from Luneville to an area near Hellering. The Division Administrative Center was set up in the village of Lutzelbourg, where bookkeeping and administration chores were handled.

Combat Command A was alerted on December 6 to reconnoiter routes into the zone of action and to begin relief of the 4th Armored Division. Its mission was to support the attack of the 26th Infantry Division by fire, or by advancing with the 26th if the situation warranted. Relief of the 4th Armored Division was completed by 0600, December 8, with the 12th's command Post moving to Domfessel. The division prepared to attack on Corps orders, to breach the Maginot Line, and to continue advancing to the Siegfried Line.

When word was handed down to the Hellcats that they were to relieve the 4th Armored Division, more stomachs rumbled. The famed "Fourth" was known throughout the whole ETO as the cream of American Armored Divisions. For months it had been the spearhead for Patton's Third Army. Its accomplishments were many and the Krauts had a most healthy respect for the 4th. The Hellcats theorized that "Mr." Eisenhower must regard the 12th as "pretty hot stuff"—or else he was running out of divisions. Since he had more divisions in reserve, Hellcats settled for the first theory.

As the Hellcats moved to complete their relief of the 4th Armored, they saw, for the first time, full-scale artillery bombardments, directed by Cub planes, and artillery support by tanks. They had only to listen to their radios to pick up radio procedure unlike any they had ever heard before, and definitely different from any they had learned from their Communication Officers. Such items as "George, this is Joe. Watch that bastard near that big barn. Better move up about 200 yards near that small hill. I'll join you." "Okay, Joe, but keep me covered. That's big stuff they're throwing today!" Or, a twist of the radio dial (in reality, the devices had push-buttons) would bring in some interesting battle action comments between forward observers in cub planes and FO's on the ground. Let the infantry catch a couple of Kraut rounds, and the FO's would immediately hear: "Get some counter-battery on those bastards."

Combat Command R and CCB moved from Kirrberg into positions in the line, with the former located near Rahling. Thus, the division's sector was split into two parts: CCR on the right, CCA on the left, with CCB in reserve. The three armored field artillery battalions returned to division control and were ready to begin supporting the action.

Division headquarters, located at Domfessel, also participated in the action. On December 12, the enemy poured intermittent artillery fire on the town during the early morning. By 1600 that day, orders were given to clear the town, and it was evacuated. Lt. Col. Richard King's 152nd Signal Company moved to the outskirts, taking position on a rain and wind-swept hill, where it operated in mud that came to the men's boot tops.

The 12th Armored's actions during December were divided into two phases—the first fight took place on December 7-15 and the second, December 19-25. In the initial encounter the Hellcats were opposed by elements of the 111th Panzer Division, which was fighting a delaying action. These elements were supported by two artillery regiments—artillery from the Fortress of Bitche to the east, and long-range railway artillery, thought to be in both the Maginot and Siegfried Lines.

Three task forces, composed of infantry-tank teams, were formed, and CCA launched the first attack on a limited objective at 2000, December 8; its mission was to seize high ground northeast of Singling, a small provincial French village. The attack, which began in earnest the following day, resulted in the capture of two towns and an enemy barracks.

Singling was captured 45 minutes after the attack began, and the high ground beyond the town was occupied. Another task force seized the slightly larger village of Bining and advanced to a point halfway through Bining barracks, an enemy military installation. On the following day it captured the commandant's flat at Bining barracks. Other forces attacked and took Rohrbach, then routed a delaying enemy force and occupied high ground north of that city.

The Hellcats soon learned one thing about after-battle results. They had to quickly pick the homes or stores which they intended to use for supply or command installations, else the hordes of rear-echelon organizations which follow up the front-line troops would swarm in like locusts to requisition every available space for sleeping or working areas.

During these first battle actions, the Hellcats

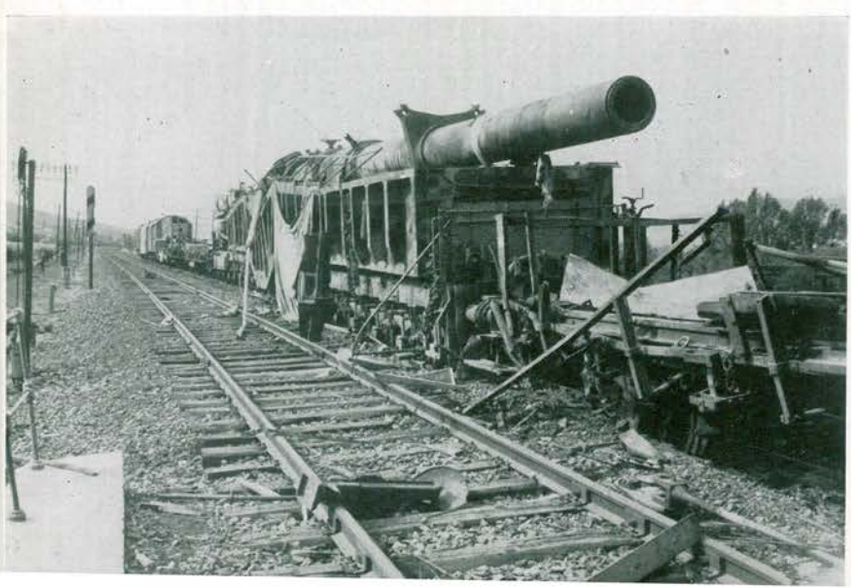


One of the 12th Armored Division's first captives—in Houffbach, France.

learned as much as they had in three years of training, or so they believed. Attacks went smoothly for first events, but it was not all easy going by any means. Although CCB did not participate as a whole force in the first action, the members of B Company, 56th AIB, well remember the event. The doughfeet were to support the actions of the 23rd Tank Battalion in an attack. In this action the doughs rode on, and walked by, the tanks. A Kraut artillery barrage rained the dreaded "time fire" from which there was no protection. Casualties were numerous in this attack, and from that time on many doughboys wanted to stay as far away as possible from the tanks during an attack, in the belief that the "iron horses" drew enemy fire.

The weather experienced at this time was something to write home about. Sunny France had turned into a wet, cold quagmire of mud. An old French farmer near the Maginot Line advanced his theory on the weather: "When soldiers come, the rain comes." Hellcats were always either muddy or cold, or both. Snow made its appearance during December, also. Tanks were whitewashed to blend with the white flakes.

A captured German railway gun—one of the enemy's most formidable weapons.



Members of Able Battery, 495th Artillery Battalion, wondered why the Krauts were throwing so much artillery their way. Then soon found out, after becoming suspicious of a police dog which had been taking the same route daily. On further check, Able members found that the dog was carrying the battery's troop dispositions through the lines to the Krauts.

That old demon, Trench Foot, began to make his presence known. Combat boots were entirely unsuitable for wet, cold, snow and mud. Everything considered, the Hellcats were equipped only as a vehicular fighting force, and the lack of sufficient warm clothing and "shoe-paks" caused widespread griping.

After Rohrbach had been taken by the Hellcats, the third task force (23rd Tank Battalion reinforced) moved out from Oberstmuhl on December 10, encountered mines 200 yards from the assembly area, and was forced to turn south and jump off at Sinnesberg. Things were hot, and Kraut fire was accurate. The force advanced under heavy fire to initial Maginot Line defenses, but mounting casualties from heavy artillery barrages caused the force to fall back to a defiladed position for a night of tense watchfulness.

Artillery officers weren't having things their own way, either. Battery commanders went forward to Bining on the early morning of December 11 to pick out positions for their guns. No sooner had the peeps stopped and the group assembled than—wham! In came an 88 round, followed quickly by a dozen more. There was no time to pick and choose dry spots on such occasions. Anything solid and in defilade was okay.

To a gun crew of Charlie Battery, 495th Artillery, Battalion, fell the honor of firing the battalion's first round onto German soil. This round was fired from positions near Bining.

On the following day, December 12, the 23rd Tank Battalion task force advanced 1200 yards, engaging 12 enemy tanks, one of which was destroyed. The others withdrew towards the small village of Petit-Rederching.

The 17th Armored Infantry Battalion, under the guidance of Col. John Evans, attacked at 1400 the same day but was pinned down on the first crest by fire from pillboxes to the front and left flank. These Maginot Line forts, strongly defended, were reduced by Corps Artillery fire directed by 12th Armored Division liaison planes.

Three task forces made separate, successful attacks on December 12 which resulted in the capture of the town of Bettviller, the division's assigned objective. The 43rd Tank Battalion and 66th Armored Infantry Battalion took both Guising and Bettviller in daylight attacks. Another force, the 714th Tank Battalion and Company C, 56th Armored

Infantry Battalion, moved across country toward Bettviller and aided in the final attack on that town, occupying it when the first task force withdrew to Guising for the night. The 17th Armored Infantry Battalion took two objectives during the same day, one being the town of Hoelling. A fourth force, the 23rd Tank Battalion and Company B, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, remained in position to protect the combat command's right flank until noon, and then moved to Rohrbach to remain in reserve.

Combat Command A moved its command post to Bining barracks, and Combat Command B moved from Rahling to Rohrbach the next day. A new division command post was opened at Rahling on December 13. Then, with the objective taken, consolidation of positions began. The 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron moved to the front of the division zone, where it remained until the division was relieved.

The division's first battle casualty reports were received on December 11, these being casualties which occurred on December 8, 9, and 10. The price that the division paid for its first real baptism of fire, covering the period December 7-15, was: 6 officers and 37 enlisted men killed, 16 officers and 141 enlisted men wounded.

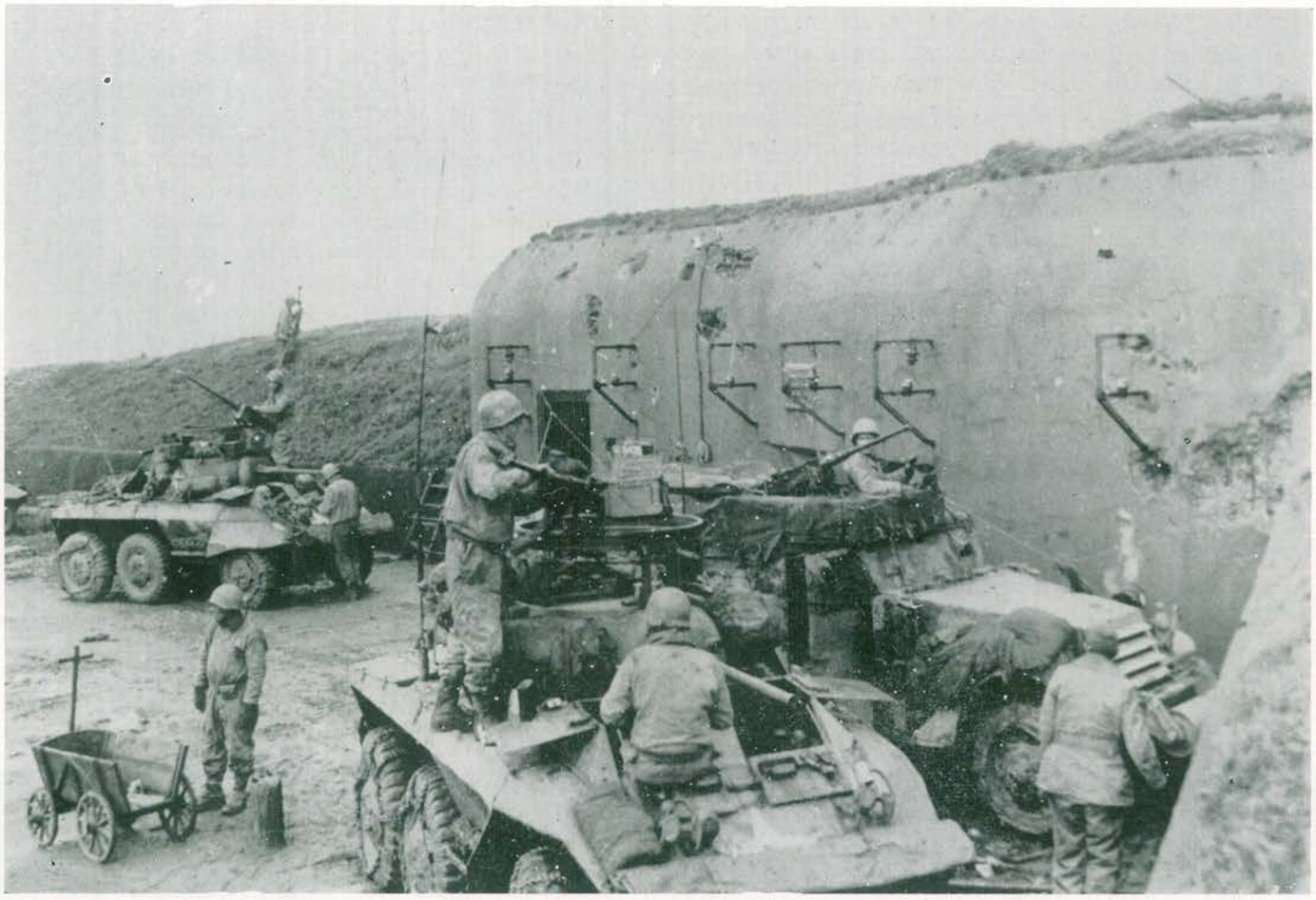
On December 14-15, the adjacent units—the U. S. 87th "Acorn" Infantry Division on the left and the U. S. 44th Infantry Division on the right—converged in front of the 12th's troops to take over the line from the Hellcats. The 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron took on the counter-reconnaissance screen. With relief of the 12th Armored's front lines, the Corps boundary was changed, and the U. S. 80th Infantry Division took over the area formerly occupied by the 12th. The division's units were assigned to bivouac areas in the rear, and long motor columns, with "cat eyes" glowing in the night, slowly made their way from the front lines.

It was now time for the Hellcats to take stock, to correct mistakes, and to rest.

The first Silver Stars awarded to members of

American soldiers and French civilians crowd the walls for protection in this little French town during the heavy artillery fire from German batteries.





Gathering for attack on Maginot Line, December, 1944

the division went posthumously to Lt. Col. Montgomery C. Meigs and Capt. Carl J. Adams, both of the 23rd Tank Battalion. Silver stars also were awarded to Sgt. Edward M. Madrack, 43rd Tank Battalion, and to Pfc. Dave Hake, Medical Detachment, 23rd Tank Battalion.

Thirteen Bronze Stars also were awarded at this time. To 1st Sgt. Billy D. Hanover, Headquarters Company, 43rd Tank Battalion, went the distinction of winning the division's first battlefield commission and he became a "shavetail" on December 24.

The first Purple Hearts in the division were awarded to seven enlisted men, on December 19, for wounds received in action. These men were: S/Sgt. John C. Maulden, T/5 Frank L. Scenosits, and Pfc. Albert D. McElroy, all of the 23rd Tank Battalion; and Pfc. Floyd E. DuBois, Pfc. Edward H. Roberts, and Pvt. Mortimer Scharf, all of the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion.

During this short period of rest in the rear areas, the Hellcats caught up on numerous things. Scarce copies of the STARS AND STRIPES were widely circulated, and the Hellcats scanned every line for a story on the exploits of the 12th Armored Division in action, but not a line could they find. That old bugaboo, security, was the reason. General Eisenhower had no desire to let the Germans know they were facing a new division.

Also, during this period thousands of V-mails were sent and received. Hellcats, billeted in empty schools, warehouses, and shell-pocked private homes, read every letter through and through. Many wives wrote, teasing their husbands about having such an easy time of it in France, where all those beautiful mademoiselles were! Hellcat husbands looked at the feminine French around them and sighed. In every case, the French women in the vicinity were raw and husky farm gals who looked much better with a pitchfork in their hands than with a cocktail. And how they could clean out those manure piles which adorned every home! The bigger the manure, the richer the family, it seemed.

Battle tactics were discussed in conferences between officers and key non-coms. In fact, every possible effort was made in these brief rests periods to orient every officer and enlisted man as to the general battle situation in the Seventh Army zone and any prospective changes. Communication officers and their sections sweated over efforts to improve communications. Infantry leaders had discovered that they must find efficient methods of

communicating with tank leaders buttoned-up inside their steel chariots. They had learned that pounding on the hulls did no good. Infantry platoons discovered their SCR 510's worked fine in vehicles, but that they were sorry examples of radios when they had to be used as portable units. The art of laying wire was re-discovered, as Hellcats began to depend more and more upon this type of communication. Battalion surgeons lectured on the uses of morphine and how to take care of simple wounds. The soldier's scourge, dysentery, came in for plenty of discussion, as cases began to break out in various units of the division. Some blamed the many flies attracted by the ever-bountiful manure piles as one contributing factor for this situation. As a precaution, messkits were doubly scoured with hot water and soap.

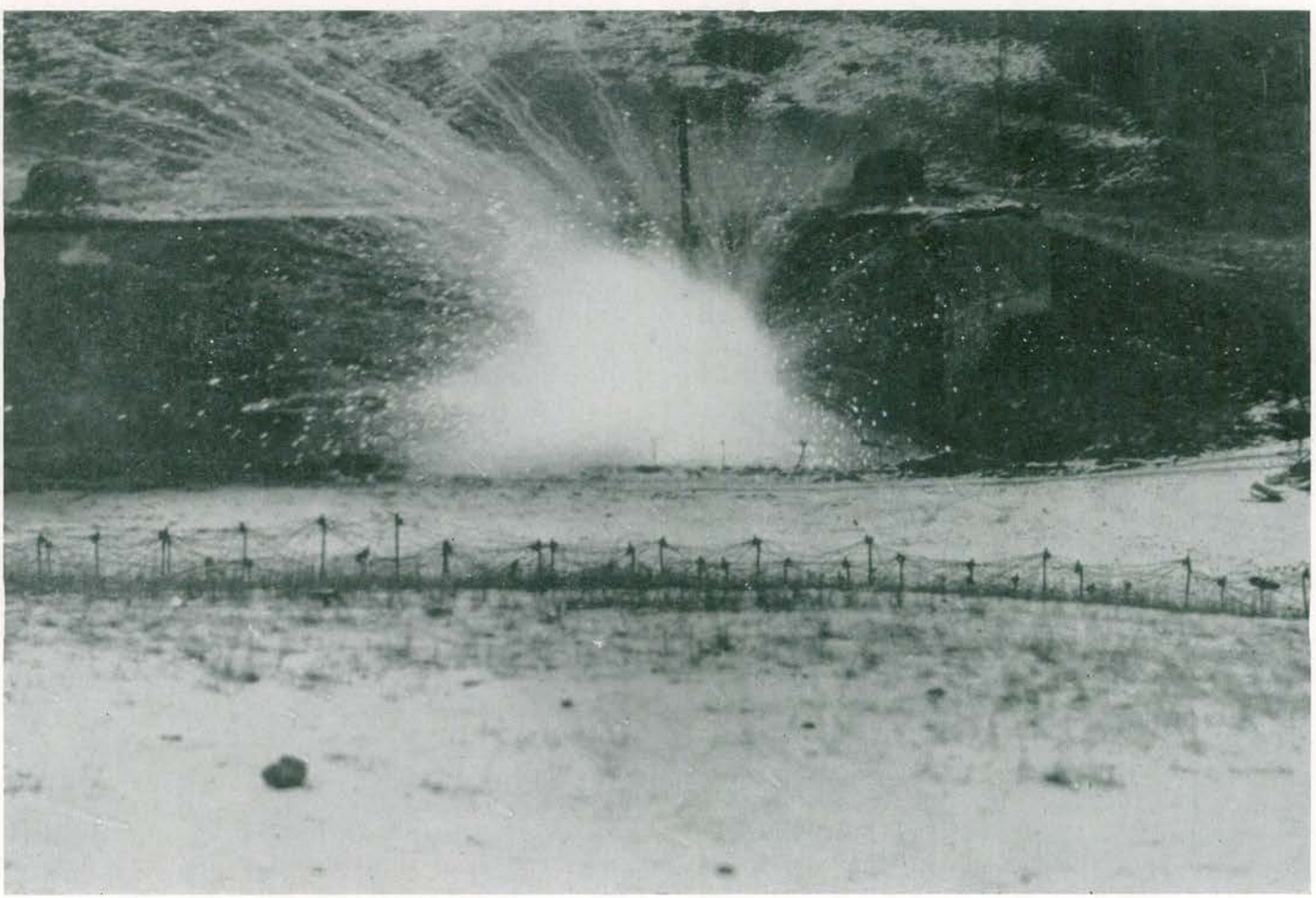
The subject of snipers was a very pertinent one. Every unit had come in contact with snipers and had disposed of them with various degrees of success. One unit had an enlightening experience with the hidden "sure-shots." After a Hellcat unit had occupied a Kraut-held village, the battalion S-3 personally checked the church steeple with a view to using it as an observation post. He found nothing there. Shortly afterwards, however, a slam-bang, "honest-to-gawd" battle began when a shot rang out near the unit. Someone yelled "Sniper in the church steeple!" Immediately, carbines, .30 caliber machine guns, .50's and 37 MM's peppered the imaginary sniper in the steeple. However, it happened that there were Hellcat tanks beyond the steeple, and their crews, believing that the fire was coming at them from the church, fired a salvo in return. A "cease fire" finally reached everyone before any Hellcats were injured.

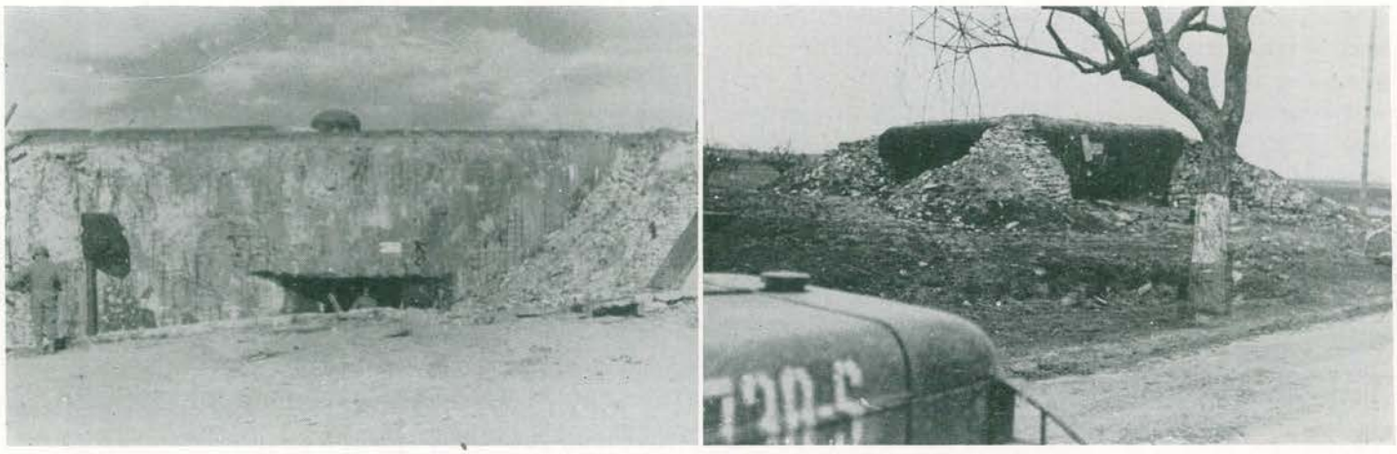
In summary, it may be said that the 12th Armored came out of its first action in the Maginot Line area with much to learn; but most of the trigger-happiness was gone, and the Hellcats had learned how to shoot. Not only had they learned how to live in the frozen out-of-doors, they also had learned that combat wasn't so bad as it was cracked up to be—it was a damn sight worse.

SECOND ACTION

The respite from the front lines was short-lived. In its second action, December 19-25, the 12th was opposed by a division new to the Western Front, the 257th Volksgrenadier Division which was fighting a defensive action. German divisions of this type were rarely up to full fighting strength. The en-

12th Armored Division makes direct assault on the Maginot Line





Grim evidences of the force of the Hellcat attack on Maginot Line

emy's defense was marked by very light small arms and automatic weapons fire, with very infrequent artillery fires. Prisoners of war were apprehended by Hellcat patrols with no difficulty, and all the PW's reported a low state of morale in their division, a condition which they attributed to a lack of preparatory training, to a shortage of food, and to the effectiveness of the 12th artillery fire.

Occasionally a Kraut PW would tell the interrogation team that many of his mates were only waiting for a chance to surrender, if promised they would not be harmed in case they did so. Since the Psychological Warfare Branch of the Seventh Army was an energetic bunch, the interrogation team decided to take action. Accordingly, a message embodying the suggested idea was broadcast over loudspeakers set up on the right of the Hellcat's lines. This action netted no substantial results, except an abundance of incoming artillery fire searching for the loudspeakers. A close surveillance was maintained by German officers and non-coms over the Volksgrenadiers to forestall any move toward mass surrender. Another effort was made when 50 rounds of propaganda leaflets were fired by the division artillery on December 15. It also was designed to make friends and influence the enemy into coming over to our lines. This effort netted little.

On December 18, the division was reorganized and regrouped. The following day the 92nd Cavalry relieved the 4th Armored Divisions' screening elements, and the forward elements of the 80th Infantry Division then threw out a counter-reconnaissance screen along the division's front and maintained contact with the 87th Infantry Division on the left and the 44th Infantry Division on the right.

Combat Command B moved from Butten to Bettviller, relieving elements of the 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and 80th Infantry Division and protecting the left flank of the XV Corps. In addition, Combat Command B picked out a command post which, unfortunately, the Jerries had "zeroed-in." The large home on a hillside received direct hits the first day that CCB set up shop. A radio half-track was demolished, and a few casualties were sustained.

Once more the Hellcats began taking their places on the battle line. Gen. Ennis' Combat Command A moved from Wolfskirchen to Singling on December 20. It was alerted to move north or northwest on three hours' notice at any time after 0700, December 21. The remainder of the division moved to forward assembly areas, elements of Col. Bromley's Command B engaging in minor patrol activities. Col. Gordon's Combat Command R moved from Eywiller to Bining barracks. The 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion came up from Sarrebourg to Bining to assist the Hellcats in case help was needed.

On December 21 the members of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, aided in the initial phase by Company C, 56th, threw off their title of "combat virgins" by taking the division's first German town—Uttweiler, a small village set in a circular sort of bowl. With fine supporting action from the 714th Tank Battalion, the doughboys of the 56th occupied the town and then withdrew to the high ground commanding it. This was one battle that the 714th's tankers heartily enjoyed. They advanced with the infantry up to the rim overlooking the city, drew up proudly in formation, and threw round after round into the town. After this the infantry moved in to an accompanying ear-splitting blast of burp guns. The Krauts gave up the town, but their artillery and mortar fire continued raking the town and the Hellcats' positions outside for some time before all firing subsided.

Combat Command B devoted December 22 to consolidating forward positions and preparing for defense of the area. Wire communication lines were laid from battalion headquarters to every company, platoon and observation post, besides other vantage points. A continuous 24-hour radio net was placed in operation. Well-detailed artillery plans for defensive fires were in the hands of each forward



Plowing through snow at Osthoffen, France, December, 1944

observer and each officer. The Hellcats were prepared to sell their newly won gains dearly, if at all. On that day and the following one activity was limited to small patrol missions. Division artillery was very busy, firing direct and time-on target missions both days.

Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch, Seventh Army CG, visited the Division Command Post at Rahling on December 22.

The 493rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion was attached to 106th Cavalry Group on December 23 on a support mission, and the 495th Artillery was alerted to move, on Corps order, to support the 103rd Infantry Division. The 493rd moved from Bettviller to St. Avold.

The 12th Armored Division continued to hold front line positions on December 24, but its operations were limited to sending out patrols, repulsing Kraut patrols, and engaging in some sharp artillery duels. The enemy was active near Uttweiler, sending out aggressive patrols which, in every case, were cut to ribbons by Hellcat fire. On this date the Division Postal Officer received the largest consignment of Christmas packages yet to come to the various units. These packages really struck a note of cheer among the noise of battle.

On Christmas Day the frozen ground was covered with snow and with American propaganda pamphlets which had been dropped short by a bomber during the previous night. However, Christmas Day proved a hectic one for some front line units. The 56th Armored Infantry Battalion received a determined enemy attack, which the doughfeet courageously threw back. In this attack the Germans were in plain view from all vantage points as they came out of their foxholes, garbed in their long green overcoats which were swaying in the bitter cold wind. As they slowly made their way in haphazard formations toward Hellcat front lines, divisional artillery, directed by front line forward observers, was having a field day. Previously planned fire plans were used to perfection as burst after burst brought terror to the oncoming enemy. Infantry mortar platoons were also brought into the fray, and their fire caused further havoc to the Germans. The attack soon lost favor with the Krauts, who retired to their lines under a continuous fire.

Mess sections prepared delicious Christmas feasts which were taken to front lines for combat troops to enjoy. Although enemy artillery fire was annoying (to say the least), mail, packages, and hot food combined to make Christmas Day a memorable one in Hellcat history.

Among the memorable events of the Uttweiller engagement was the first use of "pozit" shells by the artillery. All front line troops were instructed to dig in thoroughly and cover their foxholes in preparation for a new type of explosive. Everything was hush-hush, but preparations were made. However, the results were not disclosed to the front line troops involved in the preparations.

During this period the Krauts pulled a really surprising trick out of their battered hats. That night patrols infiltrated throughout the whole Corps front, capturing troops from each division. A small group of men from Company C, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, was surprised at night in the converted stable in which the detachment was quartered. The Kraut patrol quickly conducted their prisoners to-

M-4 tanks mounted with 75mm and 76mm, camouflaged with white paint and whitewash, line up in Oberschauffolsheim, ready for a new attack.



ward the German lines; one man was not even allowed to put on his shoes.

On the first Christmas Day that the Hellcats spent overseas, the division prepared to move to an area near Albestroff to go into Corps Reserve. It was assigned the mission of being in readiness to repel, on Corps order, any counter-attack from the north, northeast or northwest. Elements of Combat Command B were relieved at the front by the 100th Infantry Division, fresh garbed in combat winter clothing, a type which the Hellcats still lacked. The 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion was alerted to support the 44th Infantry Division; the 495th was alerted to support the 100th Infantry Division; and the 493rd drew as its assignment the support of the 106th Cavalry Group. It was apparent that there was to be no rest for the artillery.

The following day, December 26, the division moved from forward areas into Corps Reserve, with the Division Command post located at Albestroff. The first really big snow of the year fell at this time. Orders came releasing the 12th from one Corps to another; and the three Hellcat artillery battalions, plus two tank companies, were alerted to rejoin their mother division on six hours' notice. All along the front, the going was touchy, and the division was alerted for instant action at all times. Warnings about enemy paratroopers landing in the vicinity raced through the units. An American P-47 made a power-dive near a Hellcat infantry unit and met a hail of lead in return; fortunately, the plane wasn't hit. It developed that this sky trooper was merely unloading his spare gas tanks in a nearby frozen lake. Security measures were increased. More air guards were installed, the password and counter password were often changed suddenly. Road blocks were installed at critical intersections, and every traveler was closely questioned. The hunt for infiltrating Nazis was in full swing.

The division remained in concealed bivouac, continuing its maintenance, reorganization, and rehabilitation, with Col. Bromley's CCB moving from Kirrberg to Dieuze on December 29. On that day the division was alerted to move on three hours' notice, on Corps order, to counter-attack from its assembly area. On another front, the Battle of the Bulge was going well for the enemy.

Dieuze turned out to be a war-ravished city. Artillery duels had completely wrecked this once prosperous French city in Lorraine province. An American field hospital had set up operations in one part of the town. One Hellcat officer managed to date a nurse and returned, saying, "That babe had nearly as many battle stars as I got months in the Army!" This particular hospital had landed in North Africa in 1942 and had followed the fighting all the way ever since.

No serious enemy attacks that threatened to call the 12th Armored back into action materialized in the area. On December 30th, the 12th went into Seventh Army Reserve. Here was the set-up: The CG of the XV Corps could call on the 12th to counter-attack (with three hours' notice) in the direction of Benestroff-St. Avold; or to move to the vicinity of Fenetrange, prepared to counter-attack in the direction of Fenetrange-Drulingen. The Hellcats were further committed to move on 12 hours' notice, under Seventh Army Orders, to the XXI Corps. Although still on the alert, which meant that no one could relax, a training program, stressing the lessons learned in battle, was initiated. Replacements, or "reinforcements," as they were later to be dubbed, were orientated and equipped.

The last day of 1944 saw the 12th prepared to move from its bivouac area to a location south of Dieuze, with division headquarters at the front of an oval formation of units. Training continued, in preparation for the assigned counter-attack mission under XV Corps. This was the status of the division as 1944 ended, and the eventful year of 1945 began.

During the month of December, 1944, casualties in the 12th were: 62 KIA, 454 WIA, and 4 MIA. During the month the Hellcats captured 229 enemy prisoners. The division also had received 9 Silver Stars, 17 Bronze Stars, 1 Soldier's Medal, 43 Purple Hearts, and 585 Combat Infantryman Badges. The latter category came as especially good news because of the accompanying extra 10 bucks per month for each recipient, except officers.

Displaced persons presented a civilian problem to the Fighting Forces.



1945

The month of January, 1945, stands out in Hellcat history because it produced the bloodiest chapter in the whole career of the 12th Armored Division. The memorable action lasted from January 8 to 20, and no one who participated in it can ever forget any part of it. The Marines could brag about their Iwo Jima. The Navy could tell how tough the battle of the Coral Sea was. Hellcats could, but didn't, expound on the action at Herrlisheim. Only other Hellcats who had been through the tragic encounter would know the dreadful horror of this long, drawn out, bloody battle.

In this action elements of the 12th twice reached one of its assigned objectives, the town of Herrlisheim, but each time were forced to withdraw simply because the Krauts had more men, plus materials in the battered Alsatian village than the Hellcats had. Even so, the division defeated the enemy's efforts to break through the comparatively weak right flank of the Seventh Army and strike southwards to Strasbourg and a possible link-up with forces in the Colmar pocket, or northwards to Haguenau.

This battle scorched off any possible remaining traces of combat greenness. From that time on the Hellcat Division was one of the most feared in Europe. Henceforth, too, the 12th Armored had the respect of other fighting Allied divisions. The entire Seventh Army soon learned that this division would accomplish all its assigned missions, or expend itself in a determined effort. It would never let superior forces hold it down for long.

Actually the Herrlisheim battle was tied-up with von Rundstedt's offensive in the Ardennes. When the latter operation failed, von Rundstedt withdrew some of his best troops, hastily re-equipped and re-manned them, and sent them racing to the small bridgehead which the Germans had established in the small sector between Strasbourg and the Maginot Line, centering in the villages of Gambsheim and Herrlisheim. The spotlight of the German counterattack centered on the Alsace sector, where the Germans hoped: (1) to break through lines weakened by a shift of units to stem the Ardennes breakthrough; (2) to recapture the political and strategic prize of Strasbourg; and, (3) with that impetus, to link up with forces in the Colmar pocket and drive the Allies from the whole of Alsace-Lorraine.

Many factors weighed heavily against the 12th in this action. First, the terrain around Herrlisheim, a village of approximately 500-700 population, including many farmers rabidly in favor of German occupation of Alsace, was definitely not tank country. Furthermore, the tricky, canal-woven terrain made the task of the Hellcats more difficult. Also, one of the major factors against the 12th was the underestimation of the enemy's strength. What at first was thought to be a small force of inferior quality turned out to be two crack German divisions, skillfully organized for defense and heavily supported by artillery and mortar units.

The general, over-all situation in the whole Seventh Army sector was something like this: The Germans, counter-attacking all along the front, launched four offensive efforts in the Seventh Army area at once. The first of these was near the fortress of Bitche, the second in the Hardt Mountains near Reippertswiller, the third on the Alsace Plain near Hatten and Rittershoffen, and the fourth in the Rhine Riverhead near Herrlisheim and Gambsheim. It was against this latter mushrooming bridgehead that the 12th moved in January.

Early in the month the size, quality, and intentions of the Germans who had effected the crossings near Gambsheim were not definitely known. The 94th Mechanized Reconnaissance Squadron of the 14th Armored Division had been running a counter-reconnaissance screen through this area. This operation consisted of sending out motorized patrols periodically to check each town in the assigned area. When one patrol went out and failed to return, another was dispatched. It was learned that the Germans had infiltrated by night across the Rhine in small boats, gaining a foothold in Gambsheim and Herrlisheim. Higher headquarters apparently was convinced that this force was small, of very inferior quality, and that its mission was merely to occupy the ground that the Allies would give up in their anticipated withdrawal to the Vosges Mountains.

The play-by-play description of their participation in the major offensive to clean out this bridgehead makes interesting reading for all Hellcats. On January 6, the 12th was alerted for action. Col. Bromley's Combat Command B was ordered to Hochfelden, where VI Corps headquarters reportedly had a little job it wanted done. CCB arrived at Hochfelden the following morning after an all-night trip over icy roads. Seventh Army directed the 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion to hurry toward Hochfelden, but stipulated that the remainder of the division would remain in place until further orders. Two days later the rest of the division moved to Hochfelden; the 92nd Cavalry was relieved of its counter-reconnaissance screen mission; and Hellcat liaison officers with the infantry divisions were recalled.

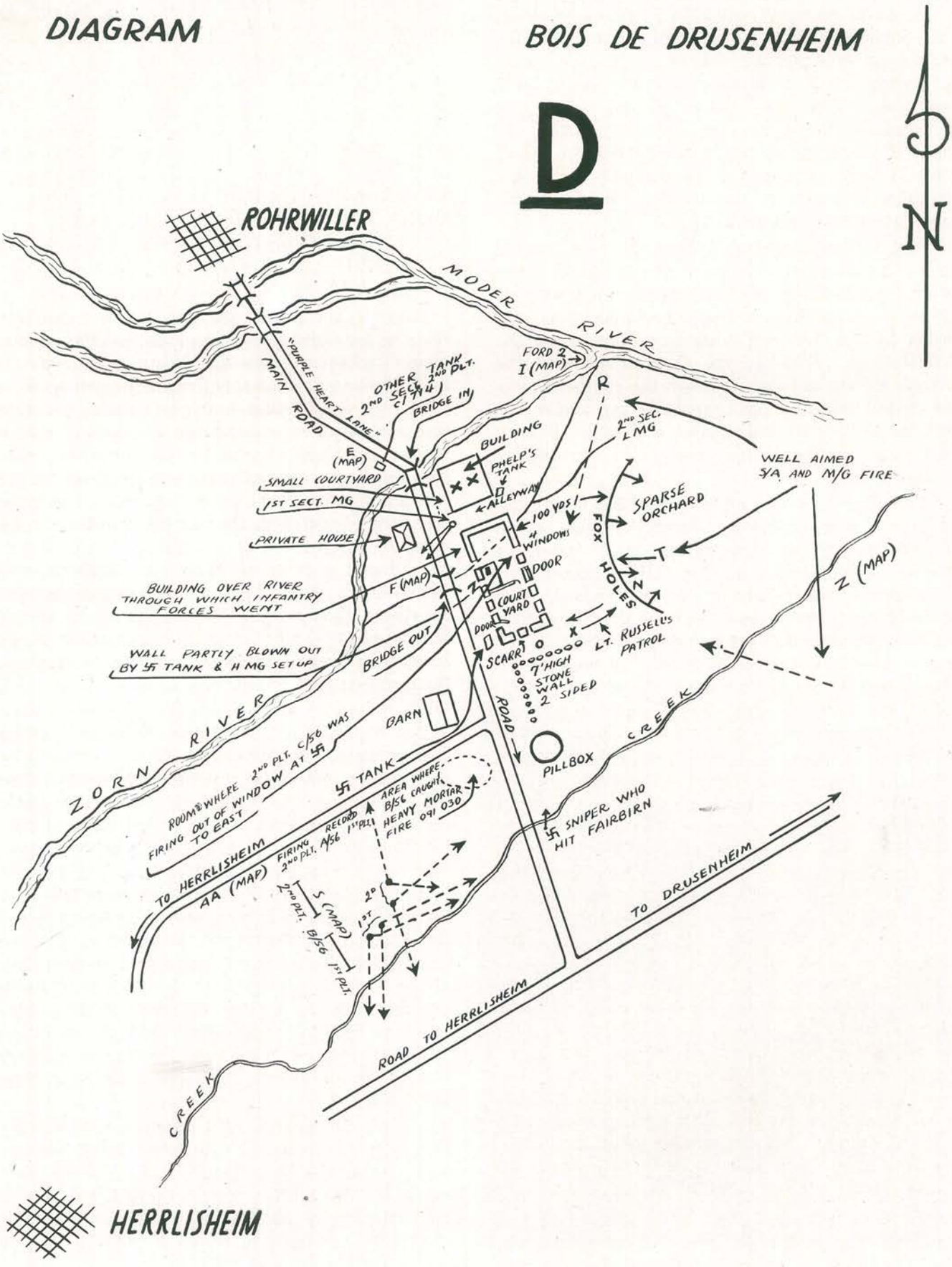
At Hochfelden, the 12th was ordered to remain in Corps Reserve and maintain a reconnaissance screen along the Corps' south boundary from Wasselone to Weyersheim, a screen which had been established by the 92nd Cavalry. The division was also to be prepared to counterattack on two-hour notice any enemy penetrations from the north to-

LA BREYMUHL - WATER WORKS

DIAGRAM

BOIS DE DRUSENHEIM

D



wards Soultz and from the east towards Bischwiller.

Combat Command B, composed principally of the 714th Tank Battalion and the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, was attached on January 7 to the 79th Infantry Division which was fighting in the Bischwiller, Weyersheim, Drusenheim area near the Rhine River. Also supporting the 79th was the 12th Armored Division Artillery, under control of the 33rd Field Artillery Brigade. Combat Command B moved out for Bischwiller, where it was to establish a command post in preparation for the forthcoming attack on Herrlisheim.

At this point the Hellcat Division's history turns temporarily to the actions of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion and of the 714th Tank Battalion in the initial assault on Herrlisheim. They will put this initial assault under a magnifying glass, and all the details of a battle will be included.

*The prominence given to this encounter is not because it was the most important one during the Herrlisheim engagement; for it definitely was not. It is related ONLY because it is the one battle in which the Hellcats participated that has been recorded * by Seventh Army historians down to the last squad's action. Seventh Army's Historical Section spent several weeks in interviewing hundreds of officers and men who participated in the initial attack on Herrlisheim. The resulting mass of information allows the reader to see exactly of what one Hellcat battle action consisted.*

The story begins as the infantry moved, in the early morning of January 8, to Kurtzenhausen, and the tanks to Weyersheim. The 56th, less its C Company, but with B/714th attached, was designated Task Force Rammer. The 714th, with C/56th replacing its own B Company, was designated Task Force Power. Upon reaching these towns, both units received word they would attack Herrlisheim from the north, jumping off at 1000 hours from an area just west of Rohrweiler. Simultaneously, the French were to seize Gambsheim from the south, while the 79th Division would "demonstrate" against Drusenheim. B Company, 119th Engineers, was attached to the attacking force to clear any mine fields encountered, and also to build or repair such bridges as were necessary to keep the attack moving.

On the night of January 7, intelligence estimates placed the number of Germans in the Drusenheim-Herrlisheim pocket at between 800 and 1200. These figures were to prove entirely too low. The enemy force ran well into five figures. The units, identified later, were the 10th SS Panzer Division; the 35th, 119th, and 2nd Panzer-Grenadier Regiments, plus elements of the 553rd Infantry Regiment with battle groups. It was also known that enemy anti-aircraft flak protection was heavy, making it difficult for friendly liaison planes to spot enemy positions.

At 0800, January 8, Task Force Rammer moved out, leaving Kurtzenhausen for Bischweiler, in order to reach the southwestern edge of Rohrweiler by 1000. The first part of Task Force Power reached its assembly area at 1100 hours, dismounted from half-tracks and dug in. Mortar fire was falling close by, along the western edge of Rohrweiler.

At 1430 hours the infantry jumped off with B/714 following A/56. B/714 was at its full strength of 17 medium tanks. The mortar platoon of Headquarters Company, 56th set up its 81 MM's behind some houses in Rohrweiler. The assault gun platoon, 56th AIB, went into position at the edge of a wooded area near Rohrweiler. The assault gun registered on the church in Herrlisheim. During the first two days they fired spasmodically into Herrlisheim and some wooded areas, mostly for harassing purposes. Visibility was better the first day. When the distant haze cleared at noon on January 8, the mortars fired four rounds each to register. Even then some rounds had to be fired to sense the bursts. In supporting the attack on that day and the following two days, 1000 HE 81 MM mortar rounds and 600 HE 75 MM howitzer rounds were fired.

In the meantime the 714th had deployed around Rohrweiler in preparation for the attack, being careful to take what cover was available to avoid direct fire. D/714, with five light tanks to each of three platoons, was to evacuate the wounded and to haul supplies.

C/56, part of the Power Task Force, was at its full strength of 251 officers and men. It had the initial mission of moving east of the area between Rohrweiler and Herrlisheim to protect the attacking 56th's east flank. Once Herrlisheim was taken, C/56th was to move south, passing along Herrlisheim's eastern edge, continue on to capture Offendorf and, eventually, to effect a junction with the French from Gambsheim. Some of the engagement's first casualties were suffered when C/56 sent a platoon to reconnoiter an area just beyond Zorn River from La Breymuhl, the latter being only a small group of buildings containing machinery for regulating the flow of the Zorn into the Moder River. All the Hellcats called this group of buildings simply "the waterworks." This platoon rounded up some prisoners, but enemy fire killed four men and wounded several others.

While this brief but torrid action was going on, the tanks of C/714, in the fields to the west, were spotted by the enemy and drew a heavy mortar and artillery concentration. Despite this fire, they were able to throw a couple of rounds at some German vehicles racing along the Drusenheim-Herrlisheim road. The mortar squad of the second platoon, C/56,

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**"Initial Assault on Herrlisheim"—Seventh Army Historical Section*

suffered six casualties as it caught this thick barrage upon reaching the field.

The bridge at the waterworks was out, a condition which prevented tanks from moving in with the infantry, and consequently plans had to be revised. The 56th was ordered to attack alone from the north. Under the revised plan, the tanks of C/714 and A/714 were to take up positions west of the Zorn River, just outside the town, and provide fire support for the assault. For about one hour before dusk, which came at about 1630 hours, the tanks were able to put intermittent fire in that area. This fire, however, had to be gradually reduced when the ammunition began to run low. A total of 170 HE and 6,500 .30 caliber machine gun rounds were fired before darkness set in and the tanks pulled back and established a perimeter defense in which they spent a quiet night.

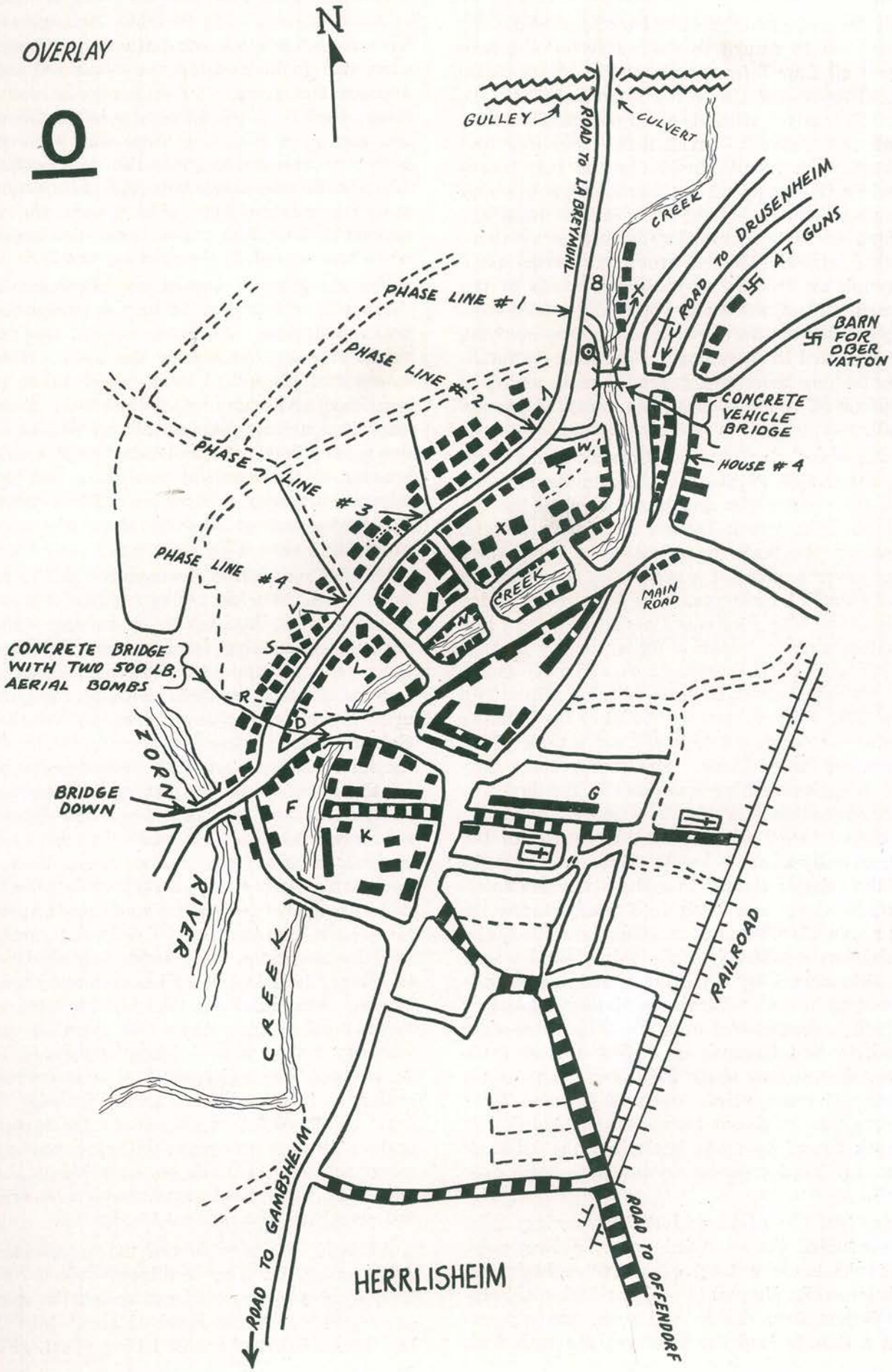
The revised plan of attack called for A and B Companies of the 56th AIB to enter the waterworks, cross the Zorn River, and continue southward to Herrlisheim. An enemy 120 MM mortar barrage caused three casualties in B/56th, including the company commander, Capt Burnett Beach. Lt. John Casner, Jr., took charge of B Company. Numerous 88 MM rounds were fired into the waterworks, but ricocheted off and caused no damage. Artillery was still being interdicted on Purple Heart Lane as more units came up to cross over the Zorn. The concentrations came at approximately 10-minute intervals, but one never knew when they were about to land. These concentrations caused many casualties and a slight lowering of morale. Artillery concentrations continued to fall all around La Breymuhl night and day.

As the infantry crossed the Zorn the night of January 8-9 and tried to dig in the frozen ground, some of the men suddenly noticed a group of about 30 Germans moving toward them over the "pool table" flat ground, silhouetted against two burning buildings in the background close to Herrlisheim. S/Sgt. Charles F. Peischl, who later was given a field commission, later said: "They had no formation, were talking loudly, and suspected nothing, because I could see the two leading men of the party, one with a burp gun on his shoulder and the other with two boxes of ammunition, nonchalantly walking straight towards me." The enemy was so close that word could not be passed of his presence. However, all the Hellcats in that vicinity must have sighted the group about the same time, for they quickly stopped digging and silently took up firing positions along the ground. To a man, they seemed to sense the element of complete surprise that was in store for the Germans and, therefore, held their fire. When S/Sgt. Peischl noticed that the German who had the ammunition boxes was slowly putting them down, apparently suspecting that something was amiss, and was about to pass the signal back to the other Germans, S/Sgt. Peischl opened fire on him. That was the signal for all of B Company to begin firing, and they let loose with everything they had. Two light machine guns caught the Germans in a cross fire, while the men heaved hand grenades and emptied their rifles. It was like picking off ducks. Some escaped towards

German dugout positions along road bank at road and railroad junction on Herrlisheim-Drusenheim highway. From these positions they used mortars and 20mm and covered approach from Rohrwiller.






OVERLAY
N
GULLEY
CULVERT
ROAD TO LA BRETAHL
CREEK
ROAD TO DRUSENHEIM
AT GUNS
BARN FOR OBER VATTON
PHASE LINE #1
PHASE LINE #2
PHASE LINE #3
PHASE LINE #4
CONCRETE VEHICLE BRIDGE
HOUSE #4
CREEK
MAIN ROAD
CONCRETE BRIDGE WITH TWO 500 LB. AERIAL BOMBS
ZORN
BRIDGE DOWN
RIVER
CREEK
RAILROAD
ROAD TO GAMBSHEIM
ROAD TO OFFENDORF
HERRLISHEIM

Herrlisheim, but 12 bodies were found the next morning.

Later that same night all units of the 56th AIB were ordered to return to the waterworks, which now held all four infantry companies of the 56th, plus L Company of the 314th Regiment, 79th Division. Defensive positions were occupied. About 0330 all hell began to break loose. Shelling and movement were heard outside in the inky darkness, while the sound of approaching track laying vehicles was heard. Mortal shells landed inside the courtyard of the waterworks, driving away those on outpost there. Then a group of Jerries came up through an orchard to the eastern side of the courtyard wall of the waterworks and tossed over hand grenades of the egg-shaped, concussion type, but they caused little damage. The Hellcats retaliated by lobbing their own grenades back, and they also picked off a few enemy who ventured around the wall.

At this point, two or more German tanks came up on either side of the road on the Herrlisheim side of the waterworks and began to shell the top of the building, which housed the Zorn's waters. Fortunately, the tanks were unable to bring their fire any lower because of a seven-foot stone wall in front of them. A tank round was fired into a bridge site where the 40th Engineer Combat Regiment had been attempting to install a Bailey bridge so that the 714th tanks could cross the Zorn and move southward. Private Robert L. Scott of the machine gun platoon, 56th AIB, volunteered to leave the building and enter the courtyard to knock out a tank which was creating havoc there. Except for some Germans talking, everything was quiet in the darkness when Scott squeezed his bazooka's trigger. The first round failed to go off. In the stillness, with the tank practically at arm's length from him, the clicking of the trigger seemed to make a terrible noise. Undaunted, Scott ran back into the waterworks, picked up another bazooka, reached the tank again, and this time disabled it. His only wound was a slight nick caused by a mortar round hitting the courtyard as he was returning. Shortly thereafter the second tank lumbered up and it pulled the other one back toward Herrlisheim amidst Hellcat artillery fire. It was now about 0500 hours, January 9, and many German voices could be heard. More men were put in the waterworks' courtyard, but they were forced to move back into the building when enemy hand grenades continued to come over the wall.

Throughout the night and early morning, light tanks evacuated the wounded from La Breymuhl. Three tanks made a total of ten trips back and forth between La Breymuhl and the 56th's aid station at Rohrweiler. There was room for only one tank at a time to load the wounded, for each tank had to move in an alley-way between two buildings, while the remaining two tanks waited their turn on the other side of the bridge. No tank ever came out with fewer than four patients, and each always succeeded in negotiating the ceaseless, murderous artillery and mortar fire falling all around "Purple Heart Lane." Miraculously, none of the wounded was hit again, including those who were unable to walk and who had to lie in the open on top of the vehicles, thereby being subjected to constant flying shell fragments. The tanks caught the effect of several indirect hits which came, fortunately, only when the wounded were not on them.

The firing at the waterworks did not abate with the coming of morning, January 9, though the enemy tanks had gone and many of the Germans surrendered when exposed by the light. However, a substantial portion of them withdrew to prepared positions. Although plans had been formulated, some time around midnight, for a Hellcat attack at dawn, it did not get underway until nearly noon, because of the morning-long firing and the intermittent surrender of Germans. At daybreak, some Germans observed moving along the road were promptly picked off.

When Capt. James Leehman of B/714 saw that some Germans were trying to give themselves up at 0800 hours, January 9, by raising white handkerchiefs or making feeble motions to come out of their foxholes amid the hail of Hellcat lead, he ordered all tank, mortar, machine gun, and small arms fire to cease unless the enemy attacked. The Germans came out in batches of four or five until the total reached about 125. After each group was in, the firing would be resumed for awhile, to be followed by another pause to permit those to surrender whose minds had been changed by the continuous machine gun chatter about them. Capt. Leehman's tanks were concentrated so as to bring more fire power to bear on well dug-in enemy positions. On one occasion 50 Germans came up the road in one group, their hands behind their heads, to a large hole in the wall surrounding the waterworks. S/Sgt. Peischl, who had his men on guard there, spoke with three of them in German, whereupon they went out and brought in 15 more. At another time a German first sergeant made several trips back and forth to the foxholes "recruiting," in all, 26 fellow prisoners. On numerous occasions that morning the infantry was ready to move out for the push on Herrlisheim, but each time they would spot some enemy who drew their fire or others who wanted to give up.

At 0730, January 9, the mortar platoon, 56th AIB, under Lt. Leo Mulligan, contributed more friendly fire to bewilder and soften the entrenched enemy, firing several hundred shells into the area east of La Breymuhl with telling effect. First, the

fire was laid down along the railroad tracks from Drusenheim to Herrlisheim, then, after adjustment, it was brought in closer to the German positions, care being taken not to hit the buildings. Shortly thereafter Lt. Mulligan and three other men went into the waterworks in search of a closer observation post from which to direct fire into Herrlisheim, but they were unable to find one more suitable than that at the western end of Rohrweiler. While returning to it that morning, the group encountered a murderous enemy concentration along "Purple Heart Lane" which killed Pfc. Gordon E. Tornquist and wounded another man.

The 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had been placed in direct support of CCB's Power and Rammer task forces. Prior to the initial attack, Major Wm. G. Raoul, Executive Officer, had 100 overlays of Herrlisheim made from a 1:25,000 scale map, which he distributed to participating units. On it were coordinates' squares and principle terrain features of the Drusenheim, Herrlisheim, and Offendorf areas, with numbered concentrations in a series of geographical groups having self-explanatory names. These overlays were successfully used throughout the engagement by the infantry, tankers, and artillery forward observers in calling for fire missions. The 494th's 18 self-propelled 105 howitzers, mounted on M-3 medium tank chassis, were put in position along the eastern edge of Bischweiler. They expended a grand total of 3700 rounds, 3244 of high explosive (HE) type M-48, bursting on impact with a quick or delayed setting; 225 of HE type M-54, fused for bursting at any time; 40 of white phosphorous WP, for smoke and against personnel, and 191 of HC, for smoke only. During the first day and night, January 8, the concentrations were not nearly so heavy as they were on the next two days. Nevertheless, from 0600, January 8 to 0600, January 9, eight missions were fired, representing a total of 521 HE M, 48 rounds and 11 WP rounds. Many of these rounds were fired on German tanks and infantry west of the Zorn River. In the afternoon harassing fire was placed on the western edge of Herrlisheim. About 0430 the next morning a barrage was directed along the northern edge of town, the creek flowing into it, and the gulley. This barrage was designed to soften those areas for the infantry's advance and to knock out what was believed to be enemy anti-tank guns hidden there awaiting the appearance of the 714th tanks. A heavy concentration also was laid along the southern edge of the waterworks, designed for thoroughly routing the two or three German tanks and infantry that had counter-attacked through that area in the early morning hours.

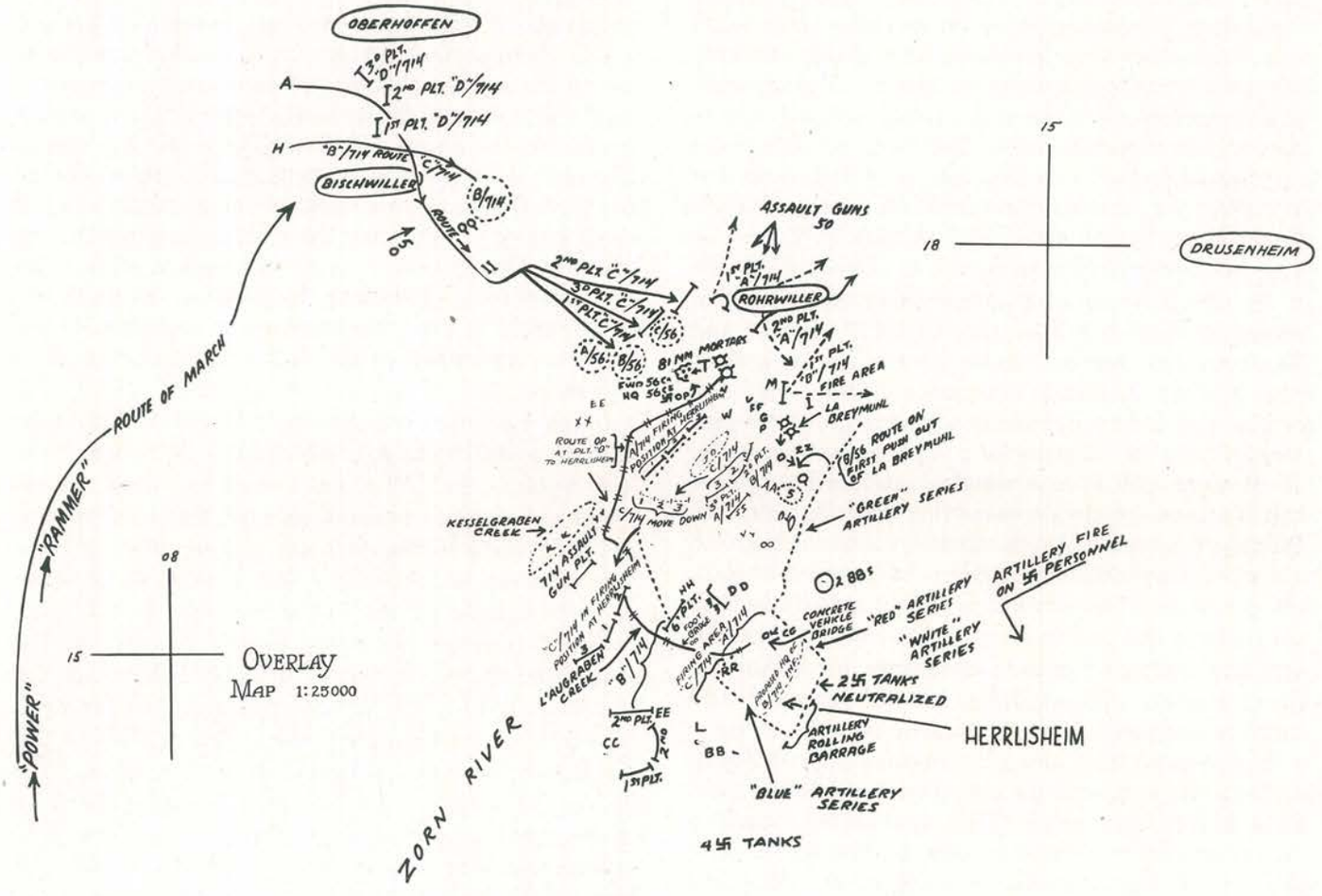
During the night plans had been drawn for the attack to continue on Herrlisheim. C/56 reverted from the 714th to the 56th AIB. B and A Companies of the 56th were again to be the lead units, as previously planned. B Company was to jump off at 0605 hours, January 9, and was allotted ten minutes to move out of the waterworks; after this interval, A Company was to start, coming up abreast on B Company's west flank. Both were to be at north edge of Herrlisheim by dawn and immediately begin a push to take it, each clearing its respective sector to the south. B Company was to cross to the east, over the stream running into Herrlisheim, while A Company remained on the west side. C/56 was to mop up in their rear, after moving to the town as closely behind them as possible. The original plan for C Company to continue on to Offendorf with B/714 was necessary because blown bridges prevented tanks from crossing the Zorn River.

Capt. Leehman was told to take his B/714 tanks across a Bailey bridge which was to be ready at the waterworks. The tanks were to follow the infantry down the general axis of the road out of La Breymuhl to Herrlisheim, giving them a close fire support as possible. The other two medium tank companies of the 714th would be in the fields west of Herrlisheim, firing into it in front of the oncoming troops. In case the Bailey bridge was not finished, B/714 was to have the same assignment. It was this alternate plan which Capt. Leehman had to follow when, upon checking the bridge at 0400 hours, he found it to be out. No attempts were being made to set one up, owing to the surrounding enemy activity, consequently completion did not take place until 1600 that day, January 9.

On the morning of the attack, January 9, the third platoon of A/714 rejoined the company on the left of the second platoon, having been relieved from attachment to the 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Lt. Col. William J. Phelan, CO of the 714th, ordered it to move as close to the Zorn River as possible in order to cover the area to the east and northeast. The platoon then spotted German machine guns and tanks which were opening up on the infantrymen emerging from La Breymuhl for Herrlisheim. "But the third platoon could not return the fire because B/56 was passing directly in front of us," explained Capt. Robt. W. Harrington, CO of A/714.

Just prior to this, the first and second platoons, A/714, moved down to the curve of the Zorn River, west of the town, to provide direct fire into its southern half. This fire would be lifted when the infantry entered. Having no knowledge of what the situation was near the Stainwald Woods, to the far east, where some movement was seen (French forces were supposed to be coming up from that area), Capt. Harrington had his first platoon arch around to face the south, and the second on its left flank

M



to face Herrlisheim and curve northward, forming a "U" shape.

Just before A/714's movement to fire into the town, the tanks of C/714 had gone forward to their approximate positions of the late afternoon before, with the same fire mission, that of neutralizing the enemy in Herrlisheim for the infantry's advance. That morning they captured about 50 Germans who were retreating westward from the outskirts of Herrlisheim. Along with the attached assault guns, one of which had to be pulled out because of gun trouble, the tanks of C/714 fired slowly into the town, gradually moving their fire down as B/714 advanced in front of them and the infantry neared the northern edge of Herrlisheim. Shortly thereafter they had to cease firing completely when B/714 took up positions in their lines of sight. After this event, A/714 cut down below both tank companies and set up inside the river's bend.

About 1030 hours, B/714 began its movement from the vicinity of Le Breymuhl to the area just west of Herrlisheim, where it could support the infantry's attack, keeping pace with the infantrymen on the other side of the Zorn. Since the first platoon had the 76 MM guns, it remained in position, firing to the east in defense of the other two platoons as they leap-frogged southward. The latter platoons moved a section at a time as close to the western edge of the river as possible. They did no firing until they came close to their positions due west of town. There, however, they let loose with machine gun ammunition at the enemy, who were in foxholes all about them along the west bank of the Zorn. There also was a pillbox in the vicinity. About 25 prisoners quickly surrendered, and the pillbox proved to be empty.

The second platoon's tanks, B/714, were on line facing to the south, their machine guns firing heavily in that direction, from which came the sound of German small arms fire. At the same time the third platoon swung around directly at Herrlisheim, sending 35 HE rounds into the southern end of the town, for it was not known just how far the infantry had advanced into this portion of the town.

As B/714 took up its firing positions and the infantry entered the town, they lost contact with each other. Lt. Col. Lee Ingram, CO 56th, told Capt. Leehman that he did not know the location of the

German infantry in Herrlisheim, and for Leehman to reconnoiter the bridge at the southwest edge of the town. It was over this bridge that the 714's tanks hoped to cross into town, thereby providing sorely needed help for the 56th, now fighting for its very life in Herrlisheim proper. But this bridge had been badly damaged by the Krauts. At about 1600 hours, January 9, Capt. Leehman went to see if the Bailey bridge had yet been installed at La Breymuhl and, happily, found that it was passable. Whereupon Lt. Col. Ingram ordered him to move his company over it and into Herrlisheim at once.

It was now dusk, and up to this time no fire, other than that from small arms, had been received by the Hellcat tanks in the field. They had been resupplied with ammunition, food, and water. Suddenly enemy tanks and anti-tank guns in excellent defilade behind the main road running southwest of Herrlisheim opened up on all three of the medium tank companies. The tank of Lt. Manders, C/714, was hit and set ablaze, but the crew escaped without injury, except Manders, who sustained a broken leg. Immediately afterward, C/714 tanks received a concentrated barrage and began backing to the rear, moving continuously with only their fronts facing in the direction from which the fire came, in order to present the smallest possible targets. At the same time, they returned fire, but found it impossible to hit any of the well-hidden German guns and tanks below the road embankment, with only their muzzles partly protruding.

B/714th's tank encountered heavy fire as they started to move up to La Breymuhl to cross the Bailey bridge. One tank went up in flames, one man being killed. As they progressed toward the waterworks, the tank of Lt. Charles M. Hisinger was knocked out and two of the crew killed. A third tank was hit and set afire shortly thereafter, but all of the crew escaped injury. Then a fourth tank caught it. All of this shooting occured in a matter of minutes, and while the tanks were moving broadside. "All of the tanks were like ducks in a shooting gallery, unable to maneuver in the field out of enemy range, because they were hemmed in a pocket between two canals, the Zorn and Kesselgraben," lamented Capt Leehman. The company withdrew to Rohrweiler to reorganize, where it caught some mortar shells, which killed one man and wounded another.

A and C Companies, 714th, tried to cover B Company's withdrawal, laying down a smoke screen and firing, though with little effect, at enemy gun flashes. While B Company was being pounded, five A/714 tanks began backing away. Four of them were hit, but not permanently disabled, as all were later repaired. All of the 714th Battalion tanks withdrew to reorganize, setting up a perimeter defense. Capt. Charles Clayton, CO of C/714, received word that some time before morning a bridge would be erected over the Zorn River which his tanks were to cross. However, this bridge was never built. During the night of January 9-10, plans were formulated for the 714th to attack Herrlisheim the following day with B and C Companies.

(Tank actions will be further discussed. The narrative now turns to the infantry as it begins its advance from La Breymuhl toward Herrlisheim.)

B Company, 56th, left La Breymuhl on January 9 with its platoons well dispersed in open squad column. Immediately after the first led off, it was greeted by machine gun fire from the southeast. No one was hit and the shooting stopped as the company began to pivot in a long skirmish line. Almost immediate a severe 120-MM mortar concentration rained down upon the doughfeet. Since they were beginning to move out into the open field, they suffered an extremely heavy toll of casualties. Lt. Floyd VanDerhoef, who had come up during the night to take over the company commander's duties, was injured, and Lt. Casner once again took over.

The decimated ranks of B Company doggedly pushed on and reached two stone buildings, when their advance again was halted by enemy machine gun and small arms fire coming from a clump of trees at the very edge of Herrlisheim. To escape this steady hail of lead, the company veered off in a southwesternly direction, but the fire continued to follow the men in the open field. It did not cease until they reached a gulley. "As we got close to the gulley, our own mortars threw white phosphorous rounds all about my first platoon," commented Peischl. An anti-tank guncrew consisting of three 16-year-old Jerries was captured. At this point, less than half of B Company's personnel was on hand, owing to the terrific loss in killed and wounded incurred by the company since it had left La Breymuhl.

While B/56th was taking this beating in its advance toward Herrlisheim, light tanks of D/714th were kept busy evacuating the wounded. One tank was knocked out by 120-MM mortar fire while waiting to cross the bridge at La Breymuhl. Crews from six light tanks performed magnificently amid the shells bursting around them. All but the drivers went into the fields to bring back the wounded, improvising stretchers with broken rifles and blankets. According to Capt William Zimmerman, 56th AIB medical officer, the light tanks saved the lives of 65 soldiers.

As A/56th moved out from the waterworks, a few minutes after B 56th and the heavy machine gun platoon, 56th, it too was met by some mortar, small arms, and machine gun fire. However, by comparison with the others, the men of this company suffered very lightly. After it came alongside B/56th's west flank, extending in a skirmish

line almost to the Zorn River, its members found that the fire was not so intense in that sector, and they proceeded to move ahead. The first platoon was closest to the river and captured eight prisoners along its banks. The second platoon was east of the road, its west edge guiding on it and maintaining contact with the first. The third, in reserve, followed both assault platoons, prepared to mop up in town behind them. A little more than half way to Herrlisheim, the company halted and waited for B/56th to come up. During this halt the second platoon captured three German burp guns in a draw. Then A/56th received orders to enter the town, while the 714th's tanks were firing into it from the field across the river. The men advanced in the same formation as before, encountering some small arms fire, intending to secure the northwest part of Herrlisheim and then continue southward through the village.

Around noon, Janury 9, the 56th ordered its C Company to leave the waterworks for Herrlisheim. The troops made it through the fields, drawing fire all the way, in record time. They entered Herrlisheim at about 1430 hours without ever having halted, suffering only two casualties from shell fragments, despite having been in the open and subjected to intense, murderous fire, including some rockets ("Nebelwerfer," or "Screaming Meemies").

About two hours before this, when A/56 had entered the town and found that its SCR 300 and 509 radios would not function, a contact party was sent to B/56. This trip, however, was unsuccessful, for B Company was still encountering heavy trouble in its sector of the field. The first four corners at the western edge of Herrlisheim had been designated previously as four separate phase lines. Upon reaching each line, A Company was to radio this information to the battalion CP in Bischweiler, which would, thereby, be informed of the progress being made. The phase lines were also established as prisoner of war collecting points. But the platoons were never able to make contact with the rear areas. A similar situation was to develop for B and C Companies. Because no tanks were able to get into town that day or that night, the 56th AIB Headquarters and CCB Headquarters were completely out of contact with their infantry units in Herrlisheim until the following morning, January 10.

BATTLES IN HERRLISHEIM

A/56th began to move through the streets of Herrlisheim, clearing the houses as it proceeded. The 40-man second platoon started first, entering the northern tip of the town and working from the westernmost north-south road to the next north-south street. The first platoon, composed of 35 men, entered just below the second platoon, moved down the same road, but cleared in the opposite direction; that is, to the west. One squad would leap-frog past the next in examining the houses. While a few stood on guard outside a house, others went to the rear door to check the outhouses. They fired into open windows to force any snipers therein to keep their heads down. The men then kicked doors ajar, hurriedly investigated the basement and second story and moved all civilians to the ground levels. These platoons captured very few prisoners, for their missions as assault platoons required them to move through much of Herrlisheim as quickly as possible. Many enemy machine gun and anti-tank positions, with excellent fields of fire, had been set up in this sector, but their crews had fled from them.

Before the third platoon of A/56 entered Herrlisheim, some mortar fire landed in its midst, killing Pvt. Emil Erber, Jr. When the second platoon reached the first east-west road, the third came in with 19 men and worked sideways to take in the areas of both platoons. In order to mop up effectively, the Hellcats had the dangerous task of carefully checking every nook and corner to flush out the Jerries. The searchers peered into dark cellars and shouted for anyone hiding there to come out. One cellar, given the hand grenade treatment, netted 16 prisoners. Many tables were found set for dinner, with hot food on them. Farther down the street the men spotted an enemy machine gun in a house, called for 60-MM mortar fire on it, and knocked it out. "That was the only light mortar fire employed during the entire operation, because observation across the creek in Herrlisheim was impossible," stated Lt. John Patterson, Jr., first platoon leader, later killed in action in Germany.

A/56th hadn't gone very far when it came face-to-face with a Mark IV tank, firing 88 rounds, plus machine guns. After a half hour, during which time the Hellcats waited, out of danger, the tank withdrew. As they began to move down, they encountered six enemy paratroopers in a house, killed three of them and wounded another. Lt. Charles M. Willis, later killed in the battle for Speyer on the Rhine, spotted the turret of another Mark IV. As the men began to drift toward the creek, three more tanks were spotted moving south on the Drusenheim-Gambsheim highway.

All the infantry units were encountering trouble at this time. German tanks infested the town, and no Hellcat tanks had yet been able to get across a series of blown bridges. Units also were losing contact with each other. Snipers were taking their toll. The enemy never dared to snipe at groups, but picked off individuals on numerous occasions. One infantry group found an unmanned anti-tank gun in a street, set a thermite grenade in its breechlock and pulled the pin, thereby melting it and putting the gun out of commission.

About 1600 hours, January 9, A/56 units asked for more ammunition and called for artillery fire by map coordinates on enemy strongpoints across a creek in Herrlisheim. A/56 was not expected to cross the creek in Herrlisheim until B/56 was in its appointed place to give it support, but B/56 was in desperate straits, having suffered a great loss of manpower, and being without communications or heavy fire support. A/56th withdrew to the northwestern tip of Herrlisheim and prepared to defend the town that night. The men were ordered to remain as quiet as possible so as not to attract the enemy. It was intended to consolidate the whole battalion the next morning and continue the push through the town. In its new position, A/56th moved into a three-sided box formation, so that it could best repel any attacks. Shortly after ten houses were occupied, a civilian passed one of them, and within a few minutes that house received a heavy mortar concentration, which, however, injured no one.

Let us now return to B/56 and pick up its travels as it entered the town about half an hour behind A/56th. The time is still January 9, the second day in the battle of Herrlisheim. Merciless pounding by artillery and mortar had thinned the ranks of B/56 to 35 men. By this time, about 1500, it had become badly disorganized and had only its light machine gun squad and a few riflemen, at whom enemy machine gun fire kept hammering. One Hellcat who attempted to return the fire with a light machine gun was literally blown apart by an 88-MM shell. After counting noses, Lt. Casner ordered his men to pull back, to be replaced by C/56th. B/56th moved into one house; and, after other members of the company straggled in, the total personnel reached 36. Dusk was now setting in. Capt. Francis Drass of A/56th was placed in charge of all infantry in Herrlisheim. He ordered B/56 to defend its present position during the night and not advance until the following morning (January 10). B/56 later expanded its holdings to six houses when the anti-tank platoon joined the company. After Lt. Casner was badly wounded by mortar shell fragments outside the B/56th command post, Lt. Henry Hilgert took over command.

Up to this time the mortar and artillery fire near the Hellcats had been harassing. But now the shelling began to grow heavier, setting a company command post on fire. After 1900 hours, the concentration lifted, and Jerries began to infiltrate into areas held by Hellcats.

C/56th also set up a defense near the other infantry companies, and established fields of fire and listening posts. Light tanks of D/714th, which had managed to get into Herrlisheim to evacuate Hellcat wounded, not only did a marvelous job in this respect, but also helped with prisoner evacuation.

Tanks hulks at Herrlisheim—one year after the battle



That night Battalion Headquarters, 56th AIB, tried to send a radio-equipped patrol into Herrlisheim to contact the infantry and bring out information as to troop strength and dispositions. When this detachment reached the bridge at Herrlisheim that spanned the Zorn, the men saw a dozen Germans manning a machine gun in the snow. They immediately racked the area with "grease" guns, killing 10 Krauts. The party also questioned two prisoners, on whose persons were found K-rations and Camel cigarettes. When questioned by Capt. Elmer Bright, 56th Intelligence Officer and leader of the patrol, the prisoners reported that the 56th AIB in Herrlisheim had been wiped out. At this point, approximately 33 infantrymen who had escaped from the northern edge of Herrlisheim and were hiding in the fields along the Zorn River, came over to the patrol when they discerned friendly fire. They claimed that all friendly troops in the town had been cut off and surrounded. The patrol decided to turn back to Bischweiler, since burning buildings were now illuminating the area. The intelligence brought back by this patrol threw the 56th AIB command post into confusion. Capt. Clyde Maddox of Headquarters Company, 56th, was ordered to round up all available men for a rescue party, but CCB caused this plan to be cancelled.

NIGHTMARE IN HERRLISHEIM

Throughout that first night in Herrlisheim proper, the beleagured infantry companies in the town were in constant trouble. Cut off and bereft of communication with the battalion, they were subjected to constant German combat patrol raids, some of which concentrated their efforts on setting fire to the houses occupied by the Hellcats. The infantrymen were ordered to shoot at anything that moved outside, and for no one to leave the house in which he was "holed up." Indeed, it meant sheer suicide to step into the darkness; and, besides, the infiltrating Germans were often difficult to identify in their white capes, which blended with the snow-covered ground.

The Germans never let up with their burp and machine gun chatter at B/56. As S/Sgt. Peischl succinctly explained, "The Krauts seemed to have a system of first firing at a building with tracers to mark it, and then blowing it up with a bazooka or AT gun. Some might have been doped up, for they would come right up to our doors, open them, and yell, 'Komm heraus!' We wasted no time in knocking them off."

Enemy mortar concentrations continued to knock out Hellcat machine gun nests, snipers took their toll, and Jerry hand grenades came through every window. However, with the coming of dawn, enemy efforts at infiltrations ceased.

The 494th's artillery support was stepped up tremendously during the night and the following day. Fire on prearranged targets in the town set them ablaze. In addition, a 600-yard strip of the main road and railroad, at enemy strong points, was constantly harassed.

At 0200, January 10, the tanks of B/714 were ordered to cross the newly built Bailey bridge at the waterworks and move to Herrlisheim immediately. Their mission was to contact what infantry remained in the town and have them withdraw under the tanks' protection.

Just at daybreak the tanks entered the western edge of Herrlisheim and began trying to locate the infantry. One German tank was knocked out at point-blank range. The crew was asleep inside. The tankers shouted for the Hellcat doughboys, but these men were afraid of stepping out of houses, owing to their harrowing experiences in the darkness of the previous night. Many figures were noticed running in the opposite directions—Germans.

An unidentified American soldier finally led the tankers to A/56; the situation was explained, and all tanks pulled up in the vicinity to protect the infantry. The tankers sent a message to CCB stating that the cut-off units had been found, and asked for permission to leave, after expressing the belief that they could not hold the town. The request to withdraw was refused, and the tanks were ordered to remain in the town.

During the day light tanks brought in supplies for the beleagured Herrlisheim forces and evacuated the wounded. Fog was thick much of the time. On the first trip one light tank was hit and the driver killed, but the remaining four tanks continued on to Herrlisheim and returned. These vehicles made three hazardous trips in and out of Herrlisheim and were able to evacuate most of the wounded. During the fourth trip back, at about 1400 hours, the tanks drew heavy anti-tank fire which prevented further work. The first tank made it back to Rohrweiler in good shape; the second came in burning; the third was knocked out, and the fourth had to return to Herrlisheim.

Early that same morning the engineer company, B/119, received word that it would move down into Herrlisheim, to be used as infantry in alleviating the situation of the 56th AIB. Ammunition, small arms, machine guns, mines, and bazookas were quickly gathered. All three platoons, at full strength of 45 men each, reached Herrlisheim safely and immediately established a "beachhead." Artillery, mortars, and machine guns opened up as the engineers moved over the footbridge at Herrlisheim and tried to knock it out.

Throughout the day it remained unsafe for any of the infantry to venture out of the houses they had occupied during the night. Nevertheless, the companies held their positions during the day, for although the Germans ceased their infiltration tactics and withdrew, they still covered the numerous

alleyways which criss-crossed all through northern Herrlisheim. Wire crews and runners were continually under sniper fire. The air was still filled with a grim tenseness, for every doughboy realized that his situation was far from favorable.

After Lt. Col. Ingram of the 56th had reached Herrlisheim and plans had been formulated for the attack to continue, CCB sent in Lt. Col. Phelan, 714th, to take charge of activities in the town. He entered Herrlisheim at 1300 hours, approved plans for the impending attack, and included the engineers and his tanks to support it. C/714 tanks were now in Herrlisheim, and German bazooka men and snipers had infiltrated all about them, knocking out two.

Up to the time that the C/714th tanks arrived in Herrlisheim, there had been only sparse harassing artillery and mortar fire. From then on the tempo increased, reaching a crashing crescendo at 1340 hours, the same time that an artillery concentration from the 494th AFA began to land in nearby Stainwald Woods. All tank hatches were securely fastened to protect the occupants against enemy artillery and mortar projectiles, but the infantry didn't fare so well. Heavy enemy concentrations steadily plastering Hellcat positions in the town reduced total 56th AIB personnel to about 150.

The command post in Herrlisheim had to be moved several times because of the number of wounded littering the floor. The latest CP, in a house, received direct hits, wounding Lt. Col. Phelan and a number of officers and men. Even the roof was knocked in. During this turmoil everything was held up. The attack was never able to get under way because of high casualties among the infantry and the steady stream of enemy mortar and artillery shells which was maintained until dusk. Requests for reinforcements, medical supplies, and evacuation of wounded were sent to CCB. Efforts at dropping medical supplies from a cub plane had to be abandoned because of fog.

With the approach of darkness that second night in Herrlisheim, Hellcat units established a defense for another night of horror. Tanks were disposed alongside houses, with fields of fire covering the streets, in the event that Kraut tanks ventured about during the night. Plans were formulated for a withdrawal if one should be ordered. At 2000 hours word came through from CCB for all units to withdraw from Herrlisheim as soon as possible. Orders, however, were immediately issued that no withdrawal would take place until all wounded, including a German officer, had been evacuated. Tanks evacuated every wounded man; although one tank was knocked out, no casualties resulted. The wounded having been successfully evacuated, withdrawal of the remainder of the Hellcats could be effected.

This withdrawal was carefully organized and was no haphazard operation, with the exhausted troopers striking out on their own. Every man knew his part, and it may be added, did it well. In order to keep noise at an absolute minimum, motors were not started until the tanks were ready to leave. A friendly artillery barrage came down on schedule, and under its protection the troops withdrew from Herrlisheim. The night was so dark and the air so heavy with fog that the infantrymen had to hold on to one another's belts as they moved in a close column. The mist and bitter cold of the night intensified the exhausted men's sufferings.

Under skillful control, all units reached the other side of the Zorn River within less than one hour after the movement began. The enemy was apparently unaware of the movement, for it was completed without loss and without being subjected to shelling. The infantry companies dug defensive positions all along the canal, not only to stem any possible German drive toward Bischweiler, but also to prepare for future attempts to taken Herrlisheim in the days that followed.

Thus was brought to an unsuccessful conclusion the first attempt of the 12th Armored Division to capture the town of Herrlisheim, its capture being one part of the Seventh's Army's over-all plan to whittled down the bridgehead which the enemy had securely established in the sector west of the Rhine River and north of Strasbourg.

HELP ARRIVES

The rest of the division now was sent in to clean out this German bridgehead. The attack began in the early morning hours of January 16. CCB, although exhausted and shot up, attacked to the east to establish a bridgehead in the vicinity of Rohrweiler. General Ennis' CCA moved out to attack enemy positions in the Stainwald Woods and Offendorf. Both combat commands renewed their attacks the following morning. CCA attacked Herrlisheim from the south with Major James Logan's 17th AIB and Lt. Col. Scott Hall's 43rd Tank Battalion, while CCB tried to extend its bridgehead across the Zorn River. The latter command made slow progress because of heavy enemy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire.

CCA elements were successful in entering Herrlisheim on January 17. During the night, however, the 17th AIB was surrounded by a numerically superior enemy force and had to withdraw, losing many officers and men by capture.

It was in Herrlisheim on January 17 that a major portion of the 43rd Tank Battalion become "missing in action." The 43rd, which had lost 12 tanks in the attack on Offendorf the previous day, followed the 17th into Herrlisheim. The last contact anyone had with the task force came at noon on January

17, when its commanding officer radioed his executive officer: "Things are plenty hot." The fact was later established that 14 tanks had been knocked out, and 15 were listed as missing. The 43rd was reorganized under a new commanding officer.

At daylight on January 18, a task force consisting of B/66th AIB and B/23rd Tank Battalion, launched an attack to relieve the elements of the 17th AIB still in Herrlisheim, but this attack was repulsed.

CCB renewed its attack on January 17, but made little headway against stiffening resistance and heavy artillery fire. An attack the next day also failed to make much headway. Also, the command was still very weak in manpower, having had no replacements for the troops lost in the initial attack on Herrlisheim.

All Hellcat elements withdrew from the vicinity of Herrlisheim during the night of January 18-19, setting up defenses along the west side of the Zorn River. Small enemy counterattacks along the division front that night were repulsed. During the afternoon of January 19 the enemy attacked in CCA's area with tanks and infantry, the attacking force being estimated at 800 infantrymen and 50 tanks. The Hellcats stopped this attack cold.

About this time higher headquarters reached the conclusion that this area was no fit place for an armored outfit, but rather a place for infantry to dig in. During the night of January 19-20 the 36th "Texas" Infantry Division took over, on defense, with two regiments where the Hellcats had attempted to attack with approximately two battalions. The 12th was ordered to move to Hochfelden, in Corps reserve, and to be prepared to counterattack in case the Germans broke out of the bridgehead. On the night of January 20-21 the Hellcats, less elements supporting the 36th Division, moved to an assembly area and established a counter-reconnaissance screen from Wasselonne to Weyersheim.

Sometime after the Herrlisheim operation, an unofficial report gave the 12th Armored credit for having contained from six to seven enemy divisions in its own "little bulge." The NEW YORK TIMES reported: "Field Marshal Gen. Karl von Rundstedt, now falling back in the Ardennes, would prefer to retain the initiative somewhere (else) along the line"—a reference to the Herrlisheim bridgehead. The BOSTON GLOBE stated: "It is here, apparently, that von Rundstedt has decided to make one more supreme effort to upset Allied plans on the Western Front, after his costly Ardennes failure." At any rate, the 12th had held the Strasbourg "prestige front" against a tremendous pinchers movement by some of the best troops in the Germany army.

On January 20 members of the Hellcats Military Police Company evacuated the civilian population of Rohrweiler under enemy fire and were the last to leave the area prior to the withdrawal of the front line troops.

A rest camp opened in Strasbourg provided facilities where one might even procure a shower. Captured wine and champagne were quickly consumed by lucky finders. This practice was in keeping with that of the 12th's newest boss—the First French Army. Hellcat Division artillery units were placed in the vicinity of Strasbourg to support the French 3rd DIA Artillery. Division headquarters moved from Hochfelden to Ittenheim on January 25, and the same day the entire division closed in that area. Movement was accomplished under hazardous road conditions, caused by the severest snowstorm that the Hellcats had yet experienced in France.

After the division came under French control, language difficulties were overcome by the Division Signal Officers sending a liaison radio station to II French Corps, traffic being handled by the 12th's liaison officer. The French reciprocated with a similar project. The last days of the month found the division making plans for counterattacking against Hoerdt, Gambsheim, and Kilstett, as well as continuing maintenance, rehabilitation, and drawing new men, vehicles, and supplies, all of which were needed as a result of losses at Herrlisheim. Brief combat training was given the new reinforcements, all of whom were awed by the Hellcats' new title of "suicide division."

U. S. Bombers took the 'fight' from this town's defenders.





One of the many Colmar victory celebrations. The Hellcats were always represented.

FEBRUARY—COLMAR

Early in February the 12th Armored Division played a major role in routing the Germans from their last major stronghold in French territory—the Colmar pocket. Aside from its political and economic significance to France, this pocket of German resistance east of the Vosges Mountains was a strategic military strongpoint of the enemy. Heinrich Himmler had promised Hitler and the German people the city of Strasbourg as a Nazi Party birthday gift. This plan the 12th Armored Division had discovered and thwarted in the Herrlisheim offensive. Toward the end of January the enemy, making his final bid for success from the south in the vicinity of Benefield-Erstein, was repulsed again—this time by French troops.

Colmar fell to Allied troops, despite desperate German resistance, on February 12, and the next day the 12th Armored Division was committed to action with the mission of continuing the attack to the south and east, cutting through the pocket and trapping as many German troops as possible in the noose.

The German order of battle was characterized by disorder and confusion, with resistance generally scattered, although intense at some points. The 12th Armored was deployed through southern Alsace between the I'll River and a line from Colmar to Rouffach for the purpose of effecting a junction with the French moving up from the south, and tying the noose on all Jerries remaining in the Vosges Mountains.

In the lightning, three-day drive, February 3-6, the Hellcats fought as an armored division is capable of doing, killing an estimated 300 Germans, wounding 850 and capturing 550. Only 23 Hellcats were killed.

A detailed description of this action, the big event for the 12th Armored during February, follows:

On February 1, Division Headquarters was located at Ittenheim, with the remainder of the Hellcat Division billeted in nearby towns. The 12th was still somewhat groggy from its experiences at Herrlisheim, despite the arrival of replacements.

On February 4 long armored columns of Hellcats were moving toward Colmar, arriving there just after its liberation by the U.S. 28th "Bloody Bucket" Infantry Division and French forces. The Hellcats arrived just in time to be received as lib-

erators as Hellcat columns threaded through the crowded streets to the Colmar outskirts where fierce fighting still raged. Every citizen of Colmar was filled with joy on that day of liberation. Beautiful Colmar girls brought pitchers of wine to the occupants of Hellcat vehicles as they passed through the city. Dead Germans littered the main thoroughfares, and the parks were covered with dead men and artillery horses. The French throngs paid no attention to the enemy dead. Some French even stood on the dead bodies in order to get a better view of the passing American armored column. French newsreel cameramen, besides U. S. Army Signal Corps photographers, were almost everywhere. It was indeed a day of wild rejoicing, but the Hellcats had a mission awaiting them and could not pause for the celebration. That very afternoon CCB launched an attack toward Sundhoffen. The attack, consisting of drives by two task forces, progressed slowly under heavy enemy artillery fire. The Hellcats, however, managed to reach the north edge of Colmar Woods, where orders were received for the entire division to attack south from Colmar, combat commands abreast, corordinating the advance with the U. S. 28th Infantry Division.

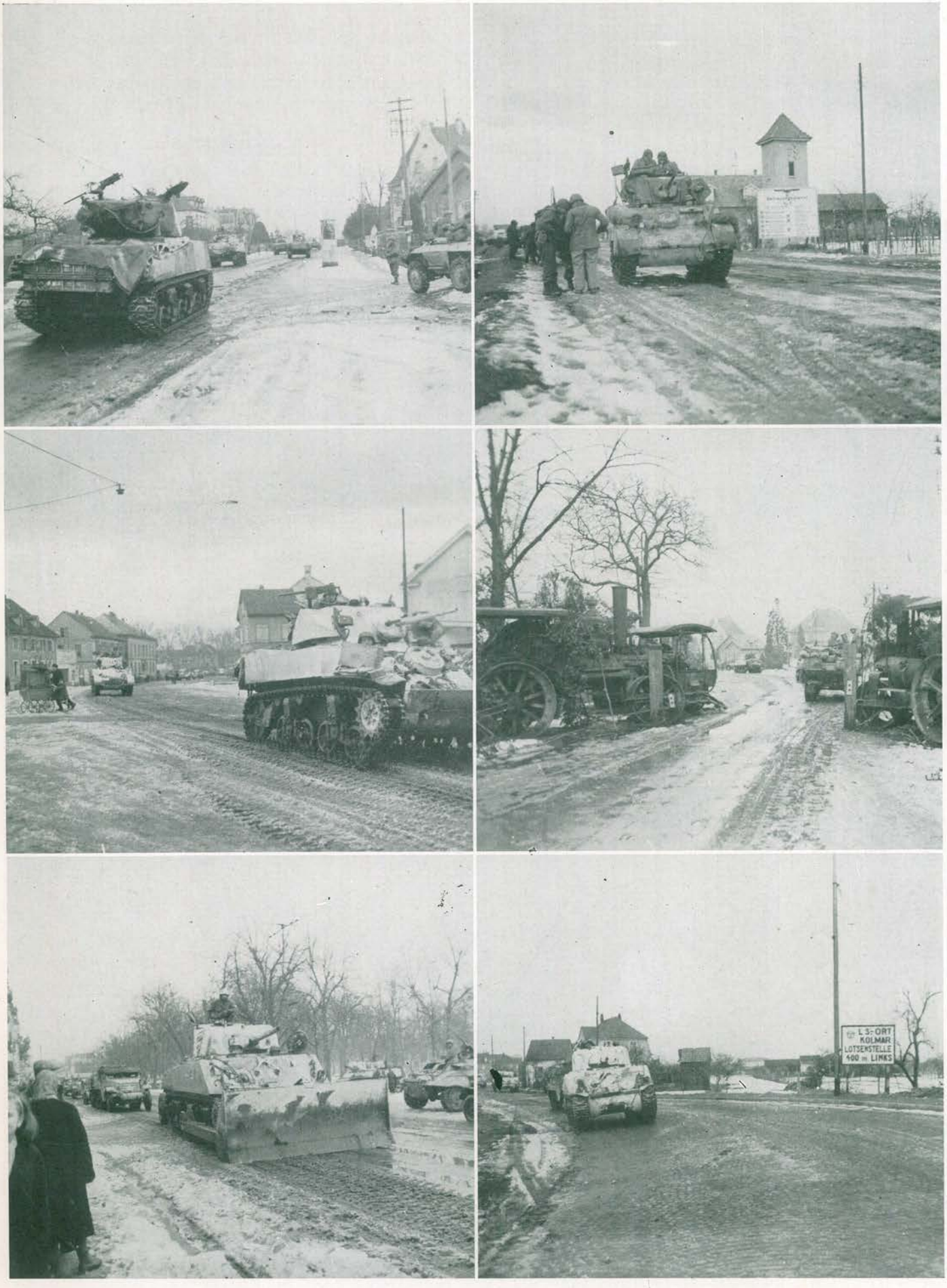
Then the rat race really began. Strong points were by-passed. Combat commands passed through one another. Artillery battalions fired at Rhine River bridges, then traversed a 3200-mil shift or "about face" and fired on targets in the Vosges Mountains. The Hellcats met Herrlisheim No. 2, but a much quieter Herrlisheim than No. 1. Despite hostile anti-tank fire from woods that destroyed three tanks and moderate infantry resistance, both objectives were taken by nightfall.

Three task forces from CCB continued the attack during the afternoon, taking subordinate objectives in conjunction with the 109th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Division. Dead German horses, used as artillery prime movers, littered every main road, victims of Hellcat artillery fire. Pockets of by-passed Germans were successfully routed in each town. More and more wine was discovered, and the villages, as well as the mademoiselles, were much prettier than their counterparts in Lorraine. The Hellcats were irresistible as they threaded their way through the Colmar pocket.

On numerous occasions French forces came up to occupy French towns after Hellcat combat drives had cleared them of Nazis. French commanders

Victory Parade in Colmar





714th Tank Battalion attacks Germans south of Colmar (the Germans are 500 yards away in the forest at the edge of the city. The Germans scattered debris on the roads leading out from the city as tank road blocks.



Tank taxi—sitting on top of a camouflaged medium tank south of Colmar, American infantrymen and armor are ready to move out for the attack on Germans in the bulge between Colmar and Mulhouse.

Major Medette, the commanding officer of the 5th R. C. A., First French Division, and Brigadier General Riley F. Ennis, Commanding Officer of Combat Command A, which took Rouffach, confer on missions to cut off Germans in the Vosges pocket.



apparently took this attitude: "The Americans can go on and fight. We will stay and kiss the girls." And orders were always waiting for Hellcat attacks on the next village! CCA's Task Force Hall, consisting of the 43rd Tank Battalion (less Company A) and C/66th AIB, started attacking in the early morning of February 5, by-passing enemy resistance. Road blocks were encountered on the outskirts of Rouffach, but infantry elements passed through and entered the town at 05:12. Other infantry elements moved around the town to seal off exits and to contact French forces which had reached the southern edge of town during the night. Rouffach was not actively defended by the Germans, but numerous prisoners of war were taken in the town. Other elements of CCA were also successful in their attacks, reporting that Gueberschwihr and Plaffenheim had been cleared of the enemy.

CCA completed mopping up operations in Rouffach on February 6 and maintained a screen to the west of Rouffach, Gueberschwihr, and Pfaffenheim, blocking exits from the Vosges Mountains.

Since attacks of the 28th Infantry Division had been going so well in the direction of the Rhine, the 12th was informed that it would not be committed further in this action and was ordered to block the passes leading from the Vosges Mountains. Hellcat troops were relocated to accomplish this mission, sending motorized reconnaissance patrols through every village and town in its assigned area, and, incidentally, picking up a number of prisoners of war who had donned civilian clothes.

The victory in the Colmar pocket action was celebrated with a parade in Colmar on February 8, and the 12th Armored was represented by C/66th AIB. The French certainly wasted no time in holding their victory parades. The Colmar fete on February 8 was the first of many victory celebrations to be held by the French in that town. For its part in sealing the Colmar pocket, the 12th Armored Division was authorized to wear the Colmar Coat of Arms. The French presented General Allen with the Legion of Honor and the Croix de Guerre with Palm, and awarded the Croix de Guerre to a dozen others officers and men of the division. Following these ceremonies, the Hellcats took off for neigh-

Fighting near the Colmar pocket



boring towns to secure billets and a day or two of relaxation before the next mission.

The rest period, however, proved of very short duration. In fact, that very day, February 8, the Division was ordered to the St. Avold area, in Lorraine, with the mission of relieving the 10th Armored Division of maintaining a counter-reconnaissance screen south of the Maginot Line and east and west of the Sarre River. Division Artillery, less the 493rd, was attached to the U. S. 70th Infantry Division and later to the U. S. 44th Infantry Division.

During the last half of February Combat Commands alternated in maintaining a three-hour alert status for possible movement to repel any enemy counter-attacks. The division conducted maintenance, rehabilitation, small arms and artillery firing, and small-unit training. The Division Artillery continued to support the 44th, 70th, and 63rd Infantry Divisions. The Division Administrative Center moved from Avricourt to Chateau Salins on February 16, then to Faulquemont on February 20. The 12th was getting a well-earned but long overdue rest period. Movies, showers, dances, passes, and a daily air show as P-47's bombed and strafed nearby Forbach and Saarbrucken helped to make the time pass all too quickly.

During this period of inactivity passes were freely issued to everyone. Rest centers in Strasbourg, Paris, Nancy, Lyon, the Riviera, and London began to notice the influx of Hellcats. Most passes were for three days, plus travel time. The London excursion was seven days, plus travel. Captured Lugers and cameras were carried to the rest centers, there to be sold to air corps or service troops who couldn't get near the front lines. Hoarded PX supplies were taken into the French cities of Paris, Nice, and Cannes, there to be sold on the black market for francs to keep the Hellcats in spending money during their "three day blitz."

A detachment of officers from the 14th Armored Division came up to the front during this period to question Hellcat troops on "what's combat like?" The 14th had just arrived at Le Havre and was assembled in the Hellcats' old stamping grounds near Auffay. This visit made the Hellcats realize that they were in truth combat veterans, and furthermore, that their tag of "suicide division" was widely known in the ETO.

MARCH—FRANCE AND GERMANY

March, 1945, saw the Hellcats in a role they loved to play—spearheading an army. The division played an extremely important part in driving the German forces across the Rhine River and deep into the heart of the Reich.

The speed and power of the U. S. Army armored division advances caught the enemy completely off balance and made an orderly withdrawal through the Saar impossible. The stream of prisoners



PW cage



DP center near Forbach



PW's and civilians arrested at Saarbrucken

through the Hellcat Prisoner of War cages, the great quantities of captured and destroyed enemy equipment and supplies, and the enemy territory captured—all were adequate proof to the Krauts that "it was the beginning of the end." And none realized it more thoroughly than they.

During the early days of March the enemy still clung to the hope that his Siegfried Line defenses would be capable of holding off the threatened Allied offensive. During this period the 12th Armored was in reserve, ready to follow up any breakthrough of the Siegfried Line in the Saarbrucken area. When no such breakthrough materialized, the Hellcats were assigned to a small sector, with the mission of supporting infantry attacks. Strong probing into the enemy's defenses forced him to give up Forbach. "General Mud" was the Hellcats' chief opponent in those days, days which represented the division's longest stay in one place since it had left Tidworth Barracks in England.

Rumors persisted that the Hellcats were to join the Third Army, which was tearing over the German landscape in breath-taking fashion. On the night of March 16, for the second time in history, a rumor proved to be true. "On again, off again" —shoulder patches and unit vehicle markings were to be removed at once. The Hellcats were going to join the "Blood 'n Guts" Army. Once again more "C" and "K" rations were to be the fare.

For the second half of the month, the 12th Armored, borrowed from the Seventh Army to augment Patton's thrust into Germany, led the Third Army drive to the Rhine cities of Ludwigshafen, Speyer, and Germersheim. It became known as the "mystery division," because it was one of the few units taking part in the gigantic push which, for security reasons, could not be mentioned by name in the press. Security was necessary, because the departure of the Hellcats from the Seventh Army left General Patch with only one armored division, the 14th, a fact which intelligence wanted to keep from the enemy.

Hellcat activity during the period March 1-17 consisted in maintaining a counter-reconnaissance screen west of the Saar River and south of the Maginot Line by Lt. Col. Whipple's 92nd Reconnaissance Squadron. Meanwhile, CCA was in the vicinity of Bousbach, supporting the attack of the 70th Infantry Division against Forbach and holding the town of Styring Wendel after it was cleared by that division. The town was cleared by March 5, and CCA took over its occupation.

The division received three infantry rifle companies (Negro) on March 10, and one company was assigned to each of the armored infantry battalions and designated as Company D.

Ready to start on attack mission



The initial order for the biggest operation of the month was received in the middle of the night of March 17, St. Patrick's Day. (And who ever heard of an order arriving in daylight!) The division was ordered to join Patton's Third Army.

After the move to the Third Army had been completed under strict security, the division was ordered to pass through the 94th Infantry Division and to race for the Rhine River, in the vicinity of Worms. The extremely narrow roads through France, Luxembourg, and into Germany at Trier took a toll of vehicles tipped over in ditches and ravines, and maintenance crews had to work for hours to right the vehicles.

The advance into German territory began with little emotion and with less competition than had been expected. Combat commands advanced steadily during the day, meeting only light opposition. Three hundred prisoners of war were taken, and two 105 MM howitzers and 25 horses were captured.

March 19 proved to be a field day for the Hellcats, who now had been ordered to veer to the southeast to the Rhine and to seize all bridges found intact. On this one day the Hellcats captured an estimated 2,500 prisoners, 3 ammunition dumps, a regimental supply train, 400 horses, and 700 trucks and wagons. In addition, they seized an enemy hospital with patients and equipment intact. The bulk of the prisoners and materials was captured in the vicinity of Birkenfeld and Baumholden.

From start to finish the drive to the Rhine was a test of human endurance. Besides, the Hellcats had to guard against snow blindness from so many white flags. These were flying from every German home. About 25 miles a day was the average measure of progress. Movement was so rapid that prisoners were merely disarmed and told to keep walking toward the rear until some one picked them up. The route was littered with German equipment: smashed small arms, panzerfausts, artillery, wagons full of junk, dead horses, and every type of Wehrmacht vehicle from Volkswagen to Tiger tanks. The Hellcats' delay in this particular dash to the Rhine seemed to be caused by Lugers and P-38's.

The advance continued on March 20, after orders were received to "Keep going. When you hit the Rhine, search for a bridge intact at Ludwigshaffen." This date proved to be another conquering day for the Hellcats. Moving from Birkenfeld to Ramsen, they took 2,200 prisoners, killed an estimated 1,000 enemy, destroyed a locomotive and cars, 20 tanks, 20 anti-aircraft guns, 15 artillery pieces, and 50 wagons. The Hellcats also were treated to spectacular air shows, as coveys of P-47's used retreating German columns as practice targets. CCB cut the Autobahn, mounted it, and raced to the Rhine near Grunstadt. The 17th AIB of CCR reached the same river at 01:00, March 21, followed by the 23rd Tank Battalion. Elements of the 56th AIB had reached the Rhine at 23:30, March 20. One task forced occupied Frankenthal, sent combat patrols into Ludwigshaffen, and contacted friendly armor on the right. CCB and the 92nd Rcn. were ordered to attach Speyer, a city of approximately 50,000 population on the Rhine.

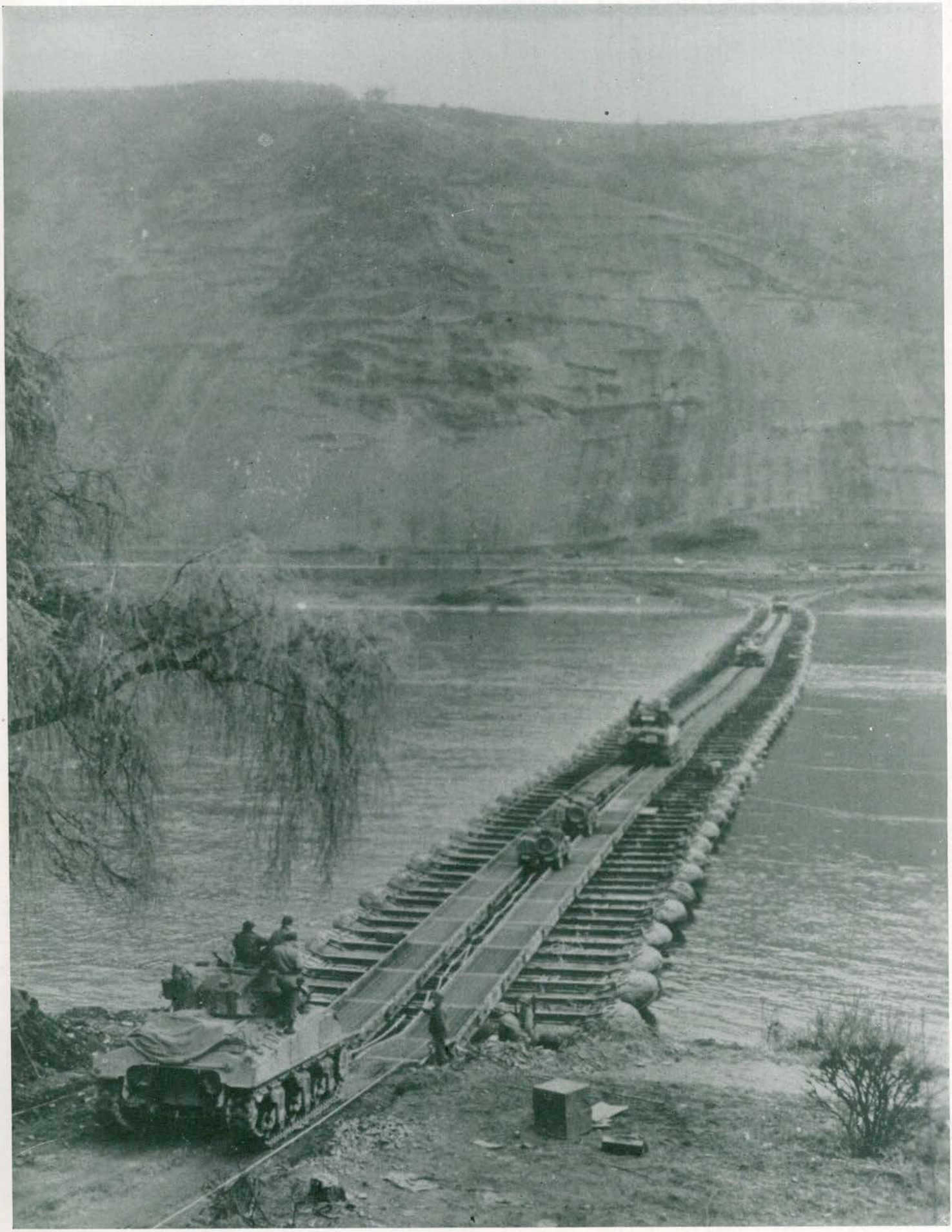
The division's newest objective, the Speyer bridge, was blown on March 23, and the attacks veered southward to seize the Germersheim bridge. On March 24 CCB cleared Speyer after a rough fight, and CCA occupied Ludwigshaffen. Although the bridges at Germersheim were also blown, CCR occupied the town, establishing contact with the 14th Armored Division.

At noon, March 24, the division reverted to control of XXI Corps and the Seventh Army. Although efforts to secure a bridge over the Rhine were unsuccessful, because all spans between Ludwigshaffen and Germersheim had been blown by the enemy, all other phases of the Saar breakthrough were outstanding achievements.

Capt. Wm. Bartholomew's troop D/92nd covered itself with glory during the fast armored action. Its exploits were recognized as outstanding achievements, and D/92nd was later awarded the Hellcats' only coveted "Presidential Unit Citation." The General Order awarding the honor tells the story: Troop D, 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance (Mechanized), is cited for extraordinary heroism, gallantry, and esprit de corps from 18 to 20 March, 1945. During the three days of action, Troop D, reinforced by the fourth platoon of Troop E, the third platoon of Troop F, and a detachment of Headquarters and Service troop, spearheaded the 12th Armored Division's drive from the vicinity of Trier, Germany to the Rhine. Covering a distance of 72 miles, the troop fought four separate engagements, overran three large columns of retreating enemy, and broke through two well-organized defensive positions. Over 1,000 prisoners of war were captured and evacuated, and hundreds more were disarmed and started to the rear. Eighteen 75mm and 88mm antitank guns were captured, ten of which were in position and overran. Fourteen medium artillery pieces, sixty assorted motor vehicles, seven ammunition trucks, and three hundred horse-drawn vehicles were captured or destroyed. The success of this brilliant drive definitely demoralized the enemy defenses west of the Rhine and enabled the 12th Armored Division to reach its objective without serious interference."

Hellcats now settled down along the Rhine for what, they hoped, was a well-earned rest. Every home was a potential wine-factory. Cellars were filled with fine wines and champagnes. "Loot" became a nasty word, and any Hellcat caught liberating a set of silverware to grace his table back home was promptly brought before his CO.

After a very short rest at Diedersheim for re-



We cross the Rhine



Bridging in combat—Infantry supported tank command on attack mission wait while treadway bridge is installed under fire near Dietersheim.

organization, word spread that the Hellcats would cross the Rhine. The crossing was made on March 28, commencing shortly after midnight. Every Hellcat sensed the melodramatic atmosphere of the crossing, going over the pontoon bridge at Worms in the tense darkness, with the burning skeleton of Worms' buildings growing dimmer in the overcast sky. Worms' quaint old tower-bridge lay demolished, impeding the Rhine's flow. Just north of it lay the Alexander M. Patch pontoon bridge, concealed by smoke in daylight and by darkness at night. The Hellcats wondered what was in the future for them as they touched the eastern bank of the Rhine. Would Jerry fight it out as an army in the open? Or would he acceed to Himmler's SS and guerilla warfare, using the Wehrmacht as a buffer?

To the 12th Armored Division fell the honor of spearheading the Seventh Army across southern Germany into the heart of the Nazi's vaunted National Redoubt. The advancing Hellcats found that the confusion and lack of control which had characterized the enemy's withdrawal to the Rhine also continued on its eastern banks.

No longer confronted by rugged Alsatian mountains or the Rhine, the Hellcats assembled at Lorsch overnight on March 28. From here the 12th promptly jumped off in three combat commands to spearhead the drive in Bavaria. Working with the 12th were the U. S. 4th Infantry Division, which had made the bridgehead, and later the U. S. 3rd Infantry Division. All indications pointed to a good rat race.

The 12th Armored Division was ordered to pass through the 3rd Infantry Division, Ennis' CCA to seize Amorbach, Bromley's CCB to capture Beerfelden, and then both commands were to advance to Wurzburg. CCR was placed in reserve. The advance continued, and on March 31, the task forces had reached Tauberbischofsheim and Eiersheim, with the divison's forward CP at Hardheim. This advance had been comparatively easy, and had been made through rolling land and small mountains where roads were lined with German ammunition dumps. While occasional Jerry planes came over for a bit of strafing, they were never very aggressive or successful. Whenever resistance was encountered at the point of a column, artillery was quickly brought up to blast a way through, or else part of the column would engage in a flanking maneuver to hit the enemy from his weak side. U. S. fighter bombers attacked Wurzburg in preparation for the coming attack on the city.

On the last day of March, Col. Gordon's CCR captured Roxberg and continued advancing to the east; other combat commands were moving rapidly in their assigned zones. On the same day the Hellcats were ordered to push forward into Germany. As the long armored columns snaked through der Krautland, the British Broadcasting Company, in a news broadcast, announced: "The U. S. Seventh Army's 12th Armored Division, near Wurzburg, is the farthest Allied unit into Germany at this time."

Within a period of less than two weeks during March, the enemy had lost 75 to 80 per cent of the infantry elements of the 23 divisions which had comprised the First and Seventh German armies which had fought and evacuated the Sarr-Palestinate region. During March, the Hellcats had captured 7,211 prisoners, including the commanding general of the German XIII Corps. The division had lost 5 officers and 72 enlisted men killed in action, 3 officers and 70 enlisted men were missing, and 20 officers and 298 enlisted men had been wounded in action. This was the price Hellcats paid for a great month of victories.

APRIL—DILLINGEN, GERMANY

The month of April was a period of continuous operation for the 12th. It also was a month of

South of Neustadt on road to Nurnberg, armored infantrymen cross small bridge on stream while treadway bridge is repaired under fire.





A victim of well aimed Hellcat tank fire

seeing white flags flying from homes in 500 odd towns which fell to the Hellcats as they advanced into the heart of Germany and extended deep into the highly publicized "National Redoubt." It was a period of seeing the Wehrmacht offer only token resistance in most sectors, and then fight with their backs to the wall savagely in other positions. Many die-hard SS troops were over-run and cut off by Hellcat infantry-tank teams.

The Prisoner of War cages were filled with members of all types of organizations, from crack paratrooper units to SS units, or decrepid members of "stomach" battalions and other units in which men with certain ailments were grouped. On April 28 the division captured 10,051 German soldiers, and at other times during the month a Corps Commander and a Lieutenant General passed through the cages of Maj. Lester Holmes' Military Police unit.

With the swift moving drive of the task forces in progress on April 1, the enemy had been driven from the Odenwald area, but he attempted to establish a defensive line from Bad-Mergentheim-Konigahofen-Ochensfurt and along the Main River to Wurtzburg. Into this line he threw all his available troops. Unable to hold his left flank securely, the enemy was forced to withdraw, and next attempted to anchor his main line of resistance from Uffenheim to Wurzburg. One by one the strong points fell as the 12th Armored hit between them and sealed them off. By April 10 his Main River defensive line had totally collapsed, and he was forced to withdraw what remained of his forces.

The only line of action open to the Germans in Bavaria at this time was to defend, wherever opportunity permitted, the approaches to Nurnberg, which was the gateway to Bavaria and the Redoubt area. Aided by the difficult terrain of the Steigerwald, the enemy resorted to strong points centered around key towns and along the wooded areas. However, in spite of numerous blown bridges, road blocks, mine fields, and well-emplaced infantry, he was rapidly cleared from the area near Kitzingen.

About the middle of April, when the United States armored threat to Nurmberg was greatest, the direction of the attack was changed for the



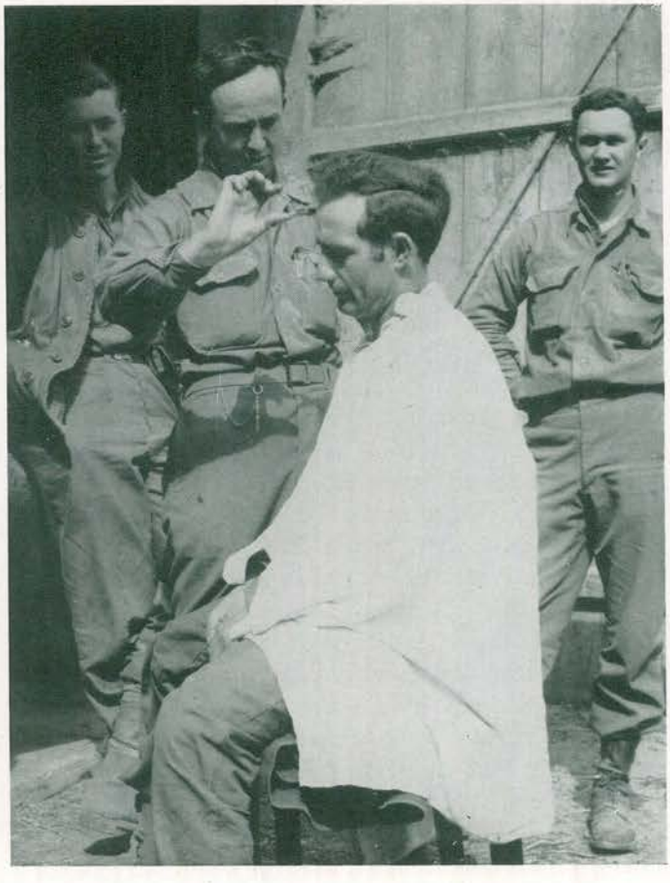
Above: Hot on the German Army's trail, remnants of the 3rd rifle squad, 1st Platoon, Company A, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, pose for squad member Robert V. Oakes, near Ansbach, Germany, April 19, 1945. They are, left to right: Isabel Quijano, Des Moines, Iowa; Harold Neff, Dayton, Ohio; Amerigo Burruano, Newark, New Jersey; Jack R. Hutchison, San Francisco, California; Edward Elko, Newark, New Jersey; Reginald Cunningham, Zebalon, North Carolina; Donald Costelli, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and Robert Milam, Cartersville, Georgia.



Left: The 12th Armored Division see the damage done by Allied bombers to the Nazi Congress city of Nurnberg.



Enemy "time" fire was often deadly



Right: Combat haircut being administered to Vergil Smith, Detroit, by Frank Marnik, Mollenauer, Pennsylvania. Sight-seers are Robert Milam, Centersville, Georgia and John Belcher of Shawnee, Oklahoma. Photo taken in Feuchtwangen, Germany by Robert V. Oakes, Davenport, Iowa.

12th Armored, and it turned south toward Ansbach. The enemy's lines was then pierced between the Frankenhoehe Heights and the Steigerwald Woods. This sweep to the south outflanked the major portion of the German XIII SS Corps.

The speed of the Hellcats' advance, added to the disorganization caused by the ever-increasing momentum of the Nazi retreat, insured for the Allied forces the first bridgehead over the Danube River. The bridge at Dillingen was secured by the Hellcats despite emplaced demolition charges and subsequent air attacks.

As the enemy retreated ever closer to the Redoubt area, his last defense line was ruptured in every sector. Here, in the vicinity of Munich, as in the case of Nurnburg, the axis of advance was again suddenly shifted, thereby butting off large numbers of enemy troops.

Even in the mountainous area of the Alpenland, propagandized as the National Redoubt, no effective line of defense was encountered by the advancing Hellcats. Despite the built-up story of impenetrable defenses and numerous full-strength German divisions in the area, the truth finally came out as Hellcat forces sped through the narrow passages of the Alps, meeting even less resistance than they had encountered south of the Danube. By the end of the month the enemy in this area, having lost 64 track-laying armored vehicles, 30 anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, 35 artillery pieces, 11 planes, and 32,000 prisoners, had suffered his share of the Allied "coup de grace" to the once proud German Wehrmacht.

HELLCAT OPERATIONS DURING APRIL

The first day of April found the Hellcat Division continuing a drive which had begun in March. The advance of CCA was eastward toward Hottstadt, which was captured. CCB advanced against moderate resistance and took Rottenbauer. CCR encountered increasing resistance in its advance to the East, but seized the town of Schweigern.

The 222nd Infantry Regiment of the U.S. 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division was attached to the 12th Armored Division on April 2. The 12th conducted active patrolling to the east in the direction of Wurzburg, but made no contact with the enemy. Task Force Norton moved to an assembly area east of Gaukonigshofen, while Task Force Fields remained in an assembly area in Ochsenfurt.

By this time all armored Hellcat task forces had gotten the art of military formations down to an exact science. The column of a battalion task force lined up something like this: At the point was a tank section, followed, in order, by a company of infantry in half-tracks; by the remainder of a tank company; by the remaining rifle company, with an engineer section or platoon, medical detachment, anti-aircraft detachment; and the headquarters company with its assault guns and mortars. The battalion headquarters unit was likely to be found at any place in the column; and the battalion commander, nearly always mounted in a peep, moved up and down the column, staying mainly near its head, where he could observe action.

Radio communications were at their best. Battalion commanders had SCR 508's in their peeps. A flick of the pushbutton and they could be in a variety of radio nets. The battalion command net probably was the most important one of all these. In it were all the company commanders, the Combat Commander, and the artillery liaison officer. Radio was the key to the Hellcats' many successful dashes through heavily defended enemy positions.

CCR, with two battalions of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division attached, launched an attack on April 2 and took high ground east of Konigshofen. CCB prepared plans for crossing the Main River in the vicinity of Oschsenfurt. Enemy aircraft were active on reconnaissance, bombing and strafing missions; and the 572nd Anti-aircraft Artillery claimed two planes shot down and two damaged.

Whenever a German plane came within shooting distance of a Hellcat armored column, up would fly thousands of bullets from every .30 and .50 caliber machine gun in the entire column. The noise of such a fusillade was worse than even a Hollywood gangster movie.

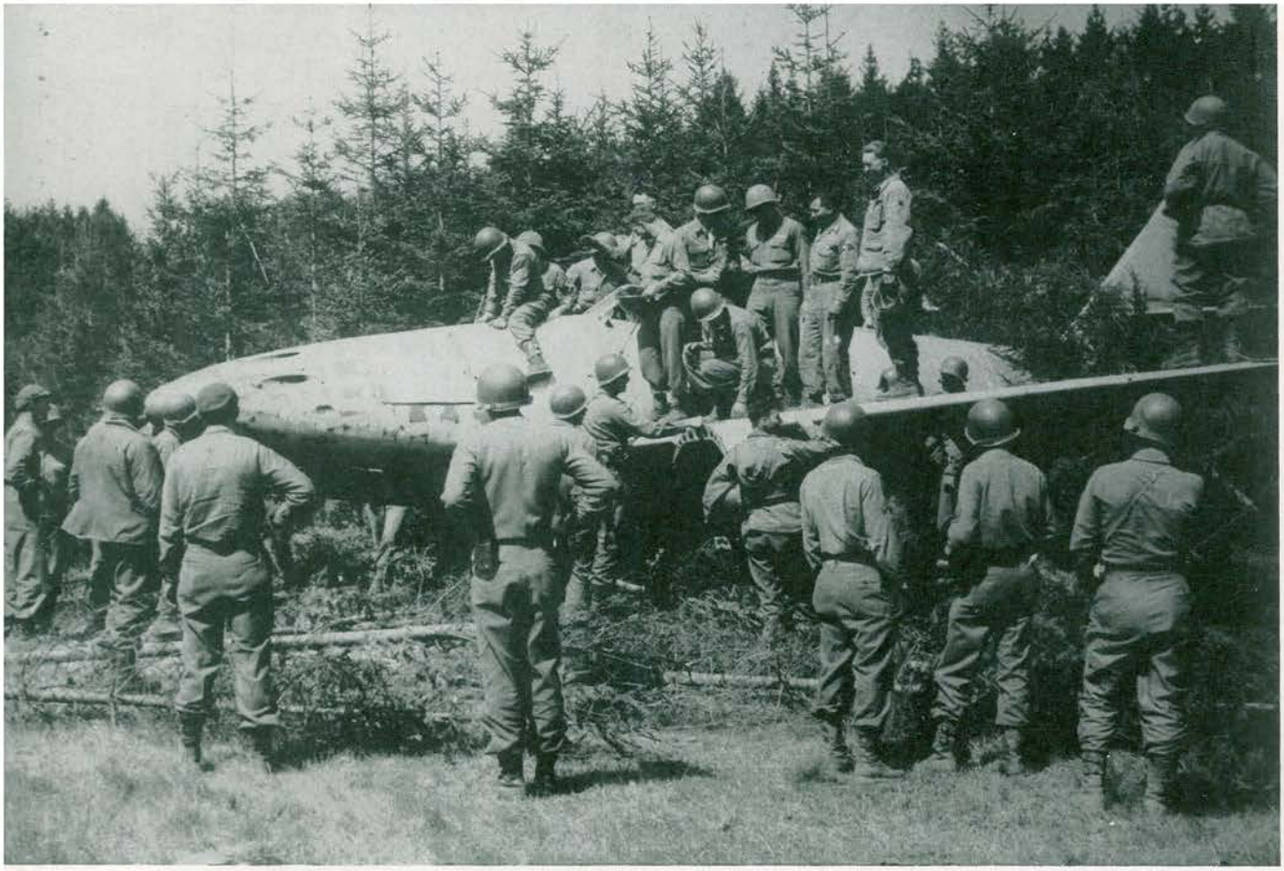
The attached elements of the 222nd Infantry Regiment moved out on April 3 to seize Wurzburg and occupied the town of Marienburg. They crossed the Main River in assault boats during the early morning and established a bridgehead on the east bank of the Main in Wurzburg, which was stoutly defended by infantry forces concealed in the ruined buildings. Despite this strong defense, the town was cleared of Germans after two days of fighting.

Task Force Fields of Combat Command B continued to attack to the north on the morning of April 4, but encountered strong enemy resistance. The task force occupied Erlach. The 17th AIB cleared and occupied Herrnberchteim; and Task Force Norton, which had been attached to Combat Command R for the operation, cleared Gnotzheim. The 92nd Cavalry attacked and seized high ground east of Obernbrett.

Operations at this time followed a similar pattern. The armored columns would travel cautiously toward their objectives until the men were forced to dismount and fight for it. When heavy resistance was encountered, the tanks were brought up to soften up the town or other objective. Able artillery support was rendered by the attached Hellcat artillery battalion. If planes were needed, and they often were, the air liaison officer with each combat command would call in his comrades of the AAF and direct them to the target. After a sufficient number of rounds had been poured into a



Top: The 12th Armored Division rolls into Erbach, Germany
Bottom: Speeding through Dinkelsbuhl, Germany



Members of Company A, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, inspect German jet-propelled plane that they have just captured intact. Event took place on autobahn, south of the Danube near the war's end. Photo by Robert V. Oakes, Devenport, Iowa.

town to terrify even the bravest inhabitants, the infantrymen inched their way through it, watching for snipers and strong points. If it appeared that the Krauts had withdrawn to the next town, the Hellcats re-mounted their vehicles, sped through the evacuated town, and repeated the process in taking the next defended municipality. Prisoners were often kept overnight, well guarded, and sent to the rear with the supply vehicles which made their daily trips to the rear for ammunition, fuel and chow.

CCA bypassed Wurzburg, advanced to the northeast toward Schweinfurt against moderate enemy resistance, and reached Rottendorf at dark. Meanwhile, Task Force Fields of CCB attacked from the vicinity of Erlach on April 5 to take Kitzingen. It seized a partially damaged bridge and established a small bridgehead on the east bank of the Main River. From this bridgehead, Task Force Fields attacked to the west and rapidly cleared several towns, and then returned to Kitzingen.

After overcoming enemy dug-in defenses at Bullenheim, CCR continued its advance to the northeast. In conjunction with CCR, the 92nd Reconnaissance, reinforced, attacked but was forced to withdraw at the close of April 5, when it was less than two kilometers west of Obernbreit. The withdrawal was caused by heavy small arms fire and Panzerfausts.

At this time, division forward was located at the Giebelstadt airport, one of the finest in Germany, which had been captured by CCB. Jet planes on the field were burned by the Germans as they fled, since it was impossible for the Germans to obtain fuel at that time. The Division Signal Company passed out one bottle of cognac (Hennessey) for each man. Quite naturally, no questions were asked as to the source.

There was little need for non-fraternization rules at this point, for Hellcats were wary of every German civilian encountered. The unromantic appearance of the average German farm girl also made it much easier for the Americans to abide by the rules. It was seldom that a German farm girl was seen without a milk pail in her hand, or engaged in pitching hay on a manure pile. All in all, the whole picture was not conducive to amorous thoughts.

After Kitzingen and Einersheim had been occupied, CCB and R and 92nd Cavalry went into assembly for maintenance repairs on April 7-8, while CCA continued advancing to the northeast in support of the U. S. 2nd Infantry Division in its attack on the ball-bearing manufacturing center of Schweinfurt. CCA had been attached to the 42nd Division on April 7.

The Hellcat Division was assigned the mission of reconnoitering in force in the zone of Ober Schenfeld-Eggensee-Insingon-Waldmannshoften, and the 101st Cavalry Group, consisting of the 101st and 106th Cavalry Squadrons, was attached to the division for this mission.

While engaged in carrying out this mission, the cavalry elements met stiff resistance, so CCR and CCB were ordered to attack. CCB continued on this mission on April 10, while Task Force Fields was held up by hostile tanks and artillery fire at Klein Langheim. Operating in the zone of the 101st Cavalry Group, CCR, on April 10, captured Reusch

Advance into Nazi city



Coberg, Germany, at the heighth of the street fighting



A Nazi general gives up to the 12th Armored



and Weingenheim, besides clearing Gechenheim against stiffening resistance.

At this time word was received over the radio concerning the death of President Roosevelt at Warm Springs, Ga. The news made the Hellcats fight all the harder.

Renewing their attack on April 11, CCB advanced to the south and southeast, capturing eight towns, and by the end of the day task forces had fought their way to Markt Bibart and Altmannhausen. After capturing Pfaffenhofen and three other towns, CCR turned southwest and took Ohrenbach. Meanwhile the 92nd Cavalry continued to follow CCR, mopping up by-passed centers of resistance. By April 12, forces of CCB had taken Krautostheim and Markt Nordheim. Other elements of CCB took a side route and surprised the defenders of Krassholzheim, capturing it.

Observers could trace the route of the Hellcats in these actions by a glance at the burning towns and knocked-out German vehicles along the roads.

The encirclement of the enemy in the Hellcat zone was completed at 14:30, April 12, when elements of CCR joined forces with the 116th Cavalry Squadron at Aub, and with the 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Division, at Waldmannshofen.

However, simply because the Germans were encircled did not mean that they automatically surrendered en masse. Most of the time they were unaware of their untenable position until they tried to break out, with resultant stiff engagements.

Lt. Col. Richard Hockman's 495th Artillery Battalion vividly remembers the time, on April 12, in the vicinity of Wallmersbach, that leading elements en route to Aub were held up by artillery fire and Tiger tanks. Liaison plane "How Eight" was called upon to provide his specialty, firing on artillery and tanks. Then the column gradually resumed its advance over the rolling terrain east of Uffenheim towards Aub. At Wallmersbach, Charlie Battery played host to a Kraut plane which had its .50 caliber guns blazing. When this plane landed, out of gas, in a nearby field, out scrambled three men and a woman. Meanwhile, the task force had been cut off from the rear; by-passed Krauts had sealed the gap. After two days of isolation, supplies were badly needed by the task force. At some periods, all the Hellcats' stomachs seemed to be filled with butterflies. Hence, the cub planes were sent to reconnoiter possible supply routes. Radio reports of German ME-109's made the battalion uneasy concerning the flights. It was later learned that "How Eight" was shot down and both occupants killed on such a flight.

CCA, which had been attached to the 42nd Division, assisted in the capture of Schweinfurt, after considerable bombing had been done by U.S. fighter-bombers. This combat command, which also cut off Nazi escape routes to the southeast, reverted to the 12th Armored control on April 13.

On April 13 Combat Command R and B captured 818 prisoners while mopping up in wooded areas. A by-pass was built for a blown bridge in Aub and Lt. Col. Henry Haltom's 119th Engineers constructed a Bailey bridge in the division zone. The 572nd Anti-aircraft claimed one German plane knocked down and the capture of its crew.

On April 13 the Hellcat Division received word regarding its new mission of exploiting territory south of Nurnberg. Relieved by the 42nd Division, CCA assembled in the vicinity of Ullstadt, prepared to follow Combat Command B on its route.

Both Combat Commands B and R launched their attacks about noon on the 14th, but advanced slowly. CCB was held up by a blown bridge over the Aisch River. Company B/119 constructed a treadway bridge in near Dietersheim, and elements of Task Force Fields crossed and established a bridgehead. Passive enemy defense measures, including road blocks, huge trees dynamited to fall across roads, mines, and blown bridges offered the major hindrances to the division's advance on April 14. The great number of "DP's" which clogged the road also hampered the rear elements; front line troops had no such problem. The displaced persons hid in cellars, until they were sure the town was in Allied hands, and then swarmed out, asking for food and cigarettes. Amazingly enough, few ever requested a rifle to even old scores. One of the few that did request a weapon was not a DP, but a captured Australian soldier, who asked for, and received, an M-1 and some extra clips. Declaring that he had a little job that nobody but himself could do, he departed and was never seen again.

The advance to the east was made against strong resistance, consisting of stoutly defended road blocks (usually by 88's cleverly hidden), small arms, and artillery fire; however, the advanced cleared some 30 towns. Many of the villages took a horrible beating from Col. Gildart's artillery. CCA moved from its assembly area to assist the 42nd Infantry Division in taking Neustadt; however, before the attack could jump off, the Burgomeister surrendered the town, which was occupied on April 16. Shortly thereafter, CCA's Task Force No. 1 moved out, and before dark captured both Langenzeen and the bridge over the Zehn River.

This grinding combat routine soon formed a similar pattern of operations for all Hellcat forward units. The armored column would start toward its first objective at about 08:00 and would attempt to take the last village by 17:00 the same day, at the latest. The town would then be divided into defensive zones, with company and task force command posts usually located in taverns. The companies would then determine the disposition and strength of guards. In the meantime, all prisoners would be taken to the "stockade," usually a well-guarded barn. Hen houses were avidly searched



Members of 1st Platoon, Company A, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, pause for photo after capturing Burgau, Germany, April 25, 1945. Photo by Robert V. Oakes, Davenport Iowa.

German prisoners captured in the battle for Burgau, Germany, and vicinity by 1st Platoon of Company A, 56th armored Infantry Battalion. Photo by Robert V. Oakes, Davenport, Iowa.







German civilians bring home loot which they said they had not had for six years from broken open warehouses.

for fresh eggs. Sometimes butcher shops yielded fine steaks. After supper, there were always conferences at battalion and company headquarters to discuss that day's operations and make plans for those of the next day. In the morning the supply vehicles would load up the empty trucks with prisoners and depart for supply depots in the rear, where prisoners would be dumped and supplies loaded for the trip forward to catch up with the advance during the day.

On April 17 CCA took six towns, while task forces of CCB (56th AIB and 714th Tank Bn.) advanced nearly 13 kilometers during the day, encountering enemy passive defenses between Burgleim and Heilsbronn. The 119th Engineers assisted the division's advances by placing bridges over the Zibart River. By this date, movies were being shown by division special service to units in the division rear.

Because of a change in Army and Corps boundaries, the misson of the 12th Armored Division was changed on April 17, and Munich was given as the direction of attack. At daybreak, April 18, CCB marched from the vicinity of Horbach to the vicinity of Dattenbach and sent a reconnaissance toward Ansbach-Feuchtwangen, with their change in mission to cut off escape routes for SS troops that were reported in that area. CCA turned east on April 19.

Advancing from Heilsbronn, elements of CCB entered Ansbach so rapidly that the Hellcats caught a German MP directing traffic at a busy intersection in the town. Patrols from CCR were contacted in the center of the city, after CCR had shelled the city, believing that no Hellcats had entered at that time. Nobody in CCB was hurt, all men having taken shelter in some of the large concrete buildings which housed Ansbach's many breweries.

CCA elements occupied Schwabach and Buchachwabach, setting up road blocks in both towns. En route to these towns, CCA captured an estimated 250 prisoners, 40 enemy combat planes on the ground, and seized an ammunition dump. CCR and CCB mopped up Ansbach and had the town (of about 50,000 population) cleared by April 19. Both commands moved the same day by two routes toward Feuchtwagen.

An interesting sidelight incident took place at this time in the interrogation of a captured German 88 crew of two who had fired two shots at the nose of Task Force Norton near a vast airport outside of Ansbach. The older of the two said he had told his young partner that it was foolish to fire at the advancing column. The result, he said, would be that within ten minutes there would be one hell-of a lot of artillery falling on the gun crew. The older German, a veteran of African combat, said he knew, for he had had too many similar experiences in Africa and Italy. Ten minutes, and then boom! The German was asked how long it did take for the Hellcats to knock out the gun after its first shot at the column. "Three minutes," was the respectful reply.

Road blocks at Schwabach and Buchswabach were maintained by Ennis' CCA until April 20, when the move to Feuchtwangen was begun upon the units' relief by elements of XV Corps. Arriving at the picturesque Feuchtwangen, CCA's Task Force 2 attacked south and rapidly seized Moyersbronn, Schopfloch, Lehengutingen, and Dinkelsbuhl. At the last named town, attack was slowed down by a blown bridge.

From Dinkelsbuhn, CCA advanced southwest, with Task Force 1 leading, and reached Elchingen at dusk. They captured 13 towns and much material. The practice of having civilians turn in all weapons, ammunition, field glasses, and cameras to the burgomeister reaped great rewards for Division members who sidetracked many such items on their way to the turn-in depot. "Let me turn it in for you," was the answer for the German to pass over a good Leica or P-38. Naturally, division headquarters FROWNED on this practice.

The 101st Cavalry Group, which CCA by-passed, continued to mop up by-passed centers of resistance in the wake of CCA. While Bromley's CCB remained in an assembly area, Gordon's CCR moved to Baldern. Commanders were ordered to continue the advance as rapidly as possible and to seize some intact bridges across the Danube River.

Jumping off in the early morning of April 22, Task Force 1 of CCA moved in high gear, reaching the Danube at Lauingen, covering a distance of 40 kilometers in approximately four hours. The task force found the Lauingen bridge a mass of wreckage. Task Force 2, also breaking speed records, reached the Danube River at Dillingen at 11:45 hours and captured a bridge intact.

This was one of the Hellcats' more dramatic moments, for seconds here meant success or failure. The force of Lt. Col. Clayton Well's 66th AIB, led by a light tank platoon, swept into Dillingen with guns blazing, routing more than 1,000 disorganized defenders, and shooting up a retreating mechanized column. Surging onto the bridge, the Hellcats captured a handful of demolition men and drove other Germans away with tank fire before the span could be blown.

They found the bridge wired for demolition; but, with the forced aid of a German, the Hellcats cut the wires to the six 500-pound aerial bombs secured to the bridge. While tanks of the 43rd held off the enemy, a squad from Company A, 66th AIB, raced across the bridge and dug in on the southern side. So swiftly had the bridge been taken that Krauts on the Danube's southern side were not even aware that the bridge had changed hands. Consequently, approaching German vehicles were easy targets for



'Nuf Said!

tanks. No sooner had the two-lane concrete span been taken than other 12th Armored units poured across to secure the new bridgehead.

Task Force Hall, first to reach the river at Lauingen, and Task Force Fields were responsible for driving the enemy beyond easy artillery range of the prize target, and the Hellcats, rightfully proud of their prizes, posted the following sign at the northern approach to the bridge:

"You are crossing the beautiful blue Danube through the courtesy of the 12th Armored Division."

CCB reached the Danube at Hochstadt at 04:35, April 22, after advancing all the way from Feuchtwangen, but found all bridges in its sector had been blown. Bombed railway box cars provided hundreds of Hellcats with fine German flying clothing, including heavy, furred overcoats. These garments felt good in the cold; but, alas, orders soon came to get rid of them, for no one wanted to be mistaken for a Kraut and get shot.

Task Force Fields of CCB was attached to CCA to assist in holding the Dillingen bridgehead. In the vicinity of Bopfingen and Lauchheim, CCR mopped up by-passed centers of resistance and captured Lippach. The 101st Cavalry Group continued to mop up resistance and occupied Lauingen.

Enemy aircraft were extremely active in attempts to destroy the bridge, but they met with no success. Sure shots of the 572nd AAA were dug in all around, and they knocked down six fast moving enemy planes.

Upon the arrival of CCA in the area, the 15th RCT, 3rd Infantry Division, was attached to it, and Task Force Fields reverted to control of CCB. Task Force 1 and the First Battalion, 15th RCT, made separate attacks on Wertingen, but the Krauts were well fortified and repulsed the attack with some losses to the Hellcats.

CCB began mopping up towns on the south side of the Danube, as the 101st Cavalry Group protected the flanks of the Hellcat Division and also secured three bridges over the Mindel River near Burgau on April 24. Enemy planes were again active in the area, and the 572nd AAA chalked up three knocked-down planes and four damaged in the record book.

Continuing their attack on Wertingen from the previous night, CCA captured the town against stubborn resistance, and on April 25 the 15th RCT reverted to the 3rd Division.

Elements of the 63rd, "Blood and Fire," Infantry Division operating on the 12th Armored Division's west flank, received a vicious counter-attack in the vicinity of Leipheim, and sent out a call for help which CCR answered with an attack on the city from the south and east. CCB elements also gave a helping hand, and by 12:00, April 26, Leipheim flew the American flag.

CCB assembled near Burgau. From there Lt. Col. Wipple's 92nd Cavalry started out on April 26, advanced rapidly to the southeast without meeting resistance, captured an airfield, and seized a bridge intact across the Wertach River near Hiltengen. Elements of CCR hurried to take guard duties at the airport and reported 40 to 50 jet-propelled ME-262 planes were captured; 20 were in working order, except that they had no gas.



The Danube, April 1945



Mail at Ration Dump near Dillingen, April 1945

The Hellcats now were really rolling. CCA roared to the Lech River at Landsberg. Lt. Col. Haltom's 119th strengthened a railroad bridge and built 240 feet of treadway bridge near it. Thousands of Allied prisoners were liberated at Landsberg and Schwabmunchen. Other thousands of slave laborers in striped gray and white clothes, with bones showing and eyes almost popping out at our chow, were set free. Included among the freed Allied prisoners were 1,400 American soldiers.

The Hellcat Division advanced against only scattered resistance on April 27 and during the day captured 5,200 prisoners, two hospitals with 1,300 patients, an airfield with 70 planes, and a signal warehouse.

Every Hellcat passing through Landsberg wondered why the Germans didn't keep Hitler imprisoned there when they had him, for it was in the Landsberg jail that "the man with the moustache" wrote "Mein Kampf."

As they advanced over the Lech River from Landsberg, Hellcats had their first clear view of the majestic Alps in the distance, with their snow white crowns. To the Hellcats, they also looked rather foreboding.

First CCA, then B, followed the 101st Cavalry Group over the newly constructed Lech River bridges. CCA advanced rapidly to the southeast against small groups of enemy and a few defended road blocks. By midnight, April 29, CCA had contacted elements of the 10th Armored Division at Oberau and assembled in that vicinity.

A rumor, which proved baseless, swept the division to the effect that, if the 12th Armored reached Innsbruck, Austria, ahead of the 10th Armored, the Hellcats would win a presidential unit citation.

After crossing the river, CCB attacked Diessen, with the mission of assisting CCA in seizing Innsbruck. It reached Weilheim on April 29. Upon receiving information from a Munich civilian that

The German prison camp Hurlach Lager No. 4 near Landsberg





this city wanted to surrender, elements of the 101st Cavalry Group moved in the direction of this Nazi bastion. Stoutly defended road blocks and artillery fire, however, caused this force to return to the division zone.

Against light opposition, CCB advanced through snow drifts to Durnhausen and Schlendorf, where seven blown bridges faced them. For amusement, the force routed out high German officers and Nazi governmental officials who had fled before the Allied advance to swank chalets in the Alpine villages. German generals became a dime a dozen in the bulging prisoner of war stockades.

Finding no bridge intact over the Laisch River, CCB made plans for construction of a bridge east of Sindelsdorf to be started early on May 1. Snow was still falling even at this date, and Hellcats had to crane their necks to see the tops of the nearby Alpine peaks.

Throughout most of the day, CCR remained in its assembly area near Weilheim; but at 19:00 hours, April 30, the command moved northeast acting on orders to sweep the area between the Ammer and Wurm Sees (inland lakes). The immediate objective was Starnberg, which CCR reached at 21:20 the same day.

Division headquarters personnel made themselves comfortable in the magnificent and luxurious Messerschmidt estate on the beautiful outskirts of Murnau. A large Polish officers' prisoner of war camp was liberated in the Murnau vicinity by Hellcats.

Combat Command V of the Second French Armored Division was attached to the 12th Armored at noon, April 30, and it moved to an assembly area near Weilheim. The 92nd Cavalry blocked the Inn River Valley despite heavy resistance.

As April, 1045, came to a close, the Hellcats were deep in snow in the once-feared "Redoubt," and still moving southward into the Alps.

MAY AND THE END

It was during the last few days of April and the first few days of May that the Hellcats came to realize that the German machine was broken and the end of fighting was near. Hellcats became extremely cautious, for no one wanted to become a

12th Armored Division enters Weilheim, Germany

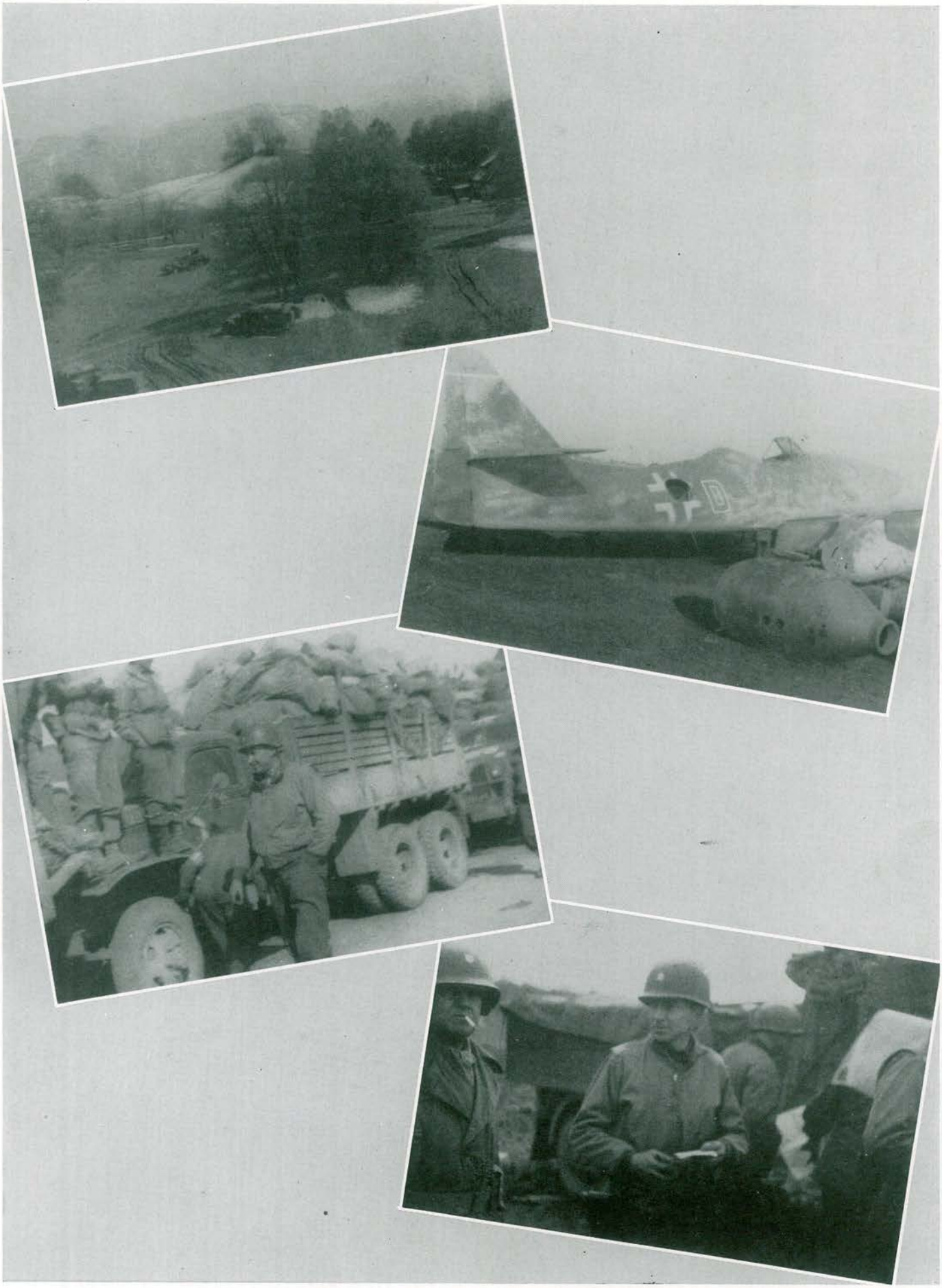




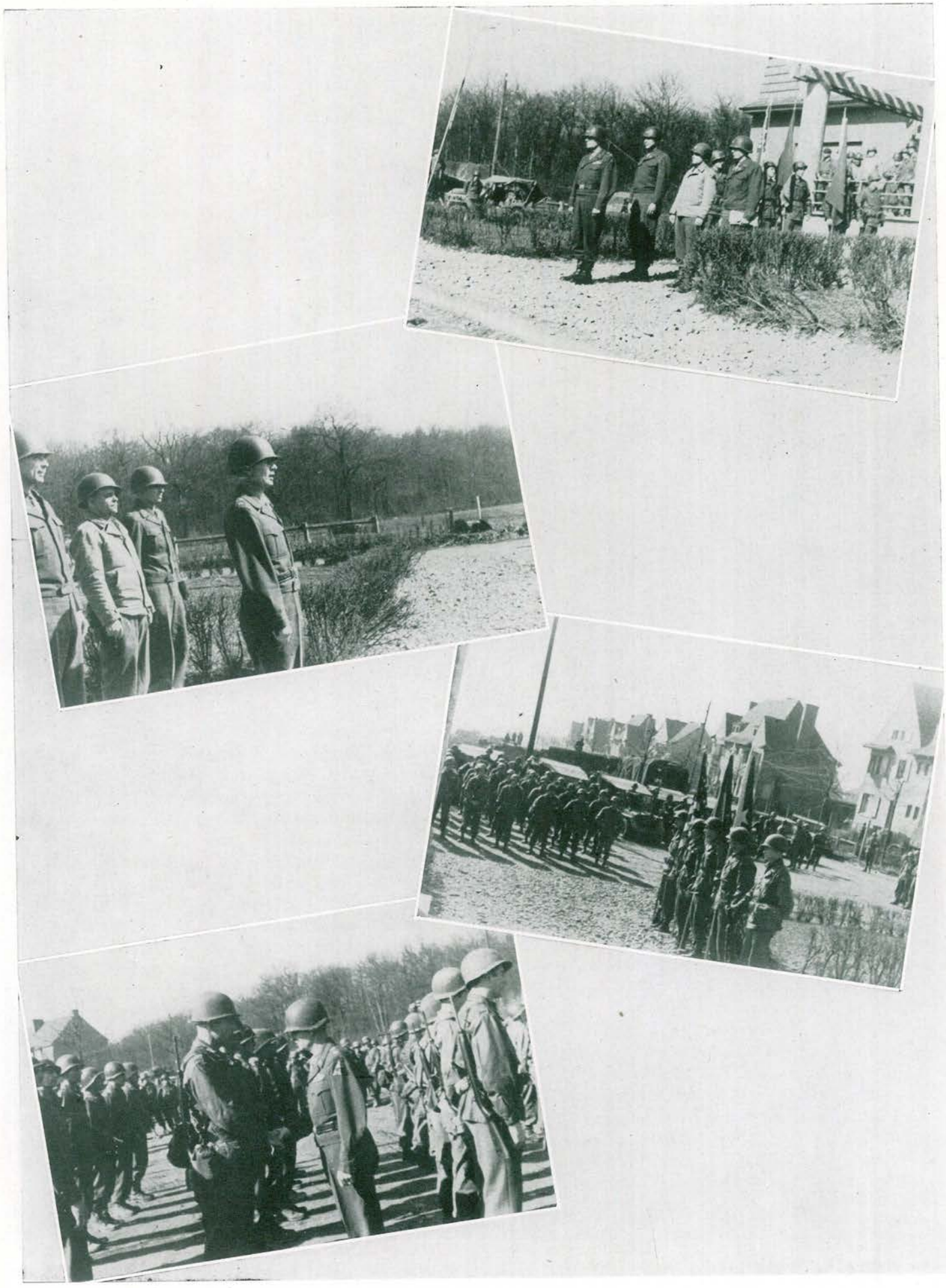
Anti-aircraft vehicles stand on the bluff above the railroad bridge over Lech River where German flak guns fought it out with mechanized cavalry units on the grounds and lost. Note that the Alps can be seen in background 40 miles away.



Left to right —In Dillingen area, Maj. Gen. Roderick Allen, Lt. Col. Edward F. Seiler greet large group of Indian troops freed by armored forces in Finningen.



Hellcats In Action



"For Gallantry in Action . . . Above and beyond the call to duty."



92nd Cavalry Squadron guard at a road junction near CP keep warm in the May snow storm near Murnau, Germany.

casualty with the end of hostilities so near a reality. The Hellcats' mission was to block the mountain passes leading into Italy and the Brenner Pass, and to clear the Inn River Valley. The task forces were making good time, meeting only light resistance from small groups of fanatical SS troops.

On May 2, Lt. Col. Douglas Cameron's 17th AIB set what is believed to be a ground force record for movement through enemy territory—60 miles in 7 hours. The 17th was operating under CCR, whose mission was to proceed from Starnberg on the Wurm See to the Inn River and to clear the river valley to the south into Austria.

Supported by a platoon of tanks from C/23rd, the 17th jumped off at 06:00, followed by the rest of the Combat Command. At 15:00 the fast-traveling doughboys whose half-tracks moved two abreast down the wide and smooth Salzburg super-highway, halted their column beyond Pfraundorf, 60 miles from their starting point. Then they realized they were alone in the spearhead position. Everyone was quietly sober. Not even one crack was heard about the caution, "Don't fire at a soul; it may be the Russians." The 23rd Tank Battalion and other elements of CCR had been halted many miles back, when SS engineers blew a bridge on the autobahn after the 17th had passed over it. Later the 23rd caught up with its companion task force, by-passed it, and with Company B, 17th AIB, crossed the Austrian border at 13:18 hours on May 3. Meanwhile CCB was waiting for the 119th Engineers to construct a bridge over the Loisach River at East Sindelsdorf. CCR units were preparing to attack south towards Innsbruck.

CCV, French, crossed the Inn River on May 3, and by the end of the day had reached Sulzbach.

It was on May 3 that the Division captured its largest number of prisoners, processing 12,060 through the division cages.

On the following day, units of CCA continued to advance slowly to the south, encountering stiff resistance, including defended road block and small arms, machine gun, and artillery fire. Having reached Sparchen at 21:00, May 4, the command was relieved in position by the U.S. 36th Infantry Division, coming up from a month-long rest.

Combat Command V continued to advance to the east along the autobahn, meeting strong passive resistance as far as Bad Reichenhall.

The word that every Hellcat was eagerly await-



Harold Neff, Dayton, Ohio, and Robert Milar, Cartersville, Georgia; pose before ancient Landsberg, Germany, structure where Company A, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion took up occupation duties as war ended. Photo by Robert V. Oakes, Davenport, Iowa, May 4, 1945.

ing arrived at noon on May 4. Nothing could have been easier on the ears. The Division was ordered withdrawn from the front lines and was made Seventh Army reserve. The French Combat Command V reverted to control of the 2nd French DB at the same time. The 101st Cavalry Group went to XXI Corps.

Orders received from Seventh Army indicated that the 12th Armored Division would assume control of the Seventh Army Security Command in the vicinity of Heidenheim, Germany, and the Hellcats began the joyful movement to that area on May 4-6. The Division CP opened in that small, quaint city at 16:00 hours on May 5.

At 02:50 hours, May 6, the Hellcats received the welcome news that the German Army Group on their front had surrendered, and that all troops were to halt in place. By this time, most of the Hellcats were on the way back to their new era. At last, fighting for the Hellcats was over.

Upon arrival in the Heidenheim area, units began the relief of the 44th AAA Brigade on the security mission of guarding vital installations and supplies. The Hellcats also assumed disciplinary control of all persons in the area.

On the Official VE Day, May 8, the units of the 12th Armored were in their assigned areas and carrying out the mission assigned by the Seventh Army Security Command. During the period, all targets were efficiently covered.

With the fighting over, the days of passes, garrison life with reveille, plenty of water and hot showers, PX rations, swimming pools, tennis courts, softball games, movies, USO shows, fraternization lectures, and leaves to Paris, England, and the Riviera returned.

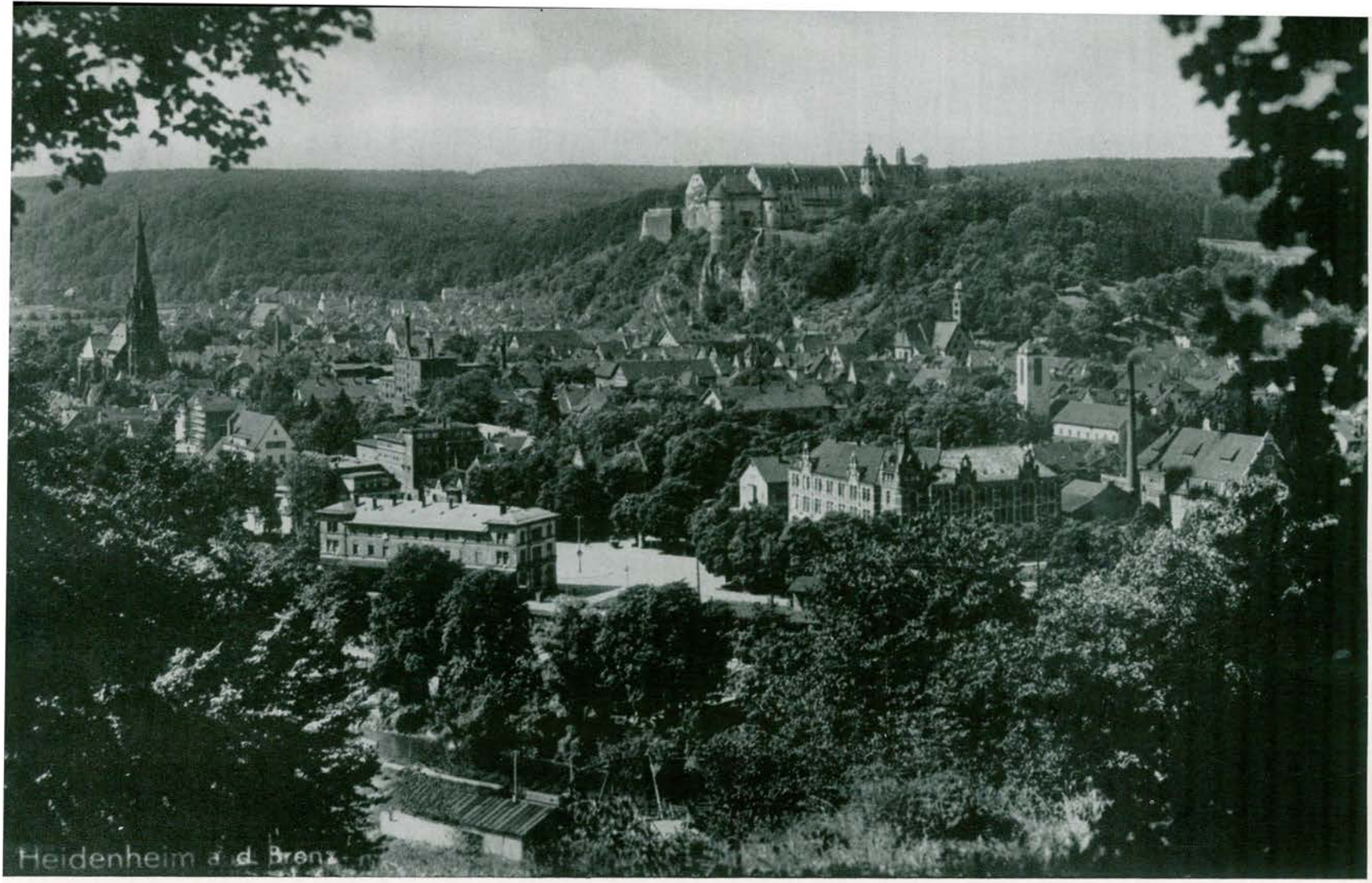
SUMMARY

The Hellcats had reason to be proud. Looking back over their rapid thrust across Germany, 37 days from the Rhine to Austria, men of the 12th Armored Division could trace a trail of victory which they had blazed against a mixture of weary Wehrmacht soldiers and fight-to-the-death SS troopers. In the short space of five months, they had seen their division transformed from a green, untested outfit into one of the most feared fighting machines on the Western Front.

The prisoner take during the final stages of the fighting was impressive. Of the 70,166 prisoners of war credited to the division, 63,013 were taken after the Rhine crossing. The total was 30,651 for

Crowded in all available passing trucks, 15,000 German prisoners were taken by the 12th in the Inn River Valley near Kufstein, Rosenheim area, Austria.





Heidenheim—the occupational CP for the 12th Armored Division

the final week alone, but the biggest one-day haul came on May 3, when 12,035 Germans, including 9 generals, passed into the cages.

Nearly 8,500 Allied prisoners of war, including 1,500 American, had been liberated by the 12th Armored. In addition, approximately 50,000 non-military prisoners gained their freedom when the division routed the Germans from the Redoubt stronghold.

Among these were 14 French notables, including two former Premiers, Edouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud; General Maxim Weygand and General Maurice Gamelin, both former commanders of the French Armies; Jean Borotra, international tennis star; Michael Clemenceau, son of the World War I French statesman, and the sister of General Charles de Gaulle.

Held in an Alpine castle in Bavaria, these people had been snatched from death at the hands of SS troops by a group of Hellcat tankers and armored infantry. They were turned over to the 36th Infantry Division, which had assisted in the rescue.

The Hellcats had set a blistering pace from the Maginot Line to Austria, and there had been little time for rest.

Combat Engineers of the 119th Armored Engineer Battalion did more than their customary job of building bridges for the tanks, removing demolition charges and clearing mine fields—they often laid aside their tools for weapons and fought as infantrymen.

The 82nd Armored Medical Battalion won the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque for its outstanding accomplishments. Every combat man had a word of praise for the medics—those men who walked the front lines unarmed.

Problems of supply were solved smoothly by supply personnel operating under G-4 and Col Evans' Division Trains. Not once were tanks stopped for lack of fuel, despite the huge quantities needed, such as during the days of April, when one million gallons of gasoline was needed to keep the division going.

Lt. Col. Paul Woods' 134th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion, which was awarded a star to its meritorious Service Unit Plaque, leap-frogged its heavy equipment forward to make it accessible when tanks and guns needed repairs.

The military police platoon, augmented in combat by the division band, had a full-time job in handling prisoners, but that was only one of the many jobs that it handled.



Red Cross girls at Heidenheim

One of the most difficult taks, that of keeping constant communications for the far-flung combat commands with higher headquarters, was efficiently performed by the 152nd Armored Signal Company, which also was awarded the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque.

These accomplishments represented teamwork by a good team, from the armored doughboys, tankers, and artillerymen at the front, to the hindmost echelon unit, which usually was not so far back at that.

The good work of the Hellcats was officially recognized, for when the fighting ended more than 500 battle decorations had been awarded to personnel of the division, and many more were pending.

Besides the individual awards, the 12th Armored Division as a unit was highly commended, as it was singled out for outstanding commendations from every corps under which it operated—VI, XV, XX, XXI, and II French. Typical of these commendations was that of Major General F. W. Milburn, XXI Corps Commander, who wrote:

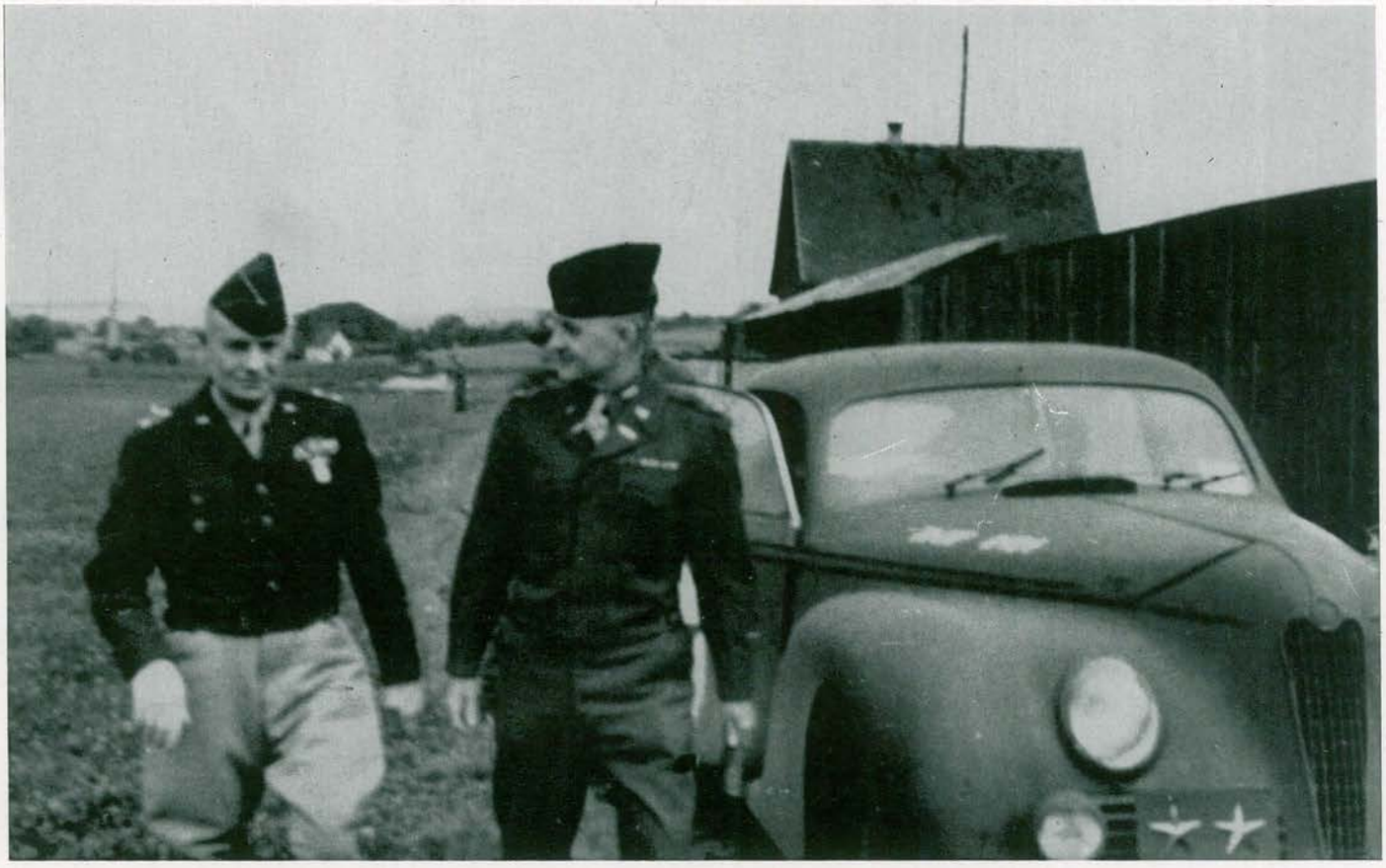
"I wish to express commendation and appreciation for the spirit, aggressiveness, and valor with which the 12th Armored Division so successfully performed its every combat mission while operationally attached to this headquarters from March 31, 1945, to May 5, 1945.

"From your initial action in Forbach and Styring Wendel through the attack and capture of Wurzburg and Schweinfurt, where you gave magnificient assistance to the 42nd infantry Division, the turn south, the capture of Feuchtwangen, to the seizure of the bridge over the Danube at Dillingen, all tasks were accomplished with a dash and expertness that bespoke superlative leadership and initiative on the part of all. These qualities continued to be outstanding as you continued on to the east, effecting the crossings of the rivers Wertach, Lech, Isar and Inn.

"These are accomplishments in which the entire 12th Armored Division may take deep pride and that always will reflect great honor upon the organization."

The Hellcats had done a job, and they had done it well. What the future held for them, they did not know—but, come what might, they would be ready.

With all the tension and pressure of combat operations relieved, the Hellcats began making themselves comfortable. An Office of Leaves and Furloughs was established under the direction of the G-1 Section. Also during this time, the personnel sections of all units were busy getting the point score for possible discharge of all officers and enlisted men.



Maj. Gen. R. R. Allen and Colonel Charles Bromley, commanding CCB, at review at Bopfingen, Germany.

One of the first men to leave the division on points for home was Master Sergeant Virgil Clubb, Communications Chief, 56th AIB, who was told to pack his bag for a fast trip to Paris, where he would be flown home. Upon his arrival in Paris, Clubb learned he was to fly home, with other high-pointers, with General "Ike." Clubb and the rest of the group were royally feted by New York and Washington parades, General Eisenhower insisting that all his companions on his flight to the United States participate in the cermonies.

The Hellcats were constantly reminded, however, that the war had not been won in all theatres. An orientation film, "Two Down and One to Go," was shown to all Hellcats. Italy and Germany were gone, but the Japanese were still fighting.

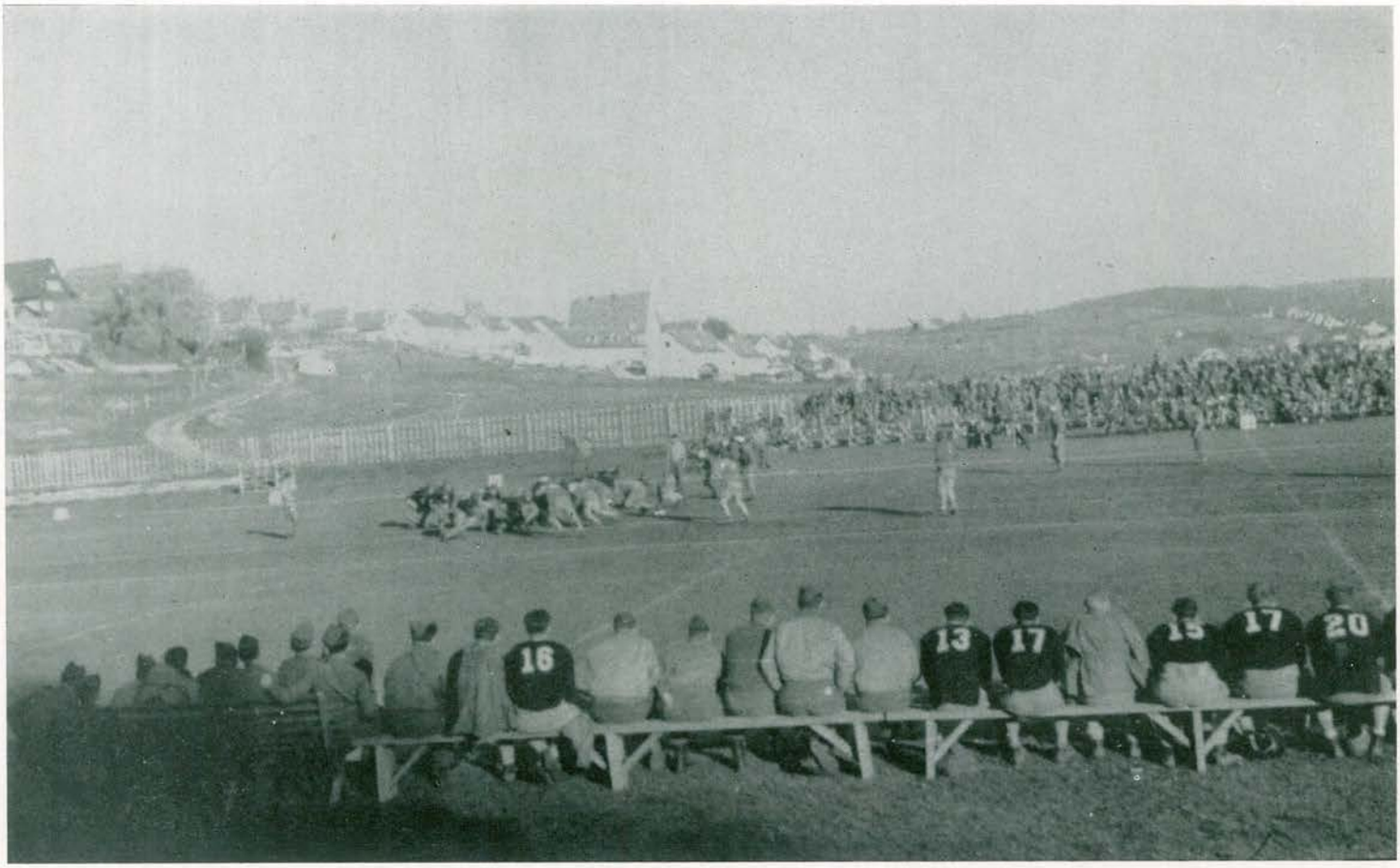
On May 12, the 12th Armored Division area was increased. Divisional units were spread out. Telephone lines were laid to all units, no matter how small. Radio experts were turned into switchboard master minds.

The 572nd AAA, which had been attached to the 12th Armored since December 4, 1944, reverted to control of the 34th AAA Brigade, and May 18 saw this crack anti-aircraft moving out of the 12th Armored area.

Throughout the latter part of May, the divisional units performed their duties in connection with the security mission, and also conducted extensive maintenance, rehabilitation and training in basic military subjects. Baseball teams were organized, and hobby groups sprung up. Large numbers of Hellcats wanted to learn the art of photography, since many cameras had been acquired overseas, so classes were begun in this subject.

Also kept busy during this period was the Military Government section, which, working closely with the Division G-3 Section, was able to clarify the handling of displaced persons and passes and to give instructions to the organizations of the division relative to disciplinary control to be exercised by the 12th Armored over military and civilian personnel.

Although VE Day brought an end of formal enemy action, the mission of the division continued to be opposed by die-hard Nazis. In the vicinity of Heidenheim, the CIC uncovered elements of a "werewolf" organization, as well as secreted arms and ammunition. The leaders of the group turned out to be former SS men and Hitler Jugend leaders. During this period, intelligence personnel arrested 84 persons because of their political and military backgrounds. In addition, Military Government and



Interdivision football game at Heidenheim, Germany

Staging Area—Marseilles, France



HELLCAT DIVISION



3RD ANNIVERSARY

HEIDENHEIM, GERMANY

15 SEPTEMBER, 1945

★

IN MEMORIAM

"The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here but it can never forget what they did here."

—Abraham Lincoln

LINE OF MARCH FOR REVIEW

92 Recn Sq	Div Arty	43 Tk Bn	CC-A
17 AIB	119 Armd Engr	714 Tk Bn	CC-B
56 AIB	134 Ord Bn	493 AFA	CC-R
66 AIB	82 Med Bn	494 AFA	Div Hq
23 Tk Bn	152 Sig Co	495 AFA	Trains

DIVISION HIGHLIGHTS

Activation . . . . . 15 September 1942	Herrlisheim . . . . . 8-20 January 1945
Tennessee Maneuvers . . Sept.-Nov. 1943	Colmar . . . . . 2-5 February 1945
Camp Barkeley . . . . 8 November 1943	Rhineland . . . . . 17-23 March 1945
POE . . . . . 12-20 Sept. 1944	Crossed Rhine . . . . . 28 March 1945
England . . . . . 2 October 1944	Dillingen . . . . . 22 April 1945
France . . . . . 11 November 1944	Austria . . . . . 3 May 1945
First Action . . . . . 5 December 1944	Last Combat Day . . . . . 5 May 1945

REDEPLOYED . . . . . ? ? ? ? ? ?

PROGRAM

0915	All units assemble in area east of Ball Park.
0930-1030	Review of all units. Awarding of Presidential Citation to D Troop, 1 platoon E Troop, 1 platoon Co F, 92nd Cav Rcn Squadron. Invocation—Chaplain Hickey. Address—Chaplain Decker.
1030-1130	Charter discussion under direction of Charter Committee.
1130-1330	Lunch at Units.
1330-1400	Band Concert at the Ball Park, 12th Armored Division Band, Director: WOJG Votapka.
1400-1700	Ball Game— Refreshments—Red Cross.
1700-1730	Retreat Formation in City Square—17th Armd Inf Bn. Awarding of 12th Armored Division flags to major unit commanders. Benediction—Chaplain Skelton.
1730-1900	Dinner at Units.
1900-2400	Continuous movies at Capitol Theater. Street Dance in City Square. Unit Parties.
2400	Taps.
0030	Curfew.

Chairman: Brig Gen W. A. Holbrook, Jr.

Vice Chairman: Col H. Paul Holz

Executive Committee:

Maj Wilkins	Div Arty
Capt Drass	56 AIB
Capt Halpern	82 Med
2d Lt Johnson	43 Tk Bn
1st Sgt Sklar	119 Engr
Sgt Lennon	66 AIB
Sgt Owne	714 Tk Bn
Tec 4 Ahern	494 AFA

Program Committee:

1st Lt Pinkmann	134 Ord
1st Lt Eblen	Div Hq Co
2d Lt Winder	119 Engr
M/Sgt Demsey	Trains
S/Sgt Morgan	Div Hq Co

Feeding and Accommodations Committee:

Maj Avery (acting chairman)	G-4
2d Lt Kenny	Hq CC-A
2d Lt Murphy	23 Tk Bn
T/Sgt Haln	56 AIB
S/Sgt Blain	134 Ord
Sgt Lippman	Div Arty

Finance Committee:

Capt Sabrowsky	152 Sig
2d Lt Lieberman	Hq CC-B
2d Lt Ries	493 AFA
1st Sgt Fisher	152 Sig
1st Sgt O'Rourke	92 Cav

Charter Committee:

Maj Payne	Trains
Capt Ebbage	17 AIB
Capt Cameron	495 AFA
Capt Kimble	66 AIB
2d Lt Branson	714 Tk Bn
2d Lt Cziner	494 AFA
2d Lt Wainwright	92 Cav
M/Sgt Clark	Hq CC-A
T/Sgt Vallei	23 Tk Bn
T/Sgt McDermott	43 Tk Bn
S/Sgt Evershed	17 AIB
Sgt Shultz	82 Med
Tec 4 Mahoney	495 AFA
Pvt Davis	MP Plat

Ex-Officio Members:

Capt DeMasellis	SSO
Lt Pavia	SSO
Lt Col Guerin	Div Fin O
Lt Col Clow	23 Tk Bn
Maj Earl	AG

12th Armored troops accounted for 414 prisoners of war and 1,549 civilian arrests.

During the last week of May, a new assignment was handed to the division: the discharge of several thousand German prisoners of war. The general staff of the division immediately made plans to handle this new responsibility.

The 12th Armored Division Band, which, until the cessation of hostilities had been working with the Military Police Platoon, was placed with the Division Trains and now devoted its full time to the entertainment of the troops.

In their post-armistice job, the Hellcats were standing guard over an area larger than the State of Delaware, an area which included various "targets" from a road block to a stock farm, from a refugee camp to a bridge—not to mention efforts that were made to keep other Seventh Army units from the fine brewery in Dillingen. The 12th took all these jobs, big and little, in stride.

JUNE, 1945

June found the 12th Armored Division continuing to perform its assigned security mission in the German landkreis of Aalen, Heidenheim, Nordingen, Dillingen, Wertingen, Augsburg, Guntzburg, Donauworth, Neuberg, and Krumbach. The Division CP remained at Heidenheim, as did the main Red Cross Club of "Hellkittens."

When the 12th Armored was placed in Category IV of the redeployment plan, there were thousands of changes in personnel. The division was called upon to supply both officers and enlisted men to Category I and II units, and the personnel sections of all units worked tirelessly in making out transfer papers.

Early in the month the division was charged with the responsibility of discharging the German Army Aalen, or 19th German Army, and it set up a processing center in the vicinity of Aalen, under CCA. Of the 86,727 German prisoners received during the month, 63,326 were processed and discharged, and 1,520 were placed under automatic arrest.

Biggest and best news of the month occurred on June 6 when 41 enlisted Hellcats left for the United States under the point system. A total of 28 more followed on June 13.

June was also the "going-home" month for 5,600 displaced Italians and Russians who had been in camps in the division's area. Approximately 1,300 Italians were taken to Bolzano, Italy, in division truck on a day and one-half trip. The Russians were taken to Goppingen, where Seventh Army put them aboard Russian bound trains.

JULY

The month of July saw the 12th Armored Division lose its identity as a unit, as thousands of Hellcats transferred to other outfits, and new members from other forces, came in as high point men for ultimate discharge with the 12th. Those in the latter category never acknowledged the 12th as anything but an outfit which they were to accompany to the States for discharge.

July also saw the completion by CCA of the processing and discharging of the 19th Germany Army.

Hidden treasures also figured in Hellcat news during July, as 21 paintings and other art treasures valued at $2,600,000 were uncovered in the vicinity of Aalen by 12th Armored personnel. The paintings, a woodcut and two other museum pieces comprising the discovery, were found in barns, farmhouses, and similar hiding places. The art masterpieces included the works of Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Reubens, and other old masters. The paintings were believed to have been brought from Berlin's city museum and hidden in the Aalen area by the Germans.

It might have been summer, but the early portion of the month was no time to sport swim trunks and light clothes. On July 4 sentries on outposts duty were observed building fires to take the chill from the air.

A surprise 48-hour inspection during the latter part of July netted Hellcat troops 359 arrests and large stores of contraband. Among those arrested were 221 former Wehrmacht members lacking proper discharge forms, 131 violators of Military Government laws, and 7 other wanted persons.

July also was the month when the First Armored Division, 100th, 36th, 84th Infantry Divisions, and Seventh Army Headquarters received a large portion of the Hellcats transferred out under the point system.

GENERAL ALLEN LEAVES

Major General Roderick R. Allen, who had been assigned as CG of the Hellcats on September 20, 1944, and had commanded them throughout their entire period of combat duty, was transferred to the First Armored Division as CG. Later he became G-3 USFET. Brgadier General Riley F. Ennis, who had commanded CCA since March, 1944, took over command of the division. He later was transferred to the sunny south of France to take command of the Riviera recreation area.

In late August, Brigadier General Willard A. Holbrook of the 11th Armored Division became Commanding General of the Hellcats. On September 15, 1945, the division's third anniversary, the 12th Armored Division Association was formed and Colonel Richard Gordon, of CCR, was elected president. This association is now active in the United States, and a convention for all ex-Hellcats was scheduled for Hotel Commodore, New York City, September 13-14, 1947 with all Hellcats invited.

Finally in November the wonderful news arrived. The Hellcats started on their last convoy—this time

on the long road home—via boats from Marseilles, France. An uneventful voyage, unmarred by the submarine menace which had put the Hellcats on edge on their trip over, brought them to New York harbor.

On December 17, 1945, at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, the famed Hellcat Division of the United States Army turned in its battle flags—a good job well done.

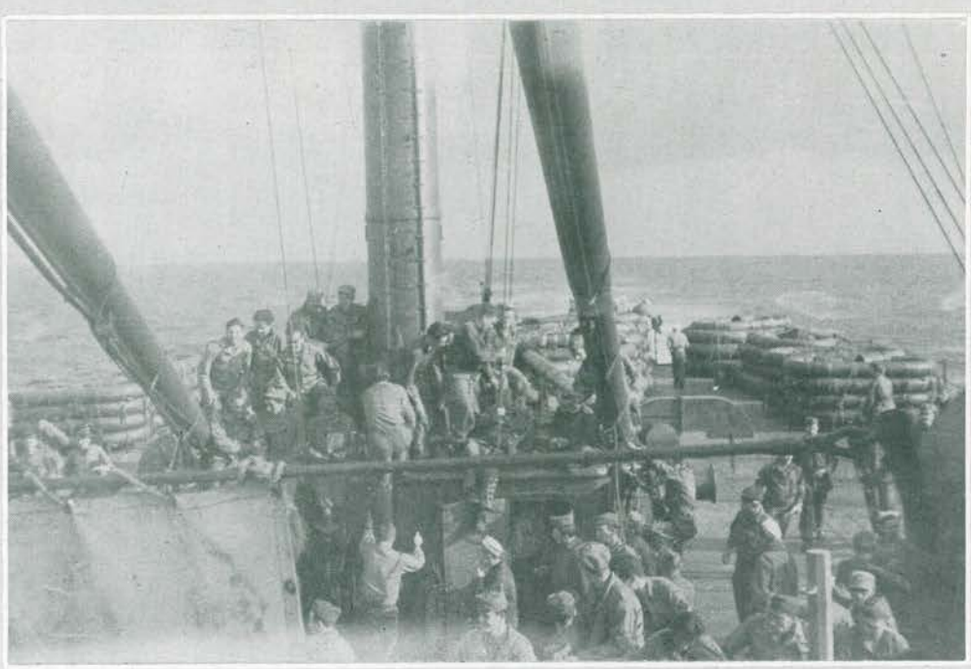
The friendships formed within the Hellcat fighting forces are being preserved in peacetime through the efforts of the Hellcat News, which resumed publication in September, 1946, and of the 12th Armored Division Association. Temporary headquarters for both are now located at 2742 S. Veitch St., Arlington, Va. Full information concerning postwar activities of the Division Association will be given all Hellcats who write that address.



Reading from left to right, top to bottom: LST off east St. Raphael; Chateau D'f; Prada; Marsailles; Callas; beach east of St. Raphael; Marsailles; Marsailles; St. Raphael; the old Port; Line waiting to get aboard the Webster Victory; Coming aboard; the waterfront at Cannes.

HOMEWARD BOUND







Hellcat News Pictorial Feature



Poles stream into Heidenheim and Germans stream out of their homes to make room for them. Here's a bird's-eye view of the transaction.



Beautiful scenic view of Lake Geneva, Switzerland, won first prize in an I and E sponsored photo contest for Sgt. Edwin Howard of Hq. Bty., 493rd AFA Bn. Gorgeous Alps are in the background.



General Holbrook was a busy man during the past week with several parades scheduled. Here he is seen reviewing one of the units of the 12th Armd. during one of the parades.



Warbling of the 134th Ord. boys was judged tops in the Barber Shop Quartet Contest held in the Concert Hall last week. Here is a glimpse of the winning combination.



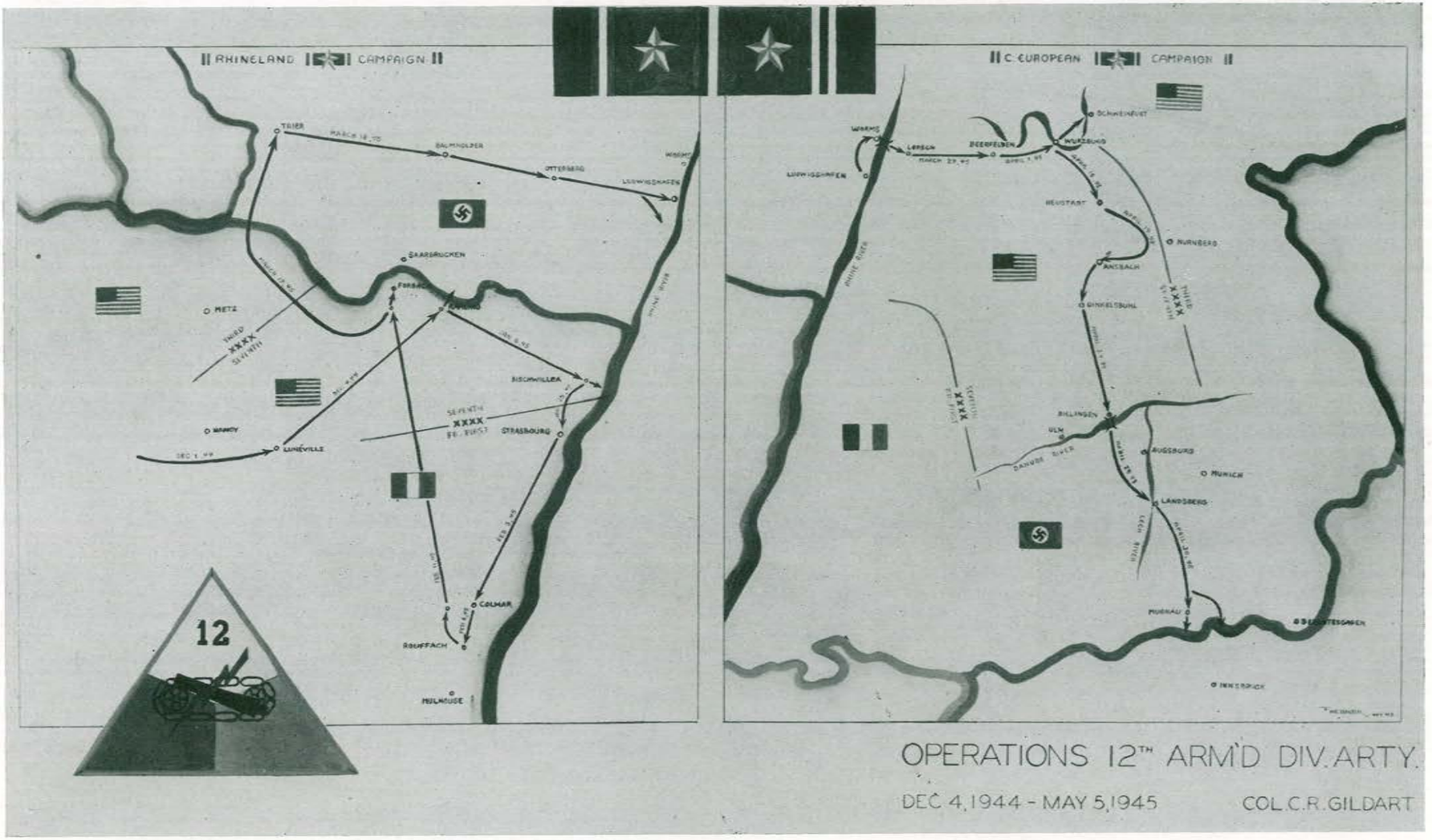
Visiting gal in the USO-show "On The Ball" was lacking a 12th Armd. patch on her well decorated jacket and Sgt. William Busby came to the rescue with needle and thread.



Barefoot Boy of the Touch Football League was fleet-footed Joe Lstorre who did wonders on the gridiron—always without shoes.



Just singing in the contest for the helluvit was the General's own Barber Shop four shown above with Gen. Holbrook seated at the piano with which he accompanied them. Looks like a scene in the gay '90s.


RHINELAND CAMPAIGN
C-EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN
TRIER
SAARBRUCKEN
METZ
NANCY
LUNÉVILLE
BISCHWILLER
STRASBOURG
COLMAR
ROUFFACH
MULHOUSE
WORMS
LUDWIGSHAFEN
HEILBRONN
NURNBERG
ANSBACH
DINKELSBUHL
AUGSBURG
MUNICH
LANDSBERG
INNSBRUCK
12
OPERATIONS 12TH ARM'D DIV. ARTY.
DEC 4, 1944 - MAY 5, 1945
COL. C. R. GILDART

COMBAT CHRONOLOGY

27 November 1944—Orders arrived Division Command Post, releasing 12th Armored Division from Ninth Army and assigning 12th Armored Division to 6th Army Group.

28 November 1944—General Allen informed Division was under Seventh Army, commanded by Lt Gen Alexander M. Patch. Advance party left Auffay to arrange billets vicinity Luneville.

29 November 1944—First elements of the Division left Auffay for new location near Luneville, closing in bivouac area 291800A near Soissons.

30 November 1944—Units closed in bivouac at 301700A northwest of Bar le Duc.

1 December 1944—Division Command Post opened in Luneville at 1600A.

2 December 1944—Division closed in assembly area 2200A vicinity Luneville.

4 December 1944—The 572d AAA AW Bn (SP) was attached to the Division.

5 December 1944—At 0001A 12th Armored Division assigned to XV Corps. 493d Armd FA Bn and 494th Armd FA Bn moved to area vicinity Drulingen, attached to 44th Infantry Division. 495th Armd FA Bn moved to area vicinity LaPetite Pierre, attached to 100th Infantry Division. At 1000 Combat Comd A, Division forward echelon, Hq and Hq Btry, Division Artillery moved from Luneville to vicinity Kirrberg.

7 December 1944—Division Command Post opened at Domfessel 1135A.

8 December 1944—Relief of 4th Armd Div completed by 0600A.

9 December 1944—Attack Maginot Line commenced 0400A. Singling captured at 0445A. Second objective, high ground beyond Singling, taken 0458A. Binning taken and half Binning Barracks.

10 December 1944—Rohrbach captured at 0830A.

12 December 1944—Guising and Bettwiller (Division objective) occupied.

13 December 1944—Division Command Post opened Rahling 1400A.

15 December 1944—Elements of 25th Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz relieved elements 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz from screen across Division front.

16 December 1944—Division Command Post opened at Rimsdorf 1115A.

17 December 1944—Relief of Division by elements 80th Infantry Division begun.

18 December 1944—Relief by 80th Infantry Division completed.

19 December 1944—25th Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz (4th Armd Div) and forward elements, 80th Infantry Division relieved by 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz at 1500A. Counter Rcn screen established across Division front and contact with the 87th Infantry Division on the left, the 44th Infantry Division on the right established.

20 December 1944—Remainder of Division moved to forward assembly areas.

21 December 1944—Combat Comd B attacked 0415A. 56th Armd Inf Bn occupied Utweiler, Germany at 1830B. First German town captured by 12th Armored Division.

25 December 1944—Elements Combat Comd B relieved by elements 100th Infantry Division.

26 December 1944—Division moved from forward assembly areas to XV Corps reserve. Division Command Post Albestroff.

27 December 1944—VOCG Seventh Army, Division relieved from XV Corps, assigned to XXI Corps at 271200A.

29 December 1944—Division Command Post opened Dieuze 1518A. Division assembled vicinity Dieuze. All units continued maintenance, reorganization and rehabilitation.

6 January 1945—12th Armored Division with all attachments released from XXI Corps and attached VI Corps effective 061800A. Combat Comd B reinforced, less 494th Armd FA Bn, moved 062330A to assembly area vicinity Hochfelden.

7 January 1945—Combat Comd B attached 79th Infantry Division as of 1200A.

8 January 1945—Division Command Post opened Hochfelden 1330A. Division closed in bivouac, vicinity Hochfelden 1555A.

9 January 1945—Counter Reconnaissance screen around Corps south flank established by 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz. Defensive road blocks, mine fields, demolitions put in by 119th Armd Engr Bn around Corps south boundary.

13 January 1945—Remainder of Division ordered to attack through elements 79th Infantry Division to destroy enemy forces west of Rhine River in the Offendorf-Herrlisheim-Drusenheim area.

15 January 1945—Division Command Post moved to Brumath.

16 January 1945—Combat Comd A moved to assembly area, prepared to seize Stainwald Woods and attack Offendorf. Combat Comd B ordered to attack 0300A. Combat Comd A crossed canal at 0520A and was stopped 300 yards west of woods by heavy enemy small arms, mortar and artillery fire. Combat Comd B attack held up by heavy small arms, and artillery fire, withdrew to Rohrwiller for reorganization.

17 January 1945—Combat Comd A attacked 0714A, entered town of Herrlisheim; 0849 17th Armd Inf Bn occupied one-third of south part of town. 43d Tk Bn overran numerous enemy positions, but were stopped around Herrlisheim-Gambsheim railroad track by heavy 88mm and 75mm anti-tank fire. 66th Armd Inf Bn repulsed by heavy fire from edge of Stainwald Woods. Combat Comd B attack held up by bridge destroyed by enemy fire so heavy as to prevent engineers from building. Supported Combat Comd A by fire. 43d Tk Bn entered east edge Herrlisheim under heavy fire.

18 January 1945—Enemy counter-attack of 200 men and 6 to 8 tanks repulsed. Second enemy counter-attack 300 men supported by tanks surrounded and captured or destroyed elements 17th Armd Inf Bn and elements 43d Tk Bn. No further contact with these troops was possible. Enemy counter-attacked constantly throughout afternoon and evening, supported by tanks and heavy artillery, mortar and small arms fire, against elements of Combat Comd A and Combat Comd B, which withdrew to defensive positions along the canal.

19 January 1945—Enemy counter-attacks broken up by artillery and close-support bombing and strafing missions. Defensive positions maintained in the face of constant small enemy infantry and armored counter-attacks. Combat Comd A halted, with heavy enemy losses, flanking counter-attack by force estimated at 800 Infantry and 50 tanks at 1600A.

20 January 1945—Division relieved by elements 36th Infantry Division 0230A. Tanks remained in support of 36th Infantry Division. Division moved to assembly area vicinity, Hochfelden.

21 January 1945—Division reserve elements supporting 36th Infantry Division moved to assembly area, vicinity Gougenheim, closing 210045A.

22 January 1945—Division passed to control II French Corps, First French Army 1700A. Tanks reverted to Division control 23 January 1945. Division Artillery relieved of support 36th Infantry Division by Division Artillery, 14th Armored Division, at 1200A. Division commenced maintenance, rehabilitation and reorganization.

26 January 1945—Division Command Post opened Ittenheim. Division closed in assembly area, vicinity Ittenheim. Prepared to repel possible counter-attack from vicinity Hoerdt and Kilstett. Division Artillery in position to support Division Artillery, 3d Division Infanterie Algerienne.

3 February 1945—Division Command Post opened in Zollenberg at 0430A. Combat Comd B attacked south from Colmar at 0930A, meeting heavy mortar and small arms fire. Remainder of Division closed in vicinity Selestat at 041040A, passing to control XXI Corps. Combat Comd B continued attack to seize Sundheffen and St. Croix.

4 February 1945—Division Command Post opened at Colmar at 041200A. Combat Comd B and Combat Comd R attacked to the south abreast, with Combat Command B on the left continuing the attack to seize Sundheffen and St. Croix, and upon relief aid by elements of the 109th Infantry Regiment exploit to the south. Combat Comd R relieved French elements in zone exploiting to the south and taking Herrlisheim-pres-Colmar.

5 February 1945—Infantry elements Combat Comd A entered Rouffach at 0512A and other elements Combat Comd A moved around the town, sealing off exits and meeting French forces which had reached the south edge of town during the night. Gueberschwir and Pfaffenheim were cleared of the enemy at 0835A. Anti-tank fire defending road blocks and heavy mortar fire were met by the Division during this period, particularly in the vicinity just south of Colmar.

7 February 1945—Bridge across Ill River and canal east of Oberhergheim completed at 0530A. Elements 28th Infantry Division passed over bridge. 12th Armored Division ordered to block passes leading east of the Vosges Mountains.

8 February 1945—Division moving to blocking positions as relieved. Division Command Post moved from Colmar to Wintzenheim.

9 February 1945—Maj Gen Milburn, commanding XXI Corps, awarded Bronze Star to Maj Gen Allen for his part of the action in the Colmar pocket.

10 February 1945—Commendation to officers and men of the Seventh Army received from Commanding General, 6th Army Group. Commendation received to officers and men, 12th Armored Division, from Commanding General, 3d Division Infanterie Algerienne. Division alerted for movement to vicinity Faulquemont. Combat Comd R moved to assembly area, vicinity Wolfskirchen, closing 0850A and relieving elements 10th Armored Division of counter-reconnaissance screen south of the Maginot Line and east and west of the Sarre River.

11 February 1945—Division Command Post opened Faulquemont at 0205A and Division passed to control of XV Corps upon closing in the vicinity of Faulquemont.

18 February 1945—Division Command Post opened vicinity (Queen 166527) at 1500A. Combat Commands took turns maintaining counter-reconnaissance screen.

28 February 1945—Division passed to control XXI Corps 1200A.

2 March 1945—Combat Comd A ordered to support attack of 70th Infantry Division on call of Commanding General, 70th Infantry Division, by occupying and defending Forbach and Stiring Wendel when cleared by elements of 70th Infantry Division.

3 March 1945—Combat Comd A occupied Forbach 0913A.

5 March 1945—Task Force 1, Combat Comd A, occupied Stiring Wendel.

9 March 1945—Combat Comd R relieved elements of 165th Combat Engr Bn in zone at 1900A.

15 March 1945—92d Cav Recn Sq, Mecz attached to 63d Infantry Division closed, vicinity St. Avold 1330A, 16 March 1945. 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz and 12th Armored Division Artillery reverted to Division control 2130A.

17 March 1945—Division commenced move at 0700 to assembly area, vicinity Apach, attached to XX Corps, Third Army, upon arrival. Division closed 1800A.

24 March 1945—1200A Division reverted in position to control of XXI Corps and Seventh Army. At time of return to Seventh Army control, Combat Comd A had cleared and occupied Ludwigshaven, Combat Comd B taken and cleared Speyer. Combat Comd R occupied Westheim and Nieder Lustadt and attacked Germersheim which was cleared of the enemy at 2240A.

26 March 1945—Combat Comd A relieved by 100th Infantry Division, Combat Comd B relieved by 71st Infantry Division, Combat Comd R relieved by element 71st Infantry Division, 14th Armored Division and 36th Infantry Division. 12th Armored Division assembled vicinity Deidesheim, passing to control XV Corps 2200A.

27 March 1945—Division commenced movement to cross bridge vicinity Worms.

28 March 1945—Division closed vicinity Lorsch and began advance to the east passing through elements of the 3d Infantry Division.

29 March 1945—Division Command Post closed vicinity Beerfelden at 1830A. Combat Comd A and Combat Comd B attacked abreast, followed by Combat Comd R, in the face of moderate resistance.

31 March 1945—Combat Comd A encountered stiff resistance at Wortheim. Bypassed city and continued attack on Wurzburg, Combat Comd B advanced along assigned routes, meeting moderate resistance. Combat Comd R attacked in two columns and captured Boxberg at 2015A in spite of heavy rocket and small arms fire. Division passed to control XXI Corps 0001A.

1 April 1945—Combat Comd A captured Hettstadt. Enemy counter-attack repulsed, town secured at 1600A. Combat Comd B seized Rottenbauer 1200A and Ochsenfurt at 1330A. Combat Comd R took Schweigern, Sachsezfleur and Edelfinger.

2 April 1945—222d Infantry attached Combat Comd A at 0355A. Two battalions, 22d Infantry, attached to Combat Comd R, attacked to assist in clearing area east of Tauber River. Kenigshofen and high ground east of town cleared by nightfall.

3 April 1945—Town of Marienburg occupied 0418A. Two battalions, 222d Infantry, crossed Main River in assault boats and established bridgehead on east bank in town of Wurzburg. Bailey bridge begun at 1500A. Third Battalion, 222d Infantry, relieved from attachment Combat Comd A at 1700A. Combat Comd B elements crossed Main River vicinity Ochsenfurt, advancing north against prepared positions stubbornly defended.

4 April 1945—Light elements Combat Comd A crossed Main River to aid infantry elements, 42d Infantry Division, in clearing Wurzburg. Combat Comd B occupied Erlach at 2030A. Combat Comd R cleared and occupied Herrnberehtheim and Gnotzheim.

5 April 1945—Combat Comd A, second battalion 242d Infantry attached 0001A. Enemy counter-attack in Wurzburg repulsed. Combat command followed reconnaissance through weak point located southeast of town and moved north toward Schweinfurt, taking Rottendorf. Combat Comd B seized Kitzingen at 1125A, crossed damaged bridge and established bridgehead east bank of Main River. Westheim, Theilheim, Beibereid and Reppernorf cleared on west side of river to protect combat command's left flank and rear. Combat Comd R cleared Bullenheim, Wassendorf, Iffigheim and Seinsheim.

6 April 1945—Combat Comd B advanced south from Kitzingen bridgehead and captured towns of Marktbreit, Obernbreit, Tiefensteekheim by 1040A. Mainbernheim occupied at 1420A. Light resistance encountered. Combat Comd B cleared Willanzheim, Herrnsheim, Huttenheim, Herrnsheim, Menehsendheim. Combat command objective Einersheim taken at 1835A.

7 April 1945—101st Cav Rcn Group attached to 12th Armored Division at 2100A. Combat Comd A cleared Bergtheim, Opferbach, Esselben, Waigelsheim against stiff resistance. Second Battalion, 242d Infantry, relieved attachment Combat Comd A. Combat Comd A attached 42d Infantry Division 1430B. Remainder Division assembled for maintenance and rehabilitation.

8 April 1945—101st Cav Rcn Group and 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz given mission of initiating reconnaissance in Corps zone. Cavalry advanced slowly against stiff resistance. Blown bridges and well-defended road blocks delayed advance. Combat Comd B, Combat Comd R moved to destroy enemy in zone meeting strong enemy fire, mines and demolitions.

10 April 1945—Combat Comd B took Stadt Schwarzachheidt and Klein Langheim and stiff resistance by hostile tanks and strong artillery fire. Combat Comd R cleared Reusch, Weigenheim and Geekenheim against stiff resistance. Division Command Post opened Kitzingen airfield 1800A.

11 April 1945—Combat Comd B attacked south and southeast at 0725A, cleared Castell, Greuth, Stierhofstetten, Ober Schenfeld, Ziegenbach, Marktbibart and Altamannshousen. Combat Comd R attacked southeast against light resistance, taking Pfaffenhoffen, Ober Scheckenbach, Uffenheim, Uttenheffen, Neuherberg and Ohrenbach. 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz made contact with Combat Comd B at Ziegenbach at 1500A.

12 April 1945—Combat Comd cleared Krautestheim, Markt Nerdheim, Neundorf, Ingelstadt and Ezelheim. Combat Comd R completed encirclement of enemy by establishing contact with 116th Cav Rcn Sq (101st Cav Rcn Group) at Aub and with 12th Infantry Regiment (4th Infantry Division) at Waldmannshoffen, Langensteinach, Wellmarsbach, Simmershoffen, Equarhoffen and Auernhoffen were cleared. Six AT guns, 12 tanks, 3 155mm guns and 2 ME109's destroyed. 508 PW's taken.

13 April 1945—Combat Comd A reverted Division control 132300 April 1945, Combat Comd B occupied 9 towns against little resistance. Combat Comd R mopped up woods and scattered enemy groups vicinity of Aub and Uffenheim. 101st Cav Group continued reconnaissance in assigned zone, meeting stiff resistance.

14 April 1945—Combat Comd A relieved by elements 42d Infantry Division at 0700A. March to assembly area vicinity Ullstadt. Combat Comd B attacked 1130A, advanced to Aisch River, over which all bridges had been destroyed. Bridge completed at 1830A and armored elements crossed established bridgehead. Main resistance passive defense. Combat Comd R commenced attack at 1145A on Aris-Ob Daschstetten, Azebach. Hochbach, Burgbernheim, Illesheim, Urfersheim and Westheim cleared 101st Cav Rcn Sq, attached 4th Infantry Division 0600. 116th Cav Rcn Sq moved south against light resistance, clearing ground between Axes of Combat Comd B and Combat Comd R. 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz attached 101st Cav Rcn Group 0600A. Division Command Post opened at Uffenheim 1430A.

15 April 1945—Division continued advance to the east. Road blocks strongly defended by small arms, anti-tank, rocket, mortar and artillery fire. Six enemy tanks captured or destroyed.

16 April 1945—Combat Comd A captured bridge intact at Langengenn, occupying town 1600B. Combat Comd B advanced to Zohn River over which bridges were found to be blown. Division Command Post opened Illesheim at 1645B.

18 April 1945—Combat Comd A moved into position to cut southern escape route from Nurnberg. Combat Comd B advanced from Heilsbrenn to Ansbach, destroyed 10 88mm anti-tank guns and one 150mm howitzer. Entered Ansbach from north and northeast. Combat Comd R cleared enemy from 16 towns between Rugland and Ansbach. Division Command Post opened 181735B vicinity Ob Sachstetten.

19 April 1945—Combat Comd A occupied Schwabach and Buchschwabach captured 250 PW's, 40 enemy combat planes on the ground and an ammunition dump. Combat Comd B, Combat Comd R cleared Ansbach.

20 April 1945—Combat Comd A captured Mayersbrenn, Schopfloch, Leseugutingen and Dinkelsbuhl before advance was halted by a blown bridge. Combat Comd B entered Feuchtwangen at 1005B. Combat Comd R attacked Feuchtwangen in conjunction with Combat Comd B, turned west and occupied Reichenbach. Estimated 1280 PW's taken, 40 combat aircraft captured or destroyed on the ground.

21 April 1945—Combat Comd A attacked 0530B, cleared 13 towns. Remainder of Division assembled prior to attack to seize Danube crossings. Estimated 1100 PW's taken during period.

22 April 1945—One Task Force reached Lauingen at 1040B to find bridge over Danube River blown as they entered town. Task Force 2 captured bridge at Dillingen intact at 1145B. One infantry company crossed and Task Force 1 moved from Lauingen to Dillingen, crossed

bridge to reinforce Task Force 2 bridgehead. Task Force 1 attacked 1530B and captured Fristingen. Combat Comd B captured Hochstadt. Bridge blown as troops approached town. Combat Comd R mopping up bypassed centers of resistance. Estimated 750 PW's captured.

23 April 1945—Combat Comd A secured Helzheim and Kicklingen. Estimated 2650 PW's taken.

24 April 1945—15th RCT (3d Infantry Division) attached Combat Comd A upon arrival in bridgehead area. Wertingen resisting strong attack of Task Force 1, Combat Comd A and First Battalion, 15th RCT. Ron clearing enemy in Division right flank, blocking on left flank. 2020 PW's, 10 planes, 30 88mm multiple anti-aircraft guns, one 75mm howitzer and two military hospitals.

25 April 1945—First Battalion, 15th RCT seized Wertingen at 1030B. 15th RCT relieved from attachment effective 1830B. Combat Comd B advanced southwest along south side of Danube River against heavy opposition. Combat Comd R advanced southwest along north side of Danube River, contacted elements 63d Infantry Division and 4th Infantry Division. Relieved from mission and moved to reinforce bridgehead south of Danube River. 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz continued reconnaissance and security of bridgehead vicinity Burgau. Estimated 2456 PW's taken.

26 April 1945—Combat Comd A moved Southeast to relieve cavalry elements securing bridge vicinity Hiltenfingen. Combat Comd B moved at 1030B to help elements 63d Infantry Division repel counter-attack in their bridgehead. 101st Cav Group attacked southeast at 0700B from vicinity of Burgau and advanced rapidly. Troop B, 92d Cav Rcn Sq, Mecz captured a bridge intact across the Wertash River vicinity Hiltenfingen. Captured 828 PW's (including one Maj Gen), two 88mm guns, 12 nebelwerfers, 40-50 ME 262's (approximately 20 in working condition), one plane assembly plant, one ammunition dump and other materiel and motor transport.

27 April 1945—Combat Comd R cleared towns of Kirch-Sienbenach, Siebenach, Ettringen, Markt Wals, Immelstetten and Neufmach. 2800 allied PW's freed (1400 Americans). Division Command Post opened vicinity Siemetshausen 1900B. Division continued advance to the east, crossing Wertach River, prepared to cross Lech River. 5200 PW's, 2 hospitals with 1300 patients, 4 nebelwerfers, 125 vehicles, 12 AA guns, airfield with 60-80 planes, QM and signal warehouses captured.

28 April 1945—101st Cav Group crossed repaired railroad bridge over Lech River and took Landsberg. 10,051 PW's and military hospital with 1400 patients captured. Division Command Post opened at Schwabmunshen 0830B.

29 April 1945—Combat Comd A made junction with elements 10th Armored Division at Oberau at 2000B. Went to assembly area south of Murnau. Combat Comd B crossed Lech River and reached Weilheim. Division Command Post opened Landsberg airfield 1630B. 3261 PW's taken.

30 April 1945—Combat Comd A Task Force 1 made contact with elements Combat Comd B at Gross-Unterau, returned to assembly. Combat Comd B continued advance to southeast until reaching Durnhausen and Schlendorf. Halted by 7 bridges blown in their path. Combat Comd R cleared area between Ammer and Wurm See's. 865 PW's captured. Combat Comd V, Second DB (French), attached 12th Armored Division 301200B April 1945.

1 May 1945—Combat Comd R advanced down Autobahn to Inn River. 101st Cav Rcn Sq attached to 4th Division. 1400 PW's taken.

2 May 1945—Combat Comd R continued reconnaissance to south along Inn River. Combat Comd V DB (French) crossed bridge at Bad Tolz. Remainder of Division in assembly areas awaiting orders. Estimated 8000 PW's taken.

3 May 1945—Combat Comd R continued advance along Inn River valley, encountering strong passive resistance. 23d Tk Bn crossed Inn River and continued attack to the south, crossing Austrian border at 031318B. Combat Comd V DB (French) attacked at 1000B against light resistance toward Berchtesgaden. Advance Division Command Post opened vicinity Redenfelden 1830B. 12060 PW's processed through Division cage.

4 May 1945—Combat Comd R relieved in position by elements 36th Infantry Division 2100B. Combat Comd V DB (French) continued advance east along autobahn meeting strong passive resistance. Relieved attachment 12th Armored Division 1200B. Reverted control 2d DB (French). 8216 PW's taken.

5 May 1945—Division Command Post opened Heidenheim 1800B.

6 May 1945—Division closed in occupation area. Commenced maintenance and rehabilitation.

7 May 1945—Commenced relief of 44th AAA Brigade in position in assigned areas.

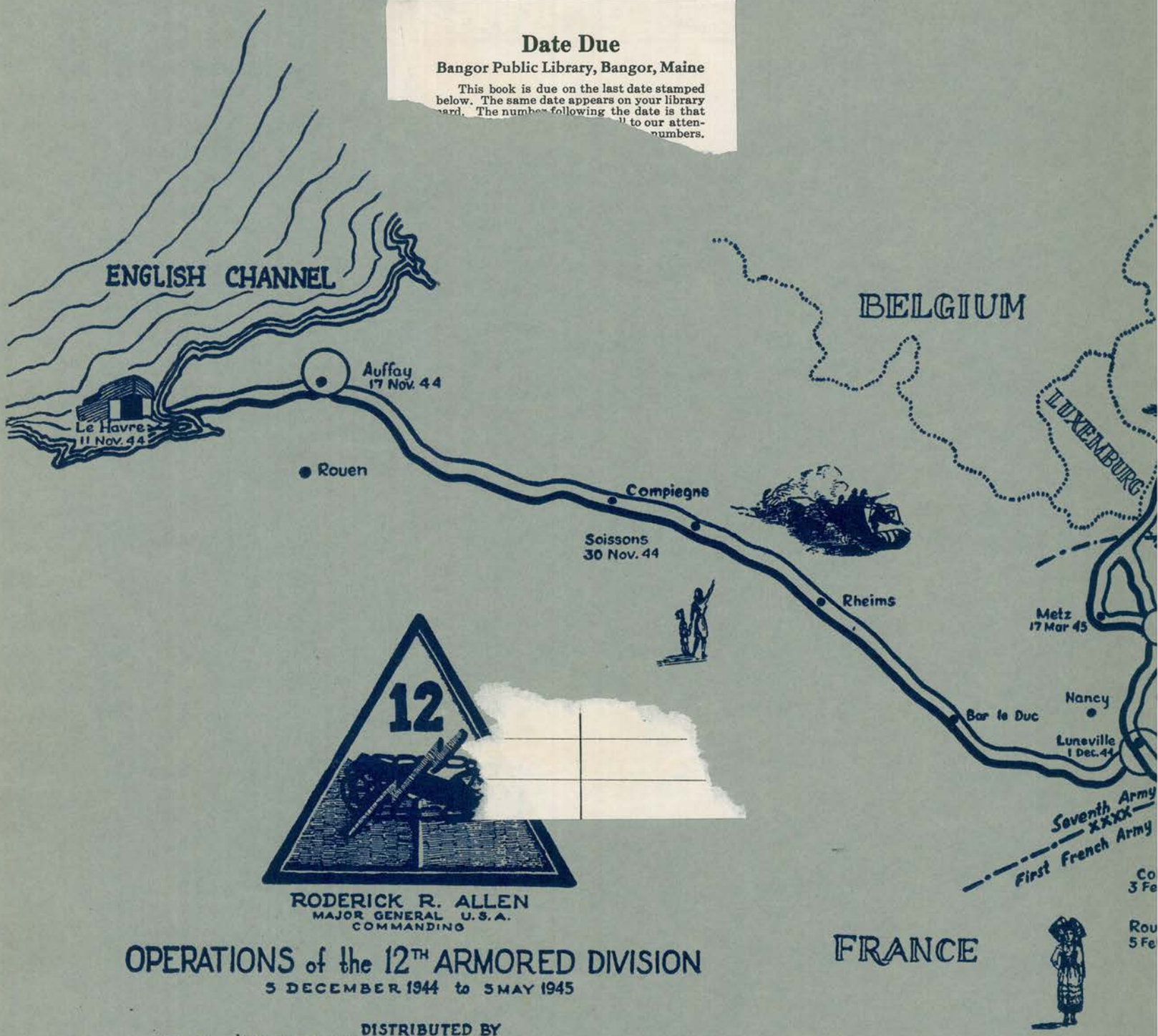
9 May 1945—Relief of 44th AAA Brigade completed in Division zone.

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5 DECEMBER 1944 to 5 MAY 1945

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Seventh Army XXXX First French Army

FRANCE

Colmar 3 Feb 45

Rouffach 5 Feb 45

Selestat

Strasbourg

Bischwiller

Herrlisheim 17 Jan 45

Hochfelden 8 Jan 45

Bitche 7 Dec 44

Ottweiler 21 Dec. 44

St Avold 19 Dec. 44

Dieuze 11 Feb 45

5 Mar 45 Forbach

Third Army XXXX Seventh Army

Baumholder

Birkenfeld

Worms 28 Mar

Diedersheim

Germersheim 24 Mar 45

Speyer 24 Mar 45

Ludwigshafen 22 Mar 45

Deerfelden 29 Mar 45

Erbach 29 Mar 45

Rhine River

Main River

GERMANY

Schweinfurt

Wurzburg 4 Apr

Kitzingen 5 April

Tauberbischofsheim 31 Mar 45

Rothenburg

Nurnberg

Ansbach 18 April

Feuchtwangen 20 April 45

Dinkelsbuhl 20 April 45

Donauworth

Heidenheim

Dillingen 22 April

Augsburg

Donau River

Ammer See

MUNICH

Landsberg 27 April

Wurm See

Rosenheim 1 May 45

Murnau 29 April

Bad Tolz 2 May 45

Berchtesgaden

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12

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