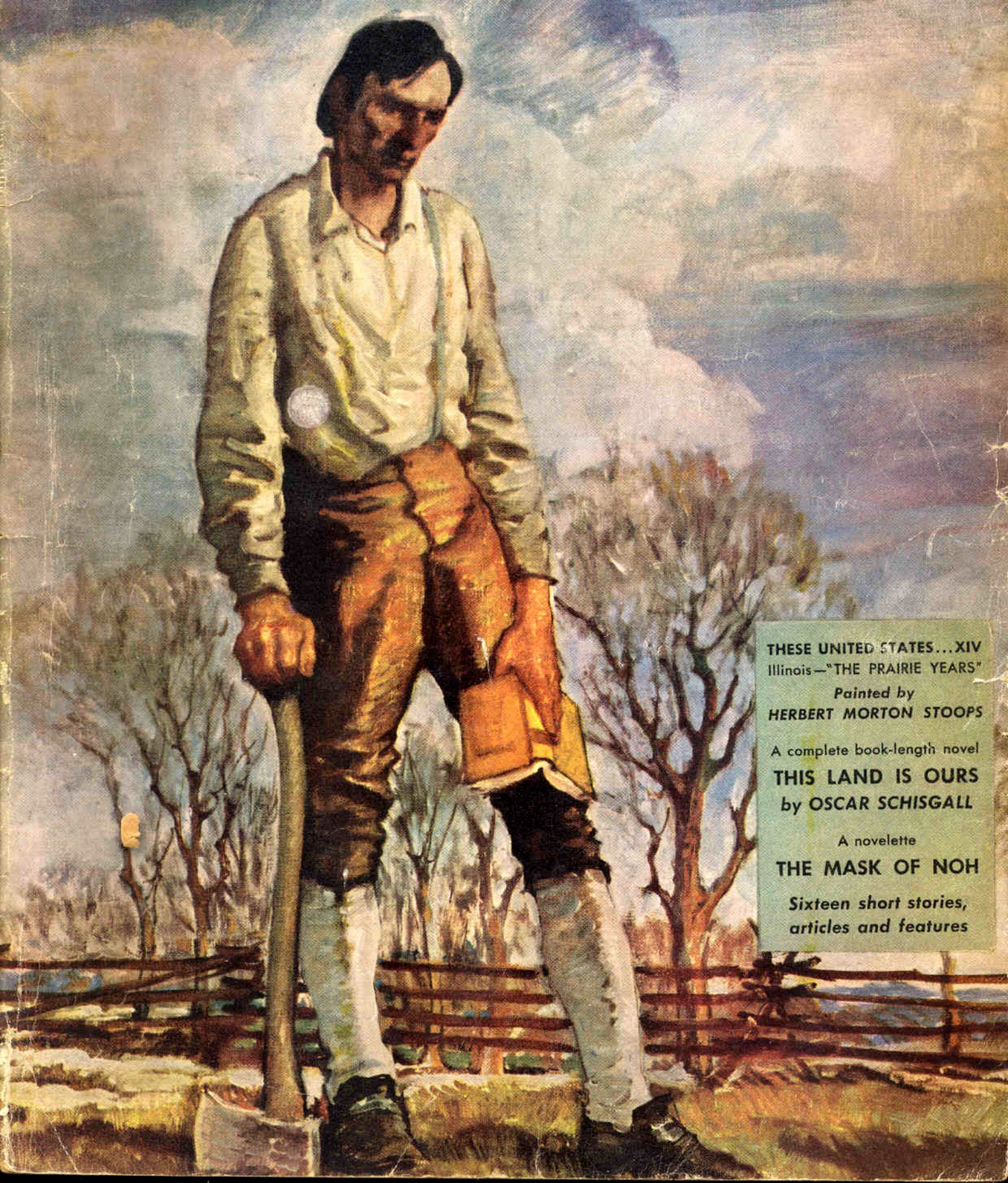


# BLUE BOOK

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# COMBAT TEAM

**W**HILE the 3rd Battalion was holding Manhay, we received orders to prepare to attack as part of the 82nd Airborne Division. The 1st Battalion had now returned from the 3rd Armored Division, and were bivouacked in Ferrières. They had lost about one hundred and fifty men, but were now fairly well rested and only slightly under Table of Organization strength. The 2nd Battalion had moved farther down into the 7th Armored sector to reinforce them, but as yet had not been committed.

The 82nd was to attack southward with its left on the Salm River and its right near Manhay, with the mission of driving the northern shoulder of the Bulge inward about five miles. The 517th sector was to be on the extreme left toward the Salm River, an area now held by the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. It was estimated that the enemy was holding the line of hills in front of the 82nd in considerable strength by Volks-sturm and Volks-Grenadier units that had been moved in behind the main attack to keep open the shoulders of the Bulge. In order to relieve the units of the 505th, who had to displace to the west and themselves prepare to attack, we moved the 1st Battalion from Ferrières. As the 2nd was now our freshest battalion they were to be used as the left assault units. The 551st Parachute Infantry, a separate battalion, had also been attached to us, and they were to be used as the right assault unit. The 3rd Battalion, which was still dug in at Manhay, was to be relieved by a battalion of the 75th Divi-

sion, which was taking over the 7th Armored Division area, and rejoin the regiment near Basse-Bodeux and remain initially in reserve. The attack was scheduled to jump off at 8 A.M. on January 3rd. Three regiments of the 82nd were to start the attack, including the 517th, the 505th, and the 325th. The 504th was initially in Division Reserve.

We moved the regimental C. P. on the night of January 2nd to a house in the town of Basse-Bodeux, then on the front line. From here we would be able to see the troops moving forward to the attack the next morning, and to get good communications. In the house there lived an old man who stayed for the most part in the kitchen. Everybody else had left the town and moved back out of the combat area, but he had stayed behind to take care of the cattle and to make sure there was something left to come back to when the fighting was over. The old man was not very communicative, and we had other things to occupy our attention at the time anyway, so he just sat there unconcernedly as things moved around him.

That night, the Germans shelled the town generally about every half-hour all night. From upstairs we could hear the shells landing out in the yard or against the building, and sleep was possible only during the intervals. As one shell had broken one of the windows of the operations office, the next morning we moved most of the installations into the basement, at least temporarily. At daylight we could see the troops moving to the attack, and shortly afterward a lot of automatic

weapons fire and mortar fire from the next range of hills beyond the narrow valley. The 551st was a little slow in getting started, which worried us, but after they got started seemed to be making good progress through the wooded slopes of their first objective.

The 2nd Battalion on the left had succeeded in taking the town of Trois Ponts at the extreme left on the Salm River, but had run into heavy resistance in trying to take Fosse, located on the side of an open hill. Since artillery ammunition was limited, the expected concentration was very light and they were now pinned down about halfway up the side of the snow-covered hill, and taking a lot of casualties. General Gavin had come up on a visit. Together we had walked along the road in back of the advance elements of the 2nd Battalion.

"They have only gone a couple hundred yards beyond the line of departure," remarked the General as we sought shelter in a ditch from a rain of mortar shells then coming in. "I want this town tonight," the General remarked, pointing on the map to the town of St. Jacques. With this, he departed, leaving us to figure how to get moving and extricate the 2nd Battalion from its unhappy position.

We tried bringing up some tank-destroyers to assist Col. Seitz with direct fire on the town of Fosse. However, they were limited to the roads due to the heavy snow, and after running over several mines, they too had to be extricated without doing much good. After much mental anguish, we finally decided to move the 1st Battalion through the area cleared by the



WITH THE SAVAGE BATTLE OF THE BULGE, THE COMBAT STORY OF THE 517TH AIRBORNE REGIMENT COMES TO ITS CONCLUSION. "THERE WERE NO BETTER MEN ANYWHERE," SAYS THEIR COMMANDER. "THEY HAD YOUTH AND THE SPIRIT THAT GOES WITH IT . . . THE CONFIDENCE TO WISH TO CLOSE WITH THE ENEMY AND DESTROY HIM."

## by COLONEL RUPERT D. GRAVES

551st, to strike St. Jacques from the flank. A company from the 2nd Battalion was also sent by the same route to move in and seize the objective behind the town of Fosse. This scheme as executed by the 1st Battalion and Company F of the 2nd saved the situation, and prevented at least myself and perhaps General Gavin from having a nervous breakdown.

UNDER the leadership of Colonel Boyle, the 1st Battalion worked its way behind the 551st, then cut over to the town of St. Jacques, reaching there about eleven o'clock at night. After an artillery preparation they moved into the town under cover of darkness. They encountered German machine-gun positions on the outskirts of town, but in the darkness the fire was not well directed, and by the number of dead Germans lying around St. Jacques next morning they had done plenty of damage after getting into the town. After mopping up St. Jacques, the 1st Battalion moved on and repeated the treatment to Bergeval about a mile farther on. Company F also had succeeded in reaching its objective, and by the next morning we were all quite elated at the success of these night operations, but we still had quite a way to go. The General wanted us to keep on until we could dabble our feet in the waters of the Salm River, as he expressed it.

The 1st Battalion was pretty tired and had taken time out in Bergeval to get rations up to the men and get them rested slightly before moving on. It was dark before they started from Bergeval.

During the afternoon we could see groups of Germans to the front and placed artillery fire on them. As the main defense line had been broken, we didn't expect to run into too much trouble now. The Germans, however, had different ideas on the subject. As the 1st Battalion moved south from town, they must have wandered right past quite a few Germans in the heavy woods and darkness, for when they stopped to dig in, they found themselves practically surrounded. Colonel Boyle while moving up to a company C. P. was shot at by a German burp gunner, and wounded badly in both arms. The Krauts then shelled the 1st Battalion position heavily, and quite a few men were hit. The Germans moved in through the woods and placed heavy automatic fire on them. It was a bad night for the 1st Battalion. The 3rd, which now had been moved forward, was sent to their assistance, and they succeeded in combing the woods and clearing out the Germans who had been behind the position and also some to the front.

With the coming of daylight it looked a little more encouraging, and Major McMahan, who had been sent to take Colonel Boyle's place, also steadied things down. Most of the Germans who had been cut off in the town of Fosse had also been rounded up. It had happened that Major Kinzer, the artillery liaison officer, after a visit to the 551st the day before, had decided to return *via* Fosse instead of coming with me. As he entered the town, he saw several Germans run into a building. He went after them, and was surprised when about fifteen of

them marched out with a white flag. Lieutenant Neiler, the Regimental S-2, joined Kinzer, and they then rounded up about sixty more who, knowing they had been cut off, were ready to turn in. It was quite a sight to see Kinzer and Neiler marching about a hundred Germans into the PW enclosure at Basse-Bodeux.

The 551st by now had reorganized in their sector, and by the morning of the third day started moving toward Petit Halleaux along the Salm River. They also were trying to dabble their feet in the Salm. This area toward the river was very heavily wooded, and movement of course greatly restricted by the deep snow. I had sent Lieutenant Neiler the day before to reconnoiter the crossings of the Salm in the 551st area, as it had been rumored that the Germans were still using an old bridge near Petit Halleaux for troop movements and for vehicles.

NEILER, accompanied by Lieut. Farren of the 551st, had only progressed a few hundred yards when they suddenly ran into a group of Germans coming up the trail. Farren, who was in front, didn't have much chance, as a German about fifteen feet away had him covered, and he therefore threw up his hands; but Neiler, who was armed only with a pistol, started to fire and took off back up the trail. A German about fifteen or twenty feet away fired at him several times, and one bullet entered his helmet and lifted both the helmet and knit cap underneath from his head. Neiler succeeded in escaping unharmed, but slightly shaky after his experience.

After this he always carried a Tommy-gun instead of a pistol. Lieutenant Farren's grave was found the next day, very neatly marked by a cross with his name on it.

This should have been a warning to the 551st, but when they started the attack next day, one company got pretty badly shot up by approaching Petit Halleaux in broad daylight along a road with steep banks on both sides. A machine-gun had been placed to cover this road and had waited until they were about ten feet away before it opened fire. The snow that fell during the night had served the purpose of camouflaging this enemy position almost perfectly, and there was no indication whatever that a German was within miles. In spite of this, the 551st pushed on and captured Petit Halleaux.

Colonel Juareg, the C. O. of the 551st, was killed that day by mortar fire while directing the attack, and his loss was deeply felt. He was a courageous leader, and had worked tirelessly during the past several days under extremely adverse conditions to make the attack a success. Major Holm, the battalion executive, then assumed command. The German regimental commander was found a suicide in Petit Halleaux. In his pocket was found a message to the division commander stating the hopelessness of his position and asking for further instructions, apparently hoping for orders to withdraw. However, the answer from the division commander was to hold until the end, and this he had done.

It was important to the enemy to hold this northern flank of the Bulge against the attacks that were now being directed by the Americans to cut off the Bulge and offset the effect of the deep penetration that had been made by the forces of Von Rundstedt. It was believed, now that the German advance had been stopped, that this offensive by the enemy would serve to end the war sooner than they had formerly expected. The optimism of ending the war early had been replaced now, due to the fanaticism of the German resistance, to the opposite trend and toward a more realistic view; and many thought now that it would last at least a couple more years. With the defenses of the Siegfried Line still to look forward to, many of us didn't think that this estimate was so far wrong.

AS the 504th had now been committed and had taken over the right of our sector, we were given orders to move over behind the 505th, who were still attacking, and prepare to relieve them. The 3rd Battalion was to remain with the 504th as we moved the men by foot to the vicinity of Arbrefontaine. Still more snow had

fallen, and it was now almost waist deep as the 1st and 2nd Battalions moved into a bivouac area in the woods, and the weather had become extremely cold. When we arrived in the 505th area, we contacted Colonel Eckman, who was busy at the time at his O. P. trying to direct fire onto a German Mark VI tank that was giving them trouble.

After checking the troops into their assembly areas, we set up the regimental C. P. at a small house just outside of Arbrefontaine. The Division C. P. and at least two other C. P.s were in this town, so we decided not to crowd in with them. This building was not very big, but it served well for the two days we stayed in that area. There were only two rooms, so one was set up as the S-3, or operations office, and the other as the S-2 office. I know that I stayed in the S-3 office most of the time, and sometimes wondered why everybody came in here to find out what was going on.

The solution to this was discovered a little later when I happened to go down the hall to the S-2 office. Captain Dearing had hung several signs outside such as "*No admittance except on business*," "*Beware the Mad Dog*," "*Off Limits*" and "*Achtung—Minen*." On looking into the S-2 room, there was Captain Dearing with his assistant very peaceably sitting beside a cozy fire in solitary splendor, reading very sedately the latest Intelligence information. On returning to the S-3 room, there also was posted a large sign as follows: "*S-3 office—come in and get warm*." Inside, where you could hardly wedge yourself in, was a bedlam. Not only the regular S-3 personnel but all liaison officers, their drivers, orderlies, odds and ends from the Headquarters Company, communications personnel and many others.

After a visit to the Division Headquarters, where we received orders to move the 2nd Battalion that night over to another position, we hadn't much to do. However, the move had to be made at night in a blinding snowstorm after they had just got themselves settled, and was not as easy as it looked on the map. As soon as they got moved, we found that the 82nd was to be relieved by the 75th Division, and that we had the honor of moving to another sector for an attack that was to take place on the 13th of January.

Taking with me the S-3, S-2 and the battalion commanders, we departed to the new area to find out what we were to do with the 106th Division, to whom we were now attached. At Francorchamps, where we arrived half-frozen, we found Gus Nelson, the C. O. of the 112th Infantry Regiment. When the Germans had started the Bulge attack, he had got separated from the rest of the Division who had withdrawn and were now on the south

flank of the Bulge. He had been attached to the remnants of the 106th Division, who were supposed to attack on the 13th. Now, however, he had just received orders to withdraw and reform his division.

We, the 517th, were therefore to take his place in the attack. His regiment was now occupying a defensive position in the vicinity of Stavelot on the Ambleve River. The 424th, which was the only regiment remaining from the 106th Division, was to attack on the right from the vicinity of Trois Ponts. We continued on to Stavelot and set up the C. P. in a large windowless building on the square. The 1st Battalion took over the sector of the 112th so we would have one battalion with which to start the attack. The 2nd Battalion had been detached to join the 7th Armored, who were scheduled to attack shortly with the mission of recapturing St. Vith, from which they had been driven a week before.

THE situation was the same as on the previous attack. The Germans held the high ground across an open valley over which we had to pass to reach their positions. In addition to this, we had to cross the Ambleve River. Although the time of attack was set at eight o'clock the next morning, we determined not to get caught out in the open as we had a week before. So during the night of the 12th and 13th we sent a company of the 1st Battalion across the river to secure that part of Stavelot to the south of the stream. They encountered no resistance but had captured a German patrol who came into the town that night.

Sergeant Vardy was standing near a building when a Kraut suddenly pushed a burp gun into his ribs. Vardy, without thinking and perhaps being a little ticklish, turned and grabbed the gun. He threw the Kraut on the ground and took him prisoner. When we got him, he turned out to be a German technical sergeant about six feet two inches tall who looked like a professional wrestler. Vardy, who is a slender little chap, really must have worked fast. Finally the tech sergeant, after some persuasion, disclosed the location of the enemy troops on the hills overlooking Stavelot.

While all this was going on, the 3rd Battalion, which was making the assault, was moving over by truck from the 82nd Airborne Division area. While they were attached to the 504th, they had gone across the Salm and secured a bridgehead at the town of Grand Halleaux, they had run into some trouble and had cleared some Germans from the town. As soon as they were relieved, they started for Stavelot and arrived on the night of the 12th. At first we had been reluctant to move trucks over the open

ground under possible artillery observation into Stavelot. However, time was getting short, so Paxton moved right into town and got away with it all right.

Before dawn next morning we had a company moving across the broken-down bridge across the Ambleve, and through the ruins, the smashed half-tracks, disabled German tanks and scattered German and American bodies left over from the German advance of just before Christmas. As soon as this company got across, we sent over another one and hoped they would get well up into the woods and not get caught in the open when daylight came about seven o'clock. Some shells landed in the town as they crossed the river, but not much damage was done, and they were well on their way by daylight.

Soon a great deal of firing was heard, however, and we knew they had run into the enemy main positions on the rolling hills beyond the town of Stavelot. They called on their artillery, and succeeded in breaking through; and by dark that night were well entrenched on the first objective. It was not done without some casualties, however, for on a visit that afternoon many men could be seen lying in the snow who would never see their home or their loved ones again. There was one soldier who was lying down apparently resting with his elbow on the ground and his head resting in his hand. I said something to him but received no answer, and on closer inspection saw that he had been dead for some time.

IT is always painful to see American dead, as they are ones you have seen and possibly talked with a few hours before, and have been the ones who have done the actual work of knocking the Germans out of their positions that higher-ups as well as you have planned so easily in orders on the previous day. About the German dead I know that for myself little pity was wasted. They were complete strangers, and although at times they were numerous, it was more with curiosity that we looked at them. We wanted to see whether they were young or old, what kind of troops they were; and the more dead there were, the more we knew that our fire, our plans, and our men had worked effectively. Besides, the more German dead we saw the quicker the war would be completed victoriously, for of course we had to keep going until the Germans realized that they were beaten.

On this attack, as on others, Colonel Paxton had many narrow escapes. On one occasion he was leading his C. P. group forward through the woods when Lieutenant Morgan, his S-2, told a man to go ahead in front of the Colonel. This man had hardly



*Some of them asked if the Boche were coming back.*

passed Paxton when he was shot through the head by a sniper. On another occasion it was not known whether or not the Krauts had the trail covered. Paxton told his group to wait a minute and he would see, and started forward. A machine-gun opened up; and Paxton, coming back with several holes in his trouser-leg, said: "Yes, I guess they are still there."

The 424th on the right had not advanced very far and the town of Henumont in their sector was still in German hands. That night I was called back to General Perrin's headquarters beyond Francorchamps. As it was still very cold, and I had been having a rather heavy siege of the GIs, and the paregoric I had taken had only served to make me sick to my stomach, this trip to inform me that we were to take Henumont the next morning was not particularly pleasant. While at the C. P., it was learned that another regiment had had over five hundred casualties that day, mostly from trench foot; that we had between thirty-five and forty from mortar and machine-gun fire, but none from trench foot.

In my mind there dawned the clear picture that the paratroopers, in spite of any faults, were the ones to have in combat. They had already been in two attacks and were beginning their third within two weeks, and nobody was falling out because of trench foot. If they had trench foot, and a lot of them undoubtedly had by now, they were not turning in to the aid station until they got back to the rear area. As Colonel Howze of the 3rd Armored Division remarked while the 1st Battalion was fighting for him around Soy and Hotton: "If all our troops were like these, we would have been in Berlin a year ago."

**D**URING the early morning of the 14th of January, the 1st Battalion left positions they had been holding in Stavelot, marched through the snow to a position east of Henumont and attacked the town after a short artillery preparation. The Germans had vacated the town, and all that was left besides a lot of homeless cattle wandering loose in the middle of the street was the remains of an American patrol who had been ambushed as they entered the town. The Germans had kept out of sight and let them come in to extreme short range before firing. The officer was a blond-haired youngster, and as we saw from his papers strewn around on the ground, from St. Paul, Minnesota.

There wasn't much to be done for the patrol; but Major Bowlby, who had been brought up in the cavalry, climbed up into a hayloft and threw down a lot of hay for the starving cattle. The people of the town had joined the miserable-looking throng that we had seen moving back before



*We arranged to give the attackers our artillery for support.*

the hated and dreaded Boche, carrying and pushing in wheelbarrows what few belongings they could. Some of them had asked us if the Boche were coming back again and we had told them they were not. Nevertheless, when the Germans retreated, they had left word that they would return within a week, and the helpless people were too scared to pay much attention to our assurances. However, the cattle seemed even more pitiful than the humans, as the latter could do something about it, but all the cattle could do was to stay to starve to death in their stalls, or if turned loose to wander in a vain search for forage in the deep snow.

The enemy had holed up in Logbierme and Coulée, the next town south of Henumont. They had a couple of tanks which caused the 1st Battalion some trouble as they slowly drove the Krauts from the buildings. The 3rd Battalion by now had reached the town of Houveignes, where they found at one house the table all set to serve dinner, and a meal cooking on the stove. I suspect also that some of the 3rd Battalion had supplemented this meal with steaks from a cow that had been killed by artillery fire.

During the night a blizzard came up and another heavy snow fell. The 3rd Battalion moved southward to Poteaux, and the 1st Battalion pushed forward to a forest-covered ridge on

their right and put out a road block on the east and west road to their front. A German water-cart with two men on it came driving up the road, and the road block ambushed them. The 106th Division had reached the limit of their advance, and we were now attached to the 30th Division, who had been attacking on our left, to continue the attack. A patrol from the 3rd Battalion surprised a German artillery observation group by finding a wire line and following it until they came to a group of twelve Krauts on a hill directing fire from an assault gun into Poteaux. This group was either killed or captured, and the heavy accurate fire into the town came to a stop. We pushed on to the south about another mile, when we reached the 30th Division final objective, and we held fast.

The engineers had a hard time keeping the trails open after the heavy snow, as the mines could not be seen. Although one or two jeeps were blown up from the mines, the heavy snowplow was not bothered too much by the explosion of a Teller mine. One bit of humor indulged in by the engineers was a big sign painted on the back of an antiquated French road-sweeper that they had impressed into service. This sign sarcastically read: "C'est la guerre." This old French vehicle must have been at least the vintage of 1890, for it had the old-fashioned carriage-type wheels, and a buggy seat perched well up in the air. It was ludicrous just to look at, but with a G.I. planted imperiously on the buggy seat and the apparition almost incredibly moving down the street impelled by its eight-horsepower engine, it gave everybody that passed a good laugh. It thus served a purpose, whether it did any useful work or not.

**T**HE newly arrived 75th Division now was supposed to attack across our front toward the east, while we remained in position until they passed our front. We watched them one morning from the road block, and they were having a hard time getting started. One battalion was trying to cross an open field under heavy German machine-gun and mortar fire in plain daylight. Major Bowlby and I happened to be visiting the 1st Battalion road block when this occurred, and a company of the 75th was trying to move up the road by crawling. Nebelwerfer fire started coming in, which while the shells were in flight sounded something like an old rusty ice-cream freezer in action, except louder. We took refuge in the building the road block was using for a C. P., and the company started back down the road. We arranged to give the attackers our artillery for support as they did not have communications with theirs. The Germans were finally driven out of their positions, and

after another day we were ordered back to Stavelot for a brief rest.

While at Stavelot, the men were put in buildings, and entertainments were arranged. Company messes were now operated for a little change in diet. While in combat, the men had existed on ten-in-one rations, which was a good ration and which they could cook up themselves. I know some of them liked it so well that objections were heard when the kitchens were set up. The 2nd Battalion was still fighting with the 7th Armored Division for St. Vith, but rejoined us after a few days. They had run into pretty strong resistance, for the Germans there were doing everything they could to hold the Bulge open until they escaped with the bulk of their forces. They were up against the fanatic S.S. Division that had killed the American prisoners at Malmédy. But they had plenty of tank support, and after a few days rejoined the regiment in Stavelot.

WE had each battalion commander give a critique on his experiences during the past weeks for the officers and men so they could learn what had been going on, and also to improve our technique from the past experiences. Beaver Thompson, the celebrated newspaper correspondent, came down for a visit from 1st Army headquarters at Spa. At our command post, a big barn of a building on the square, the windows were covered to keep out the cold winter winds, and G.I. stoves were sprinkled around. The average French stove or fireplace never seemed to heat a place adequately, since they were built with the purpose of economy of fuel. The G.I. stove, however, was round and ample, and when it came to red glow was far superior to any French stove. It finally got so that when we moved, we would try to get the stoves from the last bivouac up early, and many loaded them on the jeeps following the main attack. Here at the C. P. was an old Belgian taken care of by his daughter. The old man was apparently very sick, as he kept to his bed in the rooms they occupied and did not bother us, and we did not bother them. We found that he was a doctor, and at one time before his illness had been considered the leading surgeon in that part of Belgium.

Most of the people in this part of Belgium were not overly friendly, as it had belonged to Germany before the last war and they certainly never put themselves out to welcome the Americans. Perhaps this area had been fought over so much, and armies of both sides had passed through there with such devastating effect, that they were now apathetic and felt the hopelessness of their position—also that if they befriended one side, it might happen that the opposing side would re-

turn the next week and punish them for being so friendly. In spite of this everybody enjoyed the few days we spent in Stavelot, as all too quickly we were ordered to rejoin the 82nd Airborne Division, which had just jumped off from St. Vith, after its capture, and were attacking in the vicinity of Honsfeld toward the Siegfried Line.

The area the 82nd was operating in was very rugged. That is, it consisted of wide expanses of heavy woods, with lanes or trails cut through them. Due to the heavy traffic and melting snow, these dirt trails were now very rough, and in many places almost impassable. I had left about three o'clock in the afternoon to come forward, leaving Zais to get the battalions started forward the next morning. It took me until three o'clock the next morning to reach 82nd headquarters, where General Gavin was still up and busy. He said that the 325th was attacking toward the town of Scheid early that morning, and that we were to protect the flanks, particularly against attack from the northeast. He liked to have everything buttoned up as he called it, and it was the normal thing in the 82nd after any attack to button up so that no large enemy groups could filter through without encountering resistance.

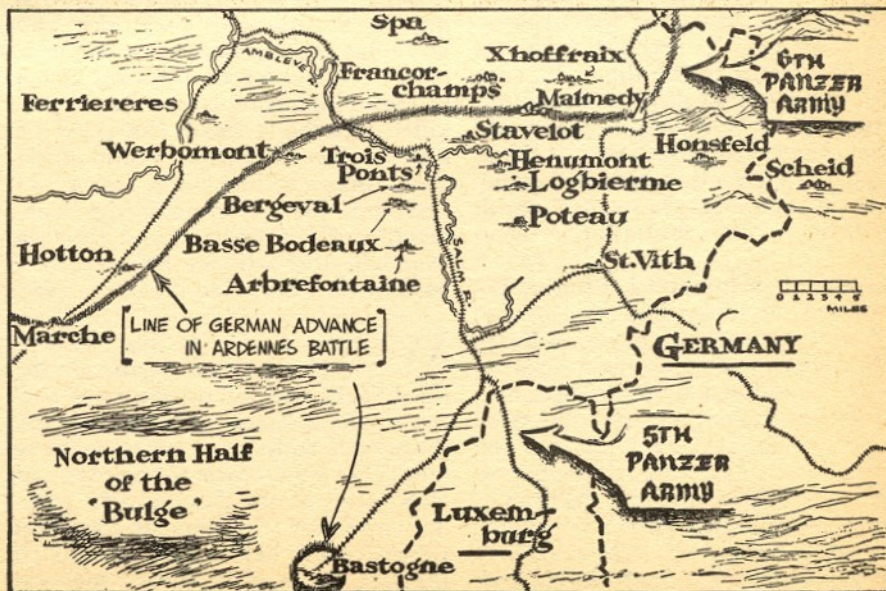
The 325th jumped off that morning all right, and as they moved forward, we saw many of them carrying the German Panzerfaust. This was only good for one shot, but carried a lot more power than did our bazooka or rocket weapon, and was one of the few things that could stop the Mark VI tank. The attack that morning was not an easy one, and soon litter men were busy bringing wounded back up the narrow forest trail from the direction of Scheid. Many more followed them that day, until the town was finally captured in the late afternoon. Our 1st Battalion was put in position to

button up the north flank of the 325th and that night when I returned to the Division C. P., I found that our regiment was ordered to another front to participate in an attack to be made by the V Corps.

As usual, I went ahead with some of the regimental staff and the battalion commanders, in order to get the plan and make a reconnaissance before the arrival of the troops under Colonel Zais. We stopped off at the headquarters of the V Corps at Eupen to get information on where we were going. Here we found General Huebner, whom I had known a few years before when he was executive of the 19th Infantry in Hawaii. He was very cordial but full of business as usual, and anxious, as he expressed it, to get the damn' war over with. He had a very tough assignment for us, however, and certainly didn't permit friendship to interfere with duty, as we soon found.

Colonel John Hill, a classmate, took us up to the 78th Division, to which unit we were going to be attached for this operation. At their headquarters near Simmerath, we met General Parker, the division commander, and General Rice, the assistant division commander. The plan was for the 78th to attack from their present position and take the town of Schmidt, and then push on to prevent the Germans from blowing up the dam and thereby flooding the Roer River Valley. While they were doing this, we were to attack in an adjacent sector held by the 8th Division. Our objective was outlined as the high ground east of the Roer River, and we were to jump off from the little town of Bergstein, Germany.

We immediately had to get word to the column to move to the vicinity of Bergstein instead of coming into the 78th sector. After getting all the information we could we started out again to Bergstein to get a look at our



*That night was a nightmare as the troops were stopped by mine-fields covered by machine-gun and mortar fire.*

area and make plans for the attack which was to be the following night, the 2nd-3rd of February. The roads were now in poor shape as they had thawed slightly and then been frozen, again covering everything with a thin coating of ice. However the troops got up there all right the next morning after riding all night in trucks, although as Major Armstrong remarked later, his eyes stood out like a bull-frog's for a week after, from leaning out of the cab trying to watch the road. The towns in this area such as Hurtgen, Kleinhau, Brandenburg and Bergstein were beaten to a pulp, and were much worse than any area we had seen. During the next few days the roads thawed out and all except the main paved roads became hub-deep in mud. The whole scene was one of war at its worst, and the combination of mud and demolished towns gave everything the aspect of desolation and despair.

However, we visited Bergstein that afternoon, which was under artillery fire and the battalion that occupied it kept well hidden in the basements and cellars. In fact, they did not appreciate us moving around in the town, as they said it drew fire; and the commanding general of the 8th Division added his protest to theirs and let us understand that we were severely reprimanded. At the 13th Infantry C. P. we found Colonel Nelson, whom I had known before in the 10th Armored Division. This C. P. was located in Brandenburg, but as all the buildings were in ruins, they had dug into the side of a hill and braced the ceilings and walls with heavy timber. The vicinity of the C. P. was extremely muddy, and even then the ceiling was beginning to drip from the melting snow. As he was moving back to Kleinhau, he let us use the C. P., and we were grateful as there was no other place to go except out in the mud. When the troops arrived, we put them in a patch of woods which had some small dugouts and where they could stay until the time for attack that same night.

As the time for attack drew near, we moved the forward echelon of the C. P. to the already overcrowded Bergstein. Here we found one room of a mostly demolished building that was not occupied, and set up our telephones, radios and an O. P. on the upper floor. That night was pretty much of a nightmare, for the troops almost immediately were stopped by heavy mine-fields covered by machine-gun and mortar fire, and illuminated by brilliant flares. As it was impos-



sible to remove the mines at night, we waited for daylight to send in groups to remove the mines and tape gaps to guide troops through them.

This they succeeded in doing; and the next night Captain Birder took our company through first. He had a rough time, as he was almost immediately surrounded by German paratroopers, and in the dark it became quite a mix-up. Captain Birder, who was a fine young company commander barely twenty-one years of age and a recent graduate of Notre Dame, was killed, and the Germans closed up the gaps in the mine-field before others could follow. The night before we had lost Captain Juichi, the commander of F Company, and Captain Woodall, the artillery liaison officer with the 3rd Battalion, by mortar fire.

**WE** seemed to be getting nowhere fast, but we tried again on the third night with about the same success. The companies that had started the attack with from thirty to forty men were now down to twenty, and with some of the best leaders gone. Two companies of the 1st Battalion were also sent to clean off the hill on the left, from which heavy fire was coming. This was done, but it still

seemed to be to no avail. The 6th German parachute regiment, which was holding this sector, was not going to budge, apparently, until they wanted to.

In the meantime the attack on Schmidt by the 78th was not progressing too well, and night after night the artillery would lay into the town, firing all night long with 155s and 240s until the place must have been a shambles. The Germans also were starting to put big stuff into Bergstein, and when a whole building or what remained of a building would crumple up from a blast, we figured it must be from at least a small buzz-bomb that they were using. However the nightmare finally came to an end. The Germans suddenly withdrew, we were relieved by the 508th Parachute Infantry and were ordered to move to Laon, France, later to join up with the 13th Airborne Division, which was now *en route* to France from the U. S.

It was a pretty tired, dejected bunch that moved back toward Brandenburg. They had been almost continuously on the move since the 19th of December. Casualties had not been terribly high, except possibly on this last venture, but the weather had been severely cold, feet were getting in bad





condition, and the many long moves in open trucks had caused many respiratory ailments. Trucks were scarce on the move back to entrain at Aachen, but the men were satisfied to load about thirty-five men on the 2½s to make sure they got out of that area. I know myself—though not having to take a lot of the hardships that the men did—that I felt as though I had taken a physical beating. What we all needed was a chance to relax, to get cleaned up and rested up. Nevertheless, as the men loaded on the forty-and-eights again at Aachen their spirits were high, and apparently the youngsters could recover quickly, particularly after a good night's sleep and knowing that they were now headed for a rest area.

Aachen, a city that had been heavily bombed, and about which one had heard and read, was about three-fourths demolished. According to the reports, we thought that the whole city was flat. However, the railyard had been put back into shape very quickly, and there were whole rows of houses that had not been hit by bombs at all.

We visited the M. P. headquarters while we were there, and the hotel was in almost perfect condition with electricity and hot water. About forty

thousand Germans still lived in the city, out of about an original one hundred thousand.

At Laon we stayed at an old French barracks for about a week before moving farther south to join up with the 13th Airborne.

**T**HE town of Joigny, nestling in the valley of the Yonne River about a hundred fifty kilometers south of Paris, was quiet and secluded. Although some German troops had been billeted there in the days of the occupation, it had missed most of the destruction and bitterness of war. It would have been an ideal spot to enjoy living in France but we were rapidly getting entwined again in the final drive to complete victory over Germany. First of all we were now assigned to a division that had just come overseas. In personnel, equipment, and administrative matters they were as near perfection as could be obtained, whereas we had now been almost continually in combat or preparing for combat for a year. Many of the old faces had now gone; and although we had received some replacements we needed about eight hundred men to put us up to full strength. So many changes had oc-

curred, and so rapidly that our service records as well as others now needed months of work before they would be anywhere near perfect. Under the expediency of combat we had picked up a lot of extra equipment which now was considered as over age, and most of the other equipment was generally in a rather beaten-up condition. At the same time both men and officers were entitled to visit Paris and other places as a reward for their long and faithful service. Time was needed to accomplish these things, but now the 7th Army advancing toward the Rhine in the vicinity of Mannheim had requested an airborne division to help them to secure a bridgehead across the river.

The 17th Airborne Division already had been set up to cross the Rhine and land near the town of Wesel. We followed them to the airfields around the 4th of April. Although the division was well spread out at these airfields in northern France, as we were to use the new C-46, carrying about thirty men, the whole regiment was at one field located a few miles from Bapaume. Here we had tents set up by a colored engineer service battalion to wait and prepare for the coming attack. The C-46 group at the nearby

airfield had lost twenty-four ships the day before on the Wesel jump, and were certainly not over-enthusiastic about this coming affair.

Preparations were made, however; but the day before the operation was scheduled to occur, everything was canceled. What had happened was that General Patton's Third Army had simply walked across the Rhine in that area and had found little opposition. Plans were then made to jump farther into the interior of Germany near the town of Heckingen. A group of mysterious German scientists were supposed to have set up in this area whom we were supposed to capture together with their records and apparatus. However Heckingen as well as most other German towns was also quickly overrun by the now rapidly advancing ground forces, and we were forced again to postpone our plans at the last minute. In another week the war ended as of the 9th of May, although reports had got out several days before that everything was *kaput* for Germany.

OUR stay now at the field was an anti-climax. The weather for several weeks had been bitter; although this was April, a driving sleet swept across the open fields, apparently coming right off the North Sea and the tents had little effect in keeping out the wintry blasts. The ground around the tents was a sea of mud, and the walk from the tents to the mess tent was a precarious and slippery journey. The Red Cross girls who had accompanied the regiment to the area, however, slogged around with the rest of us, and lent cheer to the bedraggled inmates of the camp. Most of us got a chance to see some of the surrounding cities such as Arras, Lens and Lille, and also to visit Brussels. At Lille one day they were bringing some of the displaced persons whom the Germans had requisitioned from France for labor. Hundreds of them were now coming in by train daily, and hundreds of people lined the streets to catch the first glimpse of someone who had been torn from his family four or five years before. On one occasion while returning from Lille we picked up in the car a middle-aged Frenchman in an old and torn French soldier's overcoat. He apparently had no one to meet him, and was starting to walk off with his belongings wrapped up in a piece of blanket. He was not very communicative, but we did gather that he had been captured by the Germans when they took Verdun in 1940. As we approached his home town and his house, he grew very quiet, and soon the tears were streaming down his cheeks. He was seeing the familiar scenes that he had not looked at for six years, and he would soon see the brothers and sisters, the mother and wife and children he

had not seen for those years. We kept quiet also, knowing what he was thinking about, and let him off at the house he pointed out. We waited until the old mother and all the rest of the family came out joyfully to welcome him, and then drove back to the airfield.

During the next few weeks there was a constant shuffling and reshuffling within the regiment. All the men who had a campaign star for Italy were given the privilege of transferring to the 82nd Division, who were designated as occupation troops. As this included all the older men in the regiment, our losses were heavy, and the administration work to get the service records, etc., up to date and reorganizing with replacements now sent in was very heavy. As none of the older units in the Division were effected by this shift we were thus generally far behind the others in completeness of records, and the cause of most of the worries of the Division staff. Very soon after the Italian men left, we had to transfer all the men over seventy-five points to the 17th ALB Division which was being inactivated. What we had left was a new regiment composed about ninety per cent of men and officers who had been assigned during the past few months. When we completed this last change-over, we were now prepared as far as personnel was concerned for redeployment to the Pacific for the battle of Japan.

The atmosphere of Joigny was generally pastoral with its small farms on the hillsides outside the town, its small flocks of goats in the hills, the smooth-flowing Yonne with its occasional fishermen and slow-moving barges and its peaceful inhabitants in the narrow, walled streets. However now and then through the U.S.O. program an occasional celebrity from the outer-world came for a visit and these we usually put up for the night at the regimental officers' quarters. Georges Carpentier, the famous French prize-fighter, who as a boy had worked in the coal mines of Lens, was one of these. Although the gorgeous Georges was then well over the fifty-year mark, he was still trim, exceptionally well dressed and still his dapper, confident self. He refereed one of our boxing matches held in the Place de Marche, and although I don't believe most of our youngsters remembered too much about his fight with Jack Dempsey many years before, the French people of the town were highly enthusiastic.

The stay at the assembly area, Camp Pittsburgh, was rather hectic. We turned in the equipment we didn't need, boxed up what we were to take back, made reams of rosters, and stencils covering all the reception stations where the men would go on their thirty-day furlough after arrival in the states. To add to the general confusion we were assigned about a thousand

low-point men from the 17th Airborne Division eligible to go to Japan, and these men also had to be processed physically, clothes and equipment turned in or issued as necessary and new ship loading lists prepared. As we were only due to stay at Pittsburgh a few days before starting for the port of Le Havre everybody had to work, and particularly the personnel section, with a feverish haste not conducive to the best and most accurate results. On arrival at Camp Phillip Morris at Le Havre, we found the troops had already left and were in the process of loading on the *Madawaska Victory* preparatory to sailing at twelve noon. As it was now almost ten A.M. and we had been traveling since about midnight, we started for the boat in all haste, finally locating it after a harried search of the waterfront and with a half-hour to spare. We then settled back for the crossing of the Atlantic, with the ship heavily loaded. The men had to sleep in shifts; all passageways were constantly jammed with reclining figures. The voyage was rough, but at last we were on our way back, to see that Statue of Liberty we had so missed, the past year and a half. . . .

I cannot finish my story without paying a final tribute to those officers and men who followed and fought through these pages. There were no better men to have been had anywhere than the group that left Camp Mackall, N. C., for overseas. The average age of the enlisted men was nineteen, that of the officers only slightly higher. They had youth and the spirit that goes with it. They also had the confidence in themselves to wish to close with the enemy and destroy him. I can remember the story of the lead scout in the forest near Hotton, Belgium, who went ahead of the platoon knocking out enemy machine-gun nests as he went along by himself. He had forgotten that he was simply to cover the advance of the platoon, and his job ended when he located the enemy. One or two of these men could do a lot of damage, and many are the instances where they did. For feats of physical stamina and endurance they were unsurpassed.

WHILE thinking back on these days, I can now see that another one of the outstanding qualities of a paratrooper was his willingness to take a chance. While sometimes this attribute caused some casualties, on the other hand it finished up the job more quickly. Casualties are a necessary evil in war and I can remember sweating them out almost continuously, for if excessive casualties were incurred, there was in most cases something wrong with the plans. It seemed to me that there must always be a way of arranging an attack so that a minimum of casualties would be suffered.