

BLUE BOOK

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THESE UNITED STATES...XIII—Louisiana
Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

TWO COMPLETE NOVELS

PLAY IT FOR KEEPS

Life was at stake but he kept to his code
by RICHARD STERN

DEEP WHERE YOU CANNOT SEE

A drama of the Florida sponge fishing fleet
by AHMAD KAMAL

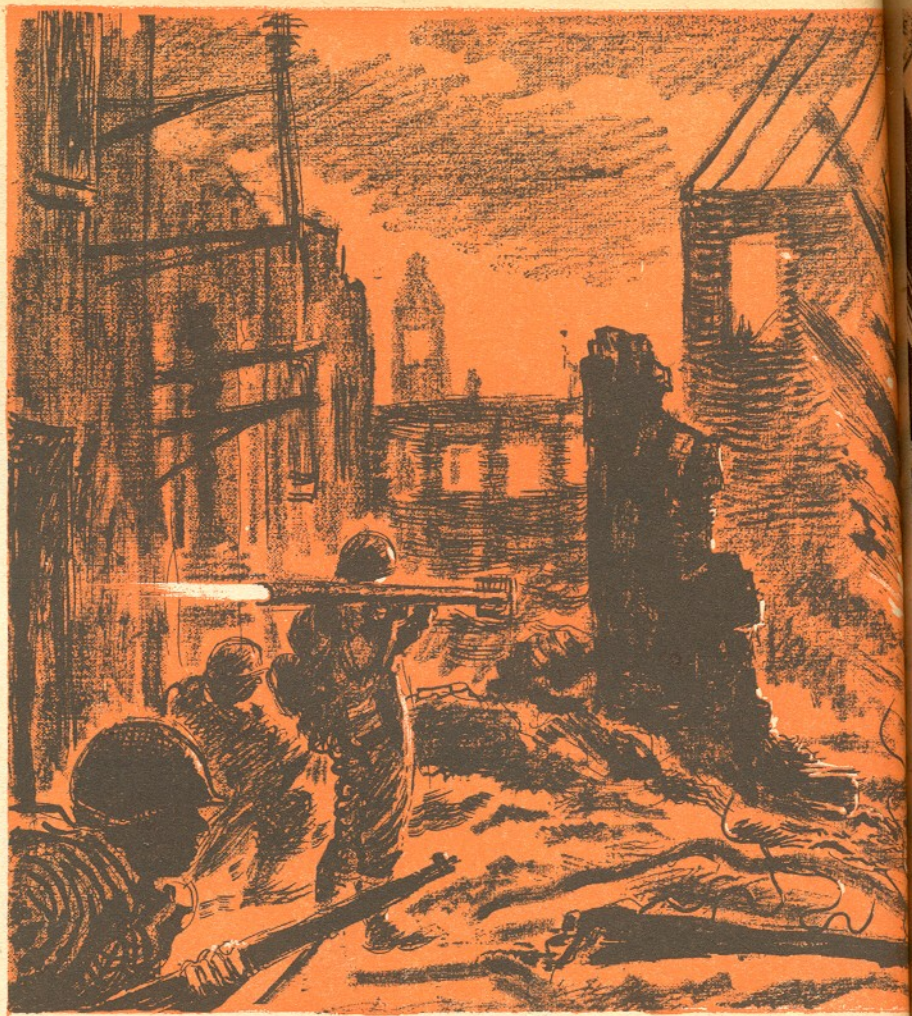
Ten short stories and many narratives
of fact and experience

BECAUSE the 517th Airborne was a "separate" regiment, not attached to any one division, it is possible to follow its story without the narrative spreading out into the record of an entire campaign; otherwise it was typical of many other fine regiments, and we are therefore presenting its record here, written by its commander, as a characteristic regimental story.

Last month we printed the story of its conditioning for battle by front-line service in Italy, and of its airborne drop near Le Muys in the Southern France attack. Here we follow its career as a screen in the Maritime Alps for the advancing Seventh Army—and its sudden call northward to help out in the Battle of the Bulge.

THE Var River was several hundred yards wide. At this time of the year a large part of the river basin was dry, and only the remaining channel about fifty yards in width was still running, surrounded with stretches of rocky sand on each side. The Germans had planted hundreds of anti-airborne poles in this sandy stretch, and had strung wires between the poles. On these wires they had hung shells of about 155-mm. caliber, intended to explode when tension on the shell fuse was released. To watch our engineers clearing a stretch of these shells was quite nerve-racking. They would move the shell while one man kept pulling on the wire at the nose of the shell in order to keep up the tension. They would then unscrew the fuse while keeping this tension until the shell was disarmed. One day someone released the wire quickly, or his hand slipped, because one of them exploded, killing a very fine engineer sergeant and wounding the others nearby. It was dangerous work, but had to be done so the rest could move on.

This time we captured the bridge across the Var in our sector intact. The Germans had it all set to blow up, but as usual weren't going to blow it up until we got pretty close. Perhaps this was for morale effect, as that seemed to be a favorite method of warfare. However, a patrol from C Co. solved the problem by capturing a couple workmen and dressing up in their clothes. They put their weapons in the wheelbarrow the workmen were using, and started across the bridge as nonchalantly as possible. As they approached the other end of the bridge, they pulled their weapons from the wheelbarrow and shot the Germans who challenged them. To cut the wires leading to the charges on the bridge was the only thing remaining to be done. Some additional men were sent in immediately to hold the bridge and prevent its destruction. This bridge was important to us, as it



COMBAT

kept our now lengthy supply-line well open.

We could see the Germans moving around in the towns of Levens and Roquette. We decided to work on Roquette first and then come around in back of Levens. One company, Co. E, was sent to ford the Var under cover of darkness and try to get into Roquette from the rear. As the town was situated on the top of a high hill overlooking the river, the company had quite a climb after the crossing. However, everything went smoothly, and by morning they were in position astride the road between Roquette and Levens. A motorcycle with a side-car came down the road from Levens early that morning, and both the driver and passenger were killed. As the company advanced into the town after an artillery preparation, some of the Germans made a break for it across an open field. These were cut down by rifle and light machine-gun fire. A

few white phosphorus grenades tossed into occupied buildings encouraged the remaining Germans to surrender, together with the garrison commander. The latter was a very surly Nazi who would not deign to say anything, except that Germany was going to win the war. He was sent back to the rear with the other prisoners.

WE pushed on to Levens, but during the attack on Roquette, the enemy had pulled out. The happiest group in Levens were members of an orphan school for young girls, who had been scared to death during the bombardment. We moved on as rapidly as possible with our meager transportation. By this time many of the men had worn through their boots and were having trouble with their feet. However, we were losing contact with the rapidly moving Germans and had to keep going. To the north of us, Germans were coming down into



TEAM by COLONEL RUPERT D. GRAVES

towns, making a raid and then withdrawing. Many patrols were sent out, covering long distances by foot and returning with information. One of these was ambushed, losing several men, but the majority of them had better luck by surprising the Germans. Apparently the enemy was moving back on the permanent fortifications around Sospel, and we followed. We reached L'Escarène and pushed one battalion, the first as far north as Peira-Cava, well up in the mountains. The Second Battalion pushed on straight through L'Escarène and started the steep climb toward Col de Bras, overlooking Sospel. I Company was sent over a rough trail to the vicinity of Mt. Scandeous to protect the right flank and connect with the Special Service Force on our right.

For the next week or so the fighting became pretty well mixed up. Company D, who led the advance of the Second Battalion after they left Touët

de L'Escarène, found that the road running over the mountains had been very badly blown in two places. The places selected to blow the road were along steep slopes, and would be extremely difficult to repair. So Lt. Starkey, the company commander, started his company off the road and up the steep slopes of Col de Brouis.

SOON he started running into groups of Germans in the heavy woods. After each short fire fight, the company continued the climb. Mortar fire started coming in on them, but they kept on until they reached the summit. The wounded had to be sent back by the same route, and as Capt. Megibow, the battalion surgeon, tried to get them down over the hill, the Germans ranged in on the Red Cross markings on the helmets of the first-aid personnel.

This made the job of getting the wounded out a very difficult one.

However Megibow kept at it, and by dark had most of them back to the road. In the meantime Starkey was having plenty of trouble warding off light German patrols who kept wandering into his position. I believe the Germans thought that Starkey only had a patrol instead of a company. This was verified by a German prisoner captured in that area. A roundabout route was found that led around Luceram and came back to the main L'Escarène-Sospel Road at Col de Bras. A company was started off, cleaning this road of Germans from the north end. They also ran into German patrols of about thirty men in strength, but soon this by-pass was open for traffic.

The Third Battalion was then sent to relieve D Company, who were by now pretty near exhausted. As they advanced to the D Company position, they again kept running into Germans in the woods, and ended up by fight-

ing their way up to make the relief. At Col de Bras there were two small stone buildings and a low ridge running to the southward. A company of the Third Battalion in trying to take the ridge were beaten back by strong German resistance. A heavy concentration was put on the ridge, and another attack made. This attack also was beaten back by heavy German machine-gun and mortar fire. Lt. Col. Paxton, however, as he watched the last attack, suddenly saw the reason for the German success. They were waiting in two stone buildings until after the artillery lifted, and then rushed out in rear of the low ridge just in time to man their positions and start pouring in a heavy fire. Lt. Ridlet, a platoon leader, on the last attack had almost reached the crest when he was killed by machine-gun fire. Ridlet had been a very aggressive leader, and his loss was keenly felt.

The next time, however, as the Germans started rushing from the cover of their buildings, Cato caught them in a heavy artillery concentration and sprinkled them all over the landscape. The hill was captured, as well as the two buildings. One of these became the new C.P. of the Third Battalion and the other the aid station for some time to come. A 37-mm. gun was also captured, as well as a victrola and a set of records with which the Germans must have passed the time while waiting to be killed. Col. Paxton described the ridge as rim-rock, and repeated this expression so often in his description of the terrain that he became known thereafter as "Rim Rock Paxton."

I COMPANY had reached Mt. Scandeous and connected up with the SST and had also tried to push in and join up with the remainder of the Third Battalion. However, they had run into strong enemy opposition, resulting in the death of Capt. McGiever, the battalion executive, who was leading one of the attacks. McGiever was a big, rugged fellow, and had played tackle at one time on the University of Montana football team. That night they brought him back with four machine-gun bullets in his chest. His loss was deeply felt by all.

The First Battalion had also pushed onward past Peira-Cava and had run into strong points of enemy resistance. This area around Peira-Cava was at an elevation of about four thousand feet, and even then in early September the air was quite cold, particularly at night. German artillery was now getting heavier, and we had apparently come upon the line where the Germans intended to hold. Cato established artillery O.P.'s at Plan Constant, where we could see the guns



The Germans ranged in on the Red Cross markings on the helmets of the first-aid personnel.

flash from Fort Agaisen, just in rear of Sospel, and from Fort Barbinette. Our return fire bounced off the thick turrets of the fort and did no damage.

Col de Bras received its daily plastering from the forts, and the supply road from Col de Bras around through Luceram was under continuous enemy observation and fire. A party carrying water up to the Third Battalion was ambushed and killed by Germans as they carried up composition water skins on their shoulders. The Battalion S-4, Lt. Calder, who was coming along behind them with the Battalion S-1, Lt. Johnson, however, saw the Germans fire, and they killed two of them immediately afterward with their carbines.

We now had most of the high ground overlooking the Sospel Valley below except a large wooded hill named Tête de Lavina. I Company had stopped to the south of this hill at Mount Scandeous. Ridge X, as we now called the low ridge near Col de Bras, was held by G and H companies. From Ridge X, we had observation of all the ground for many hundred yards toward L'Escarène. However, Tête de Lavina was much higher, and not only overlooked our

whole area, but the whole Sospel Valley to the east. It was held by an estimated battalion of the 134th German Division, which had just been switched from Russia. The plan was for I Company to move in from the south flank at the same time G Company moved in from the front, namely Ridge X. The whole thing was to be preceded by a heavy artillery preparation on successive areas on Tête de Lavina, in order to keep the Germans in the pillboxes which dotted the hill. An O.P. was set up on Ridge X from which we could see the attack.

A little before 0800 the artillery came in on the first objective, and we could see Company I under Lt. Birder move in behind it. At the same time G Company started forward, and both G and I soon came to the first pillboxes. They had followed the artillery so closely that the Germans were still grouped together under the protection of the thick walls, and just started to come out to man their positions. A few shots picked off the first ones, and the rest came out with their hands up.

AT some of the pillboxes the Germans remained inside. At these a soldier would jump up on top and throw a couple of white phosphorus grenades inside of it. This invariably caused the Germans to come out muttering "Kamerad!" As one objective was taken, the artillery, under direction from the artillery observers with the assaulting troops, would lift to the next objective. Soon the whole mass of Tête de Lavina was in our hands. We had captured two German companies in thick-walled pillboxes without the loss of a single man, in less than two hours.

However, the attacking companies still had to hold the hill. The German artillery from the Agaisen forts which had been firing over Lavina during the attack, now laid in on their former front line. The forward slopes of Lavina under the blazing guns of Agaisen at less than two thousand yards' range were almost untenable. Therefore only outposts were sent to the forward slopes, and the bulk of the company were kept under cover on the reverse slopes and in the nearby captured pillboxes.

Company D of the Second Battalion was brought around to hold the right or south flank of Lavina, and stay connected up with the S.S.F. When a yellow smoke-shell was exploded by enemy fire in the midst of a platoon position, it brought a rain of fire down on them for over an hour. A German counter-attack coming up a draw from the Sospel Valley was stopped less than ten feet from our main position. As one man described it: "A group of Germans appeared from the woods about fifty yards to our front. I kept

firing and brought down several, but one big German kept on coming. I fired several shots at almost point-blank range right into his belly, but he still kept on coming. I grabbed a W P grenade, pulled the pin and threw it at him. By this time he was about fifteen feet from me. The W P grenade exploded, throwing the burning fragments on him, and he suddenly stopped, turned and ran screaming back down over the hill from where he had come." We had no casualties capturing the hill of Tête de Lavina, but we had quite a few trying to hold it.

We had now come as far east as consistent with our mission of protecting the right flank of the Seventh Army. We also were certainly in contact with the Germans, and from our positions on Tête de Lavina, Plan Constant and the hills surrounding Peira-Cava, we could observe their every movement during daylight, and place artillery fire wherever that movement appeared. The enemy posts at Agaisen and Barbinette bothered us somewhat, and we were taking a few casualties daily. However, to push on against the posts would not only put us in a disadvantageous position but would have lengthened our already long supply-lines back to Frejus and have put us in plain view of the enemy from the still higher mountains toward the Italian border. So we settled down to hold, at the same time keeping a steady pressure against the Germans by means of patrol and artillery fire.

ONE of the patrols sent out from the Third Battalion now at Peira-Cava was particularly successful. Lieutenant (then Sgt.) Kievet, was the patrol leader. After briefing his patrol thoroughly the day before and arranging for radio communication with both the artillery and 81-millimeter mortars, he started out. After traveling some distance, his scouts located the German outpost on a cliff overlooking the trail. Sgt. Kievet led his patrol along the edge of the cliff out of sight of the outpost until he was well into the German position. Here he could see the Germans working to improve their position; some of them were digging, while others were sawing and chopping up fallen trees. Kievet arranged his patrol to fire into the German position at short range. They were to fire when he opened up with his Tommy-gun. Finally when everything was ready, Kievet lined his sights in on the nearest German and pressed the trigger. All that happened, however, was the magazine dropped out onto the ground. Kievet then grabbed his pistol and fired, hitting the German on the side of the head. As the remainder of the patrol opened fire, 81-mm. mortar-fire was brought down into the German

position. After killing about forty Germans and throwing the rest into a panic, the patrol withdrew to Peira-Cava. From a Frenchman who came through our lines later, we learned that this company had been sent back to reorganize, as it had been almost entirely wiped out. For this action Sgt. Kievet was given a battlefield promotion to Second Lieutenant.

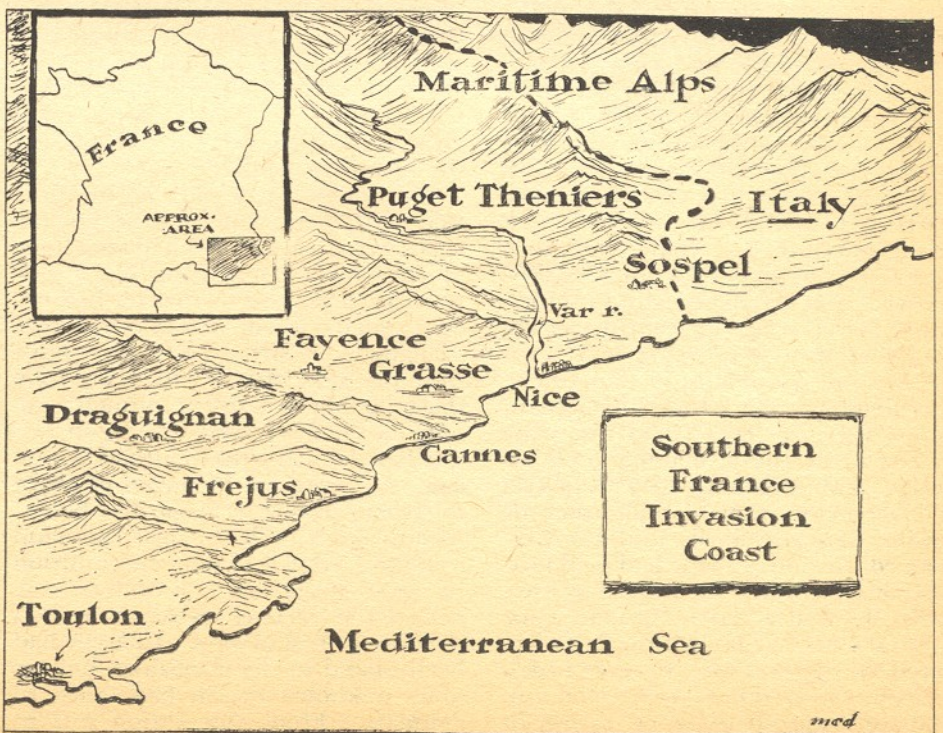
By now we had most of the vehicles that had been sent by LST from Italy. Up to this time, to go out on a reconnaissance I had to appropriate the jeep belonging to Captain Ferris of the anti-tank company. On this jeep we would ordinarily put the S-3, Major Bowlby, one runner, Captain Ferris and his driver, with Major Kinzer; the artillery liaison officer would perch himself out on the hood. In this manner we roamed over many miles of the Maritime Alps. As Kinzer was about six feet two and quite broad, it was remarkable that the Japanese driver got along as well as he did.

Now, however, we had enough vehicles with which to play. Facilities were procured at Nice, and one company kept on rotation to get cleaned up and to see the town. This was the beginning of the so-called "Champagne Campaign," where a soldier was reported to have dashed out of a café in Nice remarking that he had to get back in order to go out on a patrol.

Officers were also rotated to Nice, and as the stretch in the lines was now approaching two months, it was necessary to keep up morale as well as to keep down the scabies. A hotel building in L'Escarène was located for the regimental C.P. The hotel was orig-

inally Italian, as so many people in that area seemed to be, and was called the Castellino. It was owned by a French family who seemed very happy to have us use it. An aid station was set up in the local hospital, which had been run by nuns. The Mother Superior and some of the nuns stayed on and assisted in the care of the men. The town was shelled intermittently, from Mt. Agaisen, but usually with not too much accuracy. Usually the shells landed on either side of the road leading south from L'Escarène and in the general vicinity of the hospital. The Red Cross girls came out with doughnuts and coffee almost daily. They were Ty Cobb, and Rosanne Walker, and their presence was of great help and always welcomed and appreciated by all.

THE regiment was now so spread out it took almost all day to visit all units. Usually we would visit the First Battalion C.P. at Touët de L'Escarène, then go to Col de Bras, where there was a company C.P. in an old beaten-up building. This building was located in a narrow pass and about one hundred yards from a road junction. According to a German map that had been captured, Concentration 26 covered this cross-roads; and about five every morning and several times during the day they would lay in this concentration. When visitors came to this headquarters, it used to amuse Capt. La Chaussee, who commanded C Company at the time, to pretend to call for Concentration 26, just before the Germans were due to fire. Supply and reconnaissance jeeps going through this road junction used to speed up almost automatical-



ly, and I believe that there were more casualties from people getting thrown out of the jeeps while rounding the corner than there from the fire. However, although the old building had its chimney knocked down and several holes ripped in the roof, it provided good cover for successive company headquarters over a period of two months.

The road from Col de Bras through the Second Battalion position ran generally along the front line and through heavy woods. Several miles of this road were covered only by patrols, so we always tried to keep pretty well on the alert while riding along this trail—in many places in plain sight of the Agaisen forts. It was an ideal spot for an ambush, and it was always with a feeling of relief that we reached Luceram. Colonel Cato, in order to get better range with his 75's, had a battery in position toward the northern end of this trail, and also in plain sight of the enemy. It was shelled a few times, but why the enemy never really went to work on it, I shall never understand.

FROM Luceram we traveled northward to the Third Battalion now at Peira-Cava, climbing continuously up the steep graded slopes far over an hour. Here it was like being in another country. Even in the early fall the weather was quite cold and the surrounding hills were covered with snow. There were many resort hotels in the town where people used to stay for the winter sports season, and which were now being used by the troops not in the position outside of the town. Here too the enemy would shell the place intermittently, and German patrols at night would sometimes wander right into the town. These patrols were normally five-man patrols, and mostly for reconnaissance.

I talked with one of our sergeants who had been captured by one of these patrols while he was on his way back to the battalion aid station from his company. They had taken him back with them until they stopped at a small house to rest. While here, they had him start digging a long shallow trench. The sergeant couldn't understand German, but it seemed to indicate that they were going to get rid of him and throw him in the hole he was digging. He struck his German guard with the shovel and ran away as fast as he could, making good his escape and returning to Peira-Cava. The sergeant was pretty well upset for several days afterwards, and as a German concussion grenade had exploded near his ear while he was being captured, he had a terrific headache for over a week. The patrol that captured the sergeant wore the green edelweiss of the German Alpine Division, and were known to be operating in

the area to the north of Peira-Cava. These were good German troops, and had been trained to operate in mountainous territory. All the ones we saw were in fine physical condition, and had only the very latest and newest arms, equipment, and clothing. They seemed to know every path and trail in that area, and could negotiate long distances either by day or night.

Life went along in this more or less routine fashion until early in November. On one particular night we could hear explosions taking place in the Sospel Valley and suspected that the Germans were beginning to pull out. However, as on that same night we had a patrol out to blow up a pile of German mortar ammunition which had been spotted on the far slope of Tête de Lavina, we thought that it might be the noise from these explosions. So Captain Juichi was ordered to take a strong patrol and proceed into Sospel to see what was going on. If Sospel was clear, we then planned to send forward additional troops to take Agaisen and the hills to the east of Sospel.

Juichi moved on into Sospel without incident, found that most of the bridges had been blown up during the night and received a rather lukewarm welcome from the inhabitants. As Sospel was practically in the middle of the German position, they had kept pretty well hidden during the past couple of months. Although some shells were bound to land near the town once in a while, we had made it a point to shell only located German positions nearby. We pushed several more companies forward the next day to seize Mt. Grazian, Mt. Grosso, Fort Agaisen, Fort Barbinette, and start a company to the snowy peaks of Mt. Mangiabo which overlooked everything for many miles. It was all rimrock, as Colonel Paxton would say. We found that the Germans held Mt. Grosso and Mt. Grazian with small groups, but these were driven off and the hills occupied.

We finally got a look at the forts that had been annoying us for the past several weeks. We had seen some of the plans of these forts, but a visit to Agaisen showed us that we had underestimated their well-planned construction and size. They were built into the side of the hill, with long shafts as big as subway tunnels running in all directions. The gun turrets had French guns mounted in tandem, and were fed by means of chain conveyors from the magazines below. There were still many thousand rounds of French 75-mm. ammunition in these magazines. Elevators connected the various levels, as well as circular iron stairways. Charges had been placed in the magazines, but for some unknown reason had failed to detonate. From observation slits in

the gun turrets, one got a good view of our positions, and the charts painted on the wall gave the firing data to all key terrain features. There were underground living-quarters for the men, and with our shells bouncing off the six-foot-thick concrete walls, life at Agaisen must have gone along quite serenely. However, all the entrances to the fort were on the western side toward our positions, and perhaps this influenced the Germans in their decision to leave the place to us. Mount Grosso and Barbinette were similar to Agaisen, but not quite as elaborate.

The main body of the enemy had apparently withdrawn to Breil and Olivetta in Italy, but had left detachments behind to protect their withdrawal. One of these groups was located in a group of small buildings beyond Grosso. Colonel Cato used to bring up one of his 75's and practice direct fire against them for hours at a time. When the Germans withdrew from Sospel, they had heavily mined most of the roads and trails, and in some buildings had placed heavy charges to which had been attached a time fuse. About three days after arrival, one of these buildings in which were quartered about twenty of our men blew up. The explosion practically demolished the building, and many of the occupants were severely injured.

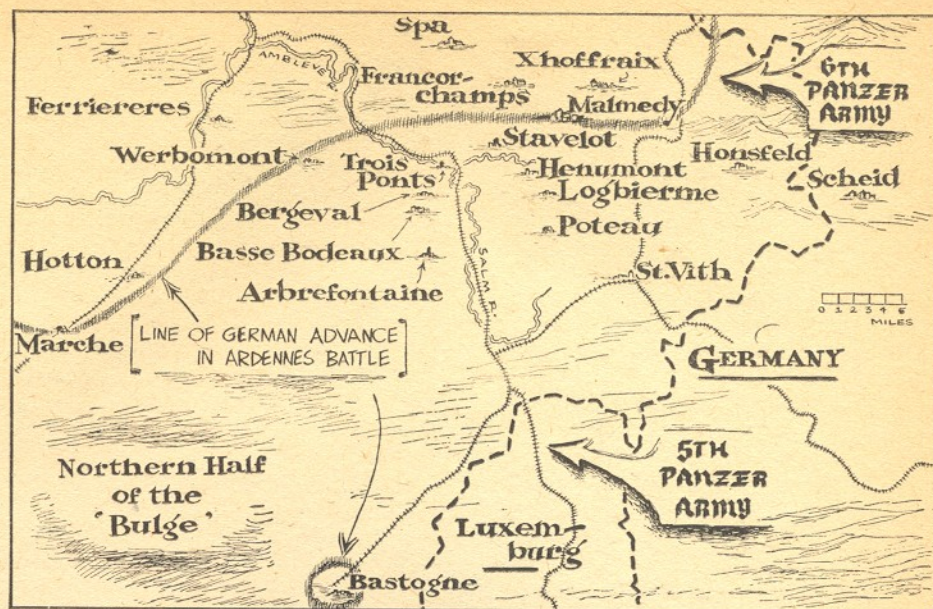
I WENT to the hospital two days later, and several of the men were sitting around on the bunk of another soldier. Most of them said that they would be back in a few days, but after a short silence the man on the bunk said "Colonel, I don't believe that I will be coming back." As the soldier looked pretty well and seemed cheerful, I made some remark that he would be all right in a few days. He then pulled the sheet back that had been covering the lower part of his body. He had had his right leg amputated above the knee the day before. He then said that he wanted just one thing and that was a pair of jump-boots to wear when he got his artificial leg. The other men wanted such things as combat infantry badges and mail. They all agreed that the hospital then located at St. Raphael was doing a wonderful job in taking care of the wounded that came there.

The regimental C.P. was in a valley to the east of town along the road going toward Breil. As we found in a few days, this location was not particularly well selected, as it was under observation from the hills to the east. It didn't take the Krauts very long to see that something was located there, because every day and several times during the night they would give it a pretty good shelling. The rooms on the eastern end of the build-

ing were not highly desirable, for the shells would invariably hit this end of the building. However, Le Golfe Hotel, a very large prominent building, in an open field to one side of us where the Third Battalion C.P. was located, received even more than we did. By moving all personnel away from the exposed side of the building, there were no casualties suffered, and we stayed in these buildings, too proud or too lazy to move until we were relieved about the 18th of November. The new unit commander came up one morning to go over the plans for the relief, leaving his jeep parked out in the courtyard. While he was inside, some shell fragments not only put a couple of holes in his jeep but also in a highly prized air mattress in his bedding roll. Needless to say, the new unit did not accept our offer to turn our C.P. buildings over to them.

AS soon as we were relieved by infantry units of the 14th Armored Division, we marched back to a selected bivouac area near the little town of Le Col just to the north of Cagnes. As the Krauts had been shelling the C.P. at half-hour intervals all night for the past several nights, and we had now been in the line for over three months, the gently rolling hills of Le Col seemed particularly restful and peaceful. However we had quite a lot of work to do, as the men were getting in bad shape: some had lost helmets and other equipment; some had scabies from lack of bathing; and what clothing and equipment they had was generally beaten up and dirty. We also had just received about five hundred replacements who had to be integrated into units, and all units had to be almost completely reorganized and retrained. Of course we also wanted to give the men a chance for recreation, so visits to Nice were arranged, and an athletic program set up to provide competition in six-man football, softball, and volleyball.

There were not many buildings in the area but as the weather near the Mediterranean coast was not severe, living in tents was not too bad. The regimental C.P. was set up at a small hotel building called rather applicably "Le Beau Sejour." This hotel was owned and operated by a woman who a few months previously had been host to a German commander and his headquarters. She liked to tell about the consternation and panic of the Germans when they received reports of the American invasion; and prophesied an early Allied victory to show her contempt and hatred of the Germans. Nearby the regimental aid station was set up at a place called "Le Rendezvous de Chasse." It was supposed to have been used as a hunting



headquarters at one time for King Louis the 11th, but had been purchased and restored by an American named Baer. It was of interest, however, to see the old cloistered ceilings, the enormous fireplaces where a whole ox could be roasted, and the rich wood carvings of the beds and walls. In contrast was the kitchen used by the new owner, with its modern plumbing, sinks and refrigerator. L'Abbaye de St. Jean, an ancient abbey dating back hundreds of years, was also close by and now used as the headquarters for our provost marshal, Captain Young, and for a guardhouse. Part of the abbey had been converted into a café by its owner, but it still was an extremely interesting old place. General Robert T. Frederick, the airborne task force commander, came out one day and presented many awards and decorations at a review held on a flat field located nearby. A memorial service was also held one Sunday to honor the missing members of the regiment. A movie-house was set up in Le Col with three shows daily, and we settled down, hopefully getting a kick out of the quietness of the Riviera countryside. It was interesting also to revisit the town of Puget Thenières where a celebration had been arranged for Isobel Pell, the American who had taken refuge there before the invasion. The day we arrived at Puget Thenières, Miss Pell could have taken over the town if she desired. All the kids followed her around, singing, wherever she went, and a street was named in her honor. . . .

By the first of December, however, we had received orders for the regimental combat team to move north, and on the morning of December 6 we were on our way by rail and motor convoy to Soissons, France. The bulk of the men moving by 40 and 8 French boxcars, and this was their first experience with this mode of travel.

Although it was not exactly like a Pullman, most men did not seem to mind it, and some seemed rather to enjoy the experience. With only about twenty-five men per car, with plenty of straw on the floor and with a warm sleeping bag for each man, it was actually better than riding on a day coach. They whiled away the hours during the four days it took for the trip by playing cards, cooking up the C and K rations, watching the French countryside roll by, and in sleeping. Stops were also made at several towns where hot meals were served at restaurants set up by service troops.

ON the way north with the convoy we left the Cote D'Azur and toured through the area where we had landed one night three months before. Captain Dearing pointed out the small building where he had been wounded and captured by the Krauts at the outskirts of the town of Le Muy. We also passed the Chateau St. Roseline, and would have liked to stop to see how M. the Proprietor was getting along. We then passed through Aix and then through the old city of Avignon, famous as the seat of the dual papacy in earlier days. Our bivouac the first night was at an old French cavalry barracks. As it was rainy and cold, the room provided at a nearby French farmhouse seemed very luxurious. This farmhouse was a sort of headquarters and mess for the French officers stationed here. The French farmer and his family were typically French and consisted of the old farmer, wife, six daughters and one son, the youngest of the brood. A few months before, an American plane had been shot down near the farm while strafing a German column. Two of the girls saw this happen, and went out and brought the flyers in, hiding them in the barn for over a



"I grabbed a WP grenade, and threw it at him. By this time he was fifteen feet from me."

week until they were able to make their escape.

The remainder of the trip was interesting but quite uneventful as we watched the cities of Lyons, Bourg, Chalon-sur-Saône, Dijon, Chaumont, Châlons-sur-Marne, and Rheims roll by. It was still raining as we reached Soissons on the third day, and we were now in for a long siege of the disagreeable cold and dampness of northern France. However, the old French barracks, which we took over from the F. F. I. were fixed up as comfortably as possible, and we prepared to spend our first Christmas overseas in Soissons. The officers were billeted and messed at the hotel Lion d'Or. Three-day passes were granted for the men to visit Paris, and movies and USO shows for the ones who remained behind. Red Cross clubmobile units were in the area almost constantly, and the girls served hot coffee and doughnuts to the men, who enjoyed talking to the girls probably more than they did eating the food.

We were directly under the 18th Airborne Corps then stationed at Rheims. The 82nd Division was at Sissonne, and the 101st at Mourmelon. On a visit to Rheims it was found that Gen. Ridgeway was in England. A visit to Sissonne a day or two later,

and on the 18th of December, found the 82nd with orders to move the next day to Belgium. General von Rundstedt had just made a strong attack through the Ardennes Forest and had penetrated over forty miles to the town of Marche to the south of Liège. One American division, the 106th, was now completely surrounded by the advancing Germans and cut off. The 101st Division was to follow the 82nd north to the vicinity of Bastogne.

ON returning to the C.P. on the night of the 18th to await orders we had not long to wait. General Ridgeway was on his way to Werbomont, and we were to move there immediately, reporting to his headquarters on arrival. We traveled all the night of the 19th and reached there early the next morning. On the move north during the night the buzz-bombs were busy, and we saw several land several miles away in the vicinity of Liège. At Gen. Ridgeway's headquarters, everybody had to present identification-cards before being admitted. When we got inside the old farm building we found that our First Battalion was being diverted to the 3rd Armored Division (less two combat commands) near Hotton, and that the remains of the regimental combat

team would constitute the 18th Corps reserve. The next morning we reconnoitered the 82nd Division area. It had already gone into position to the south of Werbomont, and we had a chance to get our bearings.

Von Rundstedt's attack had apparently caught everybody by surprise. He had struck against the 106th Division, which had just arrived from the States and was holding a front of about twenty-eight miles. The Germans had gone through or around this division, and it was doubted if more than one regiment would be extricated. To increase the effect of surprise, the Germans had used a division that was equipped with American vehicles and whose soldiers were dressed in American uniforms. This ruse had succeeded in throwing things into a panic. No one could tell whether he was talking to a German or an American. As the German soldiers could speak English, this also seemed to increase the effect of the ruse. Elaborate systems of checking personnel were established, where not only the counter-sign was required by sentries, but also a short resume of American history, sports and politics, to make sure whether you were really an American.

They tell the story of the colored truck driver who after answering

about twelve questions to a suspicious MP finally became exasperated and said: "Look here, Mr. MP—have you ever seen a black German?"

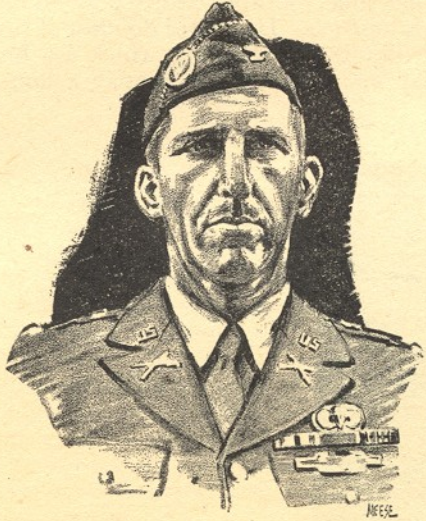
However, the attack was still progressing, and no one knew just where the brunt of the next attack would hit. In the meantime, all airborne troops had been rushed to the Ardennes, and other units were being displaced to cover the threatening Von Rundstedt. The ground was covered with about a foot of snow, and the overcast weather had prevented our planes from gathering much information. It was thought that the Germans would try next to capture Liège, thereby cutting off the armies in northern Belgium and Holland as well as seizing vast stores of fuel, munitions, food and much other booty. The 30th Division had moved into the area around Malmedy just north of Werbomont, and it was decided that this was the most likely area of attack. We received orders that afternoon to untruck, and move to join the 30th Division, with General Hobbs commanding.

IN the Malmedy area we dug into the hard ground and organized to repel the expected attack. The weather now was clear and our planes began to work on the German lines of communication. We were on the direct route of the bombing planes and daily the sky was filled by the planes and the vapor trails they made. Malmedy was bombed by mistake the day before Christmas, and a large section of the town burned all that day, driving the Belgian inhabitants out of their homes. The American formation used to fly over the target areas in pretty tight formation, and right through the flak. Every once in a while a plane would begin to smoke and fall out of the formation to the ground. There were many dog-fights taking place outside of these formations, and occasionally one of these fighter planes would be shot down. One German fighter pilot trying to escape from his burning ship landed almost in the middle of Xhoffraix, where our regimental C.P. was located. His parachute had become fouled and was wrapped around him when he hit the ground. You might say that we had a box seat for the air-show that was now going on over our head in that cold and clear weather.

In the meantime the First Battalion was having a real fight with the 3rd Armored near Hotton. This area marked the western edge of the Germans' farthest advance and was a critical point. Colonel Boyle, the Battalion Commander, was ordered to attack immediately after detrucking. This they proceeded to do, and ran into strong positions held by German SS troops supported by tanks. For

three days the First Battalion maneuvered in the snow and woods against strong opposition. Losses were heavy, and there were many cases of frostbite. On Christmas morning Lt. Allingham's platoon was cleaning the Germans from a patch of woods near Soy. The lieutenant was hit by a machine-gun bullet and was waiting for the medicos to come up. Suddenly a German appeared nearby and poured a stream of burp-gun bullets into him as he lay helpless in the snow. "Merry Christmas, Yank!" the German had said as he pressed the trigger. This was typical of the bitterness of the fighting, and the fury that the German troops felt against those who tried to stop the attack that was designed to bring victory back to the Nazis. Another example was the murder of the American prisoners captured by the Germans at St. Vith a few days before.

The attack in the Malmedy sector did not materialize and after spending Christmas eve in Xhoffraix we started back to 18th Corps Reserve at Ferrières. We had hardly got settled here when General Ridgeway said he wanted the town of Manhay recaptured. The 7th Armored Division had just withdrawn from this little town that was located on the main road running north to Liège, and also astride a good east and west road west to Soy and Hotton and east to St. Vith. The town was still in the 7th Armored sector, but they could not spare an infantry battalion to make the attack. However, they were to give us all the artillery support we needed.



Drawn by James A. Meese

Next month Colonel Graves concludes his history of the 517th Airborne and its hazardous fire-fights during the Battle of the Bulge and in the final phases of the war.

As we had received the order to attack at three P.M. and the General wanted the town that night, we didn't have long to prepare. With Colonel Paxton, the Third Battalion C.O., we visited the 7th headquarters to arrange for the artillery and get more specific details regarding the situation and the terrain. In the meantime the troops were to be moving from Ferrières by truck as far forward as they could go, a distance roughly of about twelve miles. It was decided to use the front lines of the 49th Armored Infantry as a line of departure, and hit the town from the north and east.

Colonel Paxton reconnoitered the route forward from the assembly area we had chosen, and also got a quick look at the town by daylight. As the trucks had now come up, we had the troops dismount, and led them to a patch of woods where they would be out of sight until it was time to cross the line of departure. Paxton then assembled his officers in the C.P. of the First Battalion of the 49th Armored Infantry, and issued his orders for the attack. H-hour was set at two A.M., and it was almost eleven by the time the order was finished.

Sporadic artillery fire was landing in the area and we were under good observation from the range of hills just beyond Manhay. The weather was clear and cold, and with about a foot of snow on the ground. It was rather eerie, moving around through the stillness of the snow-covered slopes, and the artillery sounded much louder as it broke the silence. About one o'clock the men started moving to their attack positions. Soon the artillery preparation started crashing in on the town. It was very intense, and the 155's split the air with a terrific *c-rr-r-u-ru-mp*.

PAXTON called for a repeat on the artillery concentration, and it started all over again. It was now time for the men to follow the artillery concentration in, and Captain Jackson with H Company and Captain Birder with Company I started through the snow. One platoon of Company I got too close and had several casualties from our own fire. As the town was reached, it was so dark the men could see very little, but used their bazookas on the vehicles and tanks in the streets, and threw white phosphorus into buildings from which enemy fire was coming. By three A.M. the town was in our possession, and we were now using our artillery on the woods on the other side of Manhay to break up any German counter-attack. This attack marked the first advance of American troops after the German Ardennes attack was stopped. Soon after this, many other attacks followed in the attempt to squeeze the bulge back into its natural shape.