

**PARTIAL
HISTORY OF THE
XX CORPS
UNITED STATES THIRD ARMY**



**23 August 1944
1 January 1945**

RACE ACROSS FRANCE

In the early morning of the 23rd of August with a Command Post located in a concealed garden in the Chateau de Courances in Milly, the XX Corps began the attack which was to breach the Seine River line in both the north and south sectors of the Corps zone. In the southern sector, Corps infantry troops drove 13 miles east from Milly through the Forest of Fontainebleau itself. On reaching the banks of the Seine, the advance guard found the River bridge blown but either swam the river or rowed across in abandoned boats. The enemy counter-attacked viciously with tanks but the small American group, aided by the close fire support of Corps artillery, clung to the small bridgehead.

Also in the South, at Montereau, which lies in a natural bowl, 5th Division forces seized the high ground surrounding the city in the dark hours of early morning. At daylight two battalions rushed to the Seine River. They swam and waded across the river at a ford, which had been located by reconnaissance patrols, to rout the surprised enemy holding the high ground northeast of the city.

Meanwhile, in the northern portion of the XX Corps zone, a surprise attempt by the armor to enter Melun without artillery preparation was foiled by an alert enemy. Heavy shelling and intense small arms fire by Nazi troops at the crossing site threatened to stop the advance of the 7th Armored Division. General Walker, who was at the scene during this critical period, reorganized the assault under galling rifle and machine gun fire that wounded several members of his party. The Corps Commander's example of complete disregard for personal safety so inspired the troops that a crossing was made by armored infantry. Captain David W. Allard, General Walker's aide, swam across a Seine, despite heavy shelling and a constant rain at machine gun bullets, to obtain vital information for the Corps Commander. Captain Allard was wounded while swimming back and for his gallantry was recommended on the spot for the award of the Distinguished Service Cross.

The enemy lashed back savagely at XX Corps' tiny bridgeheads, using every weapon he had available. Tanks, artillery, and antiaircraft guns were employed for rapid direct fire. Corps troops continued to pour across the river, however, swimming, wading, being carried in assault boats and even in abandoned enemy craft. Casualties were heavy during the crossing and in the furious fighting on the eastern shore, but five bridgeheads were made. The enemy continued to counterattack furiously with tanks and infantry. The weather factor, however, came to the aid of XX Corps. During the night of the 23rd of August it rained heavily, bogging down the enemy tank attacks. Constant artillery box concentrations by massed Corps artillery broke up the enemy's infantry attempts to eliminate the five bridgeheads. Four pontoon Treadway bridges were hurriedly thrown across the Seine. Tanks, tank destroyers, and artillery poured across the river on the 24th of August and a bridgehead was won. In two days, XX Corps had broken the vaunted Seine River line.

The 3rd Cavalry Group was placed across the Seine at Ponthierry and fanned out to the east. Closely behind it, the 7th Armored Division struck toward Provins. Free French Forces of the Interior guards were left to protect important installations, while every effort was made to get all XX Corps troops across the Seine as rapidly as possible.

When XX Corps poured across the Seine, the Germans could not hold on the eastern side. All along the Third Army from the troops were sweeping forward, threatening to cut off the enemy line of retreat to Germany by encircling his entire forces in France in a huge scythe-like surge from the south. The enemy was retiring as fast as his limited transport and confused communications allowed to the comparative safety of the Siegfried Line.

With the breaching of the Seine by XX Corps, the great city of Paris was flanked from the south. Who actually would have the honor of liberating it was militarily unimportant. The capital of France, as the German Armies of the West soon discovered, was untenable. However, scores of newspaper correspondents hovered in the wake of and with XX Corps hoping to be among the first in Paris.

Sometimes in a swift advance, some "snafu" may develop such as the "episode of the telegram." Having secured the first Treadway Bridge over the Seine River south of Paris, XX Corps turned this bridge over to VII Corps of the First Army which had moved in on XX Corps' left and which was anxious to get on in the direction of Paris. The agreement to turn the bridge over was a verbal one between General Walker and General Collins, the two Corps Commanders, and a confirming telegram was sent to VII Corps. Through some error in transmission, an extra digit was added to the Roman numeral VII. When General Middleton, commanding the VIII Corps, which was several hundred miles away in the Brittany peninsula in fighting near Brest, received the wire, he promptly wired back, "Cannot take over your bridge, I'm already stretched too damned far."

Events moved more rapidly than ever now. The men were worn and empty-eyed, covered with dust, and dead tired; but the pursuit of a battered enemy went on at a quickened pace. The narcotic of exhaustion dulled the feelings. When a pause was possible, even a bare, hard foxhole was comfortable. Cold rations were eaten on the move, but food didn't have much taste anyway. Smoking, when the situation permitted, became an automatic muscular habit. The faces of the troops held a stunned, tired look. Only the topic of victory and a rising hope for an early defeat of the Nazi war machine spurred the men on.

Everyone worked and fought hard and long. The truck drivers slaved around-the-clock shuttling troops, food, and ammunition to the flying Corps' troops. Over broad highways and narrow trails and without lights, the trucks rolled back and forth over country cleared of Germans "to the ditches only." During the many long moves, Corps artillery rode in the combat columns and ready to deliver fire at an instant's notice.

Huge stocks of material were captured by XX Corps during the campaign. Whole fleets of German vehicles, from the imitation jeep, the "Volkswagen", to big troop carriers, were used by Corps units to speed troops forward in pursuit of the enemy.

The Corps Judge Advocate, Colonel Frank P. Corbin, and the Corps Adjutant General, Colonel Robert E. Cullen, sported an "Oberkraftwagen". The columns may have looked like Gypsy Caravan's at times, but they always got their fast. This was possibly another reason why the Germans referred to the Corps as the "XX Panzer Corps."

On August 24th, plans affecting the future operations of XX Corps were received from Third Army. The mission of the Corps was to continue straight east in pursuit of the stricken enemy. August 25th found the Headquarters in the Fontainebleau Forest, historic in the military and political history of France. A hurried visit was made by General Patton who personally awarded Bronze Stars to General Walker and Colonel Collier.

On August 26th, in a single day, combat teams of the 5th Division swept along the south bank of the Seine, which runs in an East-West direction below Montereau, to Nogent-sur-Seine and captured it from the 59th Panzer Grenadier Brigade by nightfall. The bridge across the river was demolished. An

all-night bridging operation was performed by the engineers, and by noon of the next day, the 5th Division was across.

Strange and confusing things sometimes happened during the race across France. Even regimental command posts on overnight stops found themselves surrounded by enemy troops at dawn. Units soon learned to use the "corral" system of defense, barred from the days of wagon trains of the Old West. With infantry circling the outer perimeter and artillery massed in the center ready to traverse 360 degrees, units were prepared for attacks from any direction, and from any direction they did come. Frequently, bitter skirmishes were fought in headquarters and artillery areas when bands of German soldiers, cut off by the Corps' combat echelons, tried to break through to rejoin their retreating forces.

On the 26th of August, XX Corps had received orders from Third Army to swing to the north from Nogent-sur-Seine and advance on Reims. Climbing onto its organic transportation and any captured German vehicles that were still in running order, the Corps assault units drove 75 miles northeast toward Epernay on the Marne.

General Walker, reviewing the enemy situation, decided that the time was ripe for even more daring and aggressive tactics. He instructed the cavalry to move out to the front and seize bridges over the Marne. The armor was ordered to fan out in multiple columns destroying the enemy wherever he could be found. The 5th and 90th Divisions were directed to advance in trucks, tanks, tank destroyers, and any transport available, dismounting only to fight.

The lightly armored cavalry moved out at 0600 hours on the 27th of August and found the excellent road net well covered with 88mm and antitank fire. Corps Headquarters advanced to Donnemarie-en-Montois, engaging in individual skirmishing en route, and even captured a few prisoners who had paused to rest their feet. The light tanks and assault guns of the 3rd Cavalry Group ran into heavy and anti-tank and artillery concentrations at strategic points. The cavalry did, however, spot the German gun positions and transmitted the information to the heavier armor, and the guns of the medium tanks quickly blasted the enemy strong points. At dusk, elements of the 7th Armored Division rolled in to Chateau-Thierry. So speedy was the advance that a company of tanks and a platoon of armored infantry crossed the Marne just before the Germans destroyed bridge. The enemy turned furiously on the small, stranded force. The Corps' artillery battalions, which were closely following the armored combat columns, laid down direct fire across the river while Combat Command "A" slipped one mile left, found another bridge and drove in to Château-Thierry from the rear. There it attacked and destroyed the battle group of the 9th SS Panzer Grenadier Division while it was still engaged with a small force of tanks and infantry, and dodging the rain of shells that XX Corps' artillery poured into its position at close range.

Château-Thierry, historic battleground of World War I, fell to XX Corps, August 27th, 1944.

The 90th Division, marching against little opposition, reached the banks of the Marne on 28th of August. The 5th Division moved rapidly along the southern flank, mopping up isolated resistance as disorganized enemy groups were met.

The 5th Division captured Epernay on the 28th, and crossed the Marne on two quickly constructed bridges. In one day, the Marne, an important river, was lost to the Germans.

On the 28th of August, the decimated and demoralized remnants of the 49th SS Panzer Grenadier Brigade, the 48th Infantry Division, the 9th Panzer Division, and the 26th SS Brigade fled north and east with all the speed they could muster. The XX Corps' 7th Armored Division, in seven separate task force

columns (each column composed of a company of tanks, a Company of armored infantry, a squad of combat engineers, and a section of tank destroyers), with three armored field artillery battalions following in the center, fanned out after the enemy. When forced to do so, the enemy fought rearguard actions, but every indication was that he sought to reach a defensive position, known only to himself, without becoming seriously committed.

The Corps Command Post moved to the gardens of the Vicomte de la Rochefoucauld in Montmirail. General Walker decided that the Meuse River would be the next logical stopping place of the German columns. He issued orders for all Corps units to prepare to attack eastward again in the direction of the Reims and Verdun.

The 7th Armored Division, which had already overrun an enemy artillery brigade, a regiment, and a separate battalion west of Reims, crossed the Aisne and Vesle Rivers, bypassing Reims from the north, and cutting it off for any reinforcements.

A combat team of the 5th Division swept into Reims from the southeast and liberated amid a flurry of sniper fire on the evening of August 29th. That same night Corps Headquarters moved into the Louvois wood 12 miles southwest of the Cathedral city. Here General Walker was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross for his intrepid gallantry at Melun.

In capturing Reims, XX Corps took over an airplane factory, an ordinance depot, and huge German supply dumps. Also, 1847 prisoners were taken and 446 of the enemy killed, whereas only 13 Americans were killed and 86 wounded. The daring aggressive tactics of the Corps Commander were achieving maximum results at a minimum cost. Bold, reckless moves were actually saving innumerable lives.

Captured documents served to prove that the enemy intended to organize a strong defense on the line of the Meuse, but that the speed and power of the Corps lightning advances gave him no chance. The enemy still had large forces but was stunned and bewildered by the tactics of the XX Corps which would bypass towns and strong points and then wheel to attack from the east.

Prisoners streaming in now in long lines complained of the lack of equipment and organization in the German ranks brought about by the action of XX Corps armor and cavalry operating far in the enemy rear. Battered remnants of once powerful forces had come back in a forlorn procession from the Argentan pocket only to find XX Corps blocking their escape route.

After telephone conversations with his division commanders, the Corps Commander ordered a further move eastward, bypassing centers of resistance, to seize Verdun and to secure crossings over the Meuse. The 3rd Cavalry Group moved out during an afternoon of August 30, and the armored followed in multiple columns with the 5th Division close behind. Only small rear guard actions were fought until the Aisne River was reached.

There the enemy had dug in on the opposite side and halted the 43rd Cavalry Squadron. Combat Command "A" of the 7th Armored Division, following the northern route, became engaged in a fight at Vouziers and was halted. The 3rd Cavalry Squadron on the right, however, after running into the Aisne River line, turned south and ran the gauntlet of enemy anti-tank and infantry positions around the western edge of the Argonne Forest to reach St. Menehould. There the bridge been blown but the river was fordable. While a task force of armored infantry blasted its way across, the bulk of the command

followed the 3rd Cavalry Squadron through St. Menehould at 0545 hrs on the morning of the 31st of August.

The Corps Headquarters continued its policy of establishing itself close behind the assault echelons; and, while still at Louvois the Chief of Staff directed the Headquarters, Commandant, Lt. Col. Napoleon A. Racicot, to reconnoiter for the next Command Post site as far east toward Verdun as possible with a view to locating it at least east of Clermont. Colonel Racicot was further directed to have a guide meet the Chief of Staff at dawn the next day at St. Menehould.

When Colonel Collier reached the rendezvous early next morning, no guide was present. He found the main road leading to the east blocked by 20mm fire from an enemy group closing in behind the leading combat elements of the 5th Infantry and the 7th Armored Divisions. In order not to delay the installation of the vital signal communications, the forward Command Post was promptly established for the night on the slopes of the Western exits of St. Menehould and a detachment from the 43rd Cavalry Squadron, assembled nearby, was dispatched to clear the road to the east.

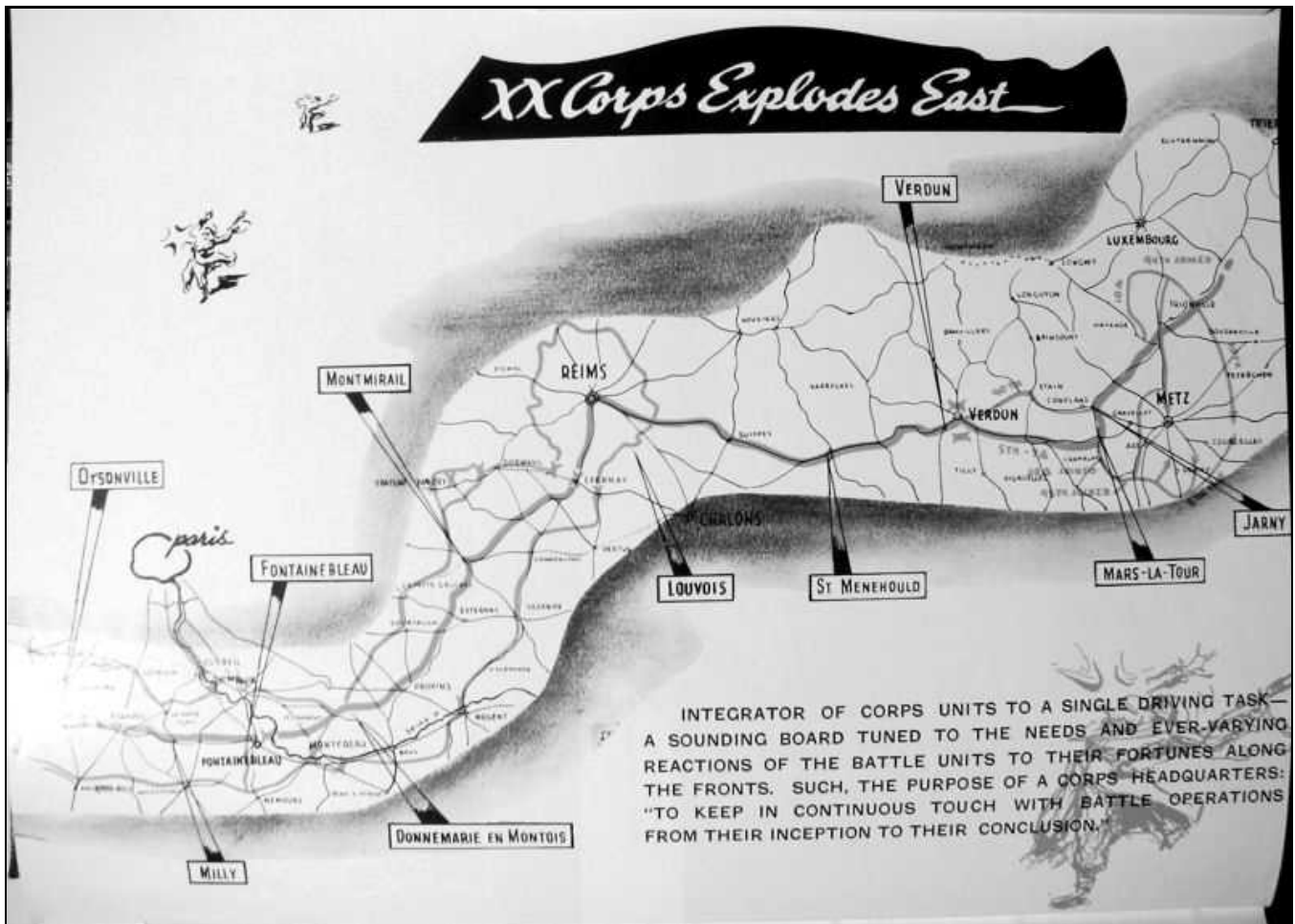
Later it was learned that Colonel Racicot and his group, following closely behind the attacking echelons, had reached Clermont about dark and decided to bivouac there for the night.

About midnight a battalion of German infantry, escaping to the south from the Argonne Forest, infiltrated into the town, terrorizing the inhabitants and engaging in a firefight at point-blank range with a small group of XX Corps troops and attached groups bivouacing in a street of the town. Several Corpsmen became casualties and several vehicles were lost, but the Germans finally moved on to rejoin their main forces.

Colonel Racicot, not knowing that the guide sent to meet the Chief of Staff had become a casualty, and not knowing about the emergency Command Post being established in St. Menehould, sent back a message to the effect that he had not heard from Colonel Collier, and that it was believed that the Chief of Staff was either killed or captured. Colonel Collier received this message while the new Command Post was being established at St. Menehould.

Meanwhile racing columns of the 7th Armored Division, after knifing through the Argonne Forest, swept into Verdun, seized the main city bridge and captured the town on August 31st.

XX Corps Explodes East



INTEGRATOR OF CORPS UNITS TO A SINGLE DRIVING TASK—
A SOUNDING BOARD TUNED TO THE NEEDS AND EVER-VARYING
REACTIONS OF THE BATTLE UNITS TO THEIR FORTUNES ALONG
THE FRONTS. SUCH THE PURPOSE OF A CORPS HEADQUARTERS:
"TO KEEP IN CONTINUOUS TOUCH WITH BATTLE OPERATIONS
FROM THEIR INCEPTION TO THEIR CONCLUSION."

VERDUN

The Germans had carefully mined the steel and concrete structure spanning the Meuse at Verdun. Two Panther tanks had been parked and two squads of enemy machine gunners placed so as to command the bridge approaches. All other bridges had been blown except this one which had been held intact for the retreat of the German rear guard. As the lead elements of Combat Command "B" entered the town after bypassing the German rear guard, members of the FFI ran forward and made their way under the bridge to cut the wires leading to the Malaysian charges. The Germans recovered from their surprise and began shooting. Soldiers ran out on the bridge and fired point-blank at the Frenchman, killing one of them, but the last wires had already been cut. The tanks of Combat Command "B" came rolling up to the bridge, knocked out the two Panther tanks and moved over the Meuse.

The 5th Infantry Division followed the armor on the 31st of August and, after a series of "pocket-sized" battles which flared up in and around the Argonne Forest, cleared the zone and closed across the Meuse on the 1st of September. The 90th Infantry Division in the meantime was immobilized at Reims and Rethal because of the acute gasoline shortage.

The battlefield of Verdun, one of the bloodiest scenes of the first World War, had been preserved by the French as a monument to its gallant dead. The deep, winding trenches, which had been so much a part of the earlier war, were still there. Barbed wire heavy with rust still guarded the trenches. All the varied litter of the battlefield was left in place. Nearby was a grim monument to the war dead: the Ossuary in which the bones of 40,000 soldiers who fell at Verdun were deposited.

In capturing Verdun, XX Corp seized warehouses bulging with food and clothing and a huge arsenal of heavy German guns and ammunition.

The capture of Verdun marked the end of the first major operation of the XX Corps. During this first phase, XX Corps had driven almost completely across France, had crossed six major rivers, and by the speed and aggressiveness of its attacks, had prevented the enemy from recovering sufficiently to form a cohesive line of defense.

The route of XX Corps in the campaigns of Normandy and northern France reads like a travelogue of famed historical shrines: Angers and Nantes on the beautiful Loire; Chartres, the Cathedral city; Fontainebleau, imperial city; Reims, the crown of kings; Verdun, bloody battlefield. But it was not just an exciting parade. There was plenty of fighting, and heavy losses were inevitably strewn across the Corp's path to military glory.

During a highly mobile drive across France, it was the mission of Corps Headquarters to control the fingers of the Corp's mailed fist: the combat teams, combat command, task forces, artillery groups, signal engineer battalions, and quartermaster and medical corp units.

The frequent and necessary changes of direction and objectives, the rapid pace of the Allied advance through the crumbling German lines, made swift and accurate staff work imperative. Because of commitments on other fronts of the Third Army and Twelfth Army Group, units up to and including division level came and went throughout the campaign, the XX Corps saw the battle through to its victorious end. The command echelon was forced to cope with logistical headaches which were created as opportunities appeared constantly for further advances in conquest before the reeling enemy could recover from the hammer blows he was receiving. Often the book of rules went out the window and any expedient was adopted to speed the advance. On long swift moves, the protection of the flanks was left

to the Air Force and the Maquis, while all the might of the Corps was directed against the tottering German defenses with an intensity and single-mindedness that disheartened the foe and gave him no rest. Venerable military historians may have turned in their graves, but the Corps slashed through to the enemy's rear and swept into the Nazi positions from every direction.

The 69th Signal Battalion performed Herculean tasks to keep pace with the flying combat columns and Corps Headquarters. Corps artillery ran with the forward elements, setting up the guns at ridiculously close range under the muzzles of hostile Canon. It had provided its own security and country where the enemy had been bypassed but not eliminated. Every element of XX Corps contributed its share to the success of the campaigns of Normandy and France. Coordination of the skill and effort of the various arms and branches of the Corps into one gigantic striking force by Corps Headquarters was a splendid achievement.

The XX Corps had performed an important role in the Third Army's amazing power drive across France. At the time of the breakthrough from Normandy, the German Seventh Army was hard-pressed for supplies and reinforcements. Since there were no major bridges intact over the Seine or the Loire, the Nazi forces in the West were compelled to dispatch troops and matériel to Normandy through the level land route between Paris and Orleans; but the Third Army's lightning advance blocked up this quarter and the German Seventh Army was doomed. Even an escape route to the German armies in southern France was denied the enemy forces trapped in Normandy.

High-level strategy had called for the use of airborne divisions to achieve this result, but the amazing speed of the American advance made this unnecessary.

During the last week in August, the action of XX Corps was the most spectacular of its entire campaign in France. It had driven in a few days through the fortified, historic seems of World War I, the Marne, the Meuse, Argonne Forest, Château-Thierry, and Verdun. The racing armored columns of the Corps chewed their way through the hallowed battlegrounds of World War I that had seen months and years of bloody fighting in which gains were measured in hundreds of yards.

At Verdun, the machines of war of the XX Corps ground to a halt. Supplies, especially gasoline, had become acutely short. The long, fast drive across the breadth of France placed the Corps too far from the strained supply line that still stretched its way back to the beaches and Cherbourg over the torn roads and hastily constructed bridges. Many of the vehicles of the combat commands were immobilized on the roads because of worn treads. The infantry divisions had barely enough gas for their cooking needs. The XX Corps was still eager to attack, still in control of the situation, but was still in control of the situation, but was like a heart with no blood to pump through its arteries.

During the period of the great gas shortage, the caps Corps Command Post and some of the Corps units were located in the woods at the junction of the Voie Sacree and the Route Nationald No. 3, west of Verdun. Here, His Royal Highness, Prince Felix of Luxembourg joined the XX Corps Headquarters. The distinguished visitor was attached to the Corps during the time it remained at this location. Here too the Corps marked the second anniversary of its activities. There was already much to be looked back upon with pardonable pride.

When partial replacement of the vital gasoline requirements had been received by airlift and the "Read Ball Express", the Corps Headquarters, in order to approach as closely as possible to the great bastion of Metz, moved east to Mars-La-Tour where another historic battle was fought in 1870. Here the rains came. The early fall downpours softened the ground and made the movement of heavy

armored vehicles a strenuous effort for all concerned. The site of the Corps Headquarters itself was a sea of mud, and an occasional bombing and strafing by a suddenly active Luftwaffe did not add cheer for the wet muddy troops.

The Corps Headquarters, while at Mars-La-Tour, was located near a large chemical plant loaded with dangerous material. The Germans had surrounded the plant with high explosive gunpowder, intending to blow it up; but they were a little too late. The troops were kept away from this hazard and everyone was a bit apprehensive.

At Mars-La-Tour, the first formal regimental organization of the Three French Forces of the Interior came under XX Corp's control. Known as the First Regiment of Paris, it was under the command of Commandant Fabien. General Walker inspected troops with their makeshift uniforms and old uniforms from the first World War. Despite their apparent lack of organization they were individually very brave. Almost all of them, including the women, had killed three or four Germans. Many of this gallant band later lost their lives fighting with their Allies for the freedom they prize so highly.

At Mars-La-Tour, the Corp's Command Post was visited by Archbishop Francis J. Spellman, Military Vicar to the Armed Forces (now, Cardinal Spellman). Assisted by the Corps Chaplain, Colonel Thomas L. Wolfe, the distinguished cleric held a field Mass, despite the heavy rain and mud.

An opportunity was also found at this time to decorate officers and men of the Corps for distinguishing themselves beyond the call of duty and for gallantry in action.

Some of the brightest stars of the show world made appearances around the area. Corp's personnel enjoyed the songs of Bing Crosby. He raised everyone's morale with his crooning and lighthearted patter; and Corps members remember that "Der Bingle" fell flat in the mud when he tripped over a low hanging branch near the Corps Headquarters while on his way to entertain the troops. He passed it off like a good trooper in the show went on mud and all.

As far back as the 1st of September, the Corps Commander, acting upon orders from General Patton, had directed his staff to prepare plans for further movements to the east. The enemy, lashed and harried by the speed steel of XX Corps, was still retreating in disorganized confusion and showed no desire to make a strong stand west of the German border. Ahead lay the poorly manned fortifications of Metz, the Siegfried Line, and the heart of Germany. The VII Corps of the First U. S. Army, on the flank of XX Corps, was turned north to strike for Liege, thus leaving the left flank of XX Corps exposed. The Corps Commander then instructed the staff to prepare a demonstration in force to the north in the direction of Sedan using elements of the 7th Armored Division. This was a stratagem intended to deceive the enemy into believing that the XX Corps was about to move out of the Verdun area in a northerly sweep towards Sedan.

It was a bold and ambitious plan and part of a larger strategic aim to smash eastward towards Metz against an enemy thrown off balance. It was planned to continue past the great forts of Metz before the enemy could fully man the steel and concrete defenses which bristled with heavy guns. Since the Advance was to Continue through the Siegfried Line to the Rhine River, where crossing was contemplated near Mainz, with the final objective Frankfurt, 160 miles away.

The entire plan was of the nature and scope of those plans already applied by an XX Corps with tremendous success in the campaigns of Normandy and France. The Battered Nazi Forces on the

Western Front were to be given no chance to form a strong defense along the German border or on the Rhine. Rapid pursuit and exploitation were still the keynotes of XX Corps planning operation.

However, supplies of fuel were by now dangerously low. The 7th Armored Division managed to siphon enough gas from all vehicles to mount a demonstration and dispatch at North. By the afternoon of September 3, it was forced the halt with fuel tanks dry.

The 3rd Cavalry Group alone was fairly mobile, having captured 4000 gallons of high-octane gas from the retreating Luftwaffe. The cavalry squadrons proceeded to make daring and sweeping reconnaissance to the North and East, to Luxembourg and the line of the Moselle. Racing 70 miles east through the German lines a platoon of cavalry entered Thionville on the banks of the Moselle on the afternoon of September 2, seizing and holding the main highway bridge over the river for several hours. The German garrison suffered heavy losses of men and equipment, but, recovering from their surprise, drove the lightly armored cavalry backed by sheer weight of firepower. The immobilized XX Corps infantry was unable to support the cavalry platoon. Finally on the morning of this 2nd of September, came the bombshell from Third Army Headquarters which said, "until gas arrives, you will have to limit movement in your area".

Some 3rd Cavalry Group vehicles did reconnoiter as far as the Moselle River 8 miles north of Metz. There, they set up observation posts overlooking the river, far behind enemy lines. The picture became clear. Information of vital importance was gained through the gallant dangerous actions of the cavalry elements of XX Corps. During one of these actions, Colonel Frederick W. Drury, commanding officer of the 3rd Cavalry Group, and several members of his Headquarters were captured when they were surrounded by superior forces, well behind enemy lines.

The XX Corps had been operating for several days with little information as to enemy disposition and intentions. The few available maps had been dropped by plane. Little was known of the state of the fortifications of Metz. It became apparent that the enemy, having once abandoned the Metz forts, now intended to prevent their capture in a crossing of the Moselle River line. All precious hours and days slipped by, the might of XX Corps was chained by lack of means to sustain the momentum of its forward drive.

Some forward cavalry elements were forced to withdraw because of the gas shortage in danger of heavy counterattacks. The history of the 5th Division, which was straining at the leash and ready to go, plaintively states, "Here sat the Division while the door to Germany swung shut, while the Gestapo drove them the Metz garrison back to their posts, while the forts were manned, positions dug, reinforcements brought up, until not all the gas in the world could force the door open without long hard days of fighting, heavy casualties, and thousands of rounds of ammunition expended."

Meanwhile a great number of stragglers and the beaten remnants of German forces fell back on Metz and its surrounding forts as a rallying point. There they found leadership under the 462nd Mobilization Division, part of which was formed by a Regiment of officer candidates, fanatic Young Hitlerites especially picked for their devotion to the Nazi cause. The 17th SS Panzer Division took up positions southwest of Metz. The 559th Division prepared to defend the Moselle line north of Metz.

The German soldiers who had fled in great droves when the guns of XX Corps spat steel death now took fresh courage behind her formidable defenses. Germans who had come behind the Corps frontlines in long straggling streams of beaten men now began to hope. No longer were high-ranking prisoners admitting that the end of the world was in sight and asking that letters and personal messages

be delivered to their families in Berlin. A new aggressive spirit seemed to seize upon the German people as the Allied Forces loomed closer to the border of the "Vaterland". The Gestapo drove the "Volkssturm" groups, which were mainly civilians organized into a semblance of military units, into the concrete bunkers of the Metz forts to make a stand there or die.

The crafty enemy was all too willing to sacrifice a cripple with one leg or one eye for a healthy young American soldier. It became increasingly clear to the Command Group of XX Corps that a bitter fight was shaping up.

Plans for future operations went steadily ahead. Metz and the flood waters of the Moselle were merely formidable obstacles, not final objectives, in a relentless drive into Germany.

On the 4th of September, 110,000 gallons of gasoline was flown into the Reims Airport in C-47s. This amount, plus that brought forward through normal supply channels, enabled the Corps Commander to man the 7th Armored Division and the 5th and 90th Infantry Divisions for bridgehead operations over the raging Moselle preparatory to an assault on the outer defenses of Metz.

The 3rd Cavalry Group was given the mission of forcing openings to the Moselle River and, if possible, the seizing bridges for the passage of the armor. On September 6, on Corps order, the cavalry moved out in five separate task forces. One task force reached the Moselle at Arnaville, 10 miles southwest of Metz, by noon; but it was forced to pull back in the face of point-blank fire from 88 mm antitank guns massed on the east bank of the river. Another task force reached the river line at Hauconcourt, several miles north of Metz. The main effort was directed along the Gravelotte Road, leading out of Mars-La-Tour, and reached a draw east of Gravelotte. Here large craters and heavily wooded terrain slowed the advance of the cavalry, and heavy, accurate artillery fire on a lightly armored vehicles forced the withdrawal after several light tanks and half tracks were knocked out.



With foxholes like these it was not difficult for Hitler to persuade the Germans that they were destined to save the "Vaterland". The Gestapo of course helped in this conjecture.

ACTION NORTH OF METZ

While the reconnaissance in force of the Metz defense line was being made, the main force of XX Corps had been mobilized for an all-out attack. The 7th Armored Division, on Corps order, moved out in a night attack, and by early morning of the 7th of September, Combat Command "A" had reached the Moselle at Mondelenge. The reconnaissance by this column found neither a bridge intact nor a suitable site for an assault crossing. Another armored column, farther south, moved east from Conflans and ran into heavy artillery fire and increasing infantry resistance in the vicinity of St. Marie. St. Privat was reached during the morning of the 7th of September, but attempts to penetrate the German positions on the high ground or the town were repulsed. It became apparent that the German garrison had built up strong defenses in this area and near Thionville.

In an effort to cut behind the enemy opposition northwest of Metz, Combat Command "A" pushed south towards Maizieres-les-Metz. This action and is described in the Operational Reports, XX Corps, as follows:

"The attack on Maizieres-Les-Metz met artillery fire from three directions and bogged down from strong resistance in the north side of town on 9 September and the forces secured their positions. In an attempt to penetrate the German positions further west, the southern column of CCA was not able to get beyond St. Privat. The 2nd Infantry Regiment, 5th Infantry Division, following CCA on the morning of 8 September attacked in the zone Amanvillers-Verneville straight east for the high ground near Plappeville, while the armor continued to press their attack north for the same objective. On 8 and 9 September this attack made little progress against concrete fortifications defended by determined Nazi officer candidates. A combined attack by the 2nd Infantry Regiment and an armored task force struck at the critical Amanvillers-St. Privat area. The 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, in spite of heavy casualties, reached Amanvillers at 1900 hours, 9 September, after five hours of severe fighting against artillery and infantry resistance. The armored task force advanced just beyond St. Privat, but at the cost of 10 tank casualties. From prisoners taken during this attack XX Corps received its first detailed information about the fortified area in its sector, which included probably the strongest fortified positions in the Metz area.

"From 10 to 14 in September, an attempt was made to continue this attack on the northwest defenses of Metz. CCA continued the attack to penetrate the line at Maizieres and Mirange-Silvange. The 2nd Infantry Regiment attacked continuously in an attempt to get beyond Amanvillers and to reach the wooded draw east of Verneville. Amanvillers changed hands many times as a result of the frantic attacks by the Officer Candidate School personnel and a vast amount of enemy artillery fire. On the morning of 11 September CCR, disengaged at Gravelotte and placed under the command of CCA, struck between CCA and a 2nd Infantry Regiment in an attempt to pierce through the line of forts barring entry into Metz. After reaching the ridge line north of Mirange-Silvange at Bromeau, CCR was unable to advance further in the face of point-blank fire from the ridge line of the Bois-de-Feves (Canrobert Forts), 1000 yards to the front. The battle of the northwest on the fortress ring of Metz was pressed vigorously until 14 September, with heavy casualties of men and equipment. Fighter-bombers and heavy artillery failed to reduce the concrete emplacements, and the Officer Candidate School troops manning the sector counterattacked any thrust at defense positions. The attacking forces occupied positions 1000 yards from the fortress ring, when on Corps order, the main effort was directed to the south of Metz."

ACTION IN THIONVILLE

The trepidation with which the Germans regarded the XX Corps' threat to their Moselle River line was clearly shown on the night of September 7th. The newly equipped 106th Panzer Brigade struck down from Luxembourg in an attempt to knife to the rear of the 90th Division which was then advancing, three regiments abreast, toward Thionville on the north flank of the Corps. The attack was a surprise, but the antitank defenses in the rear security groups were quickly thrown into action and they knocked out most of the attacking brigade before noon of the following day. The attack on Thionville was delayed briefly, but the enemy had sacrificed another of his striking forces without achieving any great tactical objective. The attack on Thionville was resumed on the 10th of September and major elements of a 90th Division reached the Moselle near the town on the 12th. The Division reported that it was prepared to cross. General Walker, however, decided not to make crossings at this point because of the extended front of his Corps, and orders were issued to hold the ground gained against the fortified area on the Corps' north flank.

ACTION IN THE SOUTH

Tank columns of the 7th Armored Division following the cavalry task forces south of Metz met heavy resistance when they struck the center of the enemy salient near a Gravelotte on the afternoon of September 6. Bypassing this strong point, the armored columns pushed south to Gorze where heavy artillery fire and extensive minefields were encountered. Cutting through the enemy resistance, the armor reached the river line at Dornot in the early morning of September 7th. A small assault force of armored infantry was rushed across, but heavy artillery fire and infantry counterattacks made the tiny bridgehead untenable. By nightfall the 70 men of the assault force were in a serious position and attempting to withdraw.

At this time the Corps Commander issued orders to the 5th Infantry Division to cross in strength at Dornot in order to knife into the outer ring of Metz forts from the south and rear. Thick mud and heavy misty rain hampered operations and slowed the advance to the west bank of the river; but at 2200 hrs on the night of the 7th of September the river line was reached. A point was selected that offered concealment from observation from the east bank and assault boats were hand carried down the steep banks in silence to the waters edge.

D-day for the crossing, September 8th, dawned wet and cold. At first there was no appreciable amount of enemy fire on the crossing site, but about 1000 hours the enemy became aware of his danger and poured a hail of artillery and mortar fire on both banks of the river. Corps artillery opened up on the enemy batteries and a battalion of infantry was put across during the afternoon in spite of continual sniping and direct fire from Tiger tanks at close range. The assault forces moved up the steep eastern banks of the Moselle and swept forward under the menacing guns of Fort Verdun, which was about a mile to the east, and Fort Driant, located about 3000 yards to the northwest. These forts had excellent observation from commanding terrain and were able to pour heavy and accurate fire at the bridgehead troops and the supporting engineers of the 1103rd Engineer Combat Group of XX Corps.

Corps infantry troops drove ahead under this barrage and worked up the steep hills to the edge of Fort Verdun. It became immediately evident that the fort was too heavily defended for the limited firepower of the assault troops. The path was cleared through five separate double-apron type, barbed wire barriers; but, in circling the fort proper, was a dry moat 30 feet deep, which, itself, was protected by

a high, spike-studded iron fence. The infantry withdrew to permit a 30 minute artillery preparation by the 8 inch guns and 240 mm howitzers of Corps artillery; but little damage was observed.

To add to an already difficult situation, enemy infantry counterattacked the bridgehead forces viciously and continuously but were, in all cases, driven back within the protective walls of the Fort. Losses from the incessant artillery fire and close-in fighting against Nazi storm troopers and troops of the Adolph Hitler Brigade began to mount. Snipers frequently popped up and fired at ranges as close as 10 feet. The massive turrets of the Fort could be seen from the forward position. They were of reinforced concrete covered with several yards of earth with natural foliage growing in the soil. This gave effective protection and concealment. A captured German prisoner revealed that over 1500 troops were within the Fort.

From the deep interior of Fort Verdun, the German commanders called down artillery support from the heavy guns of Fort Driant. XX Corps casualties began to mount, and the Corps assault elements formed a horseshoe defense with both flanks anchored on the Moselle. Six companies occupied an area 100 yards deep and 75 yards wide. The intense shelling on the bridgehead made the bringing up of reinforcements all but impossible. Evacuation of the wounded, where possible, was carried on under grave difficulties. It was here that Corps infantry troops started of the famous password, "The Wounded Don't Cry". When enemy tanks and infantry infiltrated into the Corps lines under cover of darkness in an effort to discover the location and extent of the bridgehead, the word was passed to the many wounded not to reveal their positions by moans or cries for medics. The wounded did not utter a sound but waited for help in silence.

The enemy continued to counterattack viciously and it soon became apparent that the bridgehead could not be held in such furious and strong opposition. In a period of 60 hours, 36 separate counterattacks were beaten off. Over 1000 German soldiers lost their lives in the attempts to eliminate the Corps bridgehead which was for a while the easternmost advance of the American armies.

The Germans advanced in waves, sometime shoulder to shoulder, yelling, "Yanks kaput." The Yanks, for the most part, ignored the tanks and mowed down the accompanying infantry. The enemy used every trick in his book to frighten and confuse the American forces. Shouts of "Cease firing!" By English-speaking Germans were heard in the area. Enemy troops even feigned death and then crawled toward the Corps positions under cover of darkness. In spite of all odds the tiny bridgehead force clung to its toehold east of the Moselle until the 11th of September before executing a withdrawal under cover of a terrific Mirage barrage laid down by XX Corps artillery.

The crossing at Arnaville was achieved with tactical surprise in the early morning of September 10th. The enemy was thrown off balance in this sector because of the diversionary action at Dornot. The 1103rd Engineer Combat Group on the Corps Commanders order, gave direct support while nine battalions of Corps artillery pounded the German fortified positions. Corps infantry, using marching fire, quickly overran the Nazi mainland of resistance and seized the high ridge 3000 yards east of the river.

In order to strike while the attention of the Germans was concentrated on the bitter fight raging at Dornot, the Corps Commander ordered another bridgehead across the Moselle at a point 4000 yards south near Arnaville.

The German forces, recovering from their initial surprise, launched the inevitable counterattack with several tanks and companies of infantry. Harassing artillery fire from three directions pounded the

crossing site and hampered bridging and ferrying operations of the engineers during the first 24 hours. On the second day, Corps engineers prepared a ford 400 yards north of Arnaville, and tanks and tank destroyers were rushed across the river into the bridgehead zone.

On the night of September 9th, XX Corps Headquarters lost one of its most fearless and devoted officers. Colonel Howard Snyder, Corps G-3, and Major Terry Overton, G-3 Section, were at the scene of the Arnaville crossing, checking the progress of the troops, when an infantry company deviated from its prescribed crossing site. Disregarding their own safety during the heavy shelling, the Corps officers guided troops to the correct place. A 120 mm mortar round landed close by killing Major Overton and critically wounding Colonel Snyder.

By the afternoon of September 12th a Class 40 bridge was completed by the engineers and supplies were taken over the Moselle. The bridgehead was now held securely in an area 4,000 yards wide and 3,000 yards deep.

The weather made the job a tough one. Rain and low visibility were almost continuous. Support by fighter bombers and artillery was, for the most part, denied the assault troops of XX Corps. Tanks frequently bogged down on slippery hills and churned up roads.

Hill 396, a piece of commanding ground that dominated the area to the east and south of the bridgehead, was a critical objective in the plans for XX Corps for further movement east. During the 14th and 15th of September, the Corps regrouped its forces for a drive on this important feature of the terrain.

On September 16th, a column of 7th Armored Division was sent south of Hill 396 to seize the towns of Mardigny and Vittonville but the armored spearhead was dulled at Marieulles by intense artillery fire.

On the 17th, the Germans launched a major counterattack in a desperate bid to pinch off the Corps salient and drive it back into the river. The German commanders evidently regarded XX Corps operations at Arnaville as a serious threat to the outer defenses of the Metz region.

The furious counterattack was stopped cold in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. This achievement was the more amazing in as much as the officers' candidate school troops, who opposed the Corps armor and infantry, were fighting over terrain which they had defended on maneuvers innumerable times and the defense of which had been mapped out in the classroom and polished to the point of perfection. They were fighting, in addition, against a foe whose capabilities must have been the subject of serious study. These German troops were not a beaten foe, as were some encountered during the swift drive across France; they were the flower of what was once reputed to be the cream of the world's armies. The enemy counterattacked the bridgehead until he almost exhausted his strength. Sometimes, screaming and shouting like a Japanese "Banzai" charge, the enemy troops came in waves into the waiting guns of XX Corps troops. The Corps Commanders employment of his armored columns continued to startle the German commanders. Even during periods of low visibility and in thick mud that was all but impassable, Corps armor swept right up to pillboxes and armored casemates and kept them "buttoned up" until the infantry and engineers could blow them with satchel charges.

Elements of the 7th Armored Division, after being once repulsed, took the town of Marieulles by storm and advanced toward Sillegny and the Seille River. Another armored column wheeled south to make contact with the XII Corps and to breach the Seille at Longueville.

The attack on Sillegny continued from the 18th to the 20th of September. The enemy had direct observation along the Seille in this area from the Fortified Group La Marne which he had surrounded with a large number of batteries of heavy artillery. As a result, the attack on the town was slow and costly. On the night of September 20, some armor units penetrated the western edge of Sillegny, only to be pinned down by a veritable hail of artillery fire and cut off from reinforcements. That night the Germans enveloped Sillegny with tanks and infantry, and the Corps troops in the town were lost.

On the 24th of September to ensure tighter control of the bloody bridgehead fighting across the Moselle and to shorten communication lines to Corps units involved there, Corps Headquarters moved up from Mars-la-Tour to Carny, about 12 kilometers from the guns of the outer ring of Metz fortresses. Heavy shelling was received from the forts, particularly from huge 280 mm guns across the Moselle. Many casualties occurred from Corps Headquarters. A chunk of shrapnel from one of these rounds ripped completely through General Walker's car, fortunately, while he was not in it. Several billets and installations were riddled with hot fragments of steel.

A huge stock of German liquor was taken over by XX Corps at Jarny and a "forced" issue of fine old cognac and brandy was made to all Corps troops and attached units.

While at Jarny, the now famed XX Corps was visited by a number of dignitaries and entertainers. General Marshall conferred there with Corps Commander and General Patton was a frequent visitor. Both were vitally interested in the impending assault on the Metz region.

Marlene Dietrich entertained the officers and men of the Corps at Jarny in the face of grave danger. General Dody of the French Army dropped in to pay respects on behalf of a grateful Republic of France.

General Walker and Colonel Collier went back briefly to Verdun to become "Soldiers of France" in a colorful ceremony. The court Commander was made an honorary Corporal and the Chief of Staff and honorary Private First Class in the 16th French Bataillon de Chasseur A Pied, and both received the French Fourragere in the presence of General Dody.

At Jarny, the Corps received further honors when the proud battle streamers of the Marne and Château-Thierry were affixed to the Corps Standard.

The staff of XX Corps was busy during this period studying detailed maps of the fortified region of Metz, engineer sketches and models of the surrounding ring of forts. Plans were developed for the victorious storming of the citadel of Metz and other citadels, Metz.

When the bitterly contested bridgehead over the rampaging Moselle at Arnaville had been secured in spite of every enemy effort to reduce it, General Walker was ready to implement his plans to conquer Metz. "Ghost Corps" forces had now forged a band of steel generally along the Moselle River line from the First Army zone, north of Thionville, to the zone of the XII Corps of the Third Army at Longueville – a front of over 40 miles. The XX Corps had succeeded in partially outflanking several of the major fortresses of the German salient west of Metz.

The bloody fighting in Dornot and Arnaville had cost the German defenders over 10,000 casualties and the striking power of an entire armored division, the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division,

plus huge expenditures of heavy caliber ammunition which had been rained prodigiously along the Corps front.

The Corps was in an advantageous position about the 1st of October to continue its offensive. The Corps Commander was already reorganizing his troops perfecting plans, when, for the second time in a month, XX Corps ground to a stop. On order from Twelfth Army Group, the 7th Armored Division, which was to have exploited the successful Seille River crossing, was relieved from XX Corps and Third Army control and sent north to Belgium.

This made it necessary to discontinue large-scale attacks in the sector to the south of Metz, and to establish a defensive line along the high ground west of the Seille. The 5th Division drew back from the hard earned advanced positions at Pournoy and Coin-sur-Seille to cover a large area on the southern flank of the Corps left vacant by the loss of the 7th Armored Division.

Now, in the face of increasing German resistance, even the great industrial capacity of the Allies was strained to maintain five armies in the field. High-level strategy called for an early fall offensive further north in the British and American First Army zones where the crust of German fortifications seemed more easily pierced, and where a level land route into the industrial Ruhr and the heart of Germany existed.

To strengthen this main effort, quantities of Third Army supplies and many troops were diverted to the northern flank of the Western Front. Reinforcements became scarce. Critical supply items such as ammunition over 3 inches in caliber and tanks and tank parts (especially treads) were short of the amount needed to mount a full-scale offensive.

The Third Army, as a result, was ordered to conduct an "aggressive defense" to keep the enemy in its zone off balance and in doubt as to the Third Army's intentions by continuing a vigorous patrolling and limited objective attacks. How destructive such tactics can be in the hands of courageous soldiers, expert staffs, and daring leaders was clearly illustrated in the XX Corps zone near Metz.

The 3rd Cavalry Group patrolled the line of the Moselle as far as First Army forces on the north flank, encountering enemy patrols that infiltrated into River line towns at night. Small but threatening feints by Corps units held the attention of the opposing German commanders. Even during this quiet period, several German divisions were occupied on the Corps front.

Corps artillery continued to pound enemy positions east of the Moselle. Infantry bazookas destroyed large numbers of tanks and self-propelled guns which the Germans were to need badly later. During small-scale attacks launched by Corps units, the enemy, expecting a major push, defended every foot of ground at a great cost in men and matériel. When forced from a position, he counterattacked again and again in an effort to regain it.

The XX Corps seized an opportunity during this period to rest troops who had had no respite from heavy fighting over a long period of time. Corps troops, especially the new replacements, were trained in the latest techniques of assaulting fortified positions.

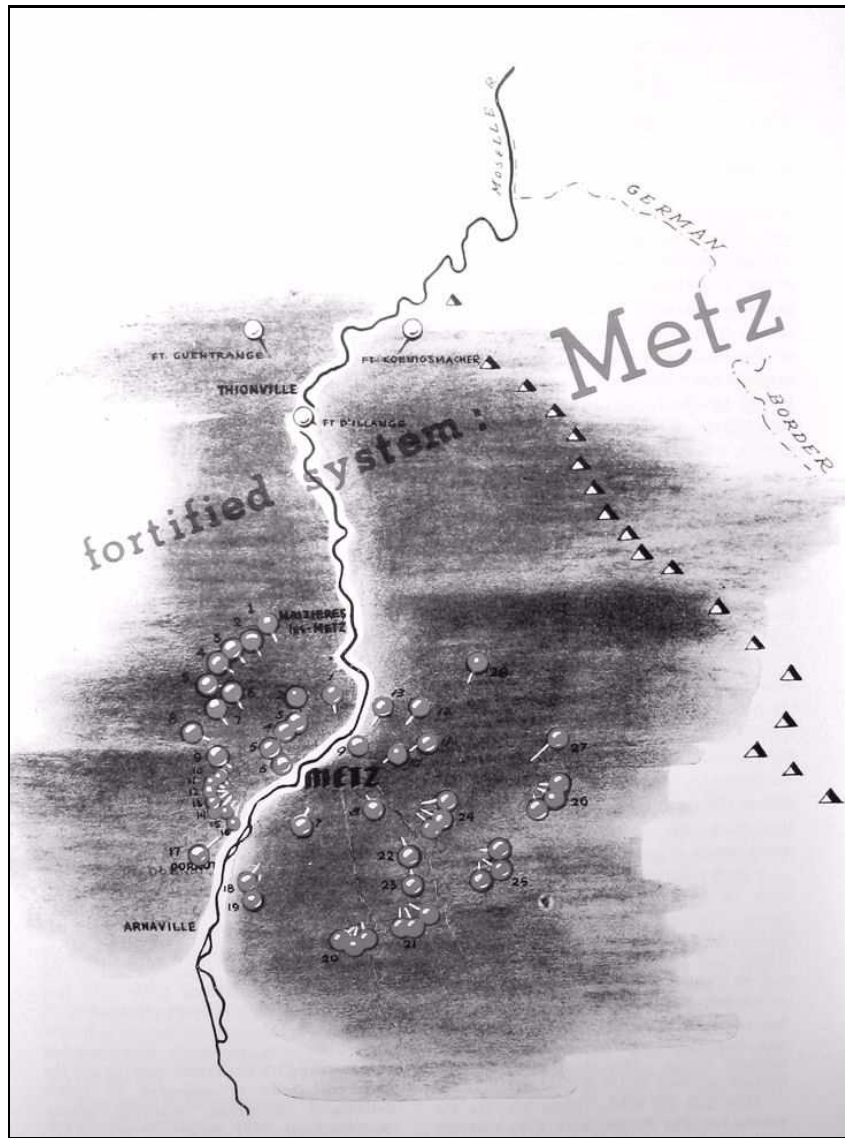
The crafty German use every page in his book of tricks during this somewhat static period. Spies in civilian clothes were frequently sent over to check the American positions in order of battle. Occupants of jeeps were likely to encounter tightly strung wires hung across the roads to decapitate the riders. Propaganda leaflets advised the Americans that they would not be home for Christmas, a fact

that was already clear to all concerned. In the bridgehead areas, the German showed fiendish ingenuity in booby-trapping. Even their own dead were mined. German bodies often lay for weeks without being moved because to touch them meant to risk one's life.

Information gathered by patrols and assembled by Corps G-2 Section revealed that the enemy intended to hold Metz in the Moselle River line at all costs. German troops were observed erecting field fortifications and strengthening the existing defenses in and around the Metz forts. Another "Hitler Battle" was facing the troops of XX Corps.

To give a clear picture of the Metz campaign difficulties met by XX Corps, some account must be given of the bastion of Metz and its great rings of forts.

REGION OF METZ



For centuries Metz has been the tug-of-war city for warring nations, the city is a museum of fluctuating military history, a metropolis of battle structures, and a favorite meeting place for peacetime tourists the world over. It has long been a political problem child of France and Germany. Many volumes describe the countless battles that have been fought on the banks of the Moselle river near Metz, in the surrounding hills and forests, and in the Saar Valley which points the way into Germany. Metz has known the legions of Julius Caesar, the hordes of Attila the Hun, the embattled nobility of the duke of Guise, and the booted troopers of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

It is the centuries old city of burial ground for thousands of soldiers who died while trying either to reduce or to defend the city.

Metz was built by the Gauls as headquarters for the department of Moselle of the Alsace-Lorraine territorial family. Later, the Romans fortified the city to defend the Holy Roman Empire against the barbarians.

Traces of forts built by the Romans to defend of the Gallic part of their empire from the Huns still exist today among the fortifications of more modern engineers.

The Romans built six great roads from Metz to distant provinces, two west to Reims, two north along the banks of the Moselle to Trier, one to Strasbourg on the Rhine, and one beyond Paris to Mayenne, only 75 miles from the Channel coast.

Until the XX Corps of the American Third Army reduced Metz in November, 1944, the city had fallen by attack only once to military forces. The Huns captured and burned the town in 451 A.D.

Metz and the entire region between the Meuse and the Rhine, were a part of the Empire of Charlemagne (742-814). In 843, after a series of wars, the city became the possession of a conquerer named Lothaire, who made it the capital of his kingdom, Lotharingia, later to be known as Lorraine.

In 870 the Treaty of Mersen assigned Metz to Louise-Le-Germanique. The city remained under the Germanized Holy Roman Empire until 1220 when it attained the title of "Imperial Free Town" and became a city Republic.

Because of its wealth, Metz was coveted by powerful neighbors, among them the Dukes of Lorraine. The city joyfully welcomed a French army sent by Henry II in 1552.

The French force occupied Metz peacefully, and the people were quick to accept attachment to the powerful French Crown, but storms were gathering east of the Rhine where emperor Charles V of Germany refused to accept the French King's *fait accompli*.

While Charles V assembled an army, Henry II sent the Duke of Guise to Metz at the head of a group of French nobles. The Duke found the fortifications in a lamentable state and set about rebuilding them. He rallied the nobility and Metz society to the task of working with their hands.

The defenses upon which the Duke and his company labored were extended in the 12th century to the island formed by the two arms of the Moselle River until they consisted of a high rampart protected by 68 towers.

The German Emperor's army reached Metz on the 19th of October, 1552, to find the Duke of Guise in command of 10,000 determined defenders, manning strong fortifications.

For two and a half months the 10,000 held 60,000 men in check. The Germans fired 14,000 rounds from 100 guns. This was extraordinary heavy fire for those times, but the French withstood all attacks. When Charles V finally lifted the siege, 30,000 of his men were dead, wounded, or sick.

From that day Metz was the pivot of French defenses on the nation's northeastern border and remained largely independent under French protection until 1648. For more than 50 years the city was

at peace. However, permanent peace was not expected, and work on the fortifications continued. As early as 1556, four years after the successful defense of the stronghold, a citadel flanked by four bastions had been constructed.

During the 18th century, engineers built a "Horned Redoubt" and added 11 new bastions to the ones already guarding the citadel. They also made it possible to inundate the valley of the Seille by using the vast waters of a Pool of Lindre.

Metz became the headquarters of the Department of Moselle in 1790 and, soon after the turn of the century, work on a fortified ring to enclose the city was started. Luxembourg and Saarlautern were to be the outposts.

Vauban, the celebrated French engineer, supervised the building of the first complete circle of forts and fortified groups in the outer defense of Metz. Fifteen in number, and designed to withstand any ordnance of that day, they were not completed until 1866 during the reign of Napoleon III.

From 1866 on, the Prussian menace became more threatening each day and Napoleon III had the forts of Saint-Quentin, Plappeville, Saint Julien, and Queuleu built around the city.

They were to be put to use very shortly. On the 6th of August, 1870, three German armies invaded France. Marshall Bazaine, commanding a large and well equipped French army, met and soundly defeated the German First Army at Borny, east of Metz, on August 14th. Two other German forces, meanwhile, were encircling Metz from the north and south.

Aware of the disproportion of the forces, Marshall Bazaine decided to withdraw toward the camp at Chalons on the Marne, but his maneuver was too slow and the two Prussian armies cut his retreat at Mars-la-Tour on the 16th of August. Furious battles were fought through the 18th of August along the entire length of the road from Mars-la-Tour to Gravelotte. After the battle of St Privat, August 18, the French were definitely encircled.

Backed against the walls of Metz, Bazaine could offer only feeble resistance and made no organized effort to save the city. He was forced to capitulate on the 28th of October.

By the treaty of Frankfurt in 1871, Wilhelm I took Metz, five-sixths of the Department of Moselle, and Alsace. However, the natives of Moselle never recognized that they were German subjects, and continually dispatched protesting emissaries to the German government.

After the Germans occupied Metz in 1871, they added considerably to the circumvallation, establishing 19 bastions surrounded by moats and protected by 13 advance works. The extent of the fortified zone was increased to 21 miles and 11 new forts were added.

During world war I the Germans created a reign of terror in Metz. French suspects were confined without trial and later sent to Koblenz even before mobilization and hostilities began. All that was French was removed or destroyed. The German press assumed full control of information channels, and there followed complete military occupation and a process of Germanization. It became a jail offense to speak French.

When the armistice was signed November 11, 1918, American artillery was within range of Metz and actually had fired upon some of the forts. Infantry was ready for an offensive against the fortress,

the “jump off” date having been set for the 16th of November. On November 19th, French troops of the Tenth Army entered Metz.

Twenty-six years later, to the day, the XX Corps of the American Third Army liberated the city once more.

The Moselle region was protected by a belt of modern fortified works connected by anti-tank obstacles.

Upon mobilization in September 1939, the French moved specially trained troops into the fortified zones. There were service forces to handle food, munitions, and fuel, as well as automatic weapons and anti-tank gun crews in positions behind obstacles. These obstacles included fields of vertically affixed railway tracks, six to eight rows in depth.

The French Third Army under General Conde established its headquarters in Metz (Jeanne D’Arc Fort).

By mid-September, before the Polish situation had become desperate, minor offensive action had been undertaken at Metz. An absolutely defensive attitude, with a front marked by the main line of resistance, was then adopted.

From October 1939 until June 1940, the French troops worked on their defensive installations. They constructed supplementary blockhouses and improved obstacles and communications.

On the tenth of May, 1940, the Germans attacked, bombing airfields and important road junctions. Large German units appeared in the Lorraine zone but did not approach the fortified line. The Lorraine front itself was held only by thinly spaced troops backed by fortified works.

The enemy was incapable of reducing the crews of the most important strongholds who had remained at their posts, and it was only following an order in July, after an armistice was signed, that the French forces threw down their arms.

No important combat took place in the region of Metz which fell automatically after being bypassed on the north. With the signing of the armistice, all resistance evaporated.

The Germans entered Metz on the 17th of June, 1940 from the west, approaching from the Meuse river.

Each of the warring forces sweeping over this historic battle ground had left on the terrain the imprint of military ingenuity and tactical inventiveness. Each had constructed new fortifications and improved on natural barriers. The Germans no sooner occupied Metz than they were digging, pouring concrete, laying wire and emplacing more guns.

The Moselle river forms one of the greatest natural barriers of them all. Through the centuries its swift current had cut the Lorraine Plateau to create a natural breastworks on the abrupt slopes of its western banks. To the east of the Moselle, tributary streams, chiefly the Seille and the Nied, have cut hills and ridges that are steep and heavily wooded.

It was up the dominating terrain formed by the confluence of these rivers that Metz, “Wonder City of Fortifications”, was built.

The Germans found an imposing, double belt of forts and fortified groups ringing the city that nature already had fortified. Positions were so cleverly selected and so cleverly emplaced that full defensive advantage could be taken of the terrain. In all there were 43 forts and fortified groups, with 128 artillery pieces of large caliber emplaced around Metz proper. These were exclusive of Maginot Line fortifications, the forts around Thionville and the Siegfried Line.

The Germans were not content with the 15 old forts and groups in the outer defenses of Metz, namely, those started by Vauban in the 18th century as well as those condemned by the French commander in 1939 as of no great military importance. They immediately put their Todt organization to work.

Although worked lagged as the German army went from victory to victory, old Fort Saint-Quentin on the west bank of the Moselle was improved and modernized and a radio signal center was installed. Two supporting forts, Girardin and Diou, built on adjacent hills, were linked with Fort Saint-Quentin by a series of supporting bunkers, pillboxes, armored outposts, heavily reinforced casemates, minefields, and a trench system that completely extended around the military crest of the hill.

Two 210mm guns were installed in a revolving steel observation post in Fort Saint-Quentin. Self-propelled 105mm guns and anti-tank guns were also emplaced. Concrete reinforced caves were dug to protect the roving artillery pieces when not in use. Extensive field fortification work was done on the rest of the 12 Forts.

When fast moving columns of the XX Corps of the American Third Army swarmed across the Seine River, in August, 1944, in the power drive to Reims, the Wehrmacht made the careful reappraisal of the Metz fortifications and their possibilities as a defense line. They had been left in good condition by the Germans when they withdrew in 1918 and they had been kept in excellent repair by the French.

Tactical experts reported to the First German Army Headquarters that the defensive effort of the Germans should be concentrated east of the Moselle river line, and the forts west of the river should be used chiefly for delaying purposes. Metz, itself, as interrogation of German officers later revealed, was to be used as an administrative center and later as a concentration point for ammunition and weapons to arm the counteroffensive which was to be organized behind the Moselle River line.

Despite general Army concurrence in this plan, Adolf Hitler personally ordered all the forts, including those west of the Moselle, to be manned, improved, and held at all costs.

Work began anew on the forts and as many artillery pieces as possible were emplaced.

A second complete outer belt of 28 forts and fortified groups, located on the rim of a wheel of hills approximately six miles from the hub of the city of Metz, was composed of permanent fortifications built by the Germans after 1871 and completed in 1912. The forts of this group were essentially fortified artillery positions in contra-distinction to those of the inner belt which were primarily infantry strong points.

There were no definitely designed fields for direct fire of automatic weapons from the forts proper. Instead, an inter-defensive system of fire was devised whereby the deep moats that surround each fort or fortified system were covered by interlocking fields of automatic fire to bar infantry crossing. The German infantry positions some distance out from the fortified artillery positions furnished all-round security.

To prevent high velocity direct fire weapons from destroying the gun emplacements, the Metz forts generally were underground with their large caliber guns firing from rounded, revolving, steel turrets that protruded slightly from the surface. Underground passages linked the various forts so that counterbattery artillery fire was ineffective. Only a direct hit on a turret by an aerial bomb of 1,000 pounds or more could cause material damage.

An assault by the American 5th Infantry Division on Fort Driant proved that it was of no avail to overrun the surface of the position by infantry. The enemy merely retired to the subterranean security of the forts while the pre-registered heavy artillery concentrations from adjoining forts made the position untenable on top of the particular fort attacked. Complete surprise was impossible, for the German infantry was deployed far out from the forts themselves. Shells of the American 8-inch gun caused only temporary cessation of fire in the forts. When the American fire lifted, the Germans would resume firing.

Each fort in the outer ring was composed of a main or center fort with two or three smaller reserve forts, batteries or casemates. Each fort or group accommodated 2,000 or 3,000 men and a crew of 150 or 200 men was required for each battery. Communications were excellent. Each fort communicated either directly with others or indirectly through a central exchange in Metz.

The string of seven minor forts, called by XX Corps assault units "The Seven Dwarfs," connected the fortified group of Jeanne D'Arc and Driant. These were intended by the French only as infantry positions, but the Germans had placed one 150mm howitzer in fort Marival and had numerous 88mm anti-tank batteries around and in the "Seven Dwarfs".

A line of four forts southeast of Metz and east of the Moselle River, plus a bunker belt around the outer circuit facing the German border, had no occupied artillery emplacements. However there were self-propelled guns of 105mm caliber and 88mm anti-tank guns much in evidence before and during the American attack on Metz.

Fort Guentrange was northwest of Thionville and was actually a part of a fortifications of Thionville.

There were two other fortified groups east of the Moselle and 20 to 25 miles north of Metz, Forts Koenigsmacher and D'Illange in the vicinity of towns of the same names. Similar in construction to the forts in the outer belt around Metz, they commanded the banks of the Moselle from the controlling terrain in the northern portion of the XX Corps zone of action. Each resembled in design a three leaf clover and had a battery of four 100mm guns. Another fort, Fort Yutz, on the eastern bank of the Moselle in Thionville, was very old and in disrepair. It had no artillery emplacements but was useful to the German defenders of Thionville because it commanded the excellent road network leading east from the river.

The 19 fortified groups that composed the Maginot Line fortifications in the XX Corps zone were situated on a rugged ridge that started at Koenigsmacher and extended in a southeasterly direction toward Boulay. They were so constructed that gun turrets swung in a complete circle. The exposed sides of the casemate were defended by machine gun emplacements that generally fired west and south. Sufficient traverse in width, however, enabled the automatic weapons of each casemate to interlock with those of the adjoining casemates, and so destroy small squads of infantry infiltrating on the flanks or rear.

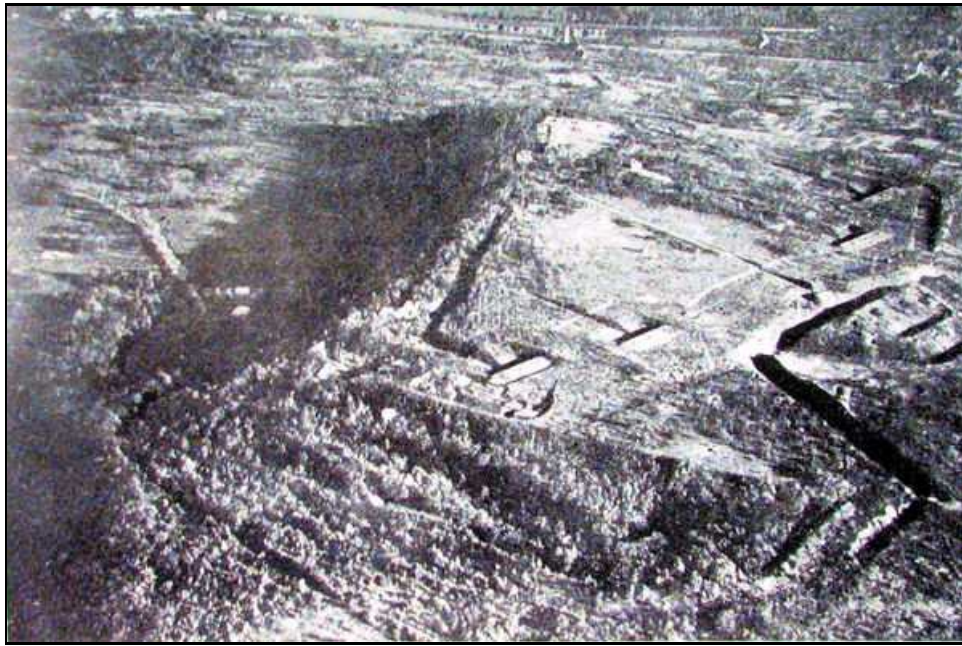
The first and northernmost fortified group in the Maginot Line east of the Moselle was the Metrich Group with a system of fire tied in with old fort Koenigsmacher 1,000 yds to the south.

Metz and its surrounding ring of steel, as can be seen, formed a formidable obstacle; but, the route of XX Corps had to be cleared at almost any cost. Dominating the surrounding countryside, the citadel of Metz could force the entire Third Army to lengthen its supply lines by 100 miles in order to by-pass the ring of forts.

Leading also through the historic city were three of the classic invasion routes into Germany: 1) the valley of the Moselle leading northeast through Trier (used in the November push); 2) the Kaiserslautern Pass, leading east through Saarbrucken; and 3) the Saverne Gap, pointing east to Strasbourg and the Rhine. These were tempting vistas to the Third Army's armored columns.

Metz was a crossroads of this part of Europe. To bypass Metz would also leave a grave threat to the rear installations and supply lines. To contain the ring of forts with their strong garrison, it would be necessary to leave behind several divisions, needed for the all-out drive into Germany.

ATTACK ON FORT DRIANT



Aerial view of Fort Driant with the Moselle River in background. Zig-zag shadows represent Tank obstacles. On the left are barracks on which troops climbed to find ventilators.

About 5 miles southwest of Metz, just west of the Moselle River, stood Fort Driant, one of the strongest in the band of forts. During the September operations across the river south of Metz, this great rampart of steel and reinforced concrete with its batteries of huge guns was a thorn in the side of XX Corps. From its commanding position, it could turn on a speedy curtain of fire down the Moselle Valley and hamper any advance. Fort Driant was, accordingly, considered a keystone in the Metz fortified region and its reduction was thought to be a necessary prelude to a successful tank attack up the Moselle Valley toward Metz. In addition, after the severe fighting along the Moselle River line, a successful assault on one of Metz' great bastions would serve as a morale booster for the troops of XX Corps.

For these reasons, and to gain first-hand experience in the reduction of such fortified bulwarks, an attack by the elements of the 5th Division was endorsed by XX Corps and the Third Army.

Very little definite information on Fort Driant could be obtained, but it was believed to be defended by at least three companies of elite troops and several batteries of heavy guns.

After a bombing run by P-47s and an artillery preparation an attack was launched on September 27th to probe out the defenses. The assault echelon ran into interlacing bands of machine-gun fire laid along a huge moat 20 yards wide and 30 feet deep. The casemates and concrete shelters had walls seven feet thick and were so located as to command all likely approaches. Wire and belts 20 feet wide surrounded these barriers and heavy accurate artillery and mortar fire was delivered from the

surrounding forts, Jeanne D'Arc, Somme and St. Blaise. Unable to approach the well protected positions with demolition charges, the attackers were forced to withdraw to their original lines.

Unfavorable weather postponed further efforts until October 3. The lessons learned in the first unsuccessful attempt were made the subject of close study by Corps officers, and a more ambitious plan was adopted. On October 3, the fort was bombed with napalm bombs, which are filled with jellied gasoline it ignites as the bomb explodes and burns with great heat. At the same time, a combined force of tanks, infantry and engineers, carrying the latest demolition equipment, bangalore torpedoes, flame throwers, and every type of explosive charge, struck at the fort from the north and south.

The southern force succeeded in reaching its initial objective, using the fire of the tanks to blast a path through the protecting wire. Even the point-blank fire of self-propelled 105 mm guns firing at ranges of 30 yards failed to penetrate concrete turrets and barracks. For a time, concentrated fire dropped on the exposed assault troops threatened to stop the attack. A few ventilators atop two barracks were discovered, however, and after several explosive charges were dropped through these, the Germans came out.

There began now a strange, confusing fight that has been called the "battle for the tunnels." Down in the subterranean fastnesses of the mysterious old fort, Germans and Americans hunted each other through the tunnels in an eerie, medieval atmosphere. Deep in the interior of the fort for the control centers for the garrison and the heavy revolving turrets of the guns; and, these were the targets sought by the Corps troops. The fight became more desperate and weird as the days went on. The combatants lobbed hand grenades around corners at each other, burned and blasted their way through steel doors and stonewalls, and set up ambushes in the dark, twisting, underground quarters. But, little progress was made, and the constant strain in the sickening fumes of explosives were gradually weakening the attacking force.

The action is described in a XX Corps Operational Reports as follows:

"The following morning artillery fire from the adjoining forts forced the attackers into the cover of underground barracks and also hampered the supply of assault units. No additional ground been gained since the initial penetration. In fact, enemy counterattacks periodically eliminated small infantry patrols that out-posted the underground barracks, and knocked out four tanks by bazooka projectiles. The Commanding General of the 5th Infantry Division decided the afternoon the 5th of October, after a conference with the Commanding Officer of the 11th Infantry Regiment, to organize Task Force Driant under the command of the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General A. D. Warnock, and additional troops were placed in Fort Driant to eliminate enemy resistance.

"The assault on the various casemates in Fort Driant continued under increasing artillery fire from adjoining forts, especially the Verdun Group and Fort Marival. On two occasions American troops, in determined sallies, were able to get on top of the gun positions of the underground concrete artillery encasements located in the southern portion of Fort Driant; but, the steel revolving turrets resisted all attempts to blow them with engineer charges. A carefully planned, concerted assault by an infantry company, supported by tanks, to take the entire southern portion of Fort Driant, resulted in the capture of most of the Company and its officers. Firing thereafter was cut down to the exchange of small arms fire and enemy explosions of engineer charges in the tortuous, subterranean passages that linked the various forts in Fort Driant. The infantry was now safe from the artillery fire, but dust fumes stirred up by the explosions made unbearable the living conditions of the men in the crowded Fort. Casualties continue to mount.

"After a week's fighting only the two barracks in the southwestern portion of Fort Driant were in the hands of the task force, now called Task Force Warnock. The five casemates of the main Fort were still held by the enemy. On the morning of 10 October, Major General Hugh Gaffey, Chief of Staff, Third US Army, Major General Walker, commanding general of XX Corps, Major General Kirwan and Brigadier General Warnock of the 5th Infantry Division decided, in a joint conference, after surveying the situation, to cease offensive action in Fort Driant. Sufficient forces were not available and to continue the attack would entail a needless loss of life. By the morning of 14 October all troops had been withdrawn from Fort Driant. The troops once more took up their position containing the fort." From this episode came a true picture of the nature of the Metz siege.

MAIZIERES-les-METZ



Troops fighting and resting in and around Maizieres
Long ago Hd learned to grin at sight and thought of
One less Nazi.



Each village suffered blitz effects because the Germans so thoroughly armed every sector.
Maizieres-les-Metz was no exception.

Another savagely fought preliminary to the main event of Metz was the town of Maizieres-les-Metz, a steel mining town of 3,000 population. It was located on the west bank of the Moselle six miles northwest of Metz and sat squarely astride the best and most direct route from the north into Metz. During September, repeated efforts to seize the town were repulsed by heavy artillery and mortar fire zeroed in on all approaches to the town.

Because of the extended front of XX Corps forces north of Metz (one regiment held 14 miles), and because the main effort at a penetration of Metz' defenses was directed by Corps Commanders order further south, the part of the front around Maizieres-les-Metz remained relatively quiet during the last half of September and early October.

In the early morning hours of October 3, elements of the 90th Division struck to secure Maizieres-les-Metz in an effort to gain positions at the base of the arc of forts west of Metz. By midday, the Bois de al'Abbe was cleared and infantry occupied a huge slag pile that towered over the town to the northwest. These positions were held against four counterattacks and incessant artillery fire by 150 mm howitzers. The addition of the 83rd Infantry Division to the XX Corps on October 5 permitted a shortening of the 90th Division's lines and a coordinated attack was launched on the morning of the 6th.

A squadron of P-47s from the XIX Tactical Air Command bombed the town with good results during the afternoon. Favorable progress was made initially, but the Germans fought back stubbornly. Bitter fighting developed in the woods and around the slag pile. While the enemy's efforts were directed toward retaking the slag pile, Corps infantry forces moved swiftly into the northern section of the town and into the steel mill district on the western edge and proceeded to mop up resistance there.

The enemy quickly brought up heavy reinforcement from the southern part of town and the battle developed into a house to house struggle. For the next three days, Corps troops in the town beat off repeat counterattacks thrown against them by special groups hastily assembled at Metz and sent to drive them from the town.

The importance attached to the town by the German commanders was evident from the tactics employed. Small groups of enemy infantry were placed in each house with orders to fight to the last man. The buildings and cells were sturdy concrete and stone construction, with walls often several feet thick. The numerous garden walls, courtyards, and heavily barricaded side streets made the reduction of each house a separate undertaking. The lack of sufficient forces to encircle the town from both the North and South made it necessary for XX Corps troops to battle their way down the long narrow axis of the town toward the southern end. Steady progress was made in this slow bloody fight, but it became apparent that a larger force in a coordinated attack would be necessary to take the town.

A Third Army order freezing all heavy caliber ammunition forced the abandonment of this plan. The close-in fighting continued until October 18th when a formidable obstacle, the centrally located City Hall, loomed up before the weakened Corps assault element. This heavily constructed building was strongly held by a determined enemy and soon became the principal bone of contention between the Americans on the north end of town and the Germans in the south. The City Hall became the hope of the defense and the focal point of the offense.

From the 19th to the 23rd of October, a 155 mm self-propelled gun was used to fire on the City Hall Building. Although one wing was eventually demolished and the roof torn off, still the enemy occupied the fortified barrier. The fact that the enemy continue to hold part of this key town, the

occupation of which was a preliminary step in and XX Corps' plan for the reduction of Metz, was a disappointment to the Corps Commander. It was felt that this northern outpost of Metz was important enough, as a supply artery for the northern arc of forts, to warrant a large-scale attack to end all resistance. Furthermore, the situation was intolerable and that both Corps and German forces were occupying parts of the same town though not on very neighborly terms. Accordingly on the 24th of October, XX Corps secured adequate ammunition allowance from Third Army for the use of the Corps infantry in the complete reduction of resistance in Maizieres-les-Metz.

Detailed plans were made for an attack on October 29th. The town of Maizieres-les-Metz was divided into sections and the striking force was assigned a specific group of houses with successive objectives designated in advance. The attack got underway after artillery was directed on all known enemy targets, and the enemy fell back in confusion. Several feints and diversionary attacks added to the confusion of the defenders while the main assault was directed toward the City Hall. Other task forces wheeled to cut the enemy escape routes to the south and east. By 1600 hrs the German garrison was split into two groups and had begun redraw to the central part of town. The enemy, now disorganized by the assault, began to surrender in groups of six to 30 men. By evening, the bulk of the town was occupied and only a few houses and the City Hall remained in enemy hands.

In the early morning hours of October 30th, the remaining enemy positions were mopped up. When Corps infantry troops moved in on the City Hall, only dead enemy soldiers were found. The capture of Maizieres-les-Metz was now complete and XX Corps ruled the town.

In this operation the equivalent of a German battalion was killed or captured at a cost of 55 casualties. Moreover, XX Corps was now in a position to cut the supply route to the fortified salient west of the Moselle and to exploit one of the best approaches to the inner defenses of Metz.

All during the month of October, lights burned late in the blacked-out Headquarters of XX Corps in Jarny. Plans for the final destruction of Fortress Metz and the drive to the Saar were the foremost preoccupation for all concerned. Supplies of every category were assembled in huge quantities for what had all the earmarks of a rugged and painful fight.

Information about the Fortress system of Metz, which had been gained through the gallant and bloody efforts of Corps troops all along the front, was closely studied by the Corps staff. All sources, from patrols to French Army Engineer officers, were combed for every shred of evidence of the great barriers guarding the valley of the Moselle.

Reinforcements were fitted into the units which had lost heavily in the savage fighting along the Moselle River line. Wherever possible, troops were pulled back for training in the assault of fortified positions and for a much-needed breathing spell before the coming offensive. Two new divisions, the 95th Infantry Division under the command of Major General Harry L. Twaddle and the 10th Armored Division, commanded by Major General William H. Morris, were attached to XX Corps during October. These new striking forces, destined to play a major role in the impending operations of the Corps, were deployed in quiet sectors of the line to give them battle experience and to hold the line already established.

The Americans and Germans both knew that something big was coming up and watched each other warily. During the latter part of October and early November, there was much shifting of forces and strengthening of positions on both sides in anticipation of the action to come. It was another "war of

nerves" with propaganda broadcasts and leaflets figuring in the pre-battle plans of XX Corps in an effort to break the morale and fighting spirit to the Nazi foe.

When the chill November days came, everyone knew the preliminaries were over and the championship bout was soon to begin. The XX Corps was ready to swing what the Corps Chief of Staff called its "Sunday Punch" in an effort to score the first knockout over the citadel of Metz in 1500 years.

The XX Corps plan, when perfected at the end of October, contemplated two distinct operations to be performed concurrently: first, an attack to encircle and destroy the Fortress and garrison of Metz; second, the seizure of a bridgehead over the Saar River in the vicinity of Saarburg as a base to resume the attack to the northeast. Regarding the second operation General Walker reasoned as follows. After the Metz operation had commenced and the enemy's strength had been siphoned into the threatened area, an infantry division, crossing north of Thionville could proceed rapidly over the base of the Saar-Moselle triangle and seize a bridgehead on the Saar River at Saarburg. The 83rd Infantry Division was to be attached to XX Corps for this mission. Saarburg was the weakest part of the Siegfried line in the XX Corps zone of advance to the east. Interrogation of prisoners of war indicated that this particular region was lightly held by the enemy. The execution of the second operation was timed to coincide with the encirclement of Metz.

The Metz operational plan directed the 5th Infantry Division to attack on the south from the Arnaville bridgehead, bypass the outer belt of fortresses, bridge the Nied River and attack north to seize the high ground southeast of Boulay.

The XX Corps Commander directed the 90th Infantry Division to make an assault crossing over the Moselle River on the north, execute a flanking attack along the trace of the Maginot Line, and join up with the 5th Infantry Division behind Metz in the vicinity of Boulay. By attacking along the ridge line containing the Maginot Forts, commanding ground would be held during the advance and the forts could be enfiladed, if necessary, one at a time without having the assault troops subjected to supporting cross fires of this fortified line.

General Walker, after making a personal reconnaissance of the northern portion of the XX Corps zone, selected the area between Malling and Cattenom for the 90th Infantry Division crossing site. This division would first reduce Fort Koenigsmacher and then establish a bridgehead over the Moselle in this area. The 10th Armored Division would be passed through the Koenigsmacher bridgehead and attack southeast to Boulay, at the rear of the Metz fortified region, on the outside of the 90th Infantry Division, after these two divisions had swept forward on their assigned mission, the 83rd Infantry Division would be passed over at the same place and dispatched on its concurrent mission to the northeast. The 90th Infantry Division was to link up with the 5th Infantry Division south of Boulay and thus complete the encirclement of fortress Metz.

It was believed, from the available intelligence, that the River line opposite Thionville was heavily defended by the enemy. Further south at Uckange there was an excellent crossing site. This was the logical place for a river crossing and it was thought that the enemy would be set for an attack in this area. With these considerations in mind, General Walker ordered a battalion of the 95th Infantry Division to make a demonstration in force at Uckange in order to distract the enemy's attention from the main effort of the 90th Infantry Division at Koenigsmacher.

The remainder of the 95th Division would be disposed to contain the German fortified salient west of Metz. The Division would maintain constant pressure along that defensive perimeter until the

encirclement had been accomplished or until a weak spot developed there. Then, on the Corps Commander's order, the 95th Infantry Division was to advance and capture the city of Metz.

Prior to the river crossing, the 3rd Cavalry Group would screen the Moselle River line north of Thionville and cover the readjustment of the troops. After the bridgehead had been established, the cavalry would follow the 10th Armored Division across to join the main effort to the south. The cavalry would then guard the north flank of the XX Corps.

D-day was set for the ninth of November 1944. The intervening two week period was to be used in training troops for the assault of fortified positions and in the regrouping units.

The 10th Armored Division was placed along the southern perimeter of the German salient west of the Moselle. This was done not only to give the Division battle indoctrination, but also to confuse the enemy. The 4th and 6th Armored Divisions of XII Corps were also being assembled further south in the vicinity of Pont-a-Mousson. It was believed by the XII Corps Commander that if the 10th Armored Division were put in the same locality the enemy would assume that a concentration of armor was to be employed in the drive south and east of Metz, a deceptive move which battle experience later proved successful.

During this period of relative quiet the enemy commanders had ample time to consider the strategic value of the Metz system and to organize their defenses. Four German divisions, numbering in all 30,000 troops, were holding Metz in the Moselle River line. On the north, the 416th Infantry Division with a strength estimated at 8300 men, held the sector from Koenigsmacher to the northern boundary of the XX Corps. The 19th Infantry Division, with a strength of more than 5000 troops, held the Moselle sector from Koenigsmacher south to within five miles of Metz. This division with its officer candidate school personnel and special Fortress troops, had a strength of approximately 9000 men. South of Metz was the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, numbering approximately 6000 men. Other General Headquarters units, such as flak and artillery battalions, totaling 2000 men, were scattered throughout the area.

Generalleutnant Kittel, an expert in Fortress defense, was brought from the Eastern front to take command of the 462nd Volksgrenadier Division. He did not arrive in Metz until the operation had begun, and then only could dispose his units to meet the attack and give orders to defend at all costs.

The enemy, at this time, held only one small pocket across the Moselle in the northern portion of the XX Corps zone. This pocket was held by three enemy companies in the town of Berg and on the high slopes directly northwest of it. Presence of the enemy at Berg precluded a surprise attack in the Koenigsmacher area. The 3rd Cavalry Group, commanded by Colonel James U. Polk, which was patrolling in this area, was ordered by XX Corps on November 4 to wipe out this pocket.

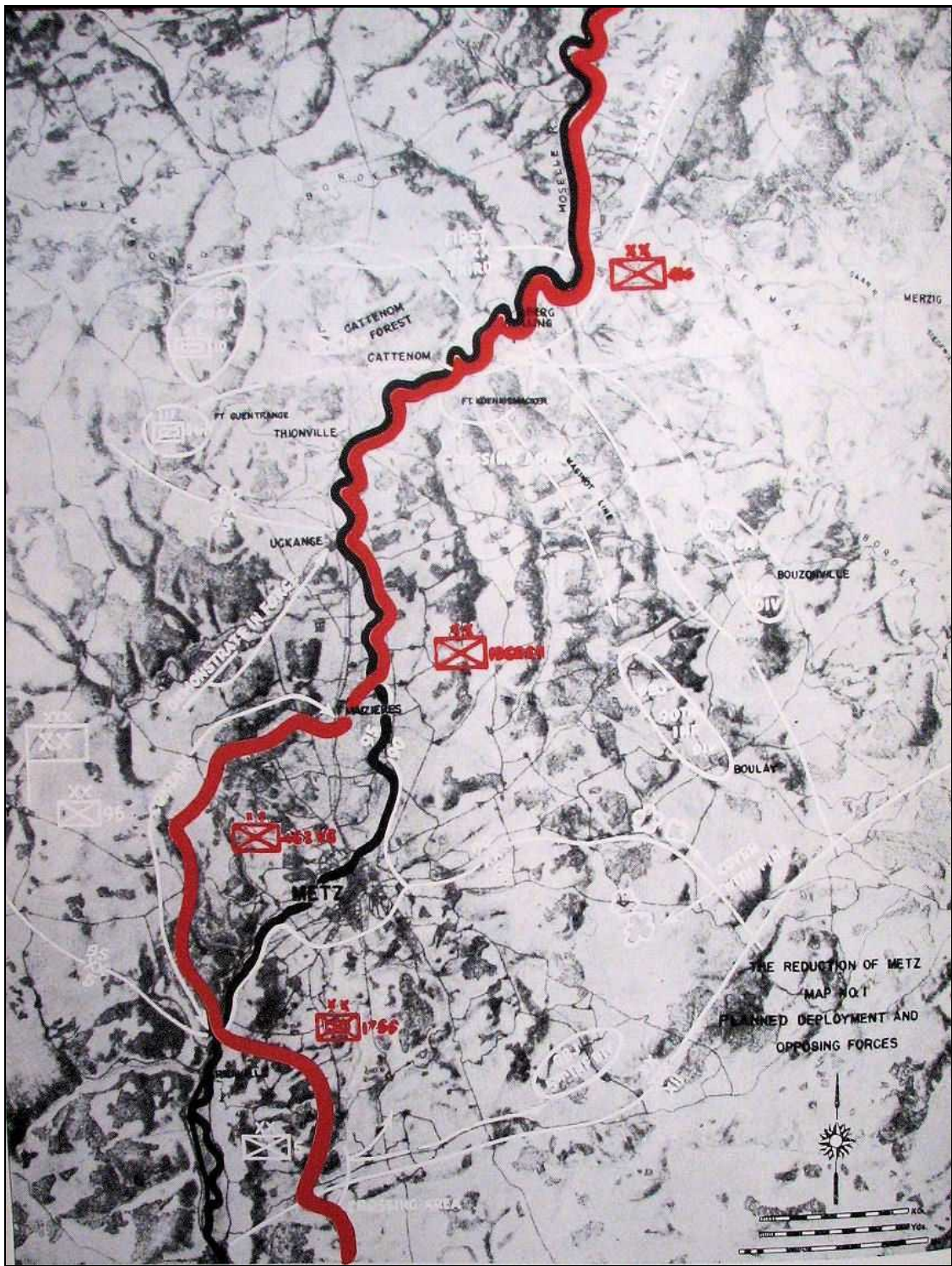
The initial assault was made in the early morning darkness of the 5th of November by a small armored-infantry team. This team penetrated the minefield that blocked entrance to the town of Berg and drove the enemy defenders back across the Moselle. This action isolated the remaining enemy company on the slope to the northwest of the town. Artillery concentrations on the slope paved the way for an attack by a small force of dismounted cavalry which captured the enemy and occupied the hill. This cleared the stage for the assembling of XX Corps units behind Cattenom prior to the attack.

The Commanding General of XX Corps Artillery, Brigadier General Julius A. Slack, had 18 2/3 field artillery battalions available to supplement the normal division artillery, plus the eight 100 mm French guns of the captured fortress Guentrange and captured German ordnance.

Because the two areas of initial assault for the encirclement of Metz were separated by 40 to 45 miles, the Headquarters Battery was placed in charge of XX Corps Artillery which was disposed to support the attack of the 5th Infantry Division in the southern bridgehead. The XX Corps artillery allocated its 18 2/3 Field artillery battalions to support the 90th Infantry Division attack. One field artillery group in the field artillery battalion, manning captured enemy guns, reinforced the 95th Infantry Division in the area selected for its demonstration in force in the vicinity of Uckange.

Security was of paramount importance in the movement of XX Corps artillery to the new position areas. Deceptive measures were adopted. Artillery, remaining in the old positions, increased the rate of fire to match the volume normally fired by all the artillery. Radios and observation posts were left in old position areas to maintain normal traffic and patrol. Reconnaissance of the new positions was restricted.

During the movement of the 90th Infantry Division to the Malling-Cattenom area, all vehicle markings and shoulder patches were changed to correspond with those of the 3rd Cavalry Group, which had been operating for several weeks in that area. As an additional deceptive measure, the 23rd Special Troops were assigned the job of maintaining the pre-existing artillery picture. Under cover of darkness, they moved with their dummy rubber guns into the abandoned positions. Gun positions, camouflage, motor traffic, and radio communications of the old setup were maintained. Flashes of chemical powders were set off simultaneously with a firing of the one group of XX Corps artillery that had remained behind to reinforce the 95th Infantry Division.



Planned development and opposing forces

PINPOINTING METZ

The 3rd Cavalry Group, reinforced by a battalion of tank destroyers, was spread over a front of 20.5 miles along the Moselle River. It screened the troop movements to its rear from Thionville to the northern boundaries of the XX Corps zone. The 95th Infantry Division, by the 2nd of November, had disposed its forces around the fortified salient west of the Moselle. On the 8th of November, the armor began its move north to an assembly area behind the Cattenom Forest. It was prepared on order of the Corps Commander to pass through the Koenigsmacher bridgehead and thereby kindle the spark that would set the front ablaze and culminate in the destruction of the fortified barrier standing like an armored shield between the XX Corps and the Saar River.

Early in November, the 5th Division came back from its training grounds and rest centers to take over once more the bridgehead area south of Metz. After the bridgehead was re-occupied, patrols learned that the enemy had prepared a systematic defense works with mines, roadblocks, and blown bridges. The enemy line was held by a Regiment of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, two fortress machine-gun battalions, and several battalions of the Stellung type which out-posted the river at night, but withdrew to strong points in the villages during the day. On the 3rd November, the 5th Infantry Division was informed of its task in the XX Corps operations to envelop Metz from the south. The initial mission was to affect the crossing of the Seille River and drive to the Nied River in the vicinity of Bazoncourt.

The enemy was known to have concentrations in Louvigny and around the stronghold of Fort L'Aisne. In addition to the artillery fire plan for covering the strong points, the XIX Tactical Air Command was called upon for bombardment of the Fort L'Aisne position and other known strong points in the zone south of Metz. Two squadrons of fighter-bombers were to provide tactical support on the initial days of the bridgehead operation. On the 8th of November, the 5th Infantry Division was informed by XX Corps Headquarters that its portion of the operation would begin at 0530 hrs, November 9th.

On the afternoon of November the 8th, the Seille River began to rise as a result of a three-day heavy rainfall. By midnight it had overflowed its natural banks and spread out to a width of 300-600 feet at the proposed sites for crossing. It was decided to cross all assault companies by assault boats instead of by employing footbridges at the planned position. The first assault crossing of the infantry support bridge north of Cheminot was slow and difficult. The leading assault elements grew fire while proceeding along the ridge east of the Seille River.

Leaving the advance units to engage the enemy, the remainder of the bridgehead force, under cover of a smokescreen and early-morning fog, rushed the slopes of the ridge and secured the wooded knoll that dominated Fort L'Aisne, 3000 yards to the north. The enemy's reaction to the occupation of the hill was a heavy artillery concentration falling dead center on the wooded area.

The 9th of November was a gray, misty day. The ground was heavy with clinging mud thickly sewn with land that personnel mines. Little cover for the advancing troops was found along the open slopes east of the Seille. The low hanging clouds and heavy mist reduced air support to a minimum and denied the attacking troops the encouragement of seeing planes of the XIX Tactical Air Command bombing and strafing the enemy strong points.

The engineers, however, were in close support with assault boats, foot bridges, and rafts and there were guides to direct the infantry to the proper sites. The 1103rd Engineer Combat Group of XX

Corps put a Treadway bridge across the swollen Seille at Longueville and a Class 40 bridge along the Cheminot Road west of the river.

It was known that the German 17th SS Division was the real backbone of the defenses of Metz, and the power that kept the Wehrmacht divisions fighting in line. A special patrol was sent out from this German headquarters with the objective of getting behind XX Corps lines to find out to strength and composition of the American troops. The patrol consisted of one SS lieutenant, one Wehrmacht lieutenant, and one SS master sergeant. It had penetrated our lines approximately 15 km when it was discovered by a road guard from an engineer battalion attached to the American 5th Infantry Division. After two days of interrogation at lower levels, members of the captured patrol were brought to the XX Corps prisoner of war enclosure where they gave the locations of the buildings, the hours of messing, and a strength and status of supply of most of the troops in their area. Three days after this information was passed on, these buildings became primary targets for the Allied Air Forces. At 1140 hours, during the enemy's daily staff briefing his G-2, G-3 building was hit. Sixty-seven enlisted men and high ranking German officers were killed. The Commanding General, who was late for the meeting, was picked up later.

The penetration east of the Seille was a serious threat to the German escape and supply route and the enemy knew it. Artillery fire from the forts in the area reached an intensity seldom encountered in France. The town of Sanry-sur-Nied came in for a particularly heavy pounding. Corps infantry elements held the high ground near the town and were making preparations to force a crossing.

Strong opposition was encountered from the German 45th Machine Gun Battalion while the immense forts of the Groupe Fortifie Verdun harassed the attackers with fire from the heavy gun batteries. In spite of this opposition the assault waves drove eastward from the river and seized Cheminot. The objective was Louvigny which was to be taken in a surprise attack from the south. Savage bursts of small arms fire from St. Jure, however, pinned down the leading elements and the assault was delayed.

At 1500 hours a surprise attack was launched from the cover of a ridge near Louvigny. The Corps troops breasted of the ridge line in full view of the enemy and knocked out enemy machine gun crews southeast of the town before they could swing the guns into action. The attacking companies closed in quickly, swept through the town, and cleared it before the enemy was fully aware of the attack. The town was occupied 1730 hours and an outpost front was extended to the railroad line on the east.

While Louvigny was being cleared, another battalion of infantry moved up to engage the troublesome pocket in St. Jure, and, in a short, sharp skirmish captured the town and drove out the remainder of the garrison.

Back at the river banks, XX Corps engineers were still hampered more by the record high waters of the Moselle than by the ever present artillery barrage from the Metz forts. The river grew wider and wider as the rain continued to fall. The engineers fought their own special kind of war against the mighty forces of nature. Standing chest deep in the icy, racing waters of the Moselle, they laid pontoons only to have their enemy, the river, turn them loose again.

A Bailey bridge could not be constructed immediately, but an infantry support Treadway bridge was put across and reinforced to carry light traffic. Dismounted troops poured across and reinforced the leading waves of the beachhead forces. Work on a 160 foot Bailey bridge was carried on under grave

difficulties and was completed at 0230 hours, November 10th. Within a few hours tanks and tank destroyers were moving across to support the infantry in its attack to the east.

The next barrier in the path of the eastward driving troops was the town of Silly-en-Saulnois. During the night of November 9th, arrangements were made and an assault schedule prepared for a combined attack by infantry of the 5th Division and tanks of the 6th Armored Division.

The drive began at 0700 hrs, November 10th, and almost at once ran into machine gun and mortar fire from the town of Alemont. Alemont was in the zone of the XII Corps on the right flank of the XX Corps where a pocket had been left by the 80th Division. The town was situated on commanding ground dominated a large area to the north in the XX Corps zone of advance. After determining that no XII Corps troops were in the danger zone, tanks and infantry, in a combined assault, took the town by 1100 hours and continued to drive, under heavy artillery fire, to seize the high ground to the southeast of Vigny.

While the attack was progressing on the southern flank of the 5th Division, the assault eastward from Louvigny on the north flank was resumed. The town of Pagny-les-Goin, although its defenses had been softened by air bombardment, still put up a stiff resistance. A fortress battalion, armed with automatic weapons, was placed in position behind temporary obstacles of logs, masonry, and machinery, and resisted all efforts to storm the town. To make matters worse the town of Goin on the exposed left flank of the Division laid enfilading fire on the attacking forces with deadly effect. The thunderous din of a "serenade" by Division and Corps artillery slowed the fire and quelled the will of the Germans to resist, and the American troops cleared the obstacles to seize Pagny-les-Goin before noon.

A combat command of the 6th Armored Division, preparing to knife east along the highway through Vigny, was blocked by a demolition bridge, and a detour through Pagny-les-Goin as soon as the town was cleared was planned. When Pagny-les-Goin had been taken, elements of the 5th Division moved quickly to the high ground north of Vigny and captured it from the German defending force. The tanks of the 6th Armored Division followed quickly into Vigny and raced on to Buchy.

Infantry troops of the 5th Division were next assigned to attack across 4000 yards of open country from Pagny to Silly-en-Saulnois and to take the objective by nightfall. The seemingly perpetual fall rains and heavy ground mist of the Lorraine region came to the aid of the attackers in this difficult maneuver, screening them from enemy observation. The attack went well until it reached the slope only 200 yards from the town, at which time heavy mortar and 20 mm fire began to fall on the assault waves. This only served to give impetus to the race for the cover provided in Silly-en-Saulnois. With the aid of concentrated fire poured into the town by the tanks of the 6th Armored Division from the south, the infantry drove in and captured Silly-en-Saulnois by 1700 hrs, November 10th.

Because of the speed and power of the infantry of XX Corps, the devastating shock effect of Corps artillery, and the close air ground cooperation, the Germans lost their defenses along the Seille River. Enemy efforts to form a wedge defense against the Northeast expansion of the bridgehead south of Metz were already being thwarted by carefully laid plans of XX Corps to encircle the city and choke it off from reinforcement from the east.

The encircling arm of steel bending up from the south was already shaping half of the noose that was to strangle the citadel of Metz.

The attacks south of Metz were carried on with redoubled fury. The Corps plan of attack now was to race another five miles east in Nied river and to seize any bridge left intact by a surprised enemy. Two armored columns spearheaded the way to Dain-en-Saulnois, early on the morning of November 12th, while infantry took over the high ground flanking the highway at Beux. The route of advance brought the attacking columns under heavy fire from enemy batteries located along a defense line 3000 yards to the north of Aube, overlooking the Nied River.

The armor knifed forward to positions looking down on the river at Ancerville. The 5th Division troops promptly surged into this riverbank town and secured it for bridging operations.

The bridge at Ancerville was blown by the enemy, and Corps engineers, sent up to prepare a crossing site, came under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. Infantry troops accordingly made an assault crossing during the night, and secured a small bridgehead, enabling the engineers to construct a treadway bridge under cover of darkness.

A combat command of the 6th Armored Division, while making a reconnaissance for a crossing site, seized the bridge and Sanry-sur-Nied just as an enemy patrol was about to blow it up. A small force was crossed and held a shallow bridgehead while preparations were made for crossing in force at dawn, November 12th.

The XX Corps master plan for the reduction of fortress Metz assigned to the 5th Division the mission of securing a bridgehead over the Nied River. This plan had a double purpose: first, to cover the wheeling movement of the tanks of the 6th Armored Division back to the XII Corps zone, and second, to cut the main escape route of the hard pressed to German garrison in Metz.

This operation was accomplished through close cooperation between the two divisions in an outstanding example of the armored infantry teamwork that was so much a trademark of XX Corps tactics. The tanks aided the infantry in the seizure of Sanry-sur-Nied, Bazoncourt, and Vitoncourt, while the infantry guarded the exposed left flank of the armored column. After a brief bitter skirmish Sanry-sur-Nied was taken at 0800 hours, November 12th. The armor followed closely but ran into heavy anti-tank gun fire and thickly mined roads in the advance to Vaucremont. Infantry aid and heavy Corps artillery support eliminated the enemy resistance and by 2100 hours the town was captured. The armor was now free to resume its turning movement to the south.

The enemy made his counterattack on the Sanry-sur-Nied area the next day. Following a heavy artillery preparation the enemy attack came in at 1400 hours against the right flank. The enemy formation was spotted as it left the cover of the woods and all available fire from artillery, mortars, tank destroyers, and tanks cut down the attacking formation.

While this attack was being met on the right, the heavier counterattack was made from Domangeville. Artillery fire came too late and the enemy overran the observation post on the western hill and got within 500 yards of the town. But the right flank defense placed a large volume of fire on the Hill and forced the enemy to withdraw.

At 2200 hours another attack broke loose from the northwest and northeast under a heavy artillery barrage. At first, darkness prevented the forward observers from spotting the enemy attack formation. A house to house defense within the town stopped the counterattack at close range and forced the Germans to pull back.

There were no other large-scale attacks on the Nied River Bridgehead. This initial objective of the 5th Division had been taken on November 12 and held until the 14th. Then on order of XX Corps, the direction of attack was changed to the north after infantry patrols, probing into the southern group of Metz forts, found them to be lightly held.



FRONT LINES DURING INITIAL PHASE OF ATTACK

KOENIGSMACHER BRIDGEHEAD

The 90th Division, fighting on the north of Metz, was busy establishing a foothold over a flooded section of the Moselle in preparation for an envelopment of Metz from the north.

The 90th Division, carefully implementing the XX Corps order, prior to moving into the Cattenom Forest prepared for an assault crossing by two full regiments. Engineer attachments from XX Corps joined and trained with the Division in its training area. The Corps Engineer directly planned and controlled the work of the engineers which consisted of furnishing and manning assault boats and constructing infantry support bridges, Treadway bridges, and floating Bailey bridges at each of the regimental crossing sites, Cattenom and Malling.

The supply echelons were busy preparing plans for evacuating the wounded and for supplying and reinforcing the bridgehead troops. Motor boats were brought up to be used in the event of the failure or loss of the ferries or bridges either through enemy action or the mighty current of the flooded Moselle.

The problem of signal communications was also given careful consideration. In addition to the double tactical net, an engineer and a traffic control meant were organized and link together and extra stocks of batteries accumulated.

With the aid of trucks provided by G-4, XX Corps, the Division was moved under cover of darkness into the Cattenom Forest. By dawn November 8, the entire force including supporting elements had closed quietly within the final assembly area and the defiladed area to its rear.

Throughout the day, final plans for the coming attacks were completed. In accordance with the Corps Commander's plan to mislead the enemy into believing that the main effort was to be made at Uckange, the artillery battalions registered with only one gun per battalion in preparing the firing data.

Every detail of the attack was carefully planned in advance. From the high ground lower echelon commanders surveyed their far bank objectives, established their initial phase lines, and made their reconnaissance of routes of approach and crossing area. Personnel concerned with traffic circulation and bridge control received their final instructions and went to their post. In the afternoon every man in the 90th Infantry Division received a thorough briefing on the coming mission with emphasis being placed on its importance in the tactical plans of the XX Corps and the Third United States Army.

Under cover of an accelerated assault gun preparation by the 3rd Cavalry Group, the XX Corps engineers moved forward at darkness to the best unloading points. Plans and preparation were finished. Their fulfillment remained to be affected.

THE CROSSING



Stealthily, and in complete blackout, the assault battalions of the 358th and 359th Infantry moved shortly after midnight from their assembly areas to the preestablished boat stations. After a 400 yard carry of the cumbersome boats over the open ground, the first waves crossed the rapidly rising waters of the Moselle. The Moselle initially aided the assault by inundating the close-up enemy defenses on the east bank, but the flooded condition of the river made the crossing more and more difficult. The assault boats were tossed about by corks in a swirling water. Some capsized and went down with their crews and cargoes. Footbridge cables could not be anchored and, to aid to the difficulties, the enemy began dropping artillery fire and mortar shells on the near banks among the infantry waiting to cross and the engineers struggling with the boats.



*The Moselle River at Thionville in flood stage
. The same as when assault crossing was made.*

The crossing was forced in a pouring rain, however, across the racing, yellow Moselle. Further trouble in the form of deep mud on the far bank was encountered. The river was now so high that the enemy mine fields were covered over with water. Some assault craft were carried as far as 1000 yards downstream from the intended landing sites. The Moselle, rather than the enemy, became the more formidable foe. The river, by noon, had swelled to 800 yards in width. More and more boats were lost. The six battalions of infantry across the river made progress but were fighting only with hand-carried weapons.

The assault waves drove ahead in spite of all difficulties and charged up the high ground toward Fort Koenigsmacher. The assault was carried on with such speed the infantry-engineer teams ripped through the wide bands barbed wire surrounding the outworks of the fort and reached the open trench system before the first alarm was sounded by the enemy sentries.

The Germans were taken completely by surprise. Thinking that the Americans could never force a crossing of the Moselle at flood stage, they had developed a sense of security. It was another instance of the "Ghost Corps" tactics of striking where least expected. The Germans, fighting skillfully, but as usual by the book, were stunned at the daring of the maneuver.

The first waves drove the German outposts into their underground fortifications seized the trenches; but with typical Teutonic ingenuity, the enemy had the trenches zeroed in, and mortar fire began to fall accurately into the trenches themselves. In some places machine guns were able to pour enfilading fire down the length of the trench system. The heavier 100 mm batteries of Koenigsmacher could not be brought to bear because of the closeness of the attackers.



Part of the fortification and obstacles at the entrance to Fort Koenigsmacher

At the end of the first day's activities the 90th Infantry Division hadn't moved eight battalions of infantry across the flooded river, penetrated to a depth of 2 miles without armor and support, overrun seven towns, penetrated a Metz type fort, and captured 200 prisoners. The initial bridgehead had been secured.

The attack continued against the armored observation posts from which the deadly mortar fire was being directed against the assault troops. The engineers came to the fort during this phase, blowing

the concrete structures on the westward approaches to the fort, one after another, with huge satchel charges of Composition C2.



Exterior view of Fort Koenigsmacher cut off from relief and finally conquered.

In the same manner, attacks were launched against the shelter points or sally points which guarded the entry into the underground portion of the fortifications. These points were one-story concrete pill boxes jutting up from the bare hillside. Each had one small entrance, protected by guard room, leading to staircases descending to the underground quarters of Fort Koenigsmacher. In many cases, infantry-engineer teams rushed through heavy fire into the entrances of the shelter points and placed the demolition charges on a staircases leading below. In this way, the exits were blocked and the enemy prevented from infiltrating onto the top of the fort.

Ventilating ports, so necessary to the German fortress troops, were a high-priority target. These were demolished by dropping satchel charges down the shaft, or by pouring in gasoline followed by thermite grenades. This effective procedure was performed so often during the day that artillery liaison planes, in response to a hurry up call, dropped more explosive supplies along the road leading to the fort.

The top side of the fort was completely overrun and the last armored observation post knocked out by noon, on November the 10th. The German garrison was trapped below in the damp, dark corridors of Fort Koenigsmacher. Efforts were made by counterattacking enemy troops from other forts to rescue their beleaguered comrades, but these attempts were beaten off by the determined troops of the 90th Division.

Final resistance in the fort was overcome on the third day by the simple but effective expedient of floating the lower portions of the fort with large quantities of gasoline and tossing thermite and white phosphorus grenades in after it. The resulting holocaust apparently cooled the desire of the fortress defenders to hold out; for, the remaining 120 troops surrendered en masse.

At other points along the bridgehead perimeter, enemy resistance to the infantry advance was stubborn and hectic, but the advance continued to make progress. By the use of marching fire, the keystone fort of Metrich was enveloped and reduced.

The rain continued and the river rose unchecked. The inundated area became a mile and a half wide, and supply for the bridgehead forces was a crucial problem.

The eight infantry battalions on the far bank were still fighting with hand-carried weapons and needed armored to counter the infantry-tank teams that the enemy had collected andis was prepared to throw into the battle at this particular stage. Battle casualties had been severe and toll from exposure and trench foot was increasing steadily. A bridge was the only answer.

General Walker, in an effort to employ the 10th Armored Division more quickly, ordered a bridgehead at Thionville by elements of the 95th Division since the river bed in that area was deeply channeled and the flood conditions of the Moselle would be least felt there.

The crossing by units of the 95th Division brought heavy artillery and mortar fire from Fort D'Illange and Fort Yutz, but the bridgehead was slowly expanded, the enemy pushed back, and gains consolidated.

On the morning of the 11th of November, the 357th Infantry drove forward in the center the bridgehead through rugged, wooded terrain along the line of the Maginot forts. They made excellent progress.

On the right of the bridgehead, elements of the 90th Division moved ahead and took up positions along the wooded ridge. The enemy launched a counterattack on the morning of November 11, but was almost annihilated and the advance continued against concentrated artillery fire and strong resistance. Hundreds of German troops, fleeing from the blazing assault on Fort Koenigsmacher, were captured or killed.

During the evening of November 11th, the Moselle River reached its highest crest in 29 years. Its swollen width and racing current made bridge building activities impossible. The artillerymen on the western side of the rivers stood knee deep in mud to support the infantry on the far side of the Moselle.

At 0830 hours, November 12th, a strong battle group of the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division counterattacked. The enemy had finally committed his last large group of reserves in a desperate effort to limit the expanding bridgehead or to smash it back into the wide Moselle. All the artillery in the Corps, over 20 battalions, blanketed the enemy troops and the attack was stopped with heavy losses. American infantry were brought across the river, and, with the aid of the 1st Tank Destroyers counterattacked and turned the Germans' attempty withdrawal into a complete route.

At Thionville, the 2nd Battalion of the 358th Infantry had encircled and swarmed over the heights of old Fort Yutz and began routing out the entrenched enemy defenders. This was accomplished by noon on November the 12th, and the guns of Fort Guentrange and XX Corps artillery blanketed the artillery casemates of Fort D'Illange.

All three regiments of the 90th Division continued to press forward through the Maginot Line, retaking Kerling and seizing the heavy woods which dominated Oudrenne. Along the southern front of the bridgehead, the town of Haute Ham was cleaned out and the high ground overlooking Distroff was firmly held.

The construction of a Bailey bridge for the 10th Armored Division was underway and the armor was ready to strike from an assembly area in the rear of the Cattenom Forest.

Throughout the night of the 12th of November, ferrying activity and bridging operations continued. A smoke generator company of a chemical mortar Battalion screened the Cattenom site proper.



Malling bridgehead much needed and rapid passage for heavy armor into Metz.

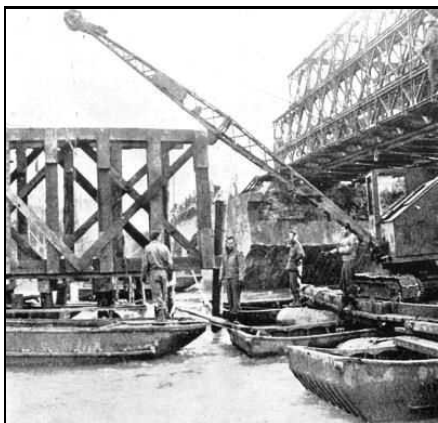
The Moselle was receding rapidly and in doing so uncovered extensive minefields the Germans had planted along the river banks. Moving these submerged mines consumed five valuable hours and many other extensive minefields were encountered throughout the bridgehead area.

During the afternoon, the sweating engineers of XX Corps that completed a bridge over the Moselle at Cattenom. The steady advances of the bridgehead troops had placed them out of range of the lighter field artillery battalions, and a bridge was necessary for close support of the assault teams knifing into the forts and fortified towns east of the river. Under the Corps Commander's urging, work on the vital span had been carried on night and day in heavy clinging mud and under intense artillery fire. At 0540 hrs on November the 13th, the first vehicle raced across the completed bridge. The bridgehead was secure.

A turning point in the entire Metz operations had been reached. The Metz defenses had been pierced in the north and south, and the strongest and most formidable obstacle, the Moselle River, had been breached. In the north, the Koenigsmacher bridgehead forces were ready to surge forward and snap the enemy defenses. The armor was prepared to hurtle behind enemy lines sever the lines of communication. On the south, General Walker contemplating the action of patrols probing to the north, decided to turn the 5th Infantry Division directly north on Metz itself. The XX Corps was ready to exploit its successes and give the coup-de-grace to the fortified region of Metz.

During the fluid action all along the 40 mile front of XX Corps, the Corps Headquarters was faced with the necessity of adjusting the plan for the reduction of Metz to meet the ever-changing situation. The master plan, and its broad outlines, called for a classic encirclement of Metz and wide, sweeping maneuver in order to avoid a slow, costly frontal assault on the strongly defended ring of forts.

Four divisions were available for the operation. While the 90th Division was to swing one arm wide from the north, the 5th Division was to drive up from the south. The 95th Division, along the western approaches to Metz, was to exert constant pressure eastward, compressing the trapped enemy into an ever smaller pocket. The 10th Armored Division stood ready to exploit any breakthrough on the north to drive into Germany itself. The 83rd Division had had the mission of driving on to Saarburg, but was lost to the Corps on November the 11th by Twelfth Army Group order. This mission was then given to the 3rd Cavalry Group which was reinforced.



Double-triple Bailey provided permanent approach to and from Thionville.

In preparing for the final all-out drive on the city of Metz itself and the drive eastward to the Saar, the 1306th Engineer General Service Regiment constructed, at Thionville, the largest Bailey bridge known to have been built in the European Theater of Operations. It was 190 feet long and of the double-triple span type.

The 95th Division had been making excellent progress in its bridgehead in this sector of the Corps front. Infantry of this Division captured the airport at Haute Yutz, north of Thionville and had, by the 14th of November, taken Haute Yutz and the woods to the south, partially enveloping Fort D'Illange. This enabled the engineers to carry on their bridging operations with a minimum of interference from the enemy although the high waters of the Moselle still created a serious problem.

Farther north at Cattenom, the 90th Division continued to push more artillery and tank destroyers into its expanding bridgehead as the towns of Distroff and Oudrenne were taken. Division reconnaissance troops effected a link up with the 95th Division troops to the south.

The Corps Commander now decided to get the armored spear heads of the 10th Armored Division rolling as fast as possible, combat Command "B" was routed over the bridge at Thionville and then turned north on the River Road past Koenigsmacher. Combat Command "A" raced across the pontoon bridge at Mallang and moved east of the Maginot Line on the left flank of the 90th Division.

The enemy made one more desperate attempt to stop the on-charging Corps forces on the 15th of November. The counterattack came in regimental size, supported by heavy assault guns. It was aimed principally at an envelopment of Distroff in the 90th Division zone. To enemy battalions with tanks and half tracks succeeded in driving a wedge between a defenders in the town, splitting them into two groups. The tanks, tank destroyers, and infantry troops in Distroff held their ground tenaciously while Corps artillery pounded the advancing enemy. After several hours of severe fighting the attack was

broken and the the remaining enemy troops attempted to pull back. Corps artillery thereupon lifted its fires to cover all routes of withdrawal and inflicted heavy casualties on the retreating Germans.

In light snow and rain, the 90th Division continued slow, steady advance along the trace of the Maginot Line to reach the high ground overlooking the town of Budling on November the 15th. Another obstacle loomed before the leading elements here. The guns of Fort Hackenberg on the left flank rained heavy and sustained fire. The artillery bunkers of the fort, reinforced by steel and concrete, were proof against the guns of the tank destroyers. Even 8 inch and 240 mm howitzers failed to lessen the volume of fire directed from Fort Hackenberg. Other infantry elements of the 90th Division drove ahead, however, capturing Inglange and Metzervisse. From these vantage points, self-propelled guns hammered steadily at the Hackenberg fortifications. With the aid of the 8 inch guns of Corps artillery, the fort's guns were finally silenced. Later inspection showed this direct fire from the self-propelled 155 mm guns had demolished the walls and turrets, torn cannon lose from mountings, and killed the occupants of the turrets and casemates.

With the elimination of this flank threat from Fort Hackenberg, the advance made rapid progress to reach the steep, wooded ridge that runs from Budling to Veckring.

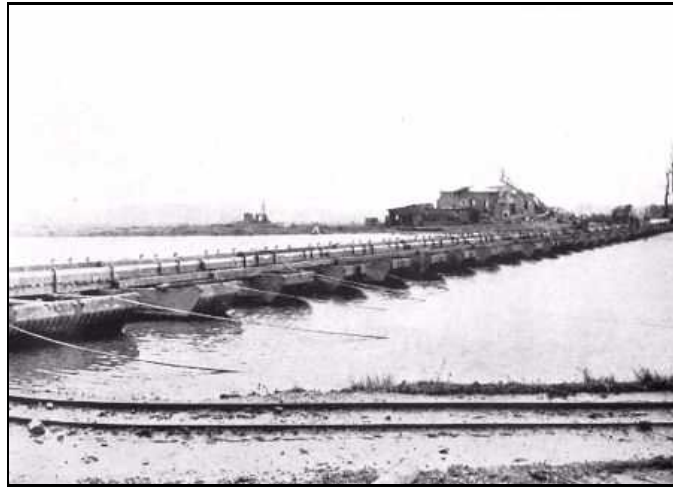
Earlier in the morning of the 16th of November, the armor had broken out of the crowded bridgehead and was racing toward Merzig. The full weight of the firepower of the 10th Armored Division was now brought to bear on the enemy. A strong battle group of the 110th Panzer Grenadier Regiment offered some opposition, but was rushed before it could fully organize. Before darkness set in, Hargarten and St. Marguerite were wrested from the enemy.

Fighting along the ridge between the Maginot forts, the 90th Division further south kept pace with the armor. Metzeresche, Kedange, and the wooded high ground overlooking Hombourg Budange were overrun and occupied. An enemy strong point was set up at Klang, but a determined tank-infantry attack broke through the prepared positions, and the Germans fled to Kemplich.

Progress was rapid on the 17th of November. The armor wheeled swiftly through surprised enemy forces toward the important objective of Bouzonville. The bulk of the German forces had withdrawn or were attempting to withdraw toward the Saar River. Driving ahead in the wake of a squadron of fighter-bombers, the armor cleared Beckerholtz, raced through the Maginot fortifications near Kemplich, and stood ready to assault Bouzonville on the morning of November the 18th.

Throughout the 17th of November, the enemy retreated in long columns along ridges of the Maginot Line. The guns of the tanks and Corps artillery were kept busy cannonading the scattered groups which either fled toward the Saar River line came down from the heights to surrender the XX Corps forces.

Observing that the noose was tightening around Metz and at the enemy was withdrawing in force to the Saar, General Walker ordered the 90th Division to drive south with all possible speed to linkup with 5th Division coming up from the south. This swift and daring maneuver, typical of XX Corps tactics, would trap sizable enemy groups in Metz and its surrounding forts. Furthermore, it would allow the Corps Commander to disengage Combat Command "A" of the 10th Armored Division and send it north toward Saarburg where they 3rd Cavalry Group was already hacking away at the fringes of the Siegfried line in the Saar-Moselle triangle.



*Engineer units believed this heavy pontoon bridge at Uckange (765 ft.)
to be the longest in France.*

After receiving the XX Corps ordered to contact the 5th Division, the 90th Division moved out quickly, overrunning bridges and underpasses before the enemy could demolish them. The drive carried through Aboncourt, St. Hubert and Conde-Northen in rapid succession. The same day, infantry troops crossed the Nied River to seize an important road junction at Pontigny.

The 90th Reconnaissance Troop with a supporting platoon of tanks and tank destroyers took over the high ground east of Avancy and cut the highway there. Late in the afternoon of the 18th of November, an enemy battalion was caught between Avancy and the high ground and blown to pieces by antitank guns and tank destroyers. During the night additional columns were jammed in the darkness against the wreckage of the first column. Tank destroyers and tanks went to work again, and, by morning of the 19th of November, 500 prisoners were taken and 32 vehicles had been destroyed.

Early on the 19th of November, the infantry captured Les Etangs in a surprise attack that plugged another escape route east from Metz. Two more long enemy columns moving east were trapped and the massed fires of the supporting artillery and the fighter bombardment destroyed 63 enemy vehicles.

The infantry was prepared to storm across the Nied River and capture Boulay, but the attack was canceled on XX Corps quarter because the encirclement had already been completed at 1100 hours on the 19th of November by the junction of the 90th Reconnaissance Troop with elements of the 735th Tank Battalion.

TASK FORCE OF BACON



From left to right foreground: General Walker, General Patton, and General Van Fleet Commanding General of the 90th Division, who is shown explaining the situation at his Command Post at Koenigsmacher. In the background are Colonel Harkins, Deputy Chief of Staff, Third Army; Colonel Codman and Major Stiller, aides to General Patton

While this action was going on in the northern sector of the XX Corps zone, the 95th Division increased pressure on the west of Metz. The bridgeheads at Thionville and Uckange were expanded against bitter opposition. Small arms melees at close range were fought frequently, as the enemy stubbornly resisted this direct threat to the inner defenses of Metz.

A strong blow was being struck against the enemy fortifications in the area around for D'Illange. The fort was first subjected to a 30 minute barrage by several battalions of XX Corps artillery and then assaulted by infantry carrying explosive charges of TNT. Final resistance in Fort D'Illange ended during the morning of November 15th. Another Metz bastion had fallen to the grit and ingenuity of the XX Corps forces.

The XX Corps Operational Reports sum up the situation: "General Walker had been studying the situation on the eastern banks of the Moselle and had realized the military potentialities that existed in the area, particularly since intelligence and battle report showed the enemy had been forced to withdraw the bulk of his river line units and commit them in the zone of the 90th Infantry Division. Accordingly, the Corps Commander decided to constitute a mobile striking force. This force would sweep the eastern banks of the Moselle along with three to four mile zone of advance and attack Metz from the north." The mission assigned Task Force Bacon was to drive into the outskirts of Metz in three days, sweep south, clear the east bank of the Moselle, and attack Metz from the north. Speed and firepower were the attributes of this force. Each town was entered with tank destroyers firing point-blank at all points of resistance. Two 155 mm self-propelled guns were placed well forward in the column ready for immediate use against enemy strongholds. On entering towns, marching fire by the infantry and heavy use of the 90 mm guns of the tank destroyers quickly discouraged snipers and gun crews who either surrendered or fled. Flank protection was provided by the wide Moselle on the right and elements of the 90th Division on the left.

Jumping off the 0700 hrs, November 16, the Task Force drove on Guenange and quickly reduced it. The town of Bousse further south received the same summary treatment and was cleared by 0900 hrs. Continuing the rapid pace, Task Force Bacon wrested Ay-sur-Moselle from an amazed enemy and took Tremery before nightfall.

The drive continued on the 17th of November. A path was blasted through several more towns until Antilly and Malroy were reached. About two miles to the south old Fort St. Julien stood squarely astride Task Force Bacon's path into the northern outskirts of Metz. Located on high ground, the fort commanded the two main routes into the city and was reported to be held in force by the enemy.

A plan was prepared for the reduction in this obstacle, and on the morning of November 18th, the attack was launched after Corps artillery from west of the Moselle had hammered the fortified position. The Task Force, after an all-day fight, had entirely surrounded the fort by dusk. After dark, a 155 mm self-propelled gun was brought up and fired point-blank across the moat at the iron gate barring entrance into the fort. The gate collapsed after 10 rounds and the infantry raced into Fort St. Julien.

Reports received about this time related that the German garrison was abandoning Fort Bellacroix in the eastern suburbs of Metz. The fort was quickly overrun and bypassed. As elements of the Task Force moved on toward Metz, a terrific explosion blew up part of the fort and killing the road next to it, killing eight and wounding 49 of the Task Force troops. The evening of November 18th found Task Force Bacon extended along the railroad line in the railroad yards of Metz, ready to sweep into the city itself at daylight.

REDUCTION OF FORTIFIED SALIENT WEST OF METZ

While some elements of the 95th Division were engaged in bridgehead operations east of the Moselle, the remaining elements were gradually drawing a ring around the strong line of fortified groups west of the Moselle on the approaches to Metz. The broad, level land behind these forts offered an ideal tank route into Metz. The forts, however, with their heavy guns were located on steep, heavily wooded ridges and dominated the surrounding terrain. The fortress ring had to be cracked and unhinged before the XX Corps armor and infantry could surge into the heart of Metz.

The 95th Division plan directed two regiments to make diversionary attacks on Fort De Feves and the Canrobert Group while the remaining regiment wheeled north behind the line of forts and then south into Metz.

The first penetrations of the fortified positions were made quickly. Attacking early in the morning of the 14th of November, infantry seized the high ground between Forts De Guise and Jeanne D'Arc before noon, while another force stormed Fort Jussy (Nord) and Fort Jussy (Sud) and captured them under intense artillery and mortar fire.

The inevitable German counterattack was a strong one and succeeded in closing behind four infantry companies cutting them off from their main forces. For three days, artillery liaison planes supplied the surrounded troops with food, ammunition, and medical supplies. The four companies consolidated their positions fought off every counterattack that the Germans launched.

This seemingly unsuccessful attack was a valuable divergent that enabled elements of the 95th Division further north to sweep around the northern system of fortified defenses. Fort De Feves was

taken by small arms fire, and the town of Feves was occupied and the German defenders chased to the south. As the defensive crust was breaking, the 95th Division seized the high ground west of the town of Woippy in one day and fanned out over the low ground west of the Moselle.

The disorganized Germans made the going costly but the Division's offensive was running ahead of schedule. The town of La Maxe was taken and fighting was raging around Woippy as darkness set in on November the 15th.

On the 16th of November, heavy fighting went on in Woippy which was the nerve center of the northern Metz defense. Opposition stiffened along the line, and an attack on Fort Gambetta was repulsed with heavy losses, but the Canrobert Group was successfully contained by Division forces.

By the morning of the 17th of November, German resistance began to crumble. Strong XX Corps columns east of the Moselle were already closing in on the city of Metz. Two full regiments of the 95th Division had succeeded in driving deeply behind the main line of forts protecting Metz from the West. The northern segment of the Metz defensive line had been shattered and the majority of the fortified groups were in the hands of XX Corps.

At midday on the 17th of November, XX Corps alerted agents of the Free French Forces of the Interior, by a prearranged radio code signal, to stand by to seize the switches controlling the demolitions which the enemy had placed on the bridges crossing the Moselle at Metz. Orders were issued by General Walker to the 95th Infantry Division to launch an all-out effort to drive into the city and seize bridges intact.

During the early morning hours of the 18th, patrols along the western side of the river could see huge fires raging in Metz. Just before dawn a series of heavy explosions rocked the city. The Free French Forces of the Interior had failed to reach the control switches and the Germans were blowing the Moselle bridges, abandoning the troops still garrisoning Fort Driant, Jeanne D'Arc, Plappeville, and San Quentin on the west side of the river.

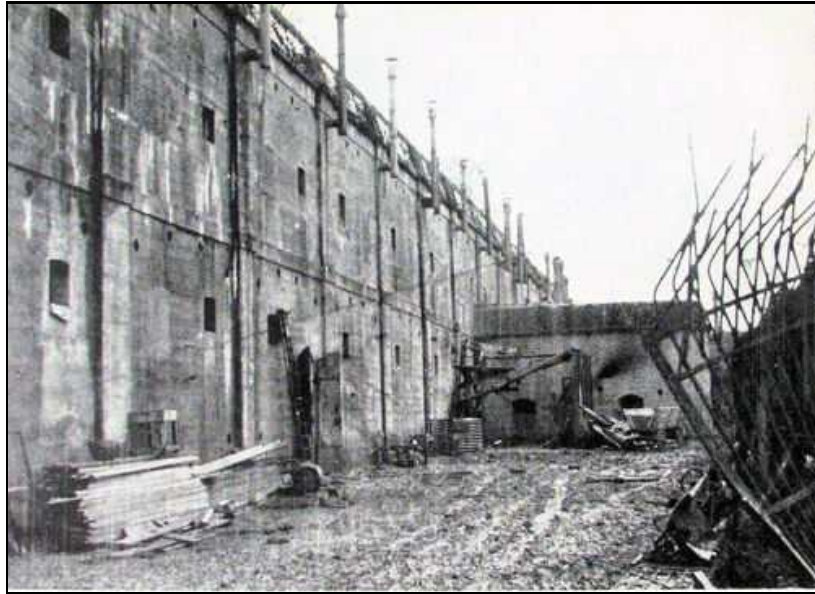
The 95th Division began its final assault on Metz on the 19th of November. Using captured canoes and barges as well as their own assault boats, troops crossed the Moselle to the island formed by the Moselle River and the Metz Canal and quickly cleared it of the Germans. Driving across the canal, they pushed on rapidly to clear three city blocks. Under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire from Forts Driant and San Quentin, another task force struck across the river and began the fight for the northeastern section of the city where the German garrison was under the personal command of Generalleutnant Kittel.

CLOSING IN FROM THE SOUTH

While these steady gains were being made on the north and west sectors of the XX Corps front, the 5th Infantry Division was surging up from the south converging swiftly on the city of Metz.

The 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, in an attempt to halt the advancing Corps drive from the south, formed the switch line on Fort L'Aisne extending to Sorbey. A strong combat patrol was sent to check on the strength of the garrison in Fort L'Aisne on the night of the 10th of November and surprisingly found this strong fortification manned by only a few stragglers. It was learned that the elite

SS Garrison had withdrawn in order to be relieved by a fortress machine gun battalion, but the patrol had reached the fort before the relief was affected. The fort was immediately secured in strength.



Fort L'Aisne, south of Metz, captured while awaiting next relief.

Another attack was made on the river line west of Metz on the morning of the 18th. Forts Kellerman and La Caene were occupied and the huge Fort Plappeville was contained. An effort was made to seize intact the bridge that spans the Moselle to the Isle De Symphorien, but the bridge was blown as a leading platoon was in the act of crossing, and eight men of the patrol were killed. The entire 95th Division was now drawn up near Metz for an assault into the city.

With the fortunate fall of this critical fortress position, the German switch line was unhinged, and General Walker decided to take prompt advantage of this opportunity to make a straight thrust into the city of Metz through the fortress system. The 5th Division was ordered to make a close-in encirclement of the city.

The division moved swiftly north in a series of rapid movements, meeting sharp but scattered resistance. The fortresses, when encountered, were first enveloped and then combat patrols were sent to probe their defenses. In most cases it was found that the garrison had withdrawn and none of the forts had to be taken by assault. To speed the advance, the entire strength of the 5th Division was committed on the 16-mile line.

The Operational Reports of the XX Corps describe the general situation as follows: "The principal problem was to get into Metz before the majority of our fighting troops were evacuated because of trench foot and exposure. All during the operation until the 14th, there had been continuous rain, and the night of the 14th rain turned to snow and sleet, covering the ground to several inches by daybreak. The wet, swampy ground canalized all motor traffic to roads. Entrenchments soon became flooded. In spite of every effort to shelter troops during pauses in the advance, to issue them dry footgear, it was estimated that 40 per cent of the initial strength became casualties to trench foot, and under these conditions it entailed a continuous effort of leadership to keep the attack going. The terrain itself was not favorable, the large expanses of open ground offered no natural cover, and the constant

threat of a sudden defense from the forts, and the calculated small but sharp delaying actions commanding ridge lines and towns constantly threatened the advance."

While the southern defenses of Metz were beginning to collapse under the pounding of Corps forces, strong elements of the 5th Division held the Nied River bridgehead against the 21st Panzer Grenadier Division. Elements of the 5th Division were also engaged in containing the Sorbey Forts, which were strongly held by the Germans, and the fortified Group La Marne which was one of the largest fortress groups in the entire Metz area. These bastions protected an escape route for the Metz garrison.

After a sharp fight, the men and the tanks of the 5th Division forced the surrender of the garrison of the Sorbey Forts on November 16th.

The fortified Group La Marne still stood in the path of the northward racing troops of 5th Division and seemed to be a likely rallying point for the German troops who were now falling back on Metz in confusion. The tremendous walls and casemates of the fortified group, if strongly held, would form a tough barrier. In a quick maneuver XX Corps troops were relieved from the Nied River bridgehead to storm this fort. The vital bridgehead zone was turned over to the 6th Armored Division. During the 18th of November, Fort La Marne was contained on two sides. Infantry assault teams gained entrance into the interior and the small garrison surrendered without firing a shot.

With the collapse of this great stronghold it became clear that the enemy defenses east of Metz had crumbled with the speed and power of XX Corp armor and infantry and the terrific pounding of the Corps artillery. The 5th Division infantry began now to seize fort after Fort in lightning thrusts. After the fall of Fort Lauvalliere, roadblocks were set up cutting off all the roads from Metz to the east. German columns, attempting to flee to the Saar, were stopped and destroyed by the air squadron supporting the drive of XX Corps. In the triangle between the Moselle and the Seille Rivers, the enemy put up a more effective resistance. In this area, the Verdun forts still sheltered a strong defensive force and slowed the advance. A heavy pounding by Corps artillery and fighter-bombers failed to reduce the strong points. No attempt was made to force an entrance into the fort since orders were to bypass them. The city of Metz was the objective now. Casualties from trench foot were mounting. One battalion, for example, reported that 70% of its casualties were from this source. The sweeping advance to the north went on steadily and Fort St. Privat and Verdun were surrounded. By the 19th, units of the 5th Division were fighting in the suburbs of Metz and were strung along the railroad tracks waiting contact with the 95th Division that was to clean out the heart of the city.

The situation at this point is briefly described in the Operational Reports of the XX Corps: "By noon of the 19th, the 95th Division on the north and west and the 5th Division on the south and east had cleared the outlying parts of the city of Metz. What remained was the core of the city enclosed within canals, the Seille River, and major railroad lines. The 90th Division had taken position astride the escape routes east of the city, just west of Boulay, and was assembled with an all-around offense awaiting the clearance of Metz.

"During the day, 5th Division troops mopped up around Fort Privat and threw a ring around Fort Quelleu. On the 20th a strong force moved across the Seille, cleared part of the town, and captured the railroad yards. That afternoon, the 95th Division pushed more troops across the Moselle into the heart of Metz under heavy harassing fire from Forts Driant and San Quentin."

As more and more Corps columns moved into the city, they encountered stiffening resistance from pockets of German troops personally directed by General Kittel, commander of the Metz Garrison. The barracks area northwest of Metz proper was swarming with snipers and machine guns.

Throughout 20th of November, mopping up of the "die hard" resistance continued, as several linkups were made by Corps columns driving into the center of the city from all directions. Remnants of the once powerful Metz garrison were driven into the ever smaller pocket formed by the barracks and military buildings on the islands in the Moselle River. There, encouraged by the presence of General Kittel, a few hundred held out until the afternoon of the 21st, when the Metz commander was wounded.

On the morning of the 22nd, a shower of mortar shells and hand grenades routed out the last stubborn groups of the Metz garrison. The city was reported entirely clear at 1435 hours on the 22nd of November, 1944.

The bypassed forts, Jeanne D'Arc, Driant, Plappeville, San Quentin, Verdun, and St. Privat were strongly held by some 2000 men still supplied with food and ammunition. The 5th Division promptly took over the city of Metz and laid siege to the resisting forts.

The fall of Metz marked a great milestone in the historic route of the XX Corps. The courage and fighting qualities of the XX Corps troops had resulted in a smashing of another "hold or die", Hitler-inspired defense system. The loss of Metz and its encircling rings of mighty forts, and the breaching of the Moselle along a broad front, though at one of its highest flood stages in history, spelled a major disaster for the German war machine. The months of planning by the Corps staff and the daring but accurate decisions had paid off once more in great triumph. The 1500-year tradition of inviolability of the citadel of Metz was destroyed for all time.

In losing Metz, the German Armies lost strategic hinge on which they had hoped to anchor their line on the Western front. Before XX Corps now lay the German border and the Siegfried Line. The battle for France was drawing to an end, a fatal end for the Nazis. Corps columns were already pounding their way to the Saar. The opening rounds of the Battle of Germany were beginning.

The fall of its last great stronghold in France was, moreover, a stunning psychological blow to the German state. Metz was more than a great armored shield against the hammer blows of the XX Corps. It was an historic symbol of victory in arms, a good luck talisman for victorious armies through centuries of war-torn history.

The XX Corps conquered Metz at a time when every factor of weather, terrain, and supply favored the defenders. "General Mud and his Lieutenants Rain, Snow, and Cold" were aligned on the side of German arms. Trench foot was an ever present specter sitting alongside the "Doughs" in their flooded foxholes; and, as the dreary, wet November days wore on, the Lorraine region, lived up to his reputation as the rainiest in France. The XX Corps, limited as it was in many important supply categories, notably heavy caliber ammunition, faced a foe well supplied with food and shells behind his steel and concrete fortification and under orders from his "Fuehrer" to live or die for the Fatherland.

The bridging of the swollen Moselle River under the bellowing guns of the great Metz forts was an engineering feat of the first magnitude, while the sweeping encirclement of the huge forts and their systematic reduction was a triumph of tactics on the part of the XX Corps.

Successful completion of the campaign had its aftermath of ceremonies and formations. This was a great climax to the years of preparation by XX Corps. The liberation of the historic city of Metz brought further honors to the Corps which already carried the famed battle streamers of Verdun, Chateau-Thierry, and the Marne.

On the 29th of November, the French Government bestowed high tribute on General Walker when he was made a member of the Legion of Honor, Officer Class, at a great civic ceremony staged in Metz.

At the same time, General Collier and Brigadier General Julius C. Slack, XX Corps Artillery Commander, received the Legion of Honor, Knight Class.

Major General Andre Dody, Military Governor of Metz, made the awards in the Place de Republique where thousands of people had gathered to witness the proceedings and cheer the parading troops of France and the United States. These were the first American troops to be so honored by the French Government.

Massed standards and banners of XX Corps divisions and regiments headed the big parade and review which was taken by General Walker. French and American military bands provided the music, and the rumble of artillery fire in the distance provided additional sound effects.

Front line troops of XX Corps who participated in the capture of Metz were heartily applauded by the populace. French Regular Army troops who took part in the parade made a fine showing.

After the general officers had received their decorations, the award of the Croix de Guerre with Palm was made to Colonel Charles G. Meehan, Captain David W. Allard, Sgt. S. Bornstein, Captain Guy de la Vasselais, Lt. Col. J. W. Libcke, and Col. H. R. Snyder received the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star, Lt. Jacques Desgranges was given the Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, and the same decoration with Bronze Star went to Tech. Sgt. Donald Post, T/4 Denver Grigsby and T/4 H. J. Schonhoff.

The demonstration at Metz took place a week after General Walker officially turned the city over to the French, following its capture by infantry and armored divisions in two weeks of hard and bloody fighting. Hailed by the press of Metz as the "Conqueror of Metz", General Walker was warmly received by the people of the liberated city.

At a formation held the next day at Corps Headquarters, General Collier made further awards to officers and men of the XX Corps.

The Croix de Guerre with Palm went to Colonels R. John West, Henry M. Zeller, Joseph Shelton, Chester A. Carlsten, and William B. Leitch. Receiving the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star were Colonel William H. Green, Lt. Col. Melville I. Stark, Lt. Col. Joseph Cowhey, Lt. Col. Napoleon A. Racicot, M/Sgt. John Taylor, and M/Sgt. Van K. Barre. The Croix de Guerre with Bronze Star was given to First Sgt. Alexander Berg, Tech Sgt. Roy S. Hahn, and press T/4 Clarence La Pierre.

ACTION IN THE NORTH

Important as was the fortified region of Metz in the strategic aims of XX Corps and Third Army, it was still only a part of the larger effort to fight on through the Siegfried Line to the Rhine. Once again, as it did during the breakthrough from Normandy, the "Ghost Corps" demonstrated its ability to fight on more than one front. While Corps forces were ringing the city and besieging remaining forts, the forward drive to the Saar River never lost its momentum on the north flank of the Corps zone of action where the 3rd Cavalry Group and the 10th Armored Division were operating out of the Koenigsmacher bridgehead.

The 3rd Cavalry Group had served as the eyes of the Corps, during a seven-week river watch along the Moselle, and was continuing to report details of enemy movements, to locate minefields and strong points for the assault troops, and to protect the north flank of the Corps along a broad front. Now, reinforced with tanks and tank destroyers, engineers and artillery, it was organized into Task Force Polk under its commanding officer, Col. James U. Polk, and was assigned by XX Corps the mission of reaching Saarburg, some 20 miles northeast through hostile territory. Further south, the 10th Armored Division was to strike for the German border in an effort to seize intact a bridge over the Saar at Merzig.

Task Force Polk, though lightly armored, used armored tactics whenever possible in its advance to the north. The cavalry by a series of dashes, lightning changes of direction, and sometimes plain, ordinary bluffing, ran the gauntlet of enemy strong points while acting as spearhead reconnaissance for XX Corps, the most mobile Corps in the Third Army. Instead of barging head-on into centers of resistance, the XX Corps cavalry preferred more startling entrances from the flanks and rear, coming through farmyards, barns, or even stone walls. This unit made such frequent use of secondary roads that it was sometimes called the "Cowpath Spearhead."

Using Jeeps, armored cars, assault guns, and tanks and wild, unpredictable cross-country tactics, XX Corps cavalry kicked up such a fuss that the Germans thought it represented at least an armored division. With these "blitz" tactics, some cavalry units were put across the German border near Perl, and were possibly the first Third Army troops to set foot on the soil of the Third Reich. Making full use of the attached tank destroyers and an entire field artillery battalion, the cavalry harried the Germans, driving them further north and east, and shortly an entire squadron had closed across the German border.

Troops of XX Corps who expected a vast change after the German border was crossed were in for a surprise. Everything seemed the same. The people, who had been handed back and forth between warring powers for hundreds of years, looked much the same. Both the French and German tongues were spoken with equal fluency. But the American soldiers knew that they had "liberated" their last town, that they were now fighting in the role of conquerors, and that their letters home would now be prefaced "Written in Germany". The fighting, too, reached at new high in intensity as XX Corps slashed deeper into the heart of the Third Reich. The desperate Wehrmacht used every weapon in its arsenal and every hill and town in a desperate but futile attempt to blunt the sharp instrument that was thrust at its vitals. It fought until it was hurled, battered and bloody, back into the hoped for safety of the Siegfried Line.

On the 19th of November when XX Corps units were entering Metz from five different directions, the cavalry assault in the north had come into contact with the switch line fortifications of the Siegfried Line.

The much vaunted "West Wall" of the Germans extended in depth along the eastern banks of the Saar, and the enemy had in addition erected a switch line of coordinated, mutually supporting pillboxes along the Saar-Moselle triangle. Superb camouflage had made spotting of the pillboxes practically impossible from the air. Consequently, after taking Borg the morning of the 19th of November, the cavalry had no advance warning of the line and its light tanks were stopped shortly afterwards. Colonel Polk at once ordered the entire group to consolidate positions won during the 20th of November, while patrols probed the line barring the advance to Saarburg, eight miles away.

In the meantime, while driving to Merzig, columns of the 10th Armored Division were stopped by strong tank defense just inside Germany.

Along the Corps zone on the north, the Germans that build up formidable defenses over a period of years. A typical tank defense consisted of several rows of heavy concrete "dragons teeth" behind which a deep ditch was dug. The ditch was usually backed up by as many as 10 rows of steel stakes. These defenses were accurately covered with heavy artillery and mortar fire, and, as a result, bridges across the anti-tank ditches were destroyed as fast as they were completed.

It was revealed by prisoners taken in the area that the bridge at Merzig had been blown. Realizing that the enemy was now aware of XX Corps effort to achieve a quick, surprise crossing at Merzig, the Corps Commander directed the armor to consolidate positions and contain the area already taken. He next dispatched another armored column and a regiment of infantry north to crack through the switch line of fortifications of the Siegfried Line and reach to Saarburg.

After a heavy covering barrage, the armor jumped off on the morning of the 21st of November and passed through Task Force Polk. The assault found the enemy ready and waiting with massed artillery, cleverly camouflaged anti-tank positions, and intense automatic and mortar fire. The attack was repulsed. On the next day, another attempt met a similar fate. The infantry was thrown into the fight on November 24th, and, after two days of bitter fighting, managed to seize the town of Tettingen.

While this bitter but inconclusive action was going on in the north, the fall of Metz to XX Corps freed more Corps forces for an eastward push. The Germans east of the city withdrew toward the Saar and the security of the Siegfried line. Wishing to exploit the enemy collapse at Metz, General Walker ordered the 90th and 95th Divisions to seize a crossing over the Saar River between Dillingen and Saarlautern.

MAGINOT FORTS



*Fortifications of the Maginot Line took terrific batterings
but in most cases were still useful.*

The terrain approaching the Saar River is undulant, rolling in a series of gentle slopes to a high plateau and then dropping sharply away to the Saar Basin. The area is laced by the French and German Niefs and their minor tributaries, and each stream has carved out a well-defined valley. There are wooded areas and dense forests of tall, straight evergreens, but most of the land is open and carefully cultivated.

The road net was for the most part a poor one and the systematic blowing of the bridges and culverts along the roads made matters worse. The situation was especially bad because almost all movement of vehicles was canalized along the narrow roads.

The Maginot Line stood between the Saar and the Moselle. Situated on commanding ground, these ponderous forts, although constructed by the eastward-minded French and now manned by a westward-minded Germans, were still strong enough to serve as a barrier in the path of the XX Corps offensive.

The Corps Commander decided to take the most direct route through the enemy held territory between the Moselle and Saar, and ordered the 90th Division into an assembly area near the Nied River on the 24th of November. Movement of the Division eastward from the assembly area was slowed by roadblocks, mines, and blown bridges, but by nightfall of the same day some infantry troops had entered Germany and were approaching the Saar. Observation posts were set up overlooking the river.

The 95th Division pushed on to Niedervisse and Denting where a hospital filled with over 1,300 seriously ill Russian prisoners of war was captured. As the advance continued on the 29th of November, the enemy resisted stubbornly and fought savagely for every foot of ground. Resistance became particularly bitter on the high plateau that looks down on Saarlautern in the Valley of the Saar and on the Siegfried defenses beyond. Heavy artillery fire from east of the river and counterattacks, spearheaded by tanks of the 21st Panzer Division, made the going slow and costly. One German division facing the

hard-pressed troops of XX Corps was called the "Twilight of the Gods" Division, indicative of the "last-ditch" resistance put up by the German defenders west of the Saar. Now, the 95th Division became involved in some of the heaviest fighting of its entire combat history. Many battalions were reduced to 50% of battle strength.

The 95th Division carried the Corps hopes for a bridgehead across the Saar and continued to push on aggressively. It often attacked in darkness and in fog to overrun the German trenches and built-up positions quickly before the startled defenders realized their danger. Hargarten, Merton, Oberfelsberg, Alt-Forweiler, Falck, and St Barbara fell before the assault and bitter, costly fighting. At times, the lines swayed back and forth along the high ridge before the Saar, as the Germans threw in precious reserves of tank-infantry teams in a desperate attempt to halt the troops of the XX Corps west of the river on the approaches to the Siegfried line.

The reason for this became apparent when the high ground was finally secured on December 1st. Only a few miles of flat country dipped down to the river banks, and the Germans were forced to fall back to the city of Saarlautern or east of the river to the high ground beyond. All hope of stopping the advance of XX Corps to the line of the Saar was now gone.

These positions on the crest of the plateau were held as a safety limit on December 1st and 2nd when 10 groups of aircraft, numbering over 400 bombers of the XIX Tactical Air Command, rocked the enemy on both sides of the river.

The final obstacle west of the river was the town of Rehlingen where a thick belt of mines of every type had been sown completely around the town. Engineer efforts to clear a path were repulsed by accurate flat trajectory fire from east of the river and the engineers were methodically picked off. Under cover of darkness and the supporting fires of Corps artillery, a gap was cleared through the mines and Rehlingen was occupied.

The 90th Division, on the left flank of the 95th, pushed its way against tenacious resistance to the west bank of the river and prepared to support a crossing with the fire of all weapons. Several groups of Corps artillery moved into position, ready to lay down a curtain of steel in close support of the operation.

At this time the 95th Division's right flank was exposed by the continued advance of XII Corps to its river line further east. The Division was unable to advance further without bridging the Saar and was attempting to do just that. Incapable of expanding its own troops to cover this area which was heavily wooded and occupied by a large force of Germans, it requested aid from XX Corps Headquarters.

The 5th Division, still investing the holdout forts at Metz, detached one of its regimental combat teams. Attached to the 95th Division on the 1st of December this Task Force (Bell) had the immediate objective of clearing Foret de la Houve. Also attached to the 95th Division at this time were the 6th Cavalry Group and the 5th Ranger Battalion. On the 2nd of December when the woods were cleared, another unit of battalion size from Metz arrived at St Avold.

The Corps was ready by the 2nd of December for its next mission: to seize Saarlautern and its vital bridge across the Saar.

During the afternoon of December the 2nd, the Germans unleashed the first of the tremendous artillery barrages that were to make the town of Saarlautern and the crossing site all but untenable for weeks to come.

The assault waves drove into Saarlautern under this heavy fire and fought in the streets and buildings of the town. The enemy defenses were designed with great ingenuity. Massive pillboxes and bunkers were sandwiched in between normal dwellings and covered the neighboring streets with fire. A harmless looking "Bierstube", a store, or even a doctor's residence might develop into a death trap with thick concrete walls housing small determined bands of German troops.

Battalion objectives, at times, were a block of houses or even a single building. The town itself had been converted into a fortress, and even peaceful looking parks became fiercely contested "no-man's lands". Every street was a battleground echoing with the clatter of machine guns and the roar of tank guns blasting in the heavy walls of reinforced houses. When night fell, the enemy could be heard moving about in the streets and houses, but in the darkness and rain could not be accurately located.

It was realized that the fight through the town from house to house in a conventional type of attack and to seize and hang on to the necessary bridgehead across the Saar would be too costly a process for the already weakened troops. It was also likely that Germans would destroy the bridge as the troops of XX Corps drove closer. So the 95th Division, with Corps approval, decided on one of the slickest tricks of the war. Estimating the psychology of the German defenders, who fought skillfully, but rigidly by the book, it was decided that the only feasible way of seizing the bridge intact was to strike from an unexpected quarter.

After quietly patrolling the riverbank north of the town during the night of December the 3rd, troops of the 95th Division paddled silently across the river in assault boats on the morning of the 4th at 0545 hours. By 0600 hours an entire battalion had crossed over without alerting the Germans and started down the east side of the river. The route led over open terrain but the Germans, taken completely by surprise, had left the outpost positions undefended. As the at battalion moved forward, groups of the enemy coming to occupy the outposts were quickly and quietly captured. As the bridge was reached, an armored scout car with a powerful radio was seized in a commando-like raid and its occupants either bayoneted or captured before they could flash a warning.

The first shots of the whole operation were fired when the startled bridge guards attempted to reach the switches and blow the bridge. One sentry was dropped 5 feet short of his goal.

As this amazing action was taking place, a task force of infantry and engineers bypassed centers of resistance in Saarlautern and fought its way through the town to seize the other end of the bridge on the west bank.

All wires leading to the bridge were immediately cut, and engineers began the work of clearing the demolitions and mines from the structure. Four 500-pound American aerial bombs laid end to end in the center the span, were discovered. These were disarmed and hauled off the bridge.

The bridge was a narrow life-line for large German forces west of the river and a pathway across the Saar for the men and the guns of the "Ghost" Corps. The German forces east of Saar were slow to react to the daring maneuver of the XX Corps troops in taking the bridge, but within a few hours they struck hard in a frantic effort to retrieve their loss. Heavy guns and mortars from the high ground east of the river poured a mass of shells on the bridge and in its vicinity. Guns of caliber as large as 240 mm

were used and the shelling became as heavy as any delivered by the German Army during the entire war in Europe.

The XX Corps rushed troop reinforcements, tanks, and tank destroyers across to strengthen the tiny foothold against strong counterattacks spearheaded by heavy tanks. The small bridgehead was maintained and the order was to hold at all costs.

During the next several days, these strong enemy efforts to recapture the bridge went on. At one time, a tank loaded with explosives and surrounded with suicide troops raced towards the bridge in a desperate attempt to blow it up the tank. The tank was knocked out by a direct hit from a tank destroyer only a few hundred yards from its goal. The bridgehead expanded, but slowly, against a stubborn, persistent resistance. A view city blocks of Fraulautern and several pillboxes were cleared and held by the infantry.

When the heavy concentrations laid on the bridge area from the Siegfried line slackened to some extent, the engineers made a more detailed examination of the bridge itself and found that large-scale preparations had been made for its complete destruction. The importance attached to the heavy stone structure by the German commanders, and their fear of a crossing by XX Corps was clearly revealed when eight huge chambers 25 foot in depth, filled with TNT, were found to be built into the piers of the bridge and carefully camouflaged as manhole covers. Over 6,000 pounds of explosives were removed. The XX Corps now held firmly in its grasp a huge stone bridge over the Saar River capable of withstanding the heaviest pounding of German artillery. Over it poured more of the powerful battle teams of the Corps. From the bridgehead, XX Corps was in a position to carve a substantial segment out of the menacing Siegfried Line, and to carry on its mission of wresting from the Germans the rich, industrial region of the Saar.

By the 6th of December, XX Corps had two more bridgeheads across the Saar, one by the 95th Division about 2,000 yards to the south of Ensdorf and the other in the 90th Division zone at Dillingen. Neither of these bridgeheads was able to push through the heavy defenses of the Siegfried Line. Pillboxes and entrenchments were profuse. There were 40 forts in one area of 1,000 square yards. The belt, itself, was approximately three miles in depth including antitank obstacles on the forward edge. And in the XX Corps zone there was a second line of greater depth 10 or 15 miles to the rear.

These were obvious reasons for the slow and painful expansion of the bridgeheads at this point. The enemy artillery was accurate and for days no bridges could be completed. As a result no heavy weapons or armor were used. On the 8th of December the Saar had risen 2 feet, restricting even more that trickles of food and ammunition into the bridgeheads. The cold and damp of winter were soaking into the bones of the soldiers, some of whom in these areas had to be carried to their weapons. P-47s flew in the low ominous clouds of fog to drop medical supplies. There were no tactical missions.

Such was the front line situation early in December as the remnants of the once mighty fortress system of Metz surrendered.

With most of the 5th Division still containing the forts there was little choice for the Germans but to starve or get out. Various attempts at reconciling the Germans were rebuffed but on the 6th of December Fort San Quentin finally surrendered. There were 22 officers, 635 enlisted men, and two American soldiers held as prisoners. All were ravenous. The same day the 87th Division supplied relief in this area and a 5th Division battalion motor-marched to Lauterbach to rejoin his regiment there.

At 1200 hours on the 7th of December, unconditional terms of surrender were agreed upon and Fort Plappeville was vacated. Again units in the 5th Division were relieved and on the 8th of December proceeded by motor to Creutzwald. On this day across the Moselle River, Fort Driant, the next-to-last if not the mightiest of all the forts, was surrendered. At 1600 hrs, with a single company remaining to evacuate the prisoners, the remainder of the 5th Division prepared to move immediately forward to within striking distance of the Siegfried Line.

Fort Jeanne D'Arc surrendered on the 13th of December to the 26th Division which moved in to Metz for arrest.

When the 2nd Infantry Regiment closed in its area on the 9th of December the 5th Division was once again an integrated unit. The balance of the Division had progressed through many square miles of woods heavily barricaded with roadblocks, craters, fallen trees, and antitank ditches.

With Ludweiler, Wadgassen, Hostenbach, and Differten cleared, the Saar River line in this area was under control. With the link-up of the 10th Infantry Regiment and the 95th Division the entire Corps zone now fronted the river.

Troops of the 5th Division from December the 9th to 19th practiced formations for assaulting pillboxes, brushed up on demolition tactics, and maintained heavy patrols on constant watch for enemy activity. Thus it was when the Germans mounted a furious, lashing counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

Combat Command "A" of the 10th Armored Division had the mission of capturing a bridgehead at Merzig. In the days prior to the 6th of December this Command had come into contact with the heavily defended fortifications of the Siegfried switch line and, with the 3rd Cavalry Group, was restricted to probing along the trace from west to east. On the 6th of December control of the entire north flank of the Corps was placed in the hands of the Cavalry Group. The Group's zone extended from Besch on the Moselle River to Schwemlingen with a patrol reaching Driesbach. It was operating on a 15-mile line, nearly a third of the Corps front.

In retrospect the successful conclusion of the battle for Metz was the result of the close teamwork and loyal strenuous efforts of every member of XX Corps and attached troops. The breaching of the Moselle and the encirclement of the entire fortified region of Metz was a military operation that required the intensive employment of almost every branch of the service. And important in the operation were all Corpsmen from the man with the M1 on the front lines to the man in the chemical battalions which generated smoke to screen Corps activities from enemy eyes.

The guns of the Corps artillery battalions were frequently emplaced within range of small arms fire. This was necessary in order to give the closest possible fire support to the hard-pressed Corps assault waves which were battling against some of the strongest fortifications encountered anywhere in World War II. Instances were noted of 8-inch guns firing from ranges of 1,000 yards in an effort to drive the enemy from his concrete bunkers.

The steel steeds of the 735th Tank Battalion and tank destroyers of the 4th Destroyer Group roared up to the very walls of the forts to rip gaps in the embrasures for the infantry.

The engineers of XX Corps conducted their bridging operations in mud and cold, under heavy shelling, to speed the build-up of the offensive. Then they moved in with the infantry to blast their way into forts with satchel charges and "beehives".

The 69th Signal Battalion, the "nerve system" of the Corps, kept the "brain" or Corps Headquarters in constant contact with the encircling "arms" of the Corps units which were engaged in choking off the fortified region of Metz. The wearers of the crossed flags had a rough job in repairing wire knocked out by enemy artillery and in moving all over the Corps area in all kinds of weather with scattered enemy groups harassing them.

The 819th Military Police Company and the various intelligence agencies made invaluable contribution to the Corps effort in directing the heavy civilian population.

The numerous medical corps units, from the man with the Red Crosses on his helmet to the huge field hospitals, were a smoothly functioning, mercy team. They were always there to relieve the suffering and reduce the number of deaths from battle wounds and exposure.

The tiny, defenseless liaison planes were a familiar sight over the front lines, pinpointing enemy gun batteries and strong points, and often coming to the rescue of isolated units with badly needed supplies.

The battle for Metz was an operation on Corps level and its successful completion remains a lasting tribute to a great fighting Corps.

Successful completion of a campaign had its aftermath of ceremonies and formations. This was a great climax to the years of preparation by the XX Corps. The liberation of the historic city of Metz brought further honors to the Corps, which already carried the famed battle streamers of Verdun, Chateau-Thierry, and the Marne.

On the 29th of November, the French Government bestowed high tribute on General Walker when he was made a member of the Legion of Honor, Officer Class at a great civic ceremony staged in Metz.

At the same time, General Collier and Brigadier General Julius E. Slack, XX Corps Artillery Commander, received the Legion of Honor, Knight Class.

Major General Andre Dody, Military Governor of Metz, made the awards in the Place de Republique where thousands of people had gathered to witness the proceedings and cheer the parading troops of France and the United States. These were the first American troops to be so honored by the French Government.

Massed standards and banners of XX Corps divisions and regiments headed the big parade and review, which was taken by General Walker. French and American military bands provided the music, and the rumble of artillery fire in the distance provided additional sound effects.

Front line troops of XX Corps who participated in the capture of Metz were heartily applauded by the populace. French Regular Army troops who took part in the parade made a fine showing.

After the general officers had received their decorations, the award of the Croix de Guerre with Palm was made to Colonel Charles G. Meehan, Captain David W. Allard, Sgt. S. Bornstein, Captain Guy de la Vasselais, Lt. Col. J. W. Libcke, and Colonel H. R. Snyder received the Croix de Guerre with

Gold Star, Lt. Jacque Desgranges was the given Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, and the same decoration with Bronze Star went to T/Sgt., Donald Post, T/4 Denver Grigsby and T/4 H. J. Schonhoff.

The demonstration at Metz took place a week after General Walker officially turned the city over to the French, following its capture by infantry and armored divisions in two weeks of hard and bloody fighting. Hailed by the press of Metz as the "Conqueror of Metz", General Walker was warmly received by the people of the liberated city.

At a formation held the next day at Corps Headquarters, General Collier made further awards to officers and men of the XX Corps.

The Croix de Guerre with Palm went to Colonels R. John West, Henry M. Zeller, Joseph Shelton, Chester A. Carlsten, and William B. Leitch. Receiving the Croix de Guerre with Gold Star were Colonel William H. Greene, Lt. Col. Melville I. Stark, Lt. Col. Joseph Cowhey, Lt. Col. Napoleon A. Racicot, M/Sgt. John Taylor, and M/Sgt. Van K. Barre. The Croix de Guerre with Bronze Star was given to First Sgt. Alexander Berg, T/Sgt. Roy S. Hahn, and T/4 Clarence La Pierre.

THE SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE DOORWAY TO TRIER

Fighting east of the Saar River had developed into a bitter slugging match against tenacious enemy resistance. In the towns of Saarlautern, Fraulautern, Saarlautern Roden, Ensdorf, and Dillingen, each block became a separate battlefield as tanks roamed up and down the streets looking for targets. Enemy machine guns were zeroed down every thoroughfare. To gain ground, Corps infantry resorted to the technique of "mouse-holing", blasting their way through reinforced concrete walls from house-to-house. They cleared the houses room-by-room only to have the Germans infiltrate back again.

Scattered through the towns and around the surrounding countryside was an almost impenetrable maze of pillboxes. They were usually dug in flush with the ground with only the turret exposed. In addition, they were carefully camouflaged with natural growth, and were hard to locate even from the air. Even when detected, the heavier types were a problem to reduce. Artillery, alone, was rarely sufficient. One steel turret, encountered during the fighting at Ensdorf, withstood several direct hits from a 155 mm self-propelled gun and over 50 rounds of 90 mm fire from a tank destroyer. The pillboxes were placed so as to support each other and lay down a continuous band of fire along all likely approaches. When Corps assault teams fought their way close to these defenses, the Germans retired inside and called down their own artillery on the positions.

Calls for the close support of Corps artillery were frequent and the fire-happy "red-legs" were never too cold nor tired to respond to the call of "Fire Mission"!



Many unequal duels were fought at close range between German guns, well protected by several feet of concrete, and the heavy cannon of Corps artillery, dug into the deep Lorraine mud behind the doubtful protection of sandbags. On one day alone, over 18,000 rounds were fired against the Germans by Corps artillery units. German prisoners expressed wonder at Corps "automatic" artillery though ammunition was restricted and firing was limited accordingly.

When the German defenders were driven deep into their shelters by heavy bombardment, the infantry-engineer assault teams drove in with small arms fire, fragmentation grenades, and explosive charges to clear the pillboxes of the enemy. After their capture, the concrete walls of the enemy defenses were usually destroyed by about 1,000 pounds of TNT.

Other factors besides the fierce enemy resistance made the going rugged. The weather was cold with light snow and almost continual rain. Foxholes filled with water so fast that they were almost useless. Another "war of nerves" developed because of the Wehrmacht's ingenious and extensive use of mines and booby traps. In abandoning buildings, the Germans often planted large and carefully concealed time bombs which, in some cases, resulted in casualties for units seeking billets as protection against the miserable weather.

The Wehrmacht troops lashed back with strong, tank-supported counterattacks but gradually the bridgeheads were developed and held. A breach had been ripped in the first line of defense of the Siegfried Line itself.

LIBERATION DAY: THIONVILLE

The 12th of December 1944 was Liberation Day at Thionville. It was a joyous day to people who after five years were again under their own rule and were again beginning to enjoy their own way of life. They did not now have Nazi appointed officials, but those of their own choice. On Liberation Day, children wearing colorful native costumes of the countryside danced happily about. Civic clubs and organizations paraded with their banners streaming. Blue uniformed Chasseurs with feathered berets and gleaming French horns added to the festive air. Officers and unlisted men from XX Corps

represented the liberating army and were most hospitably received at the City Hall. The Book of Honor was signed and then there was a public reception at which many a XX Corps soldier sampled Moselle wine.

In the meantime, Third Army and XX Corps were planning a drive to and over the Rhine and the seizure of Frankfurt. XX Corps Field Order No. 14 dated December the 16th called for a continued advance to the east to penetrate the Siegfried Line. Two Divisions launched the attack on the 18th of December. The 5th Division, replacing the 95th Division at Saarlautern, inched its way past pillboxes and concreted resistance. At Dillingen, the 90th Division used its own bridgehead and until the 20th of December seemed on the verge of consolidating this area.

The Nazi High Command on the Western front had, however, made some plans of its own. On the 16th of December, the great German counteroffensive had begun in the Ardennes.

The Third Army was compelled to discontinue its aggressive attacks to the east and to swing the biggest part of its forces to the north. The XX Corps took up a defensive position along the line of the Saar. The hard-won bridgeheads at Dillingen and Enseldorf were abandoned; but the bridge at Saarlautern was held again by the 95th Division and remained both a constant threat to the Germans and a painful reminder of how they had been outwitted in early December.

On the 17th and 20th of December, respectively, the 10th Armored Division and the 5th Infantry Division were hurried north to knife into the southern flank of the German bulge, and so these divisions passed from the control on XX Corps. The Corps continued, however, to hold its zone along the Saar, and it made preparations in depth to repulse a possible German offensive in its sector. The Corps also kept up its policy of making repeated aggressive feints to keep the enemy off balance and in fear of an all-out attack, thus preventing the shift of German reserves to the "Battle of the Bulge". Limited objective attacks and aggressive patrolling were the main activities of the thinly spread XX Corps during the remaining days of December and the entire month of January.

On the 23rd of December 1944, the city of Metz held civic ceremonies honoring the heroic XX Corps, as citizens of the city gathered to celebrate their return to freedom after five years of German occupation. Children in native costumes joyously unlined the streets of the city. Troops of the newly organized a French Army as well as the veteran combat units of the vaunted XX Corps participated in the review.

A special commemorative medal was struck for the colors, and a special battle streamer prepared in the colors of the Citadel of Metz. The latter was attached to the XX Corps flag beside its other streamers, each significant of a great achievement. In this square near the Cathedral of Metz, General Walker, representing the officers and soldiers of his Corps, was made and "Honorary Citizens of the City of Metz" when he was presented with a handsomely embossed scroll, indicating such citizenship.

General Walker, accompanied by a combat soldier of the Corps, presented the city with a framed and decorated map showing the route of the XX Corps in its rapid advance across France resulting in the liberation of Lorraine.

The Ardennes offensive had started six days earlier and the extent of the penetration was still unknown to the citizens of Metz, who became fearful. However, the mere presence of the Corps Commander for a few minutes serve to reassure them that Metz would not be given up.

On the 31st of December, the 160th Cavalry Group on the left flank of XV Corps to the south had warning that an attack would be made on its left. The implications were that a penetration might be effected between the XV and XX Corps. The 95th Division thus alerted followed developments closely. On the request of the 106th Cavalry Group to Division Headquarters, the 5th Rangers was notified to be prepared for instant movement. Later the entire 378th Infantry Regiment which was in Division Reserve received warning orders. It was reported that the enemy had an estimated 2,000 troops with ample artillery support. By this time the right flank of the 95th Division was exposed and penetration was noted toward the rear.

Although the 106th Cavalry Group did not have the information nor the whereabouts of the enemy, subsequent action by the 2nd Battalion, 387th Infantry Regiment, located and engaged approximately 300 enemy troops in the town of Werbeln and unknown dispositions in Schaffhausen. Both towns were cleared by the 2nd of January in better house-to-house fighting. The Cavalry Group then took over the sector and the 95th Division returned to a normal defensive routine. This attack seemed to be part of an over-all New Year's demonstration for Hitler in which all units in Germany were to participate.

According to captured German prisoners, if these preliminary piecemeal attacks had been successful, a drive approaching division size would have been made. Quick response by the 95th Division had saved any undue action.

Passive defense was maintained from the 3rd to the 20th of January. It employed the use of nightly reconnaissance patrols and attempted to keep the enemy guessing at feinted moves.

Captured prisoners of war in the Saarlautern bridgehead and an increase in patrol activity now gave evidence that an attack might be expected soon. On the night of the 19th of January new prisoners revealed that the attack would come before dawn.

Patrols began to infiltrate skillfully at 0500 hours so that surveillance of the enemy could be maintained for the flushing-out to come with daylight.

Beginning at 0600 hrs and continuing until early afternoon, intense enemy artillery fire covered the area. Following the initial barrage, troops were seen to move into the open streets and openly advance toward XX Corps lines. Some moved out too soon and were caught in their own shelling. The action of the attackers, exclusive of the patrols, was inept and prisoners were found who did not even know their own companies. The whole attack lasted less than one hour and yet it indicated a changing complexion of the German defenses.

Our patrols were also in action across the river and were keeping the Germans apprehensive. This was the situation on the 28th of January when the 26th Division relieved and 95th Division for a move north to Belgium.

The growing weight of the Third Army attacks against the Ardennes salient cost XX Corps the loss of another veteran division when the 90th Division left Corps controlled to move north. The 94th Division was moved into the Corps zone to occupy positions along the north flank. To give this untried Division battle experience, XX Corps committed it to a series of limited-objective attacks against the base of the Saar-Moselle Triangle.