

RECOLLECTIONS OF

JAMES F. CLARK

REGARDING HIS SERVICE IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY

JULY 16, 1942 TO OCTOBER 18, 1945

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INTRODUCTION

The text of this story was written by James F. Clark. It is his account, in his words, of his recollections of his time in the United States Army. The footnotes have been supplied by his son, Merle Clark, in order to place the events he described in context and to provide some perspective of the significance of those events in history. Thus, to be clear, this document was composed by Merle Clark in July of 2017. The “Recollections” of James F. Clark start on page 2.

The words written by James F. Clark constitute his brief outline made nearly fifty years after the events described. On reading and studying his outline, I realized that his recollections of times and events were strikingly accurate. Lest my footnotes overwhelm what he wrote, it is suggested the best way to read this document is to read each footnote in full, stopping as his story goes along, and reading each footnote to understand the context and significance of what was taking place. Alternatively, since his outline is quite brief, read his outline through and then come back and read each footnote and fit it into the sequence of events he outlined. The story outlined was a part of some of the most significant events in the history of World War II.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

After you have read the brief outline below written by my father, now heavily footnoted by me, it is my sincere wish that you then read the short book, **One Hell of A War: Patton’s 317th Infantry Regiment in World War II**, by Major Dean Dominique, USA, (Ret), and Colonel James Hayes, USA (Ret.), published in 2014. This remarkable little book is primarily the account of Colonel James Hayes, which he initially put together for his family, but which became the basic core of the book published in 2014 by Dean Dominique.

The reason why this book is so important to the recollections of my father is that it is based on the writings and recollections of a man who, like my father, trained at Camp Forrest, Tennessee, participated in the Tennessee Maneuvers, endured the cold training at Camp Phillips, Kansas, completed desert training in Arizona, further trained at Fort Dix,

New Jersey, then went to Camp Kilmer to disembark to Scotland on the Queen Mary. Thereafter, as a platoon leader of the 317th Infantry Regiment (to which my father was assigned), he was in all the same places, traveled the same roads, and participated in some of the most significant military action of World War II. I should point out that Colonel Hayes was in a position of great responsibility and was exposed regularly to frontline fighting; whereas my father, as a truck driver, was spared the worst horrors of infantry fighting. But they were in close proximity from the time of arriving in Normandy in August of 1944, until the 317th was dispersed during the post war period in the fall of 1945.

But this man, Colonel James Hayes, was no ordinary soldier. He was second in his class at West Point in 1942, and was assigned to the 80th Infantry Division at Camp Forrest Tennessee as a platoon leader of the 317th Infantry Regiment. After arriving in Normandy as a part of Patton's Third Army, over the next ten months, he fought in some of the bloodiest battles of the European Theatre of the War. By the end of the war, he was a Battalion Commander and had received a Silver Star, Two Bronze Stars, and a Purple Heart. The fact that he was a well-educated man, who was in a position of significant responsibility, but who saw what he saw as a soldier in the midst of the fight, allowed him to write with a unique ability and perspective. His accounts are as compelling as any found in our popular histories, such as Stephen Ambrose's Citizen Soldiers, Band of Brothers, and others. It would be a shame not to read his book. As you will see, Hayes was in the cross-hairs of history, and, occasionally, the spotlight was on him.

RECOLLECTIONS OF JAMES F. CLARK

I. TRAINING

On July 16, 1942,¹ I reported to the United States Army Examining Center at the armory in downtown Louisville. Then I was sent to Fort Benjamin Harrison the same day. July 17 – I took the IQ test. July 18 – I was on k.p. July 19 – boarded a troop train about midnight. Went to bed in Pullman cars and rode all night. We had no idea what direction we were going until the next morning when it was light in western Kentucky. Next we were in Nashville by 2:00 p.m. On July 20 – arrived at Camp Forrest, Tullahoma, Tennessee. Here I was assigned to Service Co. 317th Infantry, 80th Division, as a truck driver. Three months basic training, night and field training for several months. January 19, 1943, Merle was born. I came home for 6 days.

¹ Eight months earlier the Empire of Japan made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (U.S. Naval Base) on December 7, 1941. The United States Congress, at the request of President Roosevelt, issued a declaration of war between the United States and Japan. Four days later Germany and Italy, who were allied with Japan as the Rome-Tokyo-Berlin Axis Powers, declared war on the United States. By July of 1942 Germany occupied nearly all of Europe, with the exception of England, and had conquered most of Russia. (See map). Also, by July of 1942 the U. S. had won the decisive battle of Midway against Japan; however, the war in the Pacific against Japan would last longer (August 14, 1945, VJ Day) than the war in Europe against Germany and Italy (May 8, 1945, VE Day).

May 1, 1943 – We left Camp Forrest for Tennessee Maneuvers². August 1, 1943 – maneuvers were over at Gallatin, Tennessee, and I came home for a 14 day furlough. August 15, 1943 – reported to Camp Philips at Salina, Kansas. After two furloughs home, and killing time, on December 10, 1943, we left by troop train for Yuma, Arizona, and desert maneuvers.³

March 15, 1944 – boarded troop train for Fort Dix, New Jersey. April 10, 1944 – Lucille and Merle came to New Jersey by train. We lived in Bordentown about ten miles from camp. May 15, 1944 – We came home on furlough by train. June 15, 1944 – Lucille and Merle came home because we were moving to Camp Kilmer, the staging area for going overseas.⁴

July 1, 1944 – out of New York Harbor aboard the Queen Mary,⁵ the largest ship afloat at that time. Over 21,000 of us on this ship. July 7, 1944 – arrived at Greenock, Firth of Clyde, Scotland, and loaded on a train to near Wellington, England, (Northwich, England, 225 miles south of Greenock).

² In June 1941, Major General George S. Patton conducted maneuvers with the 2nd Armored Division in the Manchester, Tennessee, area. The area was selected because the terrain resembled France, Belgium, and Germany. In the initial maneuvers Patton soundly defeated the opposing forces, proving large scale armored fighting, based on Civil War General Nathan Bedford Forrest cavalry doctrine. As the result of the initial Patton maneuvers the Tennessee Maneuver Area was established. Between 1942 and 1944, in seven large scale training exercises, more than 850,000 soldiers from the 25 U.S. Army divisions trained in the Tennessee Maneuver Area. Camp Forrest, Tennessee, was within the Tennessee Maneuver Area.

³ Because the desert warfare campaigns of North Africa had reached the final stages, the primary mission of the Desert Training Center (world's largest military post) changed and the soldiers who trained there were deployed worldwide. The name was changed to reflect the mission as a theatre of operations to train combat troops, service units, and staffs under conditions similar to those which might be encountered overseas. The area was 350 miles wide and 250 miles long.

⁴ Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, was constructed in 1942 by the War Department as the best site to serve the New York Port of Embarkation. It was 22 miles from New York City and was reached by the mainline of the Pennsylvania Railroad. At Camp Kilmer troops sent personal effects home, received medical injections and the supplies needed before loading onto transport ships for travel to the European Theatre of Operations.

⁵ The Queen Mary was constructed as a very large passenger ship in 1934. Around 1940 it was converted to a troopship painted grey and was sometimes called the "Grey Ghost." It and its sister ship, the Queen Elizabeth, were the largest and fastest troop ships involved in the war. They often carried about 15,000 troops in a single voyage, and often traveled without convoy and without escort. Their high speed made it difficult for U boats to catch them. (See photo of Queen Mary).

II. EUROPEAN TOUR OF DUTY

A. FRANCE

August 1, 1944 – crossed the English Channel from South Hampton, England to Omaha Beach, France.⁶ First night in France was very scary even though we were 40 to 50 miles from enemy lines. The second night we drove all night toward front lines. The third day we were in contact with the enemy. We were moving through the countryside and small towns so fast it was hard to keep supplies up.⁷ We passed through St. Lo, Falaise, and Argentan. Our infantry's first battle was Argentan⁸ and Angers near Le Mans. August 16 – here at Le Mans we joined in with Patton's third army.

⁶ The invasion of the Normandy beaches of France occurred on June 6, 1944. The Germans had feared that the expected invasion would come across the narrower part of the English Channel somewhere near Calais, which is directly across the narrow Strait of Dover. General George S. Patton was in England organizing a new army, the Third Army. The 80th Division became part of Patton's Third Army. The German High Command thought that the Allies would save their best general for the main invasion. Thus, Patton's presence in England served to tie up on the French mainland German divisions that were not promptly deployed to stop the Normandy landings. The Allied High Command had deliberately led the German defenders to expect the major invasion to be near Calais. Thus, it was not until August 1, 1944, that the Third Army crossed into Normandy. By that time a foothold had been established in Normandy, although the fighting had been horrible in the initial invasion and then in the hedge rows of Normandy in June and July of 1944. On August 1 the Allied invasion was 45 days behind the planned schedule for "Operation Overlord"

⁷ But in just thirty days of the Third Army operations, Patton had not only caught-up with the planned schedule, his men were now actually where they were slated to be at D-Day plus ninety days. Ladislav Farago, biographer of Patton, points out the startling transformation in the entire American Plan:

But the inescapable realities of the campaign had overridden all the original plans and dispositions. By September 12 (D plus 98) the Third Army stood on a line the forecasts had expected it to reach on approximately D plus 350... Between 25 August and 12 September they (Third Army) had advanced from the D plus 90 to the D plus 350 phase line, thus covering 260 phase-days in 19 days. Coming from far behind, it was the privilege of General Patton and his Third Army to drive the whole campaign swiftly forward and bring the war to the brink of total victory in less than three weeks of ingenious fighting.

⁸ There exists in history a great deal of criticism for the Allies' having allowed an entire German Army escape complete annihilation in the famous "Falaise Gap" near Argentan. (See map of Falaise Gap). Patton realized the significance of the moment and wanted to close the Falaise Gap, but he was ordered to halt by General Omar Bradley. Patton told his staff officers and ordered:

The question why XV Corps halted on the east-west line through Argentan is certain to become of historical importance. "I want a stenographic record of this conversation included in the History of the Third Army." Patton's Third Army had officially been operational in Normandy for only eleven full days, and this was the *first*-though not the last-time that his armored columns had been ordered to halt, when there was no organized German resistance in their front, and a great chance to envelope and trap thousands of retreating enemy soldiers. Hanson, The Soul of Battle, page 368.

What was the result of delay? On the next week of confusion and Allied uncertainty, an enormous force of nearly 175,000 to 200,000 surrounded German troops now had for another week a fifteen mile corridor of escape between

B. BATTLE OF LORRAINE

We really were covering a lot of ground each day. Really had the enemy on the move. We were moving to the east to Orleans, crossed the Loire River to Sens, Troyes, Chalons Sur Marne, St. Miheil.⁹ Here, at St. Mihiel we saw old trenches and empty shells

encircling though strangely complacent Allied armies. As historian Victor Davis Hanson states in The Soul of Battle, at page 367:

George Patton's race a week later to the Seine to trap all the German forces in Normandy west of the river should never have been necessary. There was no need for a bitter fall in the Lorraine or even worse winter in the Bulge. Most of those fleeing enemy troops could have been surrounded and destroyed in early August 1944 – hundreds of miles to the west at the small town of Argentan, not far from the Normandy coast.

General Dwight G. Eisenhower walked the battlefield of Falaise and described it on page 279 of his Crusade in Europe:

The battlefield of Falaise was unquestionably one of the greatest “killing grounds” of any of the war areas. Roads, highways, and fields were choked with destroyed equipment and dead men and animals that passage through the area was extremely difficult. Forty-eight hours after the closing of the gap I was conducted through it on foot, to encounter scenes that could be described only by Dante. It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh. (See photos of destruction in the Falaise Gap).

Compare Eisenhower's description of the Falaise Gap with that of Colonel James Hayes, at page 37: “The Falaise Gap resembled the worst picture of hell, an inferno transferred to a bucolic but now hellish area. Bodies and parts of bodies of men and horses littered the area. Destroyed vehicles, abandoned aid stations full of dead bodies, and overturned artillery and anti-aircraft guns blocked the roads and trails. A few German medics awaiting capture tried futilely to treat some of the wounded. Over the entire area the stench of death permeated into the smallest places because August had turned warm and the sun beat upon the dead bodies causing them to putrefy even more. Many of the dead men and horses had died days earlier and they in particular had become bloated. Men and horses had distended and bloated stomachs. When a horse began to putrefy its stomach distended and caused its legs to form a vee shape. Finally, when rigor mortis set in the vee became a sign post on the battlefield and served as landmarks to identify particular locations. The men, unlike horses, went into rigor mortis in the position in which they died. Some men had hideous grin. Others looked bewildered and sad. None of the dead looked peaceful. Worst of all where those who had been blown in half so that only the upper or lower portion of their body still remained.

The destruction of the German Army assumed monumental proportions so cleaning up the area became tedious and time consuming. (See photos). Yet August had turned into an extremely warm month and this speeded up the decay of the dead soldiers and dead horses. In a final part of this sickening process when the bodies had putrefied to the extent that stomachs of men and horses could no longer contain the gas within them, the skin ruptured and the stinking gases in the corpses loosed itself into the area heightening the pervasive smell of death. As disgusting as this process seemed, I had now become used to it and moved through the area doing my job of damage assessment.”

⁹ The Third Army had another chance to catch the German forces that had escaped from the Allied pincers at the Falaise Gap. But again orders from General Bradley prevented Patton from encircling the retreating German army at the Seine River. Historian Victor Davis Hanson states, at page 348, The Soul of Battle:

The American indecision at the Seine River- when there was as yet still plentiful supplies available – marked the *second* but unfortunately not the last time that Patton's plan either to annihilate a defeated army or to press on ahead for an even wider envelopment had been

from World War I. August 25 – on to Toul We had been moving 15 to 20 miles a day and shuttling back and forth two and three times each day coupled with Patton’s tanks moving so fast we were using gas faster than it could be flown in. (See photo regarding Patton’s “Red Ball Express”). Mainly this slowed Patton’s tanks down a lot, and the war as a whole, and gave the enemy a chance to make a stand on the higher ground just across the Moselle River at Pont A Mousson, between Nancy and Metz (September 15). Hardest fighting was trying to cross the Moselle.¹⁰ We were almost a month crossing. We lost a lot

overruled. The consequences of the failure of nerve were that, when Patton was denied gasoline ten days later in Lorraine, there were German troops aplenty nearby to reconstitute a defense. Had he pressed on at top speed from the Seine, or at least been allowed to sweep along the eastern shore of the river to catch retreating German armies, then when his supplies were later cut off, German divisions would still have found themselves surrounded. Such a strange war, Patton thought; root out Germans, chase and scatter them, then stop before entrapping them so that they might escape and regroup, then resume the pursuit against a now desperate and savage entrenched foe.

¹⁰ Colonel Hayes said of the crossing of the Moselle River: “After the failure of the hasty crossing attempts a Pont-a-Mousson and Vandieres, the 317th began its preparation for a deliberate crossing of the Moselle River. Unfortunately, the river in the stretch from Vandieres to Dieulouard averaged about 100 feet in width and had a current of perhaps 5 mph. Colonel Cameron hoped to find fords in across the river which, of course, would make the crossing easier. He assigned the mission of finding suitable crossing points to me. My ability to speak French proved invaluable in this task.

I began my search by visiting Limey, a town several miles west of Pont-a-Mousson where several of the resistance fighters told me about a priest who had an interest in local history, particularly the sites used by the Romans when they invaded Gaul. The priest proved easy to find and eagerly seized the opportunity to defeat “le sale boche” (dirty Germans). The priest told me the Romans used a ford at Dieulouard to cross the Moselle during their numerous incursions into Gaul. The ford extended across the northern corner of an island in the middle of the Moselle called Ile de Scarpone. Moreover, if I traveled to the hill north of Dieulouard and found the statue of La Vierge (the Virgin Mary) and looked to the southeast I could easily see the ford’s exact location. He gave me directions for finding the statue and assured me that the ford still existed.” Hayes, at page 63.

After the war was over Hayes found himself back in the area of the Moselle crossing. He stated: “I want to digress briefly. In 1947 I found out why I had located the ford over the Moselle River at the Ise de Scarpone. The reasons arise out of General Patton’s study of military history. I found this out when in 1947, as aside-de-camp to Lieutenant General Geoffrey Keys, I was assigned to serve as a battlefield guide for Mrs. Patton and her son George. General Patton had promised his son a tour of the battlefields when the son graduated from West Point in 1947. However, as you know, General Patton died of injuries received in an automobile accident so Mrs. Patton decided to do the tour with her son. She called on General Keys, a lifelong friend, to assist her and because I spoke French I received the assignment. Actually, Mrs. Patton spoke French fluently because as a young woman she had been educated in France. During the course of the tour, she told me that when she and then lieutenant Patton had been married a few years they took a vacation through France. They travelled over the routes used by the Roman Legions because General Patton believed that there would be a Second World War and the Germans would control the continent before America entered the war.

The reason General Patton researched the Roman legion routes is because he knew the Roman Legions always travelled along roads that minimized the effects of weather. Generally speaking, the Romans travelled along ridges and took routes which led them to fords over the major rivers. He also believed that the allies would then have to invade the continent and he planned a campaign that which he believed might occur. She showed me the tour book they had used on their trip in 1927 and on the flyleaf of that book Lieutenant Patton had made a sketch of the Cherbourg Peninsula with the route which the Third Army actually followed in 1944 sketched on it! General Patton knew from his study of the Roman campaigns that the Romans legions forded the Moselle in the vicinity of the area

of men killed and captured.¹¹ (See photos of Moselle River area). After crossing the Moselle fighting was heavy around Dieulouard, Nomeny, Morhange, and Mt. St. Jean.¹² October 15 – It started raining a lot. Rained every day for a month. It was so muddy we could hardly walk. I would sleep in the seat of my truck with a blanket over me. My legs couldn't straighten out and would cramp. I would turn and move seems like 40 times a night. When it got colder sometimes we would sleep in barns in the straw or whatever. November 25 – When it got much colder we would stay in homes where the French people had moved because of the shellings.¹³ All the farm houses and barns were built together

I knew as Dieulouard. Therefore, he reasoned, if he placed troops in that vicinity some enterprising officer would find the ford! My finding the ford also revealed the wisdom of teaching cadets French although at the time of the decision none of those involved could have foreseen the use to which the language was put at Dieulouard. That decision no doubt saved hundreds of casualties throughout the course of the fighting in France.” (See photo of General George C. Marshall, General Patton, and General Horace McBride recognizing the 80th Division's crossing of the Moselle River. Photo taken at 80th Division Command Post, Dieulouard, France).

¹¹ Of this moment in time, Victor Davis Hanson wrote:

As far as Patton was concerned, there should have never been a Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and January 1945, much less a Rhine crossing in the spring of 1945. The war against Germany in the West should have been settled outright in late August early September 1944, right here in Lorraine. A little over three months before the Great German December offensive in the Ardennes, Patton had raced from the Seine and across the Meuse River, as thousands of scattered and demoralized Germans trailed back in small groups with scant equipment to the fatherland. For a moment the way to Germany was wide open and border less than a hundred miles away. Patton was moving his Third Army headquarters sixty to eighty miles forward every three to four days. The summer gallop through southern France had essentially crumbled all German resistance in the West- at least for a few days until retreating units could meet new divisions racing up from Germany to fashion some sort of resistance near the Siegfried Line on the German border.

“With German forces in total disarray at the end of August,” Carlos D’Este has written, “a virtually undefended Lorraine beckoned like the Rhine sirens of mythology.” Patton was poised on the eastern banks of the Meuse River and now sensed that Wehrmach itself was tottering. A final drive over the Rhine would create such terror among the remnants of the defeated armies that Hitler’s resistance would cease. The dreaded West Wall, or Siegfried Line, that constituted Germany’s last defense at the end of August was essentially undefended, the doors to the pillboxes rusted, the keys lost. The German chief of staff of the West summed up the state of Nazi resistance at that point: “There were no German forces behind the Rhine,” remarked General Gunther Blumentritt, “and at the end of August our front was wide open.” The Soul of Battle, at pages 330-331.

¹² In the Lorraine in late August the Third Army simply ran out of gas and sputtered to a halt. Patton, in fact, needed between 300,000 and 400,000 gallons *a day* to keep his vast mobile army of over a quarter of a million men moving at the rate he felt necessary to pressure the Germans into disintegration. But on August 29, the decision was made by Eisenhower and his subordinates not to meet Patton’s fuel requirements. By August 31 the Third Army was receiving just 31,000 of its requested allotment of 400,000 gallons. Hanson, at page 331.

¹³ Patton added in his diary that the delay would surely mean horrendous American casualties of the type incurred during World War One on the same ground: “Montesec has a huge monument to our dead. I could not help but think our delay in pushing forward would probably result, after due course of time, in the erection of many other such monuments of men who, had we gone faster, would not have died.”

side by side or up and over. Most all of the farm houses were in towns and villages. There were no houses or barns on the farmland. They drove out all their stock to the farm at morning and back at night. This was true in France, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium and Austria. November 30 – St. Avold where the fighting, casualties, and death tolls were heavy moving on the Maginot Line.¹⁴ (French Maginot Line and German Siegfried Line

Post war statistics bear out Patton's macabre assessment. Patton, who had driven nearly four hundred miles eastward to the Moselle River in a mere thirty days in August, would now, without adequate supplies and against an entrenched enemy, require a hundred days to crawl a little over twenty to thirty miles further east of the river. The war would not end in late summer 1944, but go on to spring 1945. Hanson, at page 333

Colonel Hayes said of this time: "With the capture of Mount St. Jean, the 80th division controlled La Grande Couronne de Nancy and with it, controlled most of the approaches to the Alsace-Lorraine Plain except for the dreaded Fortress of Metz. In all of its existence the Fortress of Metz had never fallen to an assault by an enemy force. We established defensive positions along the west bank of the Seille River. Once again, however, we had outstripped our logistics and the Third Army could advance no further. We had only enough gasoline and ammunition for a defense but not enough for an offence. Moreover, winter had arrived and with cold, sometimes freezing rain. The area turned into a sea of heavy mud which would make the attack on the Metz even more difficult." Hayes, at page 104. (See photos re Metz).

"Military history rarely describes winter campaigns for the simple reason that most armies virtually suspend operations during the winter months because of the toll such campaigns impose on one's forces. However, the Germans had lost the initiative and General Eisenhower decided that we should keep attacking as soon as supply levels became adequate for an offensive. By early November we had replenished our supplies and we received orders to attack the Fortress of Metz." Hayes, at page 104.

The 317th was in the process of clearing St. Avold which had fallen the day before. That night a series of huge explosions rocked the city. The Germans had placed delayed action bombs in many of the buildings which might be used as billets and these bombs began to explode. No one knew how many bombs the Germans had planted or when the bombs would explode. Apprehension gripped all the units. Colonel Hayes stated: "The 80th lost about fifty men in these explosions. We immediately relocated troops to buildings still occupied by French inhabitants. St. Avold was in Alsace-Lorraine and at least half of the population owed allegiance to Germany. We no longer had the luxury of a sympathetic population. For instance, we moved the regimented CP into a large home whose owner complained that we were subjecting her family to hardship. She explained to me that her husband was in the Army. It took a lot of questioning from me to find out that her husband was in the German Army and not the French Army as she would have us believe. When we moved in the inhabitants, our losses from the explosions ceased."

¹⁴ The sober British military historian Hubert Essame concluded at the end to Patton's ride, "Providence had given Eisenhower the greatest cavalry leader and as good an army as his country had ever produced: at the decisive moment he failed to use them." Another British military observer, Ian Hogg, agreed: "There can be little doubt that Eisenhower's decision was wrong in every particular, and if Patton had been given his supplies, and his head, there is every likelihood that the war could have been shortened by six months. It is a matter of record that two-thirds of all of the Allied casualties in Europe were suffered after the September check." It was as if after bombing Tokyo on March 11, 1945, Curtis LeMay, flush with victory, ran out of bombs and so ceased his B-29 attacks on the Japanese cities.

By September 7, it was clear the Germans were dug in on the other side of the Moselle River. Whereas ten days earlier the entire German chain of command was in ruins, scattered in retreat throughout France, now von Rundstedt had resumed control of all armies in the West with a momentary freedom from Hitler's interference to do whatever was necessary to restore and orderly defense. The German Army opposing the suddenly stationary Patton now had seven divisions rushed up under the old Russian-front veteran, General Otto von Knobelsdorff. Hanson, The Soul of the Battle, at page 334.

Stephen Ambrose sums up the tragedy of Patton's Third Army running out of gas as it reached the Siegfried Line:

are very close in proximity). **December 20 – Crossed the Sarre River (German: Saar; French: Sarre) at Sarreguemines near the German border. [Note: My father told me in 1993, as I planned a trip to Europe with my History Club: “Be sure to see the Lorraine Cemetery at St. Avold, France. This is where I would have been buried had I lost my life there. (See photos of Lorraine Cemetery). We fought in the Lorraine area from September 6 to December 20. All those buried in the Lorraine Cemetery were killed in the area. Seven hundred are from my division, the 80th (Blue Ridge) Division.” Little did he know that the very next year, 1994, he, I, and my son, Bennett Clark, would join scores of 80th Division veterans in a fiftieth anniversary trip to follow the route of the 1944-1945 path of the 80th Division.]**

B. LUXEMBOURG AND BELGIUM AND THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

We were ready to move into Germany toward Zweibrucken when we had to pull back because of the German breakthrough¹⁵ at Bastogne, Belgium that had several

Their fuel tanks were empty. And the Germans had gotten into the Siegfried Line. They had fuel problems, too, but as they were on the defensive they could dig their tanks in and use them as fortified batteries. Their supply lines had grown shorter... They had reached home. Men who saw no point in fighting to retain Hitler's conquests in France were ready to defend their homeland. The German officer corps began taking terrified survivors of the rout of France and organizing them into squads, platoon, companies, battalions, divisions-and suddenly what had been a chaotic mob became an army. Slave labor, meanwhile, worked on improving the Siegfried Line. The Germans later called the transformation in their army and in the defensive works the Miracle of the West. (See photos of Siegfried Line).

A week or two may seem a short time, but in war it is everything, and in that brief period the German army was literally reinvented on the Western front. Hitler scoured the German countryside for every able bodied man to the front.

In turn, Patton would now need sixteen weeks to clear Lorraine of Germans, whereas once it would have been possible in a few days –had he kept applying pressure with his huge outflanking movement of late August, when he dreamed of careening across the Rhine far ahead of the other Allied armies. The weather of early fall would now turn bad, unseasonably bad, the days would shorten and flying time for support fighters would diminish; the roads would soon be muddy and booby trapped; and elaborate systems of ambush would make the conquest of the Lorraine a horrendous battle for the slogging American troops. The German soldiers who would spearhead the stiff resistance were in great part those veterans who had once been humiliated and defeated- and allowed to escape- during the prior August in Falaise and Seine envelopments added only further tragic irony. Ambrose, The Soul of Battle.

¹⁵ The Battle of the Bulge was the Allied name given to the surprise German Ardennes Counteroffensive through the densely forested region of Walkonia in Belgium, France, and Luxembourg on the Western front. The German Offensive was intended to stop Allied use of the Belgium port of Antwerp and to split the Allied lines, allowing the Germans to encircle and destroy four Allied armies and force the Western Allies to negotiate a treaty in the Axis Powers' favor. Once that was accomplished, the German leader Adolph Hitler believed he could fully concentrate on the Russians on the Eastern Front. The Ardennes Counteroffensive was the idea of Adolph Hitler, whose preparations and plans were conducted with the utmost secrecy. Hitler and the German High Command selected their best military leaders and used their best equipment in the counteroffensive. The Germans used around 450,000 men, 1,500 tanks and assault guns, and 4,224 artillery pieces. Between 70,000 and 125,000 of their men were killed,

American outfits surrounded. We drove north all night in the longest convoy I ever drove in at night. The convoy moved slowly at times, fast at times, stopped at times. I got so sleepy at times I didn't know if I was going forward or backwards. It was about 150 miles¹⁶.

missing, or wounded in the campaign. There were 610,000 American troops involved in the battle. There were 89,000 casualties with 8,600 killed. It was the largest and bloodiest battle fought by the United States in World War II.

¹⁶ The Germans' surprise Ardennes Counteroffensive was initially successful and created a large breakthrough in the Allied Lines in the Ardennes. As the full extent of the German offensive became known, a meeting of the Allied High Command was held at Verdun, France on December 19. Present were Supreme Allied Commander Eisenhower, British Air Marshall Tedder, Beddell Smith, General Bradley, General Devers, General Patton, General Bernard Montgomery's chief of staff, and a group of staff officers. Eisenhower and the commanders quickly agreed to stop offensive action in all Allied sections to concentrate on blunting the German drive. The Allies retreat was to draw a stop line at the Meuse River. Once the German attacks had been contained, the Allies would counterattack. Eisenhower asked Patton to commence the move, under Bradley's supervision, with at least six divisions. Patton's response was that he would start as soon as Eisenhower's conference was over and that he had already left sets of instructions with his staff and by telephoning the code word the plan would be put in motion at once. He said he could attack the morning of December 21 with three divisions. This moment is famous in U.S. History. It is recounted by Patton biographer Carlos D'Estes as follows:

Forty-eight hours! Eisenhower was not amused, wrongly assuming that Patton had once again picked a very inopportune moment to act publicly boastful. "Don't be fatuous, George," he retorted, in obvious disbelief. "If you try to go that early, you won't have all three divisions ready and you'll go piecemeal. You will start on the twenty-second and I want your initial blow to be a strong one! I'd even settle for the twenty-third if it takes that long to get three full divisions."

Eisenhower was dead wrong: It was not Patton the boastful but Patton the student of war at his absolute best. Where others at Verdun came with only vague ideas and without specific plans, Patton had devised *three* plans, each tailored to meet any contingency that his superiors might direct. "This was," writes Blumenson, "the sublime moment of his career." After more than thirty-four years, it was as if destiny had groomed him for this single, defining instant in which the fate of war rested upon the right decisions being made and carried out by the men in that dingy room. While near panic existed elsewhere in the Third Army there existed a belief in a magnificent opportunity to strike a killing blow. While others debated or waffled, Patton had understood the problem facing the Allies and created a plan to counterattack the Germans and occupy Bastogne – which, although not yet surrounded, was clearly soon to be besieged. By contrast Bradley, whose army group had been attacked, "mostly observed" throughout the two hour conference, "saying little, offering nothing." Even he realized that the only principal players were Eisenhower and Patton.

Opinions vary, but certainly the reaction of some present that day was skepticism about yet another smug prediction by Patton that was quite out of place in this somber setting. Strong noted: "There was some laughter, especially from British officers, when Patton answered "Forty-eight hours." Codman witnessed "a stir a shuffling of feet, as those present straightened in their chairs. In some faces skepticism. But through the room the current of excitement leaped like a flame." John Eisenhower writes: "Witnesses to the occasion testify to the electric effect of this exchange. The prospect of relieving three divisions from the line, turning them north, and traveling over icy roads to Arlon to prepare for a major counterattack in less than seventy-two hours was astonishing, even to a group accustomed to flexibility in their military operations."

On December 20 we arrived in Gonderange, Luxembourg after moving all night 150 miles from Altviller, France, to help free Luxembourg from the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge.¹⁷ I was so tired I don't remember much until Christmas Eve. We were in

Suddenly to turn the Third Army ninety degrees to the north along icy roads in terrible winter weather when its supply dumps were located to support the drive to the *Westwall* was a logistician's worst nightmare. It posed equally daunting challenges to Patton's subordinate commanders, but the months of training and experience in combat now paid off handsomely. "Altogether it was an operation only a master could think of executing" noted Blumeson. Moreover, only a commander with exceptional confidence in his subordinate commanders and in the professional skill of his fighting divisions could dare risk such a venture. Patton not only never hesitated but embraced the opportunity to turn a potential military debacle into a triumph.

In the forty-eight hours they had been given to get into position, Maj. General John Millikin's III Corps had struggled for more than one hundred miles over icy, unfamiliar roads in snow and fog. But, as promised, at 6:00 a.m. across a twenty-mile front on the morning of December 22, some sixty-six hours after Patton's assurance at Verdun, three divisions launched the first Allied counterstrike of the Ardennes Campaign.

Bradley would later offer the highest praise to Patton he would ever accord:

True to his boast at Verdun, Patton, having turned his Third Army ninety degrees, attacked on December 22. His generalship during this difficult maneuver was magnificent. One of the most brilliant performances by any commander on either side of World War II. It was absolutely his cup of tea – rapid, open warfare combined with noble purpose and difficult goals. He relished every minute of it, knowing full well that this mission, if nothing else, would guarantee him a place of high honor in the annals of the U. S. Army. Carlos D'Este, Patton A Genius for War, at page s 678-681.

To Colonel Hayes of the 317th Infantry, here is how it came to him: "Sometime around 0200 on 17 December the phone in our operations room run. I answered the phone. Colonel Max Johnson the division chief of staff, was on the other end. He had been my military history instructor during my senior year at the Academy and I admired him for his intelligence. He wanted to know how many trucks it would take to move the 317th. I told him we needed about 27 trucks per battalion and could probably load the entire regiment in about 90 trucks. He told me that the trucks would arrive shortly and that the regiment had orders to move north on route N-1 towards the Luxembourg border. Someone from the Army staff would meet us in route and give us further orders. He knew nothing more other than to say there had been a big German attack in the Ardennes. I awoke Colonel Fisher and told him of the orders I had received. Then I awoke the regimental S-3 and directed him alert the regiment and to prepare for movement. The trucks arrived at about 0500 and my 0600 the regiment moved north on route N-1, the main north and south road between Metz and the small Duchy of Luxembourg. We did not know our destination other than to move north until we received further orders. It became extremely cold and we had not been supplied with proper winter gear despite the disastrous expenses with trench foot during the attack on Metz. My feet and hands were like blocks of ice as were my driver's. We had to share the driving chores to permit us to warm ourselves." Hayes, at pages 142-143. (See photos of convoy to the Ardennes).

The 317th was the first regiment of the 80th to get rolling north. It was loaded and moving north on the road between Metz and Luxembourg. It was extremely cold and the soldiers simply wrapped blankets around their overcoats to keep them warm. "Piled twenty-five to thirty men in open trucks we skidded over icy and crowded roads for the entire day and night," Kenneth Roettger of E. Company recalled. "Fog, dampness, and cold added to the misery." Dominique at page 143. (See photos of the "Bulge").

¹⁷ Colonel Hayes described the situation at that time: "The situation became chaotic. Rumors abounded. We heard that Germans dressed as GI's were misdirecting traffic. Assassination squads supposedly were trying to kill General Eisenhower. Our losses we heard were staggering (as indeed they were). No one knew what to believe and everywhere one went questions like "who won the World Series" had to be answered or you were in deep trouble."

reserve in Lintgen, Luxembourg. I remember as if it had happened yesterday. It snowed a lot and got really cold. We were invited into a home Christmas Eve to sleep where it was warm. (See photo). The family did not have anything for Christmas. We had been given candy Christmas Eve. We gave our candy to the children. On December 25, Christmas Day, as we were still in reserve not doing anything, one of my buddies said let's go to Church this morning. There was a Catholic Church up the street one block away to the right looking north on the main highway. (See photos of Lintgen Church). We went to the Church. Half-way through the service we heard planes over the Church. We thought we would be bombed. A minute later a bomb exploded a short distance away. After Church we went back to our area and learned that a bomb had been dropped in our area. Three of our buddies had been killed. I can still see them lying there. We moved on to Colmar and Berg. Our company Command Post and kitchen was in the Grand Duchess Castle at Berg. The Grand Duchess was exile in England.

Each day the roads got slicker for as long as the snow stayed and it stayed until March. The snow would drift 10 to 15 feet at night in the hills around Wiltz near the Luxembourg and Belgium border. It was so light at night we had to white wash our trucks and the men on patrol wore white coveralls made from sheets donated (see photo) by the Luxembourg people.¹⁸ We were in Mersch, Colmar, Berg, Echternach, Ettlebruck, and Diekirch, and Wiltz. Nice little towns and people. January 15 – Heavy fighting around Wiltz then toward Bitburg, Germany.¹⁹

Colonel Hayes stated: “We now received orders to seize Diekirch the summer residence of the Duchess of Luxembourg. We no longer had trucks so we walked. The town was unoccupied so we did not have to fight for it. I don't really remember the entire sequence of events because I had no sleep for several days and the days simply merged into each other. Finally, however, when we reached Diekirch I did get some sleep. I fell asleep in the Duchess' bed (without the Duchess of course)!” Hayes, at pages 144-145.

Frances Rajnicek of Cleveland, Ohio was in H Company. He recalled:

“I remember moving through the Ardennes at night, below zero and in eight inches of snowfall with an 81mm mortar tube. The climate conditions were just right for every time I would exhale, the water vapor would condense and freeze on my glasses. A colonel who was behind me asked why I was trying to climb a vertical hill. As I turned to answer, he saw my iced glasses, so then he took the tube and told me to clean my glasses. This went on for a couple of hours.” Hayes, at page 147. [Note: We met Rajnicek during the 1994 50th anniversary trip of the 80th Division.]

¹⁸ The weather conditions in the Ardennes of 1944 were the coldest temperatures in fifty years.

¹⁹ Victor Davis Hanson makes the following comments in regard to the Battle of the Bulge:

The great tragedy of the Bulge was that the Americans suffered the great majority of their dead and wounded in the campaign after Bastogne; that is, in late December and January, well after the German momentum had been checked. In horrific conditions of subzero weather, under constant German artillery bombardment, they were now ordered to push the head of the German salient slowly back to the Rhine. Germans who had been recklessly on the offensive now became even deadlier on the defensive, as GI's were forced to sleep out in the snow and to attack entrenched tanks and machine guns.

C. INVASION OF GERMANY

By Febraruy15th the snow was off in around Bitburg then we went back south a long all night drive in convoy. I was so sick with the flu I guess I couldn't drive. They let someone drive for me. We went south near Trier through the Siegfried Line, then east to Kaiserslautern.²⁰ March 25 – the road from Kaiserslautern to Manheim about 20 mile

As the Third Army occupied Bastogne and helped to deflate the German counterassault, Patton the first day of 1945 praised his men, emphasizing the nature of their long march from Normandy, the caliber of the enemy opposition, and the ideological nature of their struggle:

From the bloody corridor at Avranches, to Brest, thence across France to the Saar, over the Saar into Germany, and now on to Bastogne, your record has been one of continuous victory. Not only have you invariably defeated a cunning and ruthless enemy, but also you have overcome by indomitable fortitude every aspect of terrain and weather. Neither heat or dust nor floods nor snow have stayed your progress. The speed and brilliance of our achievements are unsurpassed in military history... Under the protection of Almighty God and the inspired leadership of our President and the High Command, you will continue your victorious course to the end that tyranny and vice shall be eliminated, our dead comrades avenged, and peace restored to a war weary world. Quoted by Hanson, The Soul of Battle, at page 328.

Said Patton of the Battle of the Bulge: “... During this operation the Third Army moved farther and faster and engaged more divisions in less time than any other army in the history of the United States... No country can stand against such an army.”

²⁰ By February 4, 1945, Patton felt he was still somewhat stymied and was on the defensive, as he wrote his wife. But that was not the situation, as Victor Davis Hanson summarizes:

Even as Patton wrote, he did not fully realize that the Battle of the Bulge was largely over, and his Third Army was once again free to drive eastward on their own into Germany. Nor did he fathom that his army had only about a hundred days left in the war, and its greatest successes – the greatest successes of the entire Anglo-American army in Europe – were to come. True, his supplies were to be chronically interrupted, and his official orders were to engage and hold the Germans in the south, while the main Allied thrust was to resume once more under Montgomery in the north. Still, Patton felt that he had finally enough freedom and gas to head for the Rhine and beyond. “I am taking one the longest chances of my chancy career; in fact, almost disobeying orders in order to attack, my theory being that if I win, nobody will say anything, and I am sure that I will win.” Hanson, at page 294.

Of the slow, businesslike British plan to approach the Rhine to the north, Patton scoffed, “Let the gentlemen up north learn what we are doing when they see it on their maps.” In his way of thinking, the Germans were exhausted after their failed Ardennes offensive, and there were now thousands of German soldiers west of the Rhine River who could be flanked and trapped – the river was not an obstacle for his own army’s progression farther into Germany as much as a hindrance for the retreating Germans who could more easily be killed west, rather than east, of it. Hubert Essame has written of Patton’s decision in February and March to resume a war of movement and speed:

Patton’s objections to the comparatively passive role now assigned to him were, however, based primarily on more subtle grounds. No American general had a better grasp of the human element in war; no one realized more profoundly that morale is never constant. From his experience in two wars he realized that troops in contact with the enemy should never be allowed to remain quiescent; allow them to sit still and acquiesce in a routine of

stretch was littered solid on each side of the highway with German army trucks, tanks, and whatever aircraft had strafed and bombed.²¹ (See photo). April 1 – After two days of waiting for Patton’s tanks to cross the pontoon bridge our engineers had put across the Rhine at Manheim (see photos) we crossed and went north to Mainz then to Frankfurt and to Weisbaden. Here we found a warehouse loaded with champagne, wine, and cognac the Germans had to leave behind because they were in a hurry to get away. Did we ever load up.²² Now we knew the war would be over soon.

live and let live with the enemy and they will brood to their own moral undoing, action, and offensive actions at that, alone brings release. This, allied with the concept of speed, was the very heart of the Patton approach to battle. With his army already probing the Siegfried defenses he had no intention whatever of complying literally with SHAEF’s written orders consigning him to the defensive. Quoted by Hanson in The Soul of Battle, at page 294.

²¹ According to Hayes the description was: “Kaiserslautern is at the western end of a long gorge through a densely forested and mountainous region which extends for several miles eastward to the city of Bad Durkheim. Only one east-west road traverses the gorge. The sides of the gorge rise steeply from the road which in some places is almost cliff-like in character. Into this gorge, the Fifteenth German Army passed in order to reach Bad Durkheim and the rather extensive road net which led to the Rhine and the several bridges leading across it. Disaster struck before they could execute their plan of retreat.”

The Air Force bombed Bad Durkheim. The debris from the demolished houses and the cratered roads created a huge obstacle and effectively prevented the German Army from exiting the gorge. The Fifteenth German Army had nowhere to move its vehicles laterally and the pressure of the units moving in from the rear simply clogged the road even more. It seemed to me that twenty miles of men, horses, wagons, trucks, and artillery were trapped in a huge jar into which an immovable cork had been plugged. They couldn’t get through the sides and they couldn’t dislodge the cork.

The slaughter was awesome and in some ways worse than Argentan. Ammunition from the burning vehicles exploded. The cries of the wounded men and horses filled the air. Chunks of bodies littered the area and survivors begged to be captured and taken to places of safety. The German Army thought only of escape and offered no resistance. The 317th advanced elements with whom I rode had no time to collect prisoners and that process was left to the reserve elements when they moved forward.

I suppose the worst part of this Dantean Inferno was the change in myself. Whereas at Argentan I felt some pity for the Germans, here at the Kaiserslautern-Bad-Durkheim rout I felt exultation. They were the enemy who had killed or wounded my friends. To hell with them, they deserved this disaster. Hayes at pages 187-189. (See photo).

²² Hayes summed up this campaign: “Patton’s Palatinate Campaign ended with the 317th in Kaiserslautern as German resistance continued to deteriorate in front of the regiment. “It was my opinion,” Patton wrote, “that, if the war ceased at that moment, troops under my command would have had the best and most successful campaign in history.” Casualties began to drop and moral soared.” Dominique and Hayes, at page 189.

After the crossing of the Rhine and Main Rivers, it was on to Wiesbaden and as Colonel Hayes stated:

Once we landed, the capture of Wiesbaden gave us no difficulty. In fact, the word soon spread throughout the regiment that we had liberated a champagne factory located on the outskirts of the town. In what followed, every GI who got near the factory liberated several bottles of champagne for his own reserve. It seemed, although it is probably apocryphal, the fighting for the next several days were marked by a devil-may-care abandonment which proved the wisdom of the British policy of giving their soldiers grog before a battle. Hayes, at page 195. (See photo of my dad’s friend, Lieutenant Lockhardt).

D. FINAL DAYS OF THE WAR IN EUROPE

April 14 – On north to Kassel. It was the worst torn up town we saw. (See photo). From Kassel we went east to Eisenach, Gotha, and Erfurt.²³ Here at Erfurt we found country ham, eggs by the crate at a poultry house, and we loaded up again. It was the first time we found anything to eat. They had to leave in a hurry again. April 10 – On east Weimar and Limbach. At Weimar the brakes went out on my truck and nearly cost me an awful accident. From Limbach west back to Gotha then south to Bamberg, Nurnburg, then southwest to Regensberg, crossed the Danube River, then to Dingolfing. Crossed the Isar River to Simbach. Crossed the Inn River at Braunau, Austria. May 7 – here the war was over.²⁴ (See photos). The German 6th Army came out of the mountains surrendering by the thousands. They came out in trucks, cars, Jeeps, motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and ox car wagons, and walking. They came out for five days so congested we could hardly meet on the road. (See photos). They came out and surrendered to us rather than to the Russians.²⁵

²³ Colonel Hayes describes in the chapter headed “Concentration Camps,” at pages 200-205, the 317th’s encounter with the German concentration or extermination camps, including Ohrdruf and Buckenwald. My father never mentioned anything about this. (See photos of Patton, Eisenhower and Bradley at concentration camp).

²⁴ Patton’s men fought continually from Normandy to the outskirts of Prague in 281 straight days. How Patton, in the manner of a Great Captain of antiquity, or a dashing Civil War general, was able to lend his own stamp to such a huge monstrosity as the Third Army defies imagination. Hanson, at page 301.

²⁵ Patton’s Third Army, despite its emphasis on envelopment and the resulting capture of territory – 81,522 square miles of conquered land, 12,000 cities, towns and villages taken – inflicted frightening damage on the enemy. The statistical imbalance between German and Patton dead was staggering: The Third Army killed over 144,500 of the enemy, five times more dead than it had suffered, and wounded nearly four times as many Germans. In total casualties – dead, wounded, and captured – the Third Army caused the enemy ten times the losses that it suffered – by far the greatest ratio of damage inflicted versus losses incurred in the entire Anglo-American force. The astonishing number of enemy captured – over a million Germans – is a testament to Patton’s preference for huge enveloping pincer movements. No other Anglo-American army took so many Germans captive. Hanson, at page 383. (Emphasis supplied).

Word of the German surrender came to Colonel Hayes as follows: “We continued south and a day or two late, now sometime about 7 May, we established CP in the town of Kirchdorf. The assault battalions were south of the town in the foothills of the Austrian Alps. (See photo). The fighting ahead promised great difficulty because we had absolutely no experience in mountain fighting. I made my reconnaissance to prepare my plans for the attack order which we knew we would receive from the division. It became clear to me that large numbers of Germans were guarding the few passes which led into the Alps and that we would suffer extremely heavy losses in the forthcoming attack. I conveyed my concerns to Colonel Fisher but he and I agreed that there was little we could do. The war would continue. That night as I worked on the operations order for the forthcoming attack I received a call from Colonel Johnson, the division Chief of Staff. He had been my military historian instructor in my last year at West Point. I found it difficult to believe what he was saying, “Jim, the Germans have surrendered.” He then told me to hold our present positions and that the attack had been postponed.”

On to Voklabruck, Purgg, Leizen, Hieflau on the Enns River. We never crossed the river as the Russians were on the other side.²⁶ (See photos). While at Hieflau we drove

²⁶ Patton strongly disagreed with General Eisenhower that the American army would not take Berlin and Prague. A great controversy has existed since 1945 as to whether these were major mistakes that had significant effects on the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union for nearly fifty years until the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. The flavor of Patton's thinking was expressed as:

On April 25, the Third Army arrived at the Czechoslovakian boarder, Patton was ready to move on to Prague when Eisenhower halted his advance to allow the converging Russian armies to occupy the Czech capital. Patton was now aghast that an American army of nearly a half-million men had halted a few miles from Prague, lent no assistance to a popular uprising, allowed the Germans continued occupation of foreign ground, and then sat by while Russian armies had taken control of the country, and that Nazis had done over five years earlier. That there had been prior diplomatic agreements with the Soviets meant little to Patton, who now begged Bradley, "For God's sake, Brad, those patriots in the city need our help. We have not time to lose." Later, Bradley relayed Eisenhower's order to stop Patton – and to allow Prague to be occupied by the Russians to avoid "complications." Patton replied, "For God's sake, Brad, it seems to me that a *great nation like America should let others worry about complications.*" *On the earlier American decision to halt before the Russians in central Germany, Patton himself told Eisenhower, "Ike, I don't see how you figure that out. We had better take Berlin, and quick – and get Bradley on to the Oder River."* Eisenhower muttered back, "Well, who would want it." Patton replied carefully, "I think history will answer that question for you." Hanson, at page 299.

But Colonel Hayes personally experienced the decisions: "Our advance continued eastward and, by now, we were virtually unopposed. A day or so later we were within striking distance of Chemnitz. The autobahn north out of Chemnitz led to Berlin and I feel absolutely certain that had we continued we would have captured Berlin before the Russians. In addition, the way to Dresden was clear. In fact I had taken Kentucky and we drove down the autobahn to see how far we could go. In a short while we could see the spires of a huge cathedral in what I thought was Dresden. Someone fired at us as we sped down the autobahn but Kentucky was literally flying and whoever had fired the mortar or grenade missed us by a huge margin. The way to Berlin was open. However, I had nothing to say about the political or military decision which had been made and we never received the orders to continue forward.

I need not tell you that the orders to give up East Germany grew out of the Yalta agreements between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin. This grievous mistake spawned the Cold War. We know now that Roosevelt was a dying man at the Yalta Conference and quite possibly believed our own propoganda about "Uncle Joe" Stalin. We also know that Churchill did not trust the Russians but he could not convince Roosevelt and the mistake was made. Hayes, at 210-213. (See photo).

On our way to Nurnberg we had a chilling encounter with the future. We were perhaps a day's march away from Nurnberg in what turned out to be a slow march because the Germans destroyed all the autobahn bridges and we had to build detours. As we marched southward we were suddenly strafed by an aircraft which was new to us. Moreover, it was travelling at a rather remarkable rate of speed. I later learned it was a Messerschmitt 262, the first operational German jet. Fortunately, it did no damage to our column because the pilot had not properly bore-sighted his guns. He made his first pass which caused us to stop the convoy and dismount take cover. Then he turned to make a second strafing run when a flight of P-47's jumped him. That's when we saw the future! The German pilot applied full throttle and made the P-47's appear to stand still." Hayes, at page 213.

back to Lintgen, Luxembourg to pick up duffle bags that had been stored for infantry men. It was a two day drive one way.

E. GERMAN OCCUPATION AND DEMOBILIZATION

The American Army gave the German prisoners a discharge and then we loaded them on trucks and would drive them from town to town where they would unload wherever they were from. May 20 – We left Hieflau and went west through Salzburg, Munich, southwest to Seeg, Germany, a small farm town. June 5 – We moved south to Fussen²⁷ a nice sized town at the foot of the Bavarian Alps on the Lech River. Here we lived in the Hotel Lowen by the river. (See photo). Each of us had our own room and the people that ran the hotel took care of our rooms and cooked for us although they didn't have much food. They used our food and theirs together and we really had a feast. Two

²⁷ As many people now know, the Nazis had looted the art and treasures of Europe. The subject was in recent times covered in the documentary "The Rape of Europa" and the book and movie "The Monuments Men." Colonel James Hayes had an interesting assignment described as follows:

"Sometime around the middle of July the 10th Armored relieved the 80th Division. I received orders to move my battalion to Fussen the capital of the landkreiss of the same name. Here I took over the responsibility for several displaced persons camps, the largest of which was located in a German Kaserne on the outskirts of the town. In addition, I assumed responsibility for guarding another castle which had been built by Ludwig the Mad King of Bavaria. The castle, unlike Linderhof, looked like a castle straight out of Disney Land. In fact, many people can recognize it at sight because it is used on most posters advertising trips to German and particularly to Bavaria." (See photo).

Neuschwanstein housed a large part of the art treasures the Nazis looted from the rest of Europe. (See photo). The throne room on the top floor of the castle contained cases full of paintings of Raphael, Tintoretto, Titian, Corot, Monet and other great masters. Downstairs in the spacious kitchen the silver place settings, all 800 of them, from the city of Metz, France covered a huge table. A room on the first floor contained shelf after shelf of boxes of precious emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. Some of them were in their original settings in other cases the stones had been detached and simply filed the boxes which filled the 20x20 room. Some of the stones were ornaments in the hilts of ceremonial sword or in the stocks of fancy rifles. In one box was the most beautiful of all pieces. It was Napoleon's signet with which he stamped his initials into the wax used to seal his official correspondence. The signet itself was a huge amethyst with the letter "N" incised into it. The amethyst, it turn, was mounted on a gold replica of a French cuirassier's helmet. Finally, the helmet hung from a chain made of four stands of large pearls fastened together and topped by an emerald about the size of the end joint of my thumb. Other rooms contained national treasures such as the tapestry from The Hague, Netherlands.

Neuschwanstein sat atop a square hill, three sides of which were precipitous cliffs. The fourth side sloped in to the valley and served as the only approach to the castle. I fortified this road with machine guns, anti-tank cannons, and an especially strong sentry post. I posted several guard posts inside the castle court yard and at several points throughout the castle proper. The officer in charge of the guard had strict orders to call me in the event anyone tried to get into the castle without the written permission of General Patton himself. As I mentioned earlier, several generals tried to bully their way into the castle but I simply showed them a copy of General Patton's order and asked them if they would like to call the general for permission to enter. The simple threat always worked and they would leave. Several months later, probably in September or October, the castle was taken over by a commission responsible for returning the treasures to their original owners." Hayes, at pages, 239-241. See also Hayes' account of his part in taking possession of the assets of the Hungarian National Bank, including the Crown of St. Stephen given by the Pope Sylvester II to the King of Hungary in the year 1000 (stored at Fort Knox, Kentucky, until returned in 1978). Hayes, at pages, 223-224.

meals a day breakfast around 10 and dinner about 4:30. The hotel people really knew how to manage the food. Most of the time we only had to work a couple of hours a day distributing food to our battalion. It was the first time we could really relax since the desert maneuvers in Arizona. A few times I drove my truck to Luxembourg City to take men from our regiment going on pass to catch a train to Paris. It was a hard twelve hour drive because of the roads and bridges being out from the war. Our route from Fussen was to Kempton, Memmingen, Ulm, Wurttemberg, Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Zweibrucken, Saarbrucken, Germany, Thionville, France to Luxembourg City.

F. BACK ACROSS THE ATLANTIC AND DISCHARGE FROM THE U.S. ARMY

September 2 – I was transferred to the 10th Armored Division so that I could come back to the states with them.²⁸ Left Fussen for Garmisch to the 10th Armored about two weeks. September 15 – From Garmisch to Reims, France. September 25 – From Reims to Marseille by freight train. Roughest ride I ever had. October 3- We loaded on the USS General Breckenridge and sailed out of the port of Marseille into the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar. Saw the rocks of Gibraltar and after that day nothing but water for nine more days. October 13 – Landed at Port of Hampton, Virginia. October 15 – Loaded on a train. October 16 – Arrive at Camp Atterberry, Indiana. 12:00 Midnight October 18: Got my discharge and five minutes later was on a bus for home.²⁹

²⁸ Although the war in Europe was over in May, and by August the war with Japan was over, Patton did not agree with a rapid demobilization and feared the Russians would not demobilize and would rebuild with modern weapons. He felt that the march for freedom should continue through Eastern Europe to push the Soviets back inside Russia. But a battle weary nation was not inclined to keep Eastern Europeans and Germans, many of those had fought for Hitler, free from Russian tyranny. It would nearly be fifty years later before the Soviet “Iron Curtin” over Eastern Europe would come down.

²⁹ Final Note: Having chosen the footnotes to place in perspective the events mentioned by my father in his outline, my attempt was simply to tell the story within the broader context of what was happening and the significance of it. Hopefully, this makes it more meaningful and understandable.

A great deal of the material comes from historian Victor Davis Hanson’s The Soul of Battle (1999). The reason for this was that Part III in his book “The Third Army: Patton’s Race into Germany, August 1, 1944 – May 8, 1945” covered the identical period of time and group of events mentioned in my father’s brief outline. I should state that Hanson’s account is one of analysis and conclusion based on other major respected historians. Thus, the footnotes relate, in large part, to General George Patton’s command of The Third Army. The Third Army had many subordinate Generals and Officers who were under the command of General Patton. Those men were extremely important in the story of The Third Army throughout this part of the war; however, the story can perhaps be more easily followed and understood by focusing on General Patton because his thinking, character and overwhelming personality impacted The Third Army in a way unique in military command. Some of the analysis in the footnotes necessarily reflects on other Generals mentioned. Suffice it to say that General Eisenhower was the Supreme Allied Commander and he had the incredibly complex responsibility of the overall planning and coordination of all of the Allied forces engaged in the European Theater of Operations. And he operated under the command of General George C. Marshall, United States Chief of Staff, and the political leaders including Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.

EPILOGUE

Will it be all lost in the fog of history or the passage of time? This is just a small spec in a vast story. Most of the people involved just did what they had to do. World War II historian Stephen Ambrose stated in Citizen Soldiers (1977):

In the fall semester of 1996 I was a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I taught a course on World War II to some 350 students. They were dumbstruck by descriptions of what it was like to be on the front lines. They were even more amazed by the responsibilities carried by junior officers and NCO's who were as young as they. Like all of us who have never been in combat, they wondered if they could have done it – and even more, they wondered how anyone could have done it.

There is vast literature on the latter question. In general, in assessing the motivation of the GIs, there is agreement that patriotism or any other form of idealism had little if anything to do with it. The GIs fought because they had to. What held them together was not country and flag, but cohesion. It has been my experience, through four decades of interviewing ex-GIs, that such generalizations are true enough.

And yet there is something more. Although the GIs were and are embarrassed to talk or write about the cause they fought for, in marked contrast to their great-grandfathers who fought in the Civil War, they were the children of democracy and they did more to help spread democracy around the world than any other generation in history.

At the core, the American citizen soldiers knew the difference between right and wrong, and they didn't want to live in a world in which wrong prevailed. So they fought, and won, and we all of us, living and yet to be born, must be forever profoundly grateful.

Subsequently, in 2002, shortly before his death, in his last book, To America, Ambrose gave us a history of the 20th century in nearly one page:

In 1919, at Versailles, the Allies, led by France and England, set out to punish the defeated Germans by taking away their colonies, severely reducing the size of their army, keeping them from occupying the Rhineland. What the world got out of this was Hitler. But we learned, and from 1945 on, the victors worked to make Germany into a modern democracy. They succeeded.

What America, the Allies, did in West Germany and throughout Western Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War was generous and wise. America's young men had gone to Europe not to conquer, not to enslave, not to destroy, but to liberate, and no country in the world had the resources of spirit to do what America did. America turned West Germany from a Nazi dictatorship into a democratic state, then made it into a model that all the Central European countries occupied by the Soviet Union, including East Germany, envied. When the chance came to overthrow their communist rulers and embrace freedom and democracy, they did so.

It sounds too good to be true. It happened. While the Soviets were looting, raping, pillaging in Eastern Germany, Poland, and elsewhere, the Americans were feeding, rebuilding and restoring. In 1948, while the Soviets were attempting to blockade West Berlin into starvation and submission, the United States was feeding and supplying the city through the Berlin Air Lift. The Marshall Plan was just what Winston Churchill said of it, the most generous act in human history.

President Harry Truman's Secretary of State Dean Acheson titled his memoirs of the years after the war *Present at the Creation*. That caught it exactly. After playing a leading role in the defeat of Nazi Germany and the principal role in the defeat of Imperial Japan, the United States set out to create a new world. A democratic Germany. A democratic Japan. A democratic South Korea. The Berlin Air Lift. The Marshall Plan. The recognition of Israel. The formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. All those came into being a half-century ago, under the sponsorship and leadership of the United States. It is impossible to imagine what the world would be like today without them. And it was the American Spirit, more that American productive power, that made it so.

Of course, no one knows the future, but looking back now, we can clearly see that millions of people have benefited, at least for decades, from the efforts and sacrifices of the greatest generation. Let's not forget them.³⁰

³⁰ Although this is not meant to be a scholarly writing, the following are sources consulted or referenced in the footnotes.

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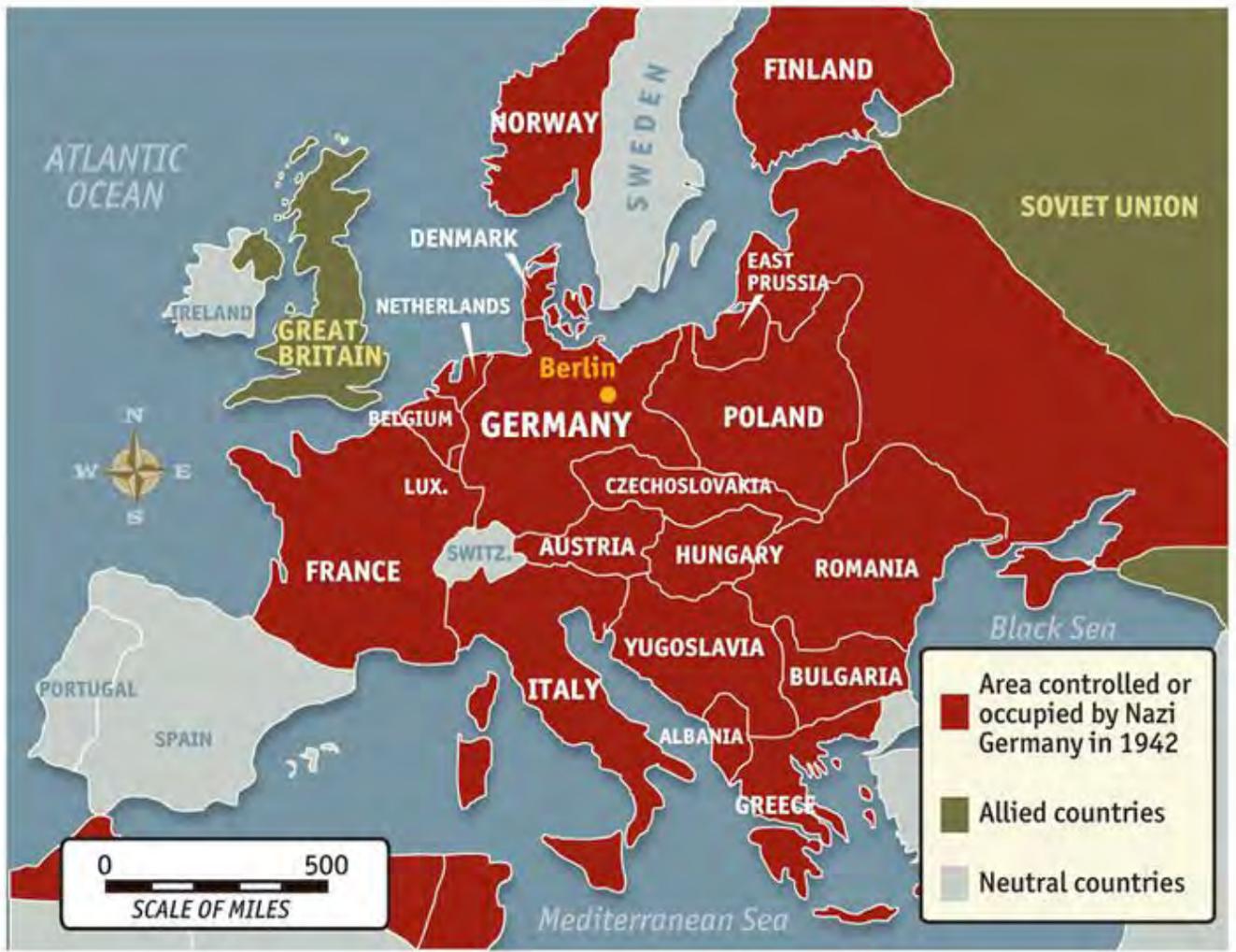
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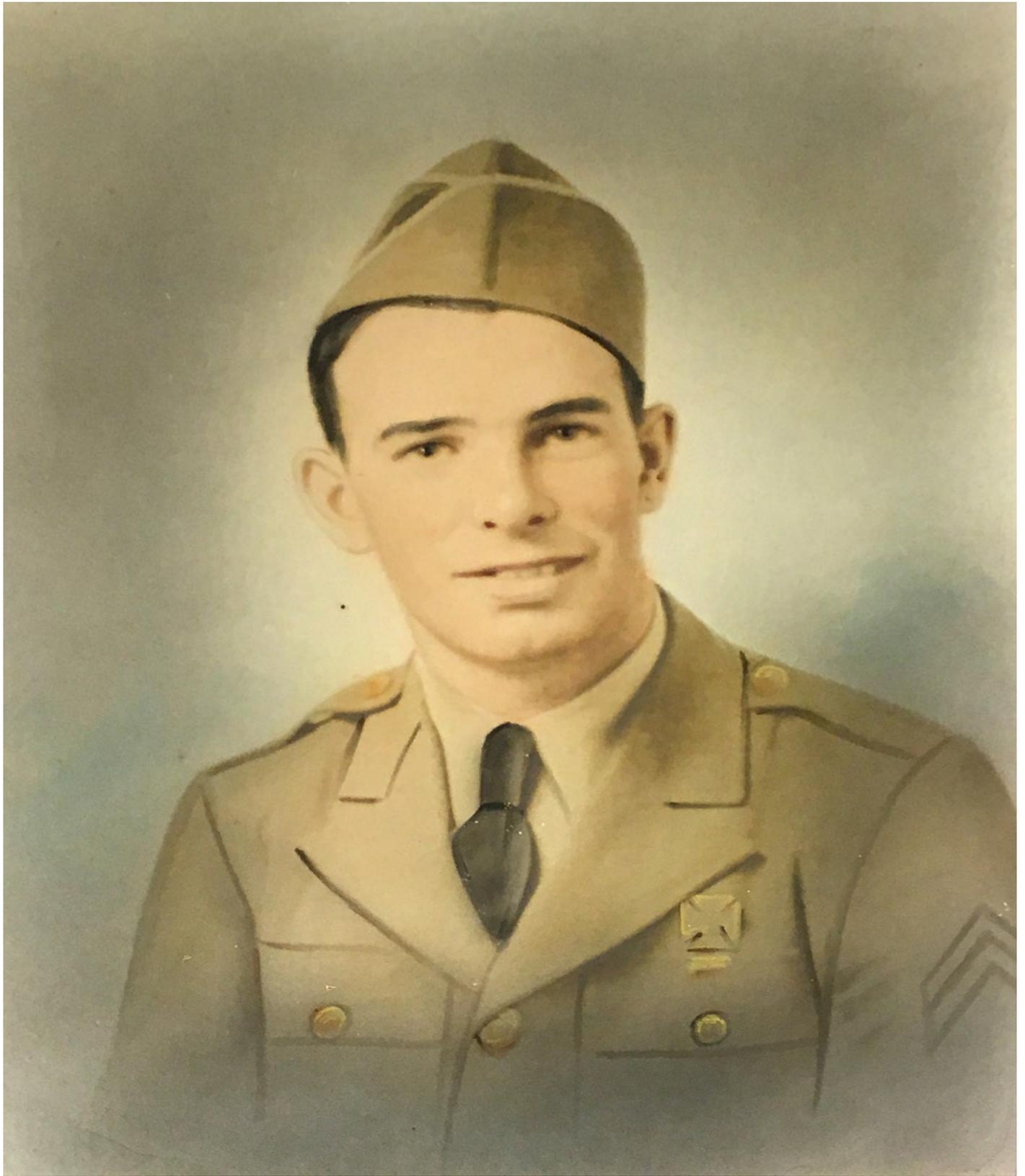
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This document was composed by Merle Clark in July of 2017.





2a



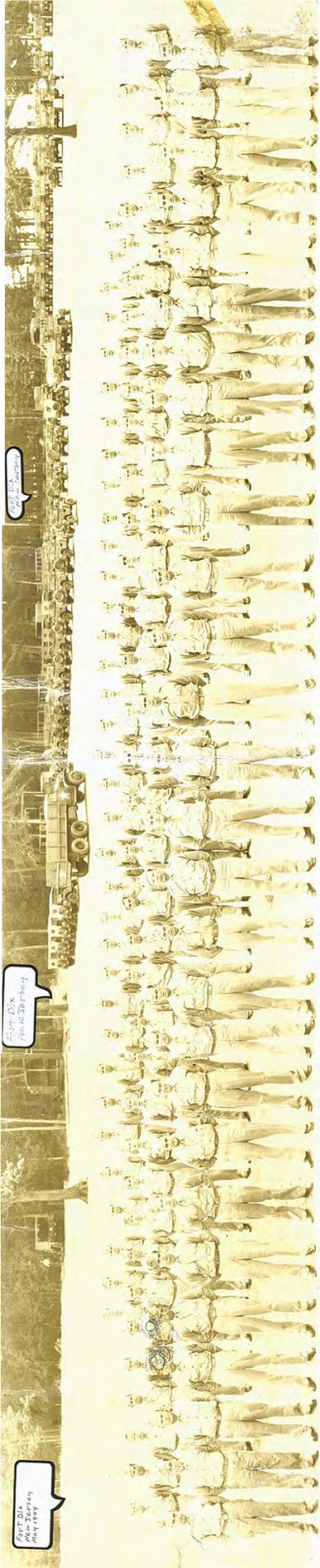
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2c



Soldiers on the move from Camp Forrest, Tennessee en route to Camp Phillips, Kansas. (Courtesy of James A. Detamore)





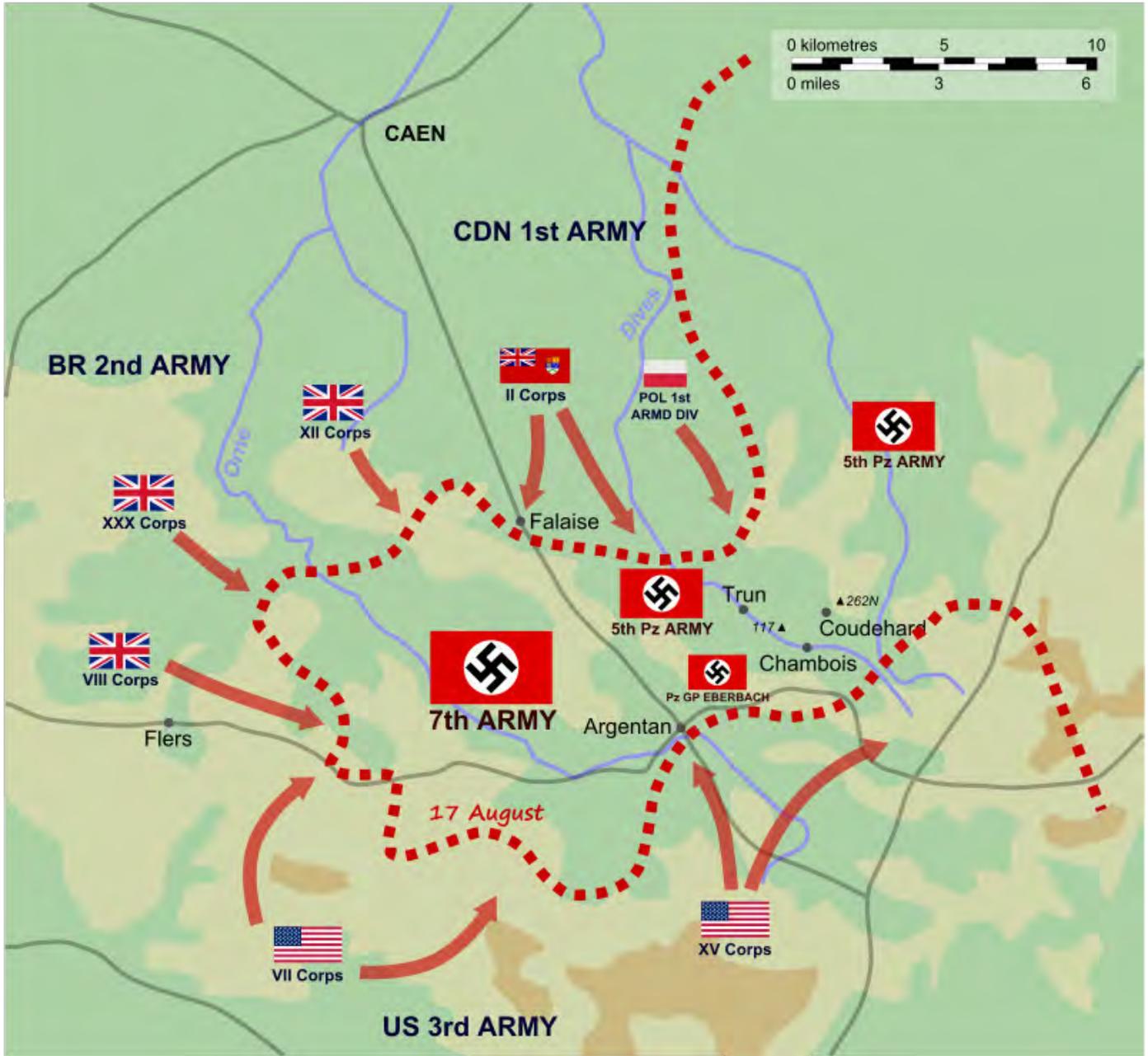


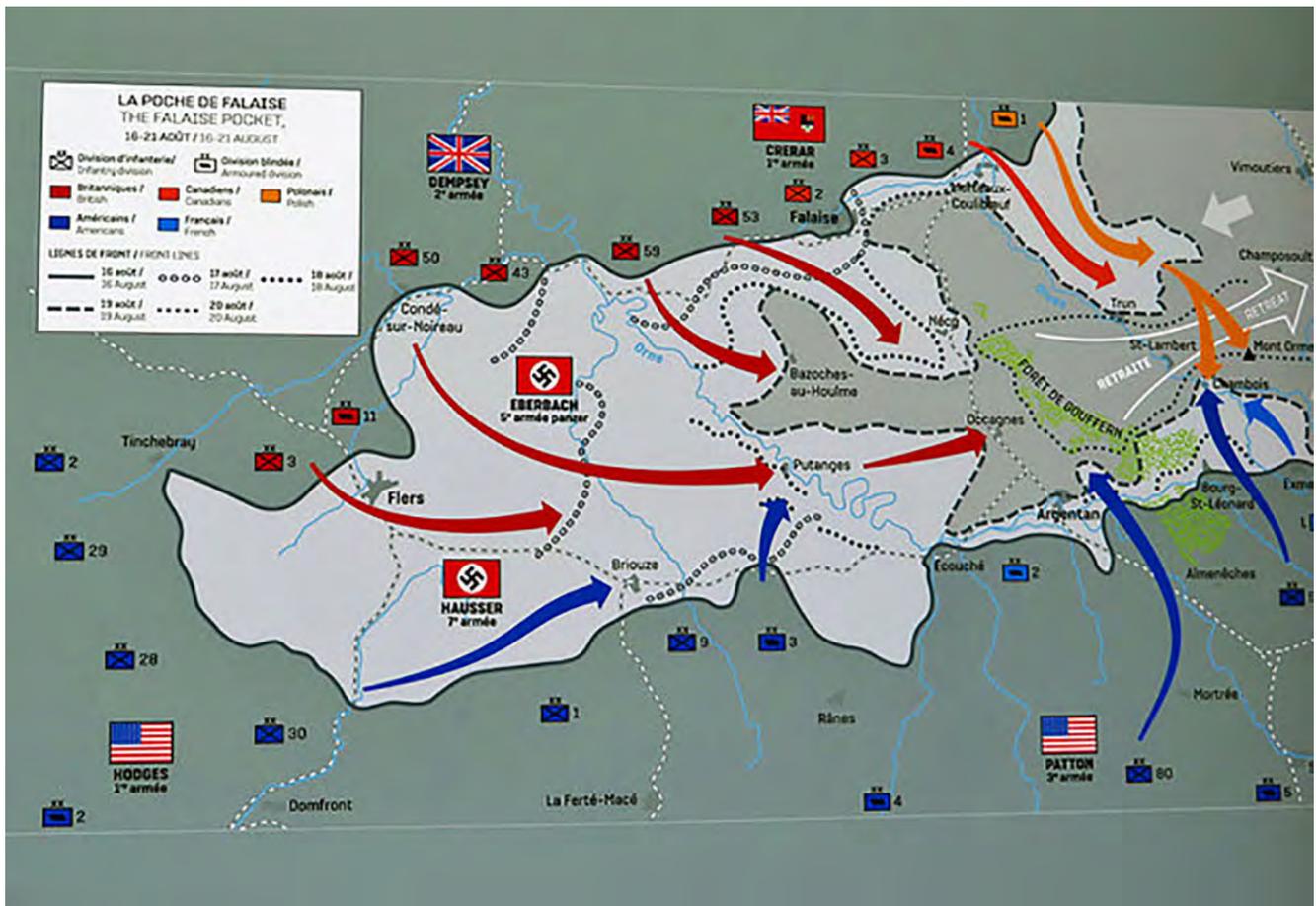




7b































HILL 383 TO LOISY BEZAUMONT VILLE-AU-VAL
LE PONT DE MONS LANDREMONT



MOSELE RIVER LA COTE PELEE FALAISE HILL













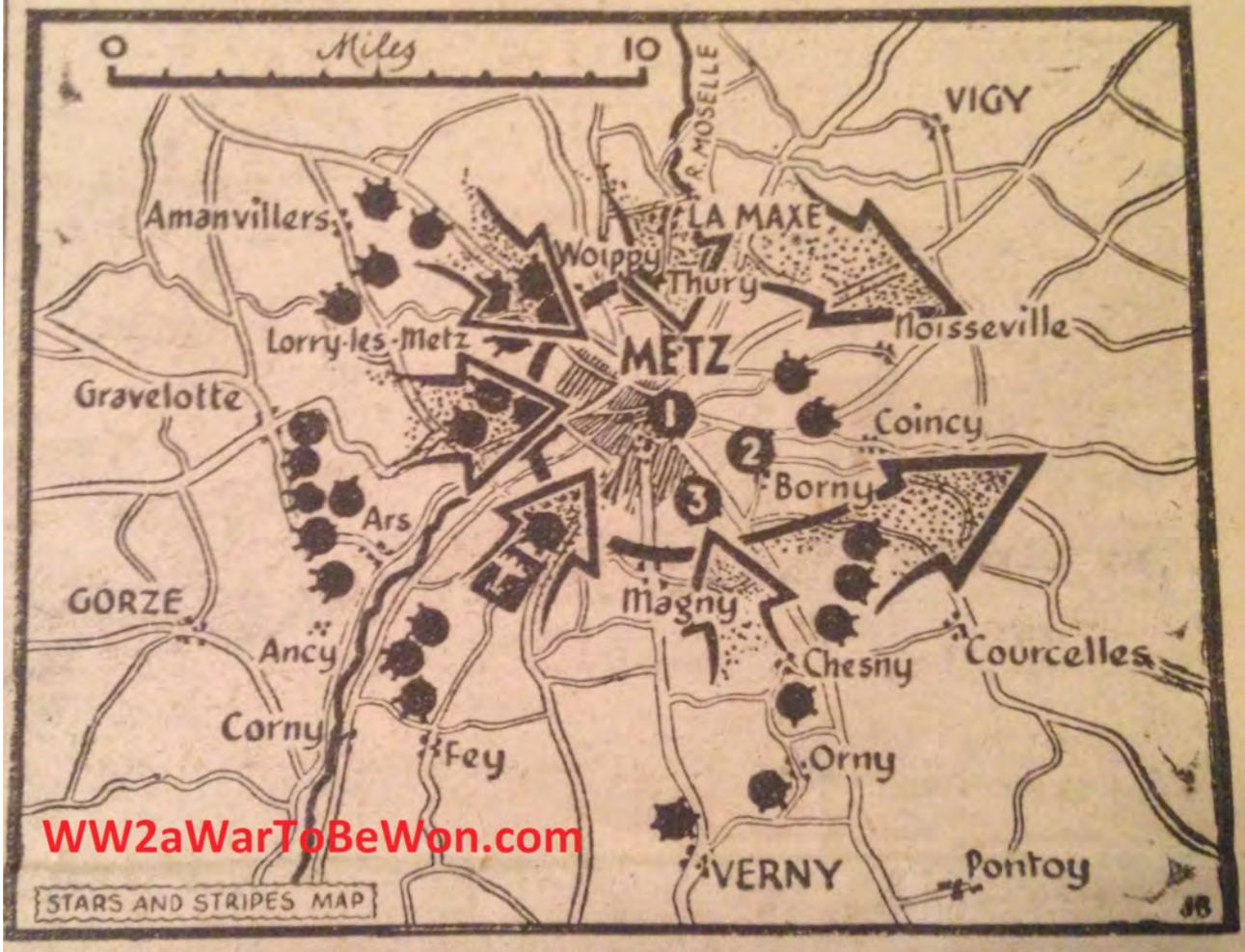








Ring of Forts 3rd Army Broke





15c



Generals Marshall, Patton and Eddy came to Ville au Val to decorate 80th Infantry troops for their tough fight to establish bridgeheads across the Moselle. (Courtesy of Demis A. Delaney)













"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times.

LATE CITY EDITION

Increasing cloudiness followed by
light snow today.
Temperature Today—Max., 27; Min., 12
Forecast, 9:11 A. M.: Snow, 4:12 P. M.

Copyright, 1944, by The New York Times Company.

VOL. XCIV...No. 31,745.

Printed at Second-Class Matter
Postoffice, New York, N. Y.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1944.

THREE CENTS NEW YORK CITY

GERMANS SWEEP WEST THROUGH LUXEMBOURG; REPORT PATTON ATTACKING ON SOUTH FLANK; EISENHOWER URGES GREATEST ALLIED EFFORT

MAYOR DEMANDS U. S. ACT AT ONCE ON MEAT CRISIS

Calls for at Least a Temporary
Plan So That Shops That
Obey Law Can Stay Open

BREAD, PIE MAKERS CLOSE

Shut for Christmas Week-End
in Labor Row—Hotels and
Restaurants Affected

Mayor La Guardia joined hands
yesterday with the city's retail
butchers in demanding that the
Federal Government step in im-
mediately with some workable plan
for averting a "meat holiday" here.
With retailers threatening to stop
sales beginning on Christmas, the
Mayor said, "Washington cannot
remain idly by in a situation where
dealers want to comply with the
law."
The city was threatened with a

President Accepts Just One Columnist

Special to The New York Times
WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—
President Roosevelt called col-
umnists today an unnecessary
excessiveness on our civilization.
Asked to comment on reports
of proposals for the establish-
ment of an international board
to function on political and eco-
nomic matters similar to the
Joint Chiefs of Staff in the mili-
tary field, Mr. Roosevelt turned
the question aside by saying
they were written by a col-
umnist.

"But, Mr. President," said
Mrs. Elizabeth May Craig, cor-
respondent for Maine newspa-
pers, "you've got one in the
family."
That was true, Mr. Roosevelt
said, amid the roars of laughter,
but this column was different in
most ways, as it was a diary.
The reference was to Mrs.
Roosevelt and her daily syndi-
cated column, "My Day."

CITY BUDGET SUIT UPHELD ON APPEAL

ROOSEVELT URGES HOMEFOLKS TO BACK SOLDIERS AT FRONT

Calls the Carrying Out of
Tasks the Best Christmas
Gift to Troops

'FULL WAR' BUDGET DUE

President Says Principles of
Atlantic Charter Are as Valid
Today as in 1941

By C. F. BRISSELL
Special to The New York Times
WASHINGTON, Dec. 22—Presi-
dent Roosevelt appealed to the peo-
ple on the home front today to back
up the fighting forces with a sus-
tained concentration on efforts
which will help win the war as
quickly as possible.
"We can best help the Christmas
season of our fighting men," he said
at his news conference, permitting
himself to be quoted, "if we carry

GERMAN TOWN REDUCED TO RUBBLE AFTER SHELLING BY BOTH SIDES



Not much remains of the buildings in Pier, about five miles northeast of Eschweiler, after being fired upon by the United States 104th Division and the Nazis in positions across the Roer River.

RAIL HUB ISOLATED

Panzers Smash 15 Miles
Past Bastogne—Enemy
Slowed on Flanks

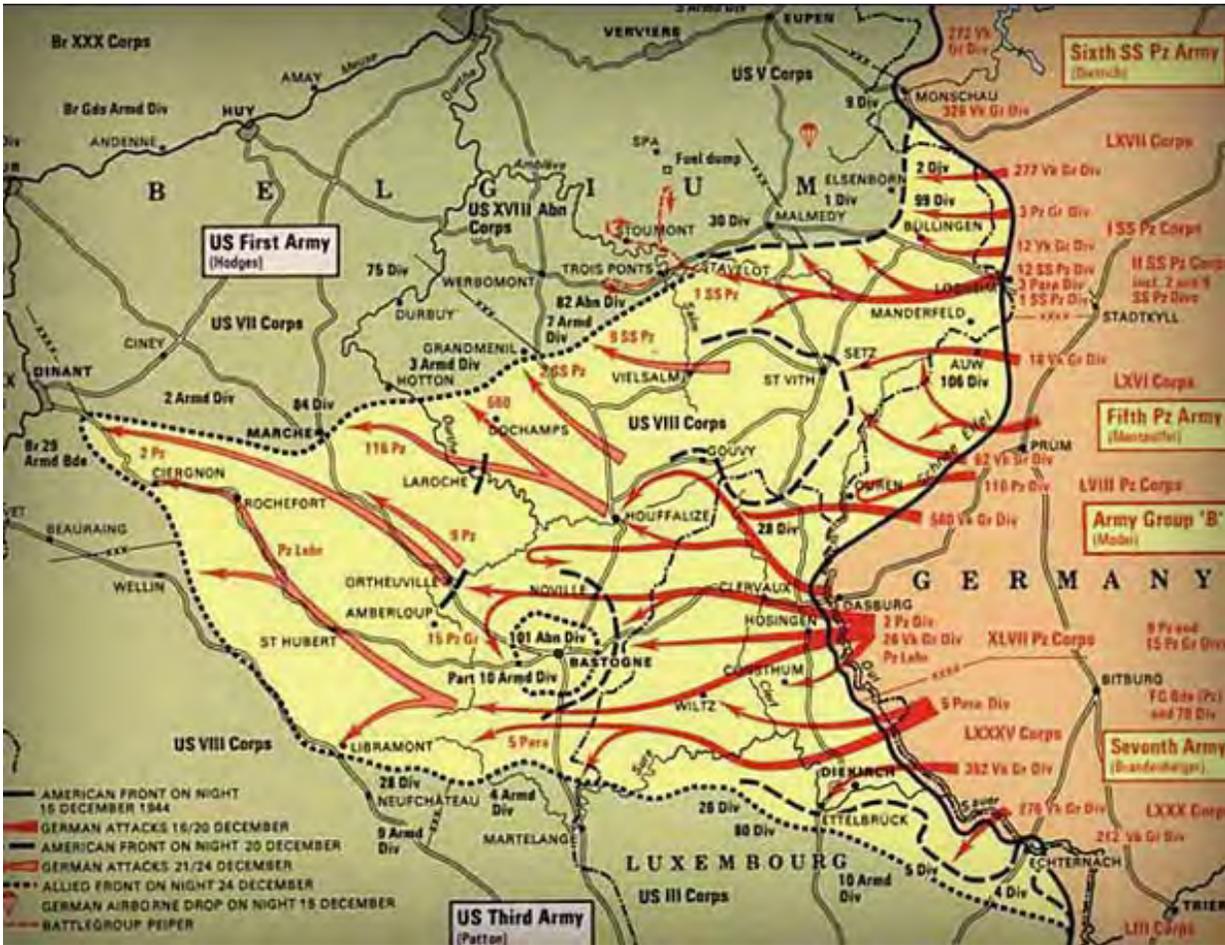
NEAR FRENCH BORDER

Americans Recapture 2
Towns—Reports Still
48 Hours Late

By OWEN MIDDLETON
Special to The New York Times
SUPREME HEADQUARTERS,
Allied Expeditionary Force, Dec.
22—The great German winter of-
fensive smashed westward through
Belgium unchecked today for the
seventh consecutive day.
Although American infantry and
tanks have managed to hold posi-
tions along the sides of the flood
tide of enemy soldiery, the ad-
vance in the center shows no signs
of slowing down.
By late Wednesday panzer units
had swept through the duchy of

NEW RUSSIAN DRIVE | Commander in Chief Hails | FOG AT FRONT LIFTS







19d











PRAYER



Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for Battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies, and establish Thy justice among men and nations. Amen.

HEADQUARTERS THIRD UNITED STATES ARMY



To each officer and soldier in the Third United States Army, I wish a Merry Christmas. I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We march in our might to complete victory. May God's blessings rest upon each of you on this Christmas Day.


G. S. PATTON, JR.

Lieutenant General,
Commanding, Third United States Army.









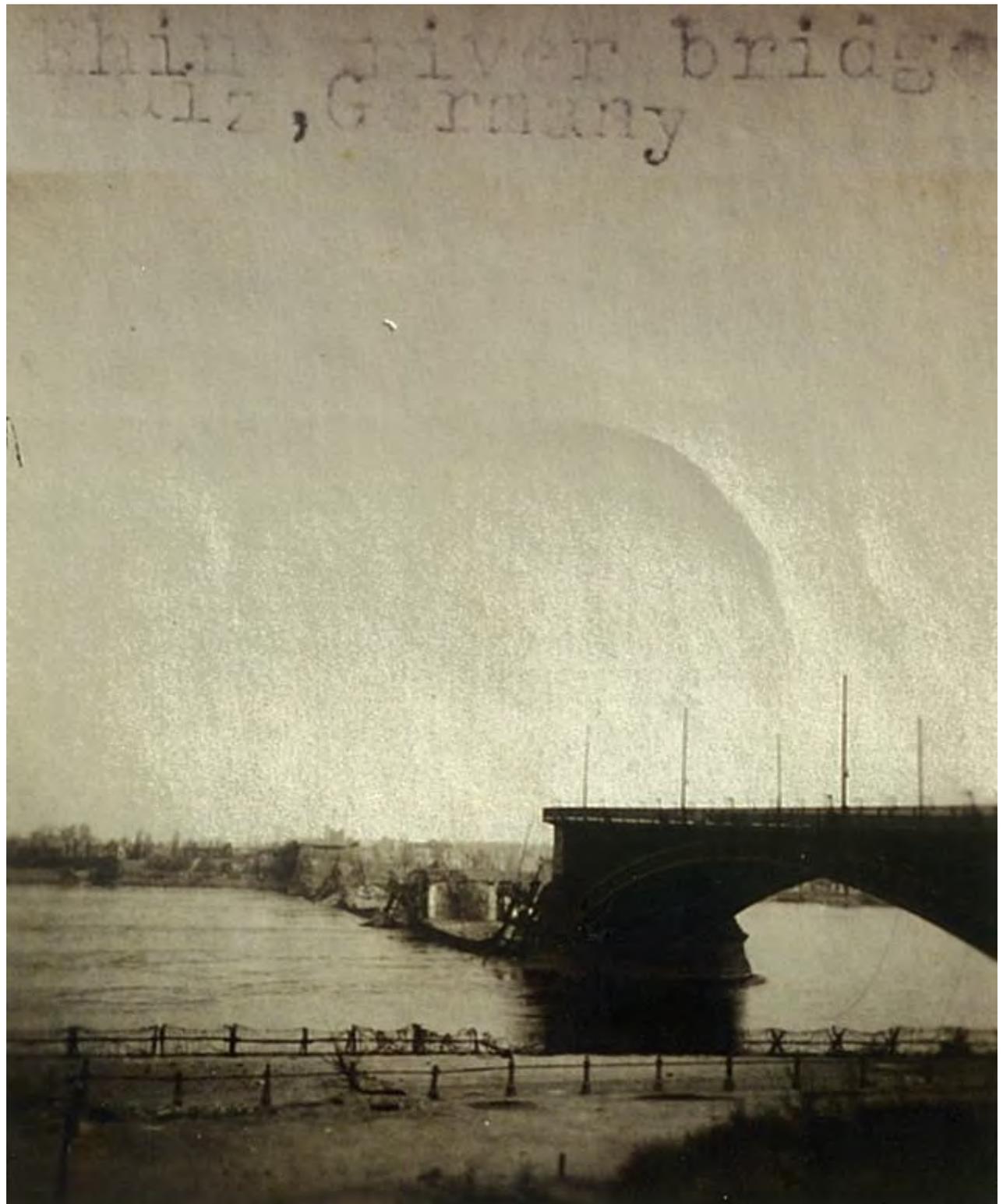












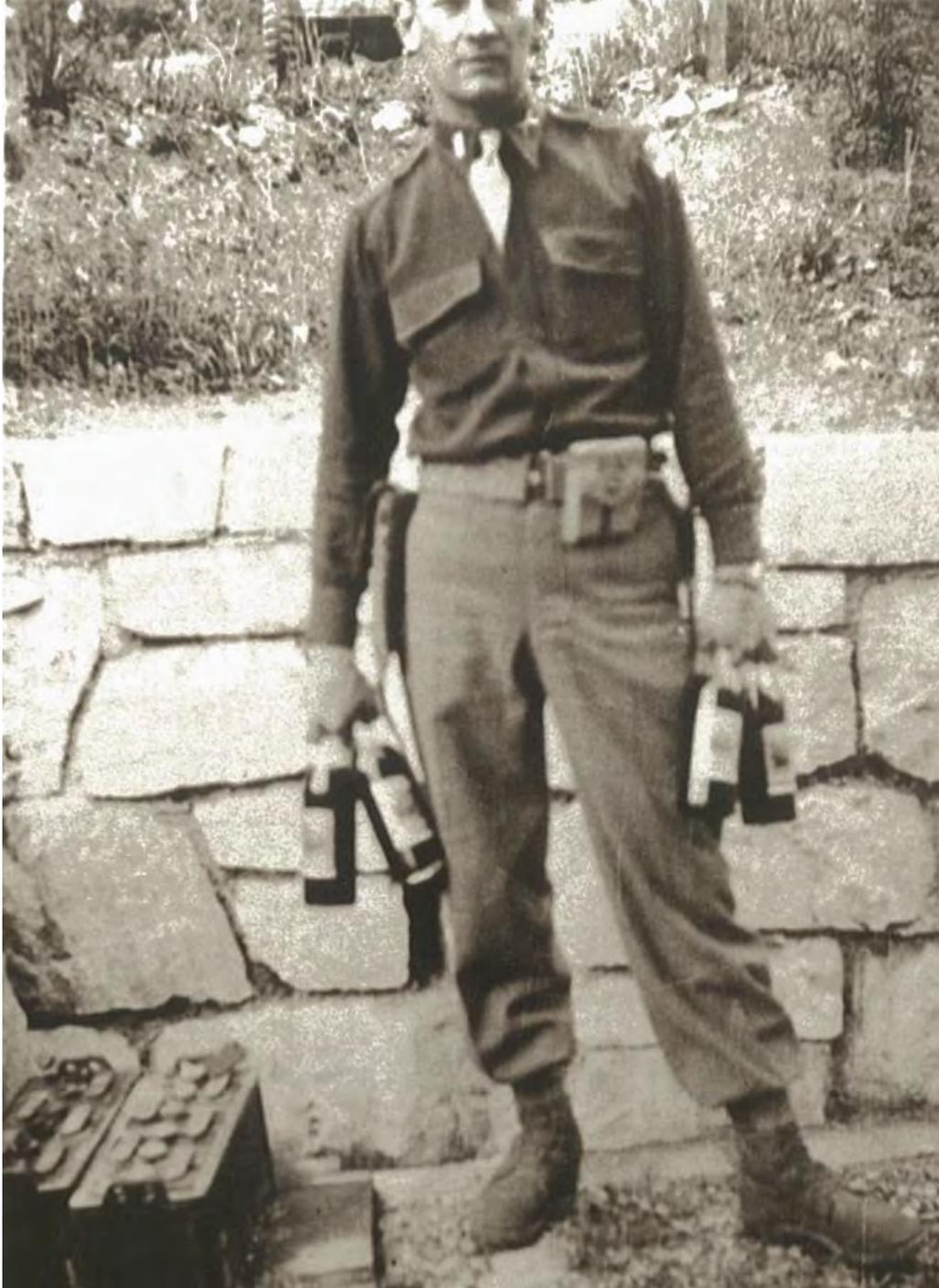






















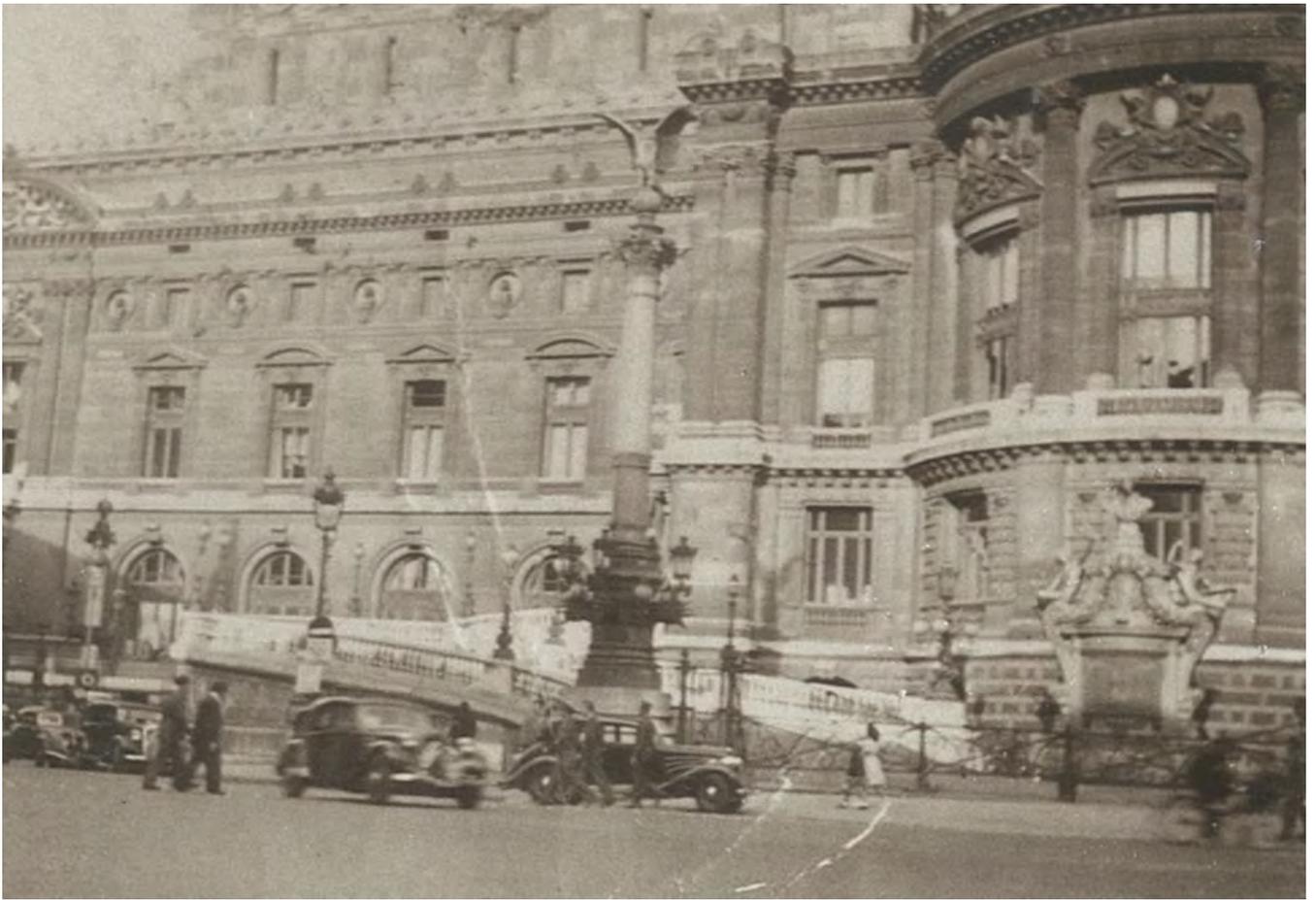






32a











Only this text in English is authoritative

ACT OF MILITARY SURRENDER

1. We the undersigned, acting by authority of the German High Command, hereby surrender unconditionally to the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command all forces on land, sea, and in the air who are at this date under German control.

2. The German High Command will at once issue orders to all German military, naval and air authorities and to all forces under German control to cease active operations at 2301 hours Central European time on 8 May and to remain in the positions occupied at that time. No ship, vessel, or aircraft is to be scuttled, or any damage done to their hull, machinery or equipment.

3. The German High Command will at once issue to the appropriate commanders, and ensure the carrying out of any further orders issued by the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and by the Soviet High Command.

4. This act of military surrender is without prejudice to, and will be superseded by any general instrument of surrender imposed by, or on behalf of the United Nations and applicable to GERMANY and the German armed forces as a whole.

5. In the event of the German High Command or any of the forces under their control failing to act in accordance with this Act of Surrender, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and the Soviet High Command will take such punitive or other action as they deem appropriate.

Signed at *Rhinna 0241* on the *7th* day of May, 1945.
France

On behalf of the German High Command.

Jewel

IN THE PRESENCE OF

On behalf of the Supreme Commander,
Allied Expeditionary Force.

On behalf of the Soviet
High Command.

A. B. Smith

Soylovov

F. H. Hill

-2-

Major General, French Army
(Witness)















After the truce was negotiated with the Germans at Lezin, the floodgates opened and the German POWs poured across the Inn River into 80th territory. (Courtesy of Dennis A. DeLeon)



James F. Clark
1945
Hotel Lowen, River Laye



40b



The Blue Ridge Boys













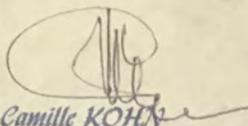






Certificate of Appreciation
awarded to
CLARK, James
for his contribution to the Liberation
of Luxembourg in 1944 - 1945




Camille KOHN
President

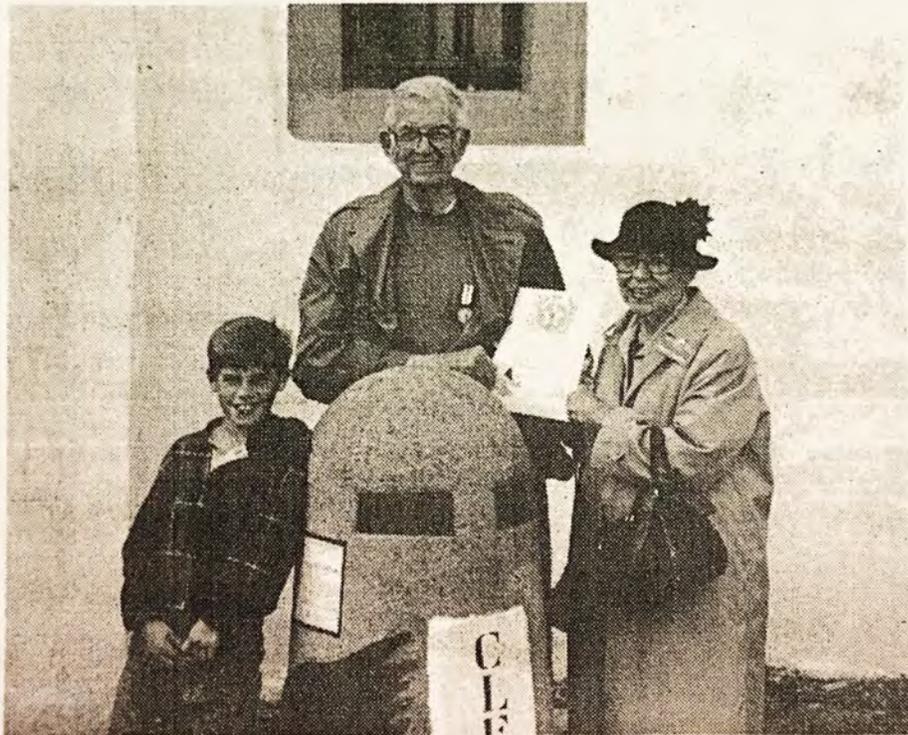
Past Grand President gets Battle of the Bulge Medal

CLERVAUX CASTLE – Past Grand President Louis B. Engelke and Maxine joined other U.S. Army 80th Infantry Division veterans in Europe to retrace the 4,300-kilometer attack route of the Blue Ridgers in World War II.

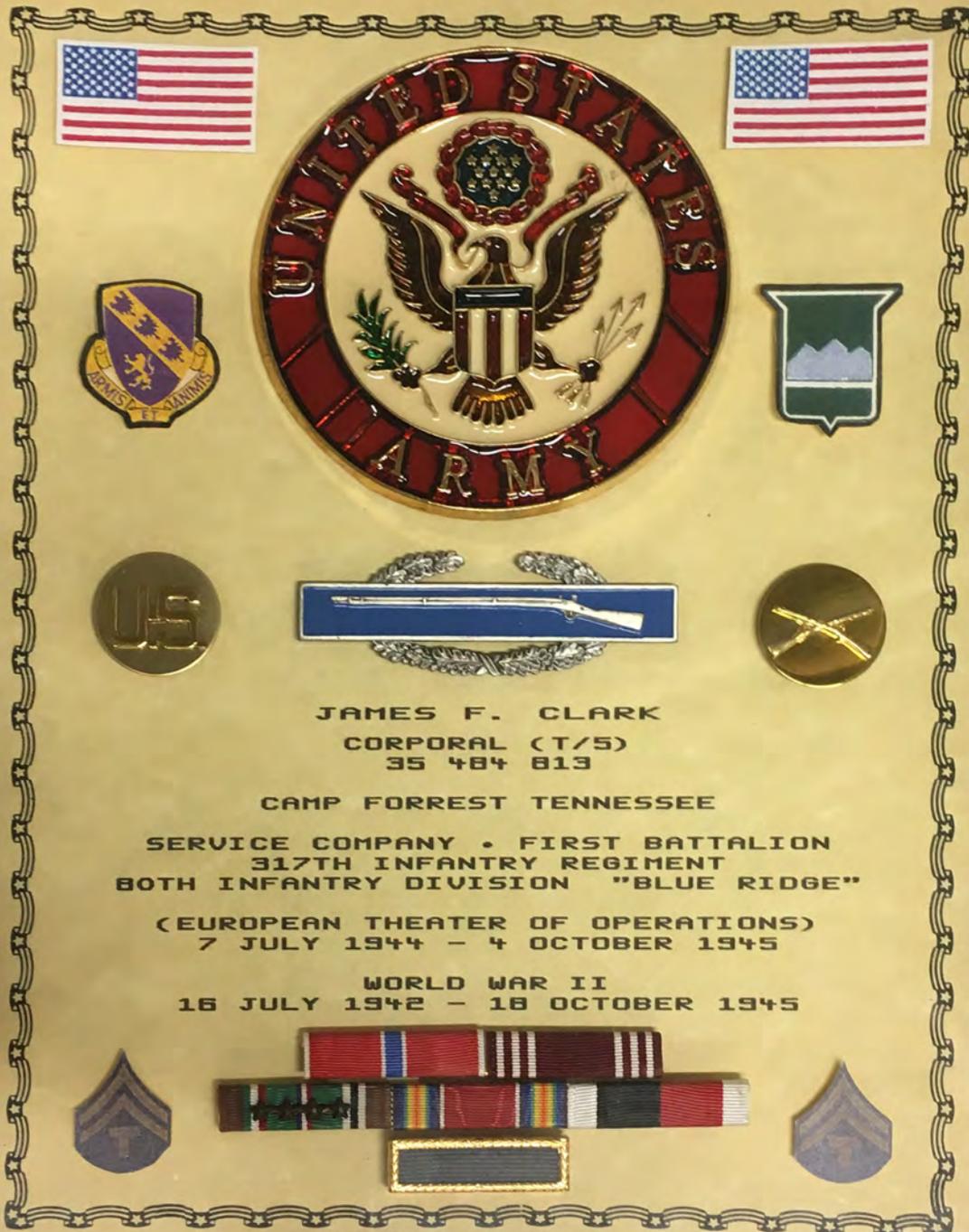
Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army liberated more of Luxembourg than any other combat division in the Battle of the Bulge, which was raging in December and January 50 years ago. Historians describe it as the biggest battle in American history.

At the conclusion of the retracing of the route, some 40 veterans gathered for a ceremony inside Clervaux Castle in the tiny nation of Luxembourg, where the veterans received certificates of appreciation and the Battle of the Bulge Medal, which is the equivalent of the Croix de Guerre of Luxembourg.

Making the presentations were officials of the Cercle D'Etudes sur la Bataille des Ardennes, Grand Duchy de Luxembourg.



Past Grand President Louis B. Engelke, with the Battle of the Bulge medal pinned to his shirt, and Maxine proudly display the certificate of appreciation presented to veterans of the U.S. Army 80th Infantry Division. Also in the photograph is Bennett Clark, the grandson of one of the other veterans.



CERTIFICATE COPYRIGHT 1946 BY MILIBOOKS OF AMERICA

RETURN TO THEIR GLORIOUS FUTURE FOR 80th VETERANS
OF THE U. S. ARMY

Some 80 members of the American Veterans Association of the famous "80th Blue Ridge Division" made a stop at the City Hall of Pont-a-mousson yesterday. They were amicably received by Michel Lercher and Pierre Berthou.

Caps in the colors of their Division on their heads and assorted insignias, Veterans of the glorious 80th assembled. Some of their memories at times were very precise. As those of James Allen spokesman of the Association, who remembered his entry into Pont-a-mousson and the battle of Mousson which followed. "We were in the Infantry under the orders of General McBride of Pattons Army" He said "The hardest thing was when we crossed the Moselle under bursts of fire from the Germans. The Liberation of your region was truly the most difficult period of our campaign".

The thing that most impressed us about the American Veterans, was their perfect organization and extreme kindness. Whether they were veterans of the 8th Armoured Division as those who visited the City in July, or the 80th Division, their faces were weathered in smiles. "They were extraordinary" said Pierre Berthou, impressed by the class of these U. S. Vets. The only difficulty, a big one, was the language barrier which often kept the Veterans from communicating with their French friends.

The honor of welcoming these veritable heroes went to Michel Lercher, the Deputy Mayor. "This evening I have the honor of bearing witness to say my gratitude to you, who, heeding only your courage, fought the enemy without relenting. Without your involvement we would not be living as we are today in peace, with the respect of men and liberty". Mr. Lercher then gave two small gifts to James Allen who appreciated the gesture and thanked the citizens of Pont-a-mousson for their hospitality.

The glass of friendship was served in the Grand Salon of the City Hall, the opportunity for certain Vets to relive their 50 year old memories. Francis Rajnicek from Ohio, was in the front lines in 1944, the thing he remembers most are the "charming, likable little French girls" one of whom a Comrade ended up marrying.

For a good number of Veterans, this pilgrimage was a first. A pleasant journey which led them from Utah Beach, to Pont-a-mousson and St Avold somewhat like in 1944....

(Caption to the right of photo)

The U.S. Veterans were accompanied for the most part by their wives. It was therefor, as couples that they traveled through France 50 years later...



RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
DÉPARTEMENT DE LA MOSELLE
VILLE DE FARÉBERSVILLER
Arrondissement de Forbach
57450 - Tél. 87 89 22 11

SPEECH OF THE MAYOR OF FAREBERSVILLER

On the 6 June 1944 the assault against the Nazi fortress was launched in Normandy. The Battle of France began with a landing of staggering logistics and calculated down to the minutest details.

But, from the earliest days, the American Rangers met with the worst difficulties, at the Pointe du Hoc and Omaha Beach, to get over the ridge. How long the road would be to Moselle, full of pitfalls in the Normandy Bocage surrounded by Rommel's soldiers ! Hitler decreed that "to die in Normandy and to throw the allies back into the sea was the only fate worthy of the German infantryman", to which one chief of staff sarcastically replied : "he would have done better to send us V1's and V2's : our only strategic weapons are the apple trees" !

Amongst the Germans who were bracing themselves were the SS of the 17th "Panzergrenadier-division" of Goets von Berlinchingen. They used the same trusty old methods as the 18th Century Chouan counter-revolutionaries :

- young fanatics accustomed to all sorts of hardship,
- spirited old veterans,
- snipers lying in ambush,
- tanks moored in the hollow lanes out of sight of the Jabos.

We find those grenadiers with the emblem of the steel hand again, here in Farébersviller, in what is now generally known as the "Battle of Farébersviller".

Once the Cotentin and the Falaise Gap were broken through (out of the latter 50 000 Germans managed to escape and the last of them were to be those devils of pioneers !), it was the irresistible rush on to Paris. The capital was liberated on 25 August 1944. Then, the support of the fighters in the shadows (the Resistance) increased the insecurity of the occupying forces. The FFI accelerated the pace of the liberation. On 12 September, the troops from Normandy and those from the Provence landings joined up at Dijon. All these men pushed back the invader who was caught in a pincer movement which left behind it a wake of tragedy and blood.

Operation Overlord was coming to an end. Eisenhower was faced with two alternatives :

- 1) To send in Montgomery, an English ally of some weight, who was proposing to take Antwerp (a port for unloading supplies), the destruction of the V1 and V2 launch pads and finally the rush on to North Germany across those flat plains from where he could get to Berlin by Christmas, before the Russians ;
- 2) or push the fiery Patton on to Lorraine, the naturel route of invasions.

He was to give the green light to one, then to the other.

It was to be a sad, black autumn for Montgomery, whose operation came to a halt at Arnhem.

Once the crisis of re-supplies was overcome, Patton set off on 8 November towards Moselle after encircling Metz.

A rainy autumn turned the meadows into artificial lakes and the terrain into oceans of mud.

Hitler took advantage of the lull to consolidate the western wall and create the "Volksgrenadier-division".

The Germans were to stiffen up, brace themselves (the Ardennes, Operation Nordwind), so many ordeals that set back the victory offensive towards Berchtesgaden and Berlin. Here in Farébersviller the 317th and 318th infantry Regiments were stuck for two weeks punctuated with bouts of deadly fighting : street fighting, hand to hand, deadly shell explosions, tanks coming into the village which then changed hands four times.

I believe that amongst our 85 guests, these memories of turmoil and sacrifice remain firmly anchored in the hearts of our American veterans, who by their courage, self-sacrifice and devotion took part in the liberation of Farébersviller from 26 November to 4 December 1944. It was a bloody battle since "only the fishes were alive in Farébersviller".

We must also have a thought for our fellow citizens who stayed in the village during these events and listen to some of them relating their memories of this tragedy that they experienced in their flesh and in the very depths of their being.

We must pay tribute to all these witnesses of history.

It seemed opportune to us to rediscover these feats of arms, these examples of gallantry in the exhibition that we have dedicated to this historical event.

This commemoration of the liberation of Farébersviller is going to give us a great breath of liberty and heroism. On the eve of the 21st Century, it is appropriate to remind our contemporaries, our young people who have so many difficulties in coping with life, our younger generations, of the ideal which drove on the allied soldiers in 1944, of the efforts they put in, the price they paid in order to recapture our eternal France.

It is my duty, finally, 50 years after this tragedy, to express in the name of the town of Farébersviller our everlasting recognition and gratitude towards our liberators.

Before "La Marseillaise" in few minutes time, I will also ask you for a minute's silence in order to preserve the memory of those anonymous heroes who died on the field of honour here in Farébersviller and whom we must venerate in these circumstances.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your bold actions in our village and for the fighting spirit which drove you on throughout the French campaign.