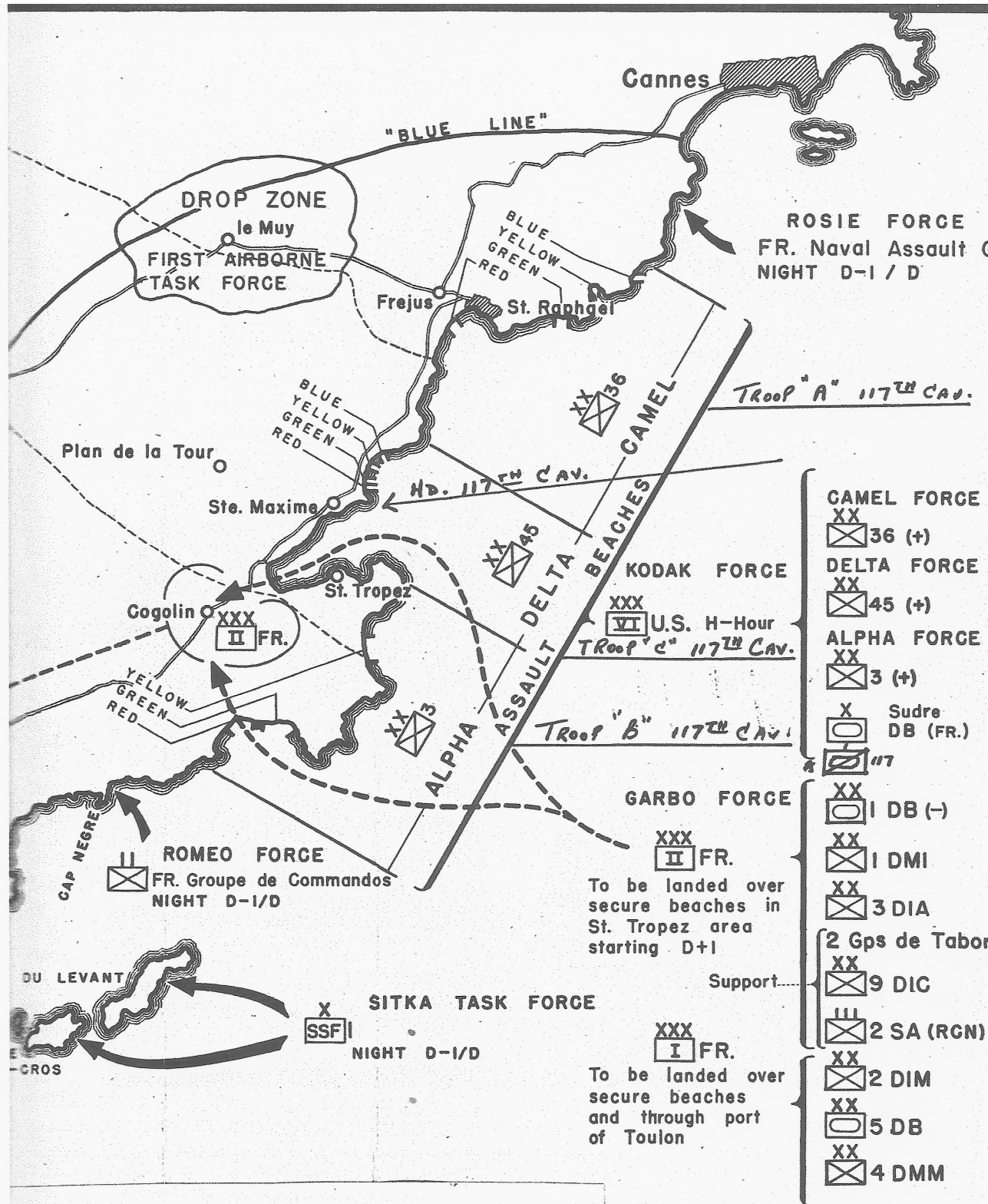


Chapter 4: Operation Anvil/Dragoon and the March Through France

It is now time to depart from Italy and to put into action the planning for the assault on Southern France, whose code name was Anvil [changed to Dragoon because of security concerns], The One Hundred and Seventeenth Armored Cavalry was assigned to the three American divisions making the assault on Southern France on August 15, 1944, with H-hour at 0800 hours. The various tactical units of the One-Seventeenth were attached to the Third Division, the Thirty-Sixth Division and the Forty-Fifth Division for the assault. Upon the completion of the assault and the landings, they had orders to move forward as rapidly as possible and to assemble at a town called Le Muy, which is some twenty-five miles northwest of the three landing points. The landing points of the Invasion of Southern France—or as they commonly were called, the “beaches”—were St. Rafael, St. Maxim and St. Tropez.

The landings took place on schedule after various preparations, including bombardments from both the air and the sea, and with the provisional paratroop brigade landing in the area of Le Muy. It is my personal opinion that the invasion was a very great success, and this success was due in a large part to careful planning, to detailed knowledge of the terrain and to knowledge of German fortifications and defenses along the southern coast of France. It is not to be forgotten that the forces making this landing—American forces—had been through a great deal of combat experience. The staff work was excellent. To the best of my memory, there were very few “snafus” because of this careful planning. It is fair to say, although I have mentioned it before, that the troops which took part in the Invasion knew full well that to stop on the beach was to risk serious problems and high casualties. As a result, the troops fought forward and moved forward, I believe in one of the most telling attacks of any of the invasions. The strip maps attached hereto give an indication of the rapidity of the move inland in Southern France on D-Day. My own headquarters moved across the beaches, and fighting with our own units moved into the vicinity of St. Aygulf, which was about fifteen to eighteen miles inland from the coast. Our forces were gathering in the vicinity of Le Muy, and here I would like to add a human element into the undertaking of Aug. 15, 1944.

In the staging areas, prior to loading and embarking on the landing craft, the order had specified that the initial assault would take place and then would follow complementary lifts. After the personnel had been landed and the action had started, as soon as possible after would come the first lift, which would be ammunition; then the second lift, which would be fuel and more ammunition, and so forth. Then the rest of the administrative-type equipment, such as the kitchen trucks, would be brought in a later lift.



FINAL PLAN ANVIL

Aug. 15, 1944

- CAMEL FORCE
XX
XX 36 (+)
- DELTA FORCE
XX
XX 45 (+)
- ALPHA FORCE
XX
XX 3 (+)
- X Sudre
DB (FR.)
- XX 117
- GARBO FORCE
XX
XX 1 DB (-)
- XX
XX 1 DMI
- XX
XX 3 DIA
- 2 Gps de Tabor
- XX
XX 9 DIC
- Support...
XX
XX 2 SA (RCN)
- XX
XX 2 DIM
- XX
XX 5 DB
- XX
XX 4 DMM

To be landed over secure beaches in St. Tropez area starting D+1

To be landed over secure beaches and through port of Toulon

We had prepared carefully for the mission we had received. We were to form the base of the Task Force Butler, and to continue a probing operation with the express mission of breaking through the German line, moving to the northwest and cutting the Rhone Valley at Montelimar. This mission suggested a few things to me which had not been considered too carefully. One of them was that if we broke and if we were going upon that extended operation, where and how were we going to eat, except for the K-rations and C-rations which were available? It was true that with our many, many vehicles of combat nature and with our many, many ammunition-carrying trucks, we would have what was considered a very large amount of ammunition, both small arras, automatic weapon ammunition and artillery-type ammunition, for the tanks and the self-propelled artillery. It appeared to me that we would be weeks and weeks and weeks without our kitchen trucks if the operation was successful. If it was not successful, it wouldn't make a great deal of difference.

With this in mind, I suggested that the men take the bows off (the bow being the curved struts which supported the tarps) the six-by-sixes. The six-by-sixes were used as kitchen trucks when their kitchen equipment had been installed. However, when they removed the bows and the tarps and reorganized the trucks, they looked like ammunition and fuel trucks, those being six-by-sixes carrying hundreds of five-gallon cans of fuel for the motor vehicles. These trucks then looked exactly like ammunition trucks and fuel trucks with tarps tightly battoned down, and we just smuggled a required number of kitchen trucks into this type of lift. It was no great moment, but upon a successful landing, which we were very confident we would have, we would have our trucks to start off on this extended operation behind the German lines.

The operation was successful. We were collecting units at St. Aygulf about 3 a.m. on the morning of the 16th. We were at my headquarters which had its kitchen trucks set up. We were dispensing coffee, as St. Aygulf was in the mountains just northwest of St. Maxim and St. Rafael, and it was chilly in the high ground. The men were being fed only coffee as they came through, regardless of who they were or what unit they came from. It was about that time of the early morning when the corps commander came into our area and stopped. He was particularly complimentary of the action which had taken place from H-hour up until this wee hour of the morning the following day.



The 117th Squadron heads for the landing beach during Operation Dragoon.

He commented that we had done a great job, and I said to him, "Well, General, would you like to have a cup of coffee?"

He replied, "I sure would."

We walked over to one of these kitchen trucks, when I suddenly remembered that we were not supposed to have these kitchen trucks until the third or fourth lift, which had not taken place as yet:

General Truscott—I can see him now—had his boot on the bottom step of a small, short ladder, which was used to ascend to the floor of the kitchen truck. He said, "My heavens! Where in the name of heaven did you get this kitchen truck?"

I replied by telling the truth that we were quite sure that this operation would be successful; that we had plenty of room for ammunition and fuel supplies; and that we thought that we probably could use a kitchen truck. Incidentally, we did have a fair amount of ammunition in the kitchen truck itself. General Truscott was not particularly happy about it, but about that time some American infantry units started to come into our area, having made the invasion landing. Remember, this was about fifteen to eighteen miles from the coast, and the first units which appeared were members of the Third

Division. It just so happened that the Third Division was commanded by Gen. Truscott in the invasion of North Africa at Casablanca. The Third Division was coming through at that particular time, and, of course, in the area the odor of coffee was rampant. Like any American soldiers, they came in, descended on the kitchen truck and then disappeared into the woods. As was normal, we gave every soldier that came through there a cup of hot coffee, and then they went on about their business.

This did play a very nice feeling with Gen. Truscott, and he said, "You little rascal. It's a good thing you're feeding the rest of the American forces here with coffee. I personally would like to thank you for taking care of my old division."

I don't mean that we fed the whole division, but we sure gave hot coffee to every American soldier that we came across at that point.

General Butler joined us in the early morning at around 0600 hours on the 16th. Task Force Butler was assembling in place and on time in the vicinity of Le Muy in preparation for the probing to the north toward Draguinan. I repeat that our mission was to break through, and we kept probing with heavy patrols, seeking the weakest point through which we could break their lines. It was in the vicinity of Draguinan that we did break through. The terrain was hilly—I would not say that it was the mountainous type such as the Alps—but it was hilly enough so there were many caves in the vicinity contiguous to Draguinan. Some of our forward elements broke through, and we then threw as much force as we could into what we ascertained was the weakest point of the German line, and then started to push us through very rapidly. The whole Task Force Butler, having been assembled, followed us.

It was in this vicinity that some shots emanated from one of the caves as we were passing. If you remember, it was not our intention to halt and to fight any static battles, but to break the whole force through for the accomplishment of our mission at Montelimar. When some of these shots came from a cave, one of our tanks just wheeled around and let a few rounds of fire go into the mouth of the cave. I was in my command half-track, and naturally we stopped to see what was in the cave. Out of the cave came the entire staff of General Neuling, who was the commanding general of the German forces of Southern France. The German commanding general was a very high-grade, Prussian-type officer, and I would say about fifty-five to sixty years of age. He surrendered his pistol as a token of surrender for his staff and for the small force which was surrounding and supporting his staff. At this point most of his forces were behind us, as we had bypassed them.

He surrendered his pistol to Lieutenant Joe Symes in my presence, and Lt. Symes very nicely presented me with the pistol as being the weapon of the commanding general of the enemy forces of Southern France. I took the gun, which is a beautiful,

elongated-type of deer-hunting pistol—a Luger—bench-made and with Neuling's initials engraved on every part of it. The pistol now is hanging in my library at Delray Beach.

The taking of Gen. Neuling posed somewhat of a problem because frankly we didn't know how to get him back to Corp Headquarters for interrogation and for the normal procedures which are followed in the capture of a high officer in the enemy force.

In the meantime, some correspondents from American news media had been at Corp Headquarters and had requested that they be allowed to visit the force which they understood was to attempt the breakthrough. This group of correspondents came and reported, and said that Corp Headquarters had said if they wanted to see some action, they should come to Task Force Butler, to get in touch with Col. Hodge, and they probably would see all they needed. They did come in two jeeps and explained what they were there for and I told them fine, but to put the two jeeps out of the way behind the half-tracks and to stay with us.

After the incident of the capture of General Neuling and his staff, the news people came to me and said, "We think we will go back now, as you undoubtedly will be moving forward."

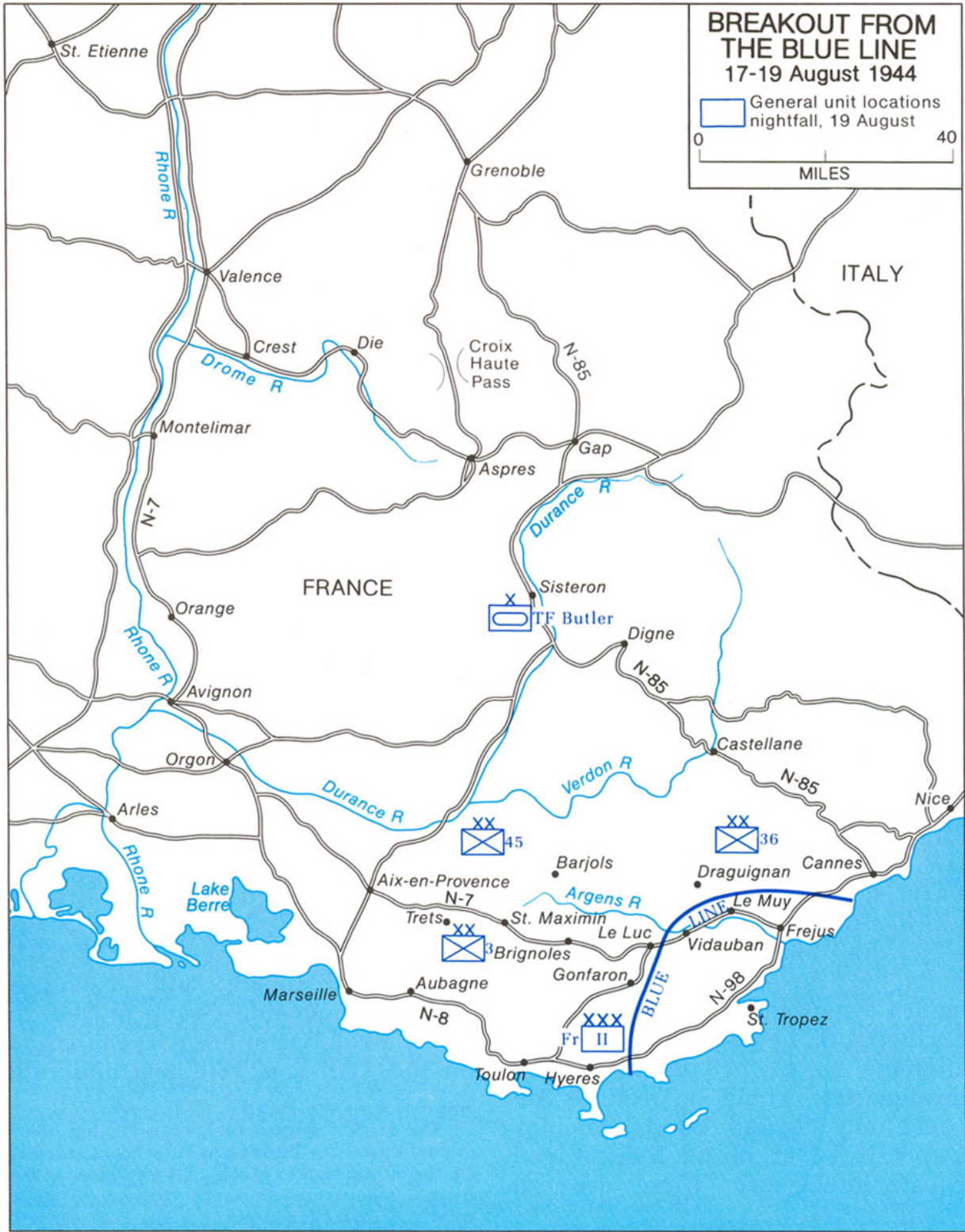
I said, "We are moving forward, and I had forgotten all about you. I'm sorry to say that there is no way that you can get back because the Germans have closed the gap through which we broke. To go by yourselves, trying to get back to the main line of the American forces, would be suicide unless we send a substantial force with you, which we cannot do. All I can say to you is to put yourselves with my headquarters, and we will see what we can do. We will get you back at the first possible opportunity."

I have forgotten to mention that as we were starting out on the mission to cut the Rhone Valley, a Seventh Army intelligence officer got to me just before we shoved off and said, "If you can give any aid to Col. [Waller B.] Booth, please do so". I was so busy with organizing the move, getting necessary patrols and forces in the proper position that I forgot all about it, but as you will hear later in this expedition, Col. Booth's name will come up and under some very interesting circumstances.

After Draguinan, we moved up practically unopposed and, as will be related later, we immediately were aided by the French Forces of Resistance. These units of the FFI were of immeasurable help to us, and they certainly were one of the reasons whereby we proceeded as rapidly as we did toward our mission at Montelimar. The FFI had arranged the severing of all telephonic communications from town to town, so that, in effect, although it may seem highly improbable, the Germans had no way of knowing where we were, - except by air reconnaissance. This move—inasmuch as we were a rapidly moving, completely mechanized unit—would go fifty or sixty miles with practically no opposition, again aided by the FFI.

Moving generally northwest from Draguinan, we proceeded to

Salermmes, then to Aups, gradually getting a little further to the towns of Riez and Valensole. Most of this move was without any opposition at all. It was our plan to move toward Forcalquier, swinging around somewhat to the east until we connected with the Napoleonic Highway at Chateau Arnoux.



MAP 7

Chateau Arnoux, which was an important road junction, was on the Napoleonic Highway which moved north and northwest and which was an important route of approach. The Germans had taken a substantial position at Chateau Arnoux and along the road from Chateau Arnoux to a town called Digne. We had quite a little fight at Chateau Arnoux and took it. Then the battalion of the Thirty-Sixth Division—an infantry battalion—was assigned to Task Force Butler, it was given the task of moving east along the road from Chateau Arnoux to Digne, to clear out the Germans which might be there, with the objective of taking Digne. This way we would not have our flanks exposed. Our tanks moved into Digne, and it turned out to be a Gestapo headquarters town. As a matter of fact, it's a pretty little town, and if you are over there in that area, it is well worthwhile to spend a few days at Digne.

There were several incidences along the line from Chateau Arnoux to Digne, and I believe the reader can well imagine that we were very impatient over any delay because of the main mission. However, there was no way that we could have moved up toward Sisteron and consequently toward our final objective of the mission and let ourselves be exposed to the right and to the rear without putting many miles between us.

The Drive into France

The enemy ambush was a good one and caused us some trouble. We were holding the crossroads at Chateau Arnoux and had sent some of our armor with the battalion, but it was the first serious confrontation we had had since the breakthrough. It is my opinion that only extraordinary courage on the part of the acting battalion commander got the infantry battalion out as well and as lightly as it did. This was Maj. Jim Gentle. At the point of this attack, when we had cleared it up, it was obvious that we had to take the town of Digne, which we did. And when I said before that we had destroyed it, I meant that we had destroyed the Gestapo headquarters, and not the town. A peculiar incident occurred in relation to another general, a pompous little fellow, who was caught bathing in his tub in the hotel he had requisitioned for himself at the Gestapo Headquarters. He was somewhat embarrassed when one of our American sergeants marched him out of the hotel in his BVDs, with his batman running after with his trousers. Needless to say, the American sergeant was not the slightest bit embarrassed, but when they finally got him into our possession, they did allow him to dress. This general officer was a typical Gestapo personality: pompous, sarcastic, and as he told us often,

he was a brave man. This latter opinion was not necessarily shared by us for several reasons.

He had asked to see me, and we had placed him in a pup tent with a very thin, light strand of rope outlining his area of confinement, and with only one sentry. While I had had a great deal of respect for General Neuling, who was a real soldier, I had no respect for this little bit of obnoxiousness that was the Gestapo general.

Nevertheless, when he asked to see me, I had him brought over to my headquarters, and he said, "What I want to say to you is that it is a disgrace for a German general to be a prisoner of war, captured as I was. I want to let you know that I would rather be dead than to be a prisoner."

Through the interpreter I said, "You tell the general I understand his feelings very well, and I have a simple solution. It is as follows. Surrounding his pup tent there is one strand of light rope, purely to outline where he can and cannot go. The sentry has instructions that upon any move of the general over or beyond the rope, he is to be shot immediately. No further questions, no further orders will be given."

Upon my answer to him, being interpreted in German, this hero became quite nervous and immediately was sent back to his little area, with the sentry. The net result of all this was that this brave little man wouldn't even come out of his pup tent because he was afraid he'd get close to that rope. He knew that we were impatient with him; that we didn't care particularly; and that we didn't like carrying him around with us. To make a long story short, he did not take advantage of the suggestion I had given him.



A 117th Cavalry Squadron M5 light tank enters Digne.

After the incident of Digne and Chateau Arnoux, which really held us up only for one day, we started up the Napoleonic Highway toward our next planned point of hesitation. This was at the town of Asprey. It was at Asprey that the planned phase of Task Force Butler had decided to make a move toward the west, over the mountains into the Rhone Valley, toward Montelimar. The attached map illustrates that Grenoble is to the north of Asprey and that a town called Gap is to the east of Asprey, toward the Italian border. Again, we could not move carelessly to the west over the hills until we definitely had determined what forces were to the north and east of Asprey. In other words, no surprises: we were not a large enough force. The patrols that we sent out to the north were sizeable, strong patrols, able to take care of themselves in a moderate type of fire fight. The same type of patrol was sent to the east toward Gap, because we knew nothing of Gap, except that the FFI told us there were a good many German soldiers there and we believed it was a rest camp. As a matter of fact, Gap, it turned out, was a resort town—another pretty town.

We sent a very strong patrol unit toward Gap on a Sunday afternoon.

It was almost impossible to conceive that the Germans had no idea there was an American force anywhere within a hundred miles of them. So on this Sunday afternoon, the scouting and patrolling that was done around the town proved that they were absolutely at a rest camp, with no thought of being within a thousand yards of an American force. We deployed some of the tanks and armored cars and some infantry squads around the town, and then let one tank round be fired into the town. The result was fantastic. I don't believe the Germans fired one shot, but immediately surrendered. And there were 3,500 of them.

This may sound like a very happy point, but I must point out to our readers, that we never had the transportation, food or other requirements to take care of 3,500 prisoners. And we had no idea at this point of where the Thirty-Sixth and the Forty-Fifth Divisions were. They were supposed to follow us. We had heard from confidential reports that they had been held up, and it turned out they were held up for four or five days. So what would a person do with 3,500 prisoners? One cannot have them lying around, so the solution was as follows. We corralled them, put a guard around them, and we did find that in the 3500 there were some impressed Polish soldiers and they were pretty good ones. Through interrogation we discovered that these Polish soldiers hated their German masters, so to speak. We used these Polish soldiers as our own military police, and they were about as rough on the Germans as I have seen.

The interesting point that confronts one in a condition such as this is that you cannot turn 3500 enemy soldiers loose. I'm sure the readers will remember what Napoleon did under similar types of circumstances. He said there was no recourse but to destroy the prisoners. We were not that savage at that point. So what we did was to take one or two jeeps that we call machine gun jeeps and put some of our walking wounded into the jeeps. Then we started them off to the south on the route which we had just come up, hoping that the forward-moving Thirty-Sixth and Forty-Fifth Divisions would pick them up. They hardly could believe their eyes when they saw this long line of prisoners coming out of nowhere, with about six Americans, most of whom had been wounded and the Polish soldiers with yellow brassards on their arms, really moving the herd, so to speak, back to captivity. A six-by-six truck can hold-crowded- about twenty-two or twenty-three men, so you can imagine the burden that was put on the Thirty-Sixth Division having to turn their supply trucks into prisoner of war carry-alls.

I certainly had some unpleasant remarks at later dates from the higher officers of the Thirty-Sixth Division. Of course, with humor, they were saying to us, "You cheap so-and-so. You put us on

the spot. We had to divert all our trucks to get these so-and-sos back, while you were having a merry time up in the mountains." It all ended up all right. The prisoners were collected and our own wounded were taken care of, and it was a successful solution. At any rate, as you read history about 3500 prisoners being taken at the town of Gap by the Thirty-Sixth Division or by Task Force Butler, it was Task Force Butler and the One-Seventeenth Cavalry which did it.

Having solved the problem at Gap and having reconnoitered well toward the north toward Grenoble on the Napoleonic Highway, we felt free to move nearer to our main mission. We advanced in a northwesterly direction, with the idea of cutting directly west to the town of Crest. If this move were successful, we would be within good striking distance of the Rhone Valley and the main highway up the Rhone Valley, over which the entire Nineteenth German Army was retreating. We moved into Crest, or into the lower ground just southwest of Crest, and set up a base of operation.

At this point—why I cannot tell you—the Germans were confused and they did not know we were there. We decided to send a patrol down to as close to the main arteries moving north as we could and to try to get close to a bridge which crossed the Saone at Loriol. Again, this patrol was of substantial size and had with it a demolition team just in case we should get an opportunity to blow a bridge. I was with the patrol, and I remember General Butler had come along with us, beyond Crest, toward Loriol.

I said, "General Butler, I would like very much to go with this demolition group which will have in its company a heavy armored patrol, because if we can blow this bridge, it will be quite an accomplishment." Butler approved and off we went. My vehicle on this particular mission was my command half-track. I shall never forget that I had a male secretary who rode with me practically everywhere, so that in emergencies I could give him a message for radio transmission to our units. He was excellent at getting it accurate and speedily getting it written so that all could read it.

Glenn asked me that day, "Colonel, I would like to go with you in your half-track."

I said, "If you want to, get in."

So off we went, and literally we got down to within about two hundred yards of the bridge. Now, remember, this bridge was crossing the Saone River, which empties into the Rhone River about one thousand yards west. It was truly unbelievable that we could maneuver a patrol and demolition group comprised of about fifteen people to work under the bridge, to attach explosives to it and to get out. And there was never a shot fired. In the meantime, the German forces never even saw us. I don't believe the Germans even knew we were anywhere near that area until the bridge blew right in the middle of their column. I must say, this changed things

quite a bit. If one can visualize the broad highway in those days—it would be called broad—two lanes, sometimes three, but the retreating German array was using all lanes moving northward. And to the left, off about one thousand yards, was the Rhone River and to the right, off about one thousand yards, was the high ground with hills running four to five hundred feet. So when the bridge blew, it had a stunning effect on the entire German Nineteenth Army.

We had realized at this point that we had a tiger by the tail, but on the other hand, we felt that the Thirty-Sixth and the Forty-Fifth Divisions following our route up, and the Third Division attempting to push up the Rhone Valley, would be putting in an appearance in short order. I believe this was three days after our departure from the area of Le Muy that we were at Loriol, and it was quite a move. Quite naturally, when one is facing a massive force such as this with a relatively tiny group, one begins to wonder where the major units are. Again, the question of ammunition and fuel supply is a paramount one. We distributed our heavier firepower, such as self-propelled artillery and tanks, in the high ground, east of the avenues of retreat, between the retreating road and our elements. This was a distance of between one thousand and fifteen hundred yards, which was perfect for direct fire into the disorganized mass of military equipment, including some horse-drawn vehicles.

Montelimar was about fifteen miles south of Loriol on the Rhone River and was an important rail junction. The objective was to cut the Rhone Valley, at this point. It became quite obvious that Montelimar was an important German center of operations and was not going to be taken without a substantial force. At least, that's what I thought.

Again, picture this: a retreating column, moving north, abreast for as many lanes as they could get; on their left the Rhone River and no bridges and on their right the high ground with artillery and tanks firing directly into their column. You can imagine that there was going to be a severe reaction on the part of the Germans. Communications with our own forces substantially further south of us was very poor because of the distances, and we were praying that we could get a message to our Air Force, since this was perhaps the greatest military target that ever had been presented. We did not succeed in getting information of this important type to the Air Force, but their own reconnaissance flights discovered this congested, disorganized column for miles and miles, from Loriol down to Montelimar, and, of course, brought in their attack planes. It was about the worst massacre I've even seen.

There really was no anti-aircraft fire that could be brought to bear on the attacking planes and, of course, as they should have done, the attacking planes would look over the back of the

hills which were between our own headquarters and the German column. You could almost hear one pilot think, "Well, what's that?" That was our headquarters, with our few remaining trucks of ammunition and fuel. Of course, they dived on it, not knowing that there were American forces anywhere near that area. To do the pilots justice, when you dive on a target such as some trucks, you're going at such a speed that all you know is that there are some vehicles there. Because of the dive speed, you don't know if they're German or Chinese or American, and some of our trucks were destroyed. This made the situation a little tighter, because we still had no idea as to when our major forces would catch up with us.

I cannot pass this mission without being critical of the tactics used here. We had attached to Task Force Butler a company of combat engineers, and as you may know, most units of combat engineers are worth their weight in gold. The reason for their being attached to us was that if we did cut the Rhone Valley, they could be used to mine the area between the Rhone River and the avenues of escape; or in the low ground running parallel to the foothills to the east. Why—and I will never know—but General Butler decided to launch an infantry attack on Montelimar, which he never had a chance in the world of taking. He used the company of engineers in the attack and, of course, the infantry attack was a failure. There was no possibility of their even making a dent at Montelimar with the forces which were available to him. At the same time, he had dissipated the company of engineers, using them for other than their most competent mission, which was to have been to plant mine fields from the avenues of escape to the hills where we had a substantial amount of fire power to cover the mine fields. This, in my opinion, aided the Nineteenth German Army to gain time to start their reaction and to launch vigorous attacks on our own forces. This was a decision which I found difficult to believe when I learned of it. Gen. Butler, as I said before, was a very brave man and certainly an intelligent one. He was not as well-trained in tactics and the use of his various arms as he should have been, and I regret this mistake for many reasons.

I do not mean that there was no chance of Gen. Butler taking Montelimar, because behind the retreating infantry divisions and along with them were two Panzer divisions [There was only one—ed.]. One of them was the crack Panzer division of the German Army, the Eleventh Panzer Division.

A human story, as there always are in conditions and actions such as this: A very high-grade officer by the name of Capt. Omar Brown had spoken to me at Pazzouli, saying that he would like to consider being sent home for about thirty days, as he was afraid he was having marital troubles. I had attended Omar's wedding—it must have been about August of 1942—and I was distressed to hear of this fine, upright young man suffering the feelings of a for-

gotten soldier.

He said, "I will have some mail pretty soon, and I would like to hold this decision until such time as I get additional mail. Then I may have to come and speak to you later about this."

I said, "Omar, when you're ready, you come in to see me, and we'll see what we can do."

I believe it was on the morning of the embarkation to Southern France, and we were on the move, and he came to me and said, "Colonel, I have worse news. I think my marriage is going to break up and my wife wants a divorce to marry another man. I need to go home."

I said, "Omar, I would like to do it, but at this particular point, you know where we're going now. It is impossible for anybody to leave this unit unless they're hurt."

Capt. Brown accepted this very nicely and with understanding.

Then, at Crest, up near Loriol, we had a real old-fashioned, eyeball-to-eyeball tank battle. Capt. Brown was there, but what was going through his mind I will never know, because he was killed while trying to fire a tommy gun through the eye-slits of a German tank. He obviously had no chance of survival, and I can only conclude that his mind had worked to a point where if he was going to be a casualty, he might as well do it right.

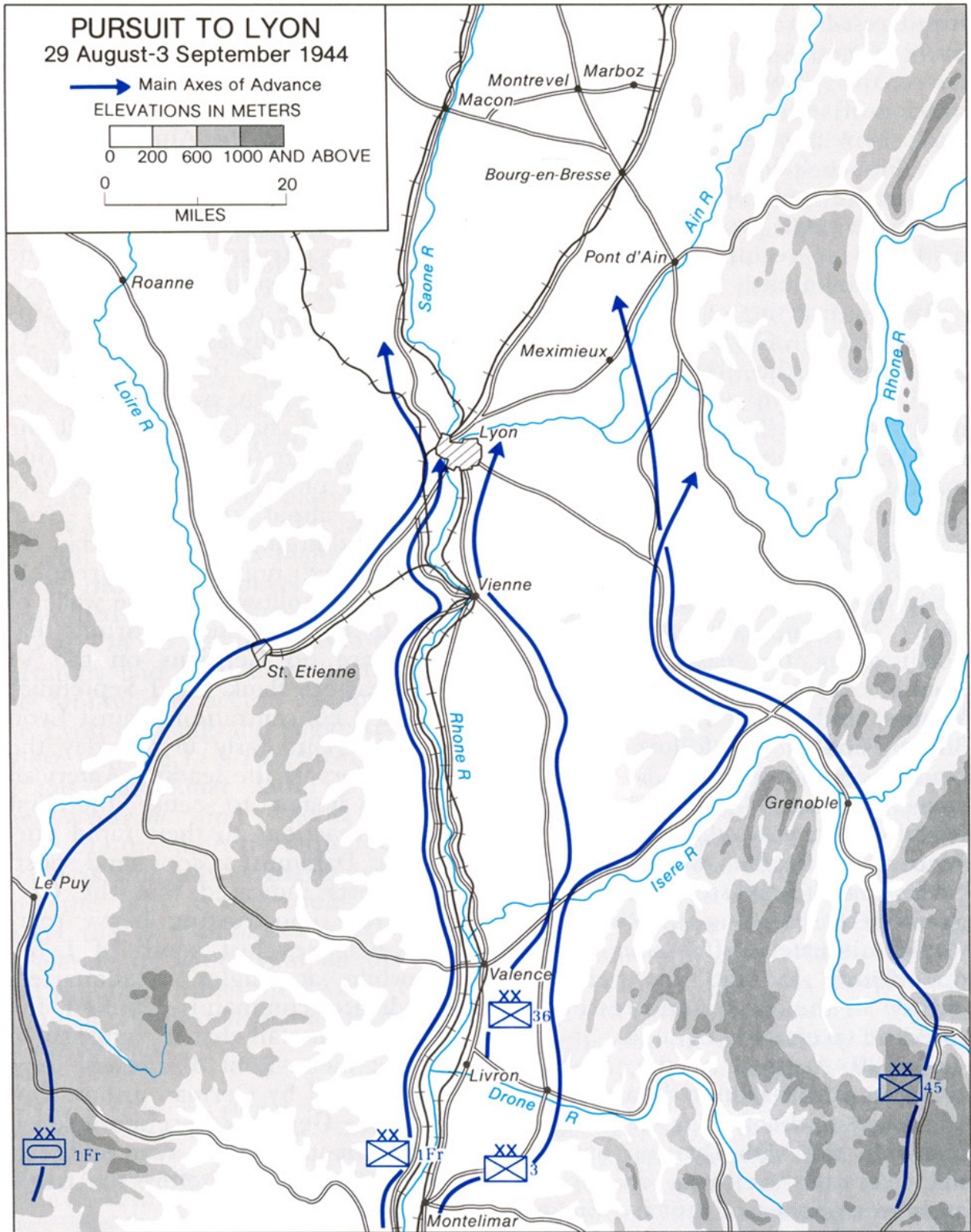
The Air Force, as I have said, had a heyday between Montelimar and Loriol. They were very busy little beavers. In the meantime, our ammunition was declining to a very disastrous level, so much so that in the last two days we would not permit artillery fire into the column, which was trying to reorganize, unless an officer looked through the sights at direct fire and ascertained that the target was worthwhile. Our fuel, when finally the Thirty-Sixth Division reached us, was practically non-existent; I believe we figured we could have moved fifteen miles on the fuel which we had left. But those are the chances of war, and it came out, I believe, as one of the greatest maneuvers and end runs to cut the retreat avenue of an opposing force that I have heard about. I don't in the slightest way mean to detract from Gen. Butler's courage, and I think he was a good, bold commander, but prone at times not to make a proper estimate of the situation and then would have to pay the penalty.

Beginning the Operation North of Montelimar

Upon being relieved by the Thirty-Sixth Division in the vicinity of Loriol and Crest, just north of Montelimar, the Third Division was pushing strongly up the Rhone Valley to take Montelimar and to pursue the Nineteenth German Army to the north. By this time, the German Army had reacted and had done an amazing job of reorganizing and pulling their heavier units into the

continued harassment of the much smaller forces facing it. I think I pointed out to you earlier that the Eleventh Panzer Division, which was one of the best of the German Army, was fighting very well and very thoroughly, and we happened to be in their way.

Task Force Butler, as such, was disbanded at Crest and Loriol, and the Thirty-Sixth Division took over. There is an incident here, however, before I leave that one thing. As I mentioned before, in my opinion, a grave tactical error was made by the use of the company of combat engineers to launch an infantry attack at night at Montelimar, with no chance at all of securing the town. The net result of this was that the company of engineers was mauled badly, and they were unable to fulfill their most important mission, which would have been to lay minefields between the highway in the Rhone Valley and the hills which were just east of the highway. If they had done this, substantial fire power would have been put on the minefields, and German armor would have been slowed substantially and perhaps stalled.



MAP 10

General Dahlquist had taken command of the Thirty-sixth Division at the planning phase of Anvil and arrived at Crest/Loriol about the 25th of August. Right behind him, by light airplane, came General Truscott, the commanding general of the Sixth Corp. Gen. Truscott, a fine soldier, tactician and strategist, was highly disappointed that the Nineteenth German Army had been allowed to escape the trap. He was so upset that he was blaming Gen. Dahlquist for this breakthrough. General Truscott called me into a conference—just he and I alone.

He said, "Hodge, what happened here, because I am going to relieve Gen. Dahlquist for not having laid the minefields."

This type of happening is very dissatisfying; on the other hand, I had no recourse but to inform Gen. Truscott of my own thoughts on the matter, which I did, these thoughts being that the attack by infantry on Montelimar with the small force which was available to General Butler was a very grave error and interfered with the mine-laying capabilities of the engineers. I explained to Gen. Truscott that it was not Gen. Dahlquist was at fault. It was Butler who erred. Dahlquist was not relieved.

The Task Force Butler was disbanded, and we then became attached to the Sixth Corp, as reconnaissance elements. We proceeded more or less on the left flank of the Forty-Fifth forward, leap-frogging Grenoble, as the Forty-Fifth was taking Grenoble without much opposition, and we moved to the northeast, and rather rapidly, because the German resistance in that area was practically nil. We continued this rapid movement roughly up route 75, moving from Warron, up toward Lagnieu. And our patrols to the west at Meximieux got into a very heavy fire fight with elements of Nineteenth German Army. This was more than just a little fire fight. It was a determined effort to keep us from getting too close to the right flank of the retreating German Army. I'd like to believe that we forced them to continue their movements on routes further to the west, that is, the route from Lyon to Macon on the main highway, Macon being northwest of Bourg. We were sure that their route, and the shortest route, to their homeland and their defensive position was the route from Lyon to Bourg.

At the fire fight at Meximieux, my headquarters were at about Lagnieu, and on the afternoon of the battle going on at Meximieux, we received the following message: "You will move to the town of Montreval, which you will seize and hold. You will occupy this town by daybreak tomorrow morning. Signed, General Carlton, Chief of Staff, Sixth Corp."

It was obvious that Montreval was one of the avenues of retreat for the German Army, and that this was going to be a mission which almost could be called a suicide mission. Our unit was no match for the Panzers, with their infantry backup division.



Troopers arrive in Montrevel on September 3, 1944.

We were in a battle at Meximieux which was taking up part of our tanks and Troop C, commanded by Capt. Nugent of the reconnaissance battalion. I called my officers together at approximately the town of Ponein, in the evening and gave them the following orders: "Major McGarry, you will take command of the rest of the squadron, and you will seize and hold Montrevel and occupy it by daybreak tomorrow morning. I will go back to Meximieux. We're in a battle, and I will try to withdraw that unit and bring them up with me to Montrevel. I will be there by the time that you are there. Is that clear?"

The order was given. All the officers in the room knew that this was going to be a very, very difficult task, and the chances of coming out of this without being badly damaged were very remote indeed.

I am going to quote a paragraph from the book of Command Decisions by Gen, Truscott. This paragraph was listed at the bottom of page number 439: "This incident was—almost the only mistake this gallant 117th Cavalry squadron made during the entire campaign. I had ordered Colonel Hodge to gain the rear of the 11th Panzer Division which was opposing the 45th Infantry Division at Bourg, and he had done so. This detachment obviously had grown somewhat careless because when the 11th Panzer withdrew during the night, these companies were surprised and overrun, and most of the one and a half companies, were captured. It was a sad blow to me,

even though many of these men rejoined us within the next few weeks. It is testimonial to the Cavalry spirit and to the attitude of the American soldiers that this blow only spurred the squadron on to greater efforts."

My operations officer, Col. Samsel, was a very careful and detailed type of an officer, and he religiously kept all of the orders—and has a record of them to this day—which we received during this campaign. So the fact of the matter was contrary to the incident explained by Gen. Truscott's book and was an order to directly attack Montreval, to seize it and to hold it, which we did at a very heavy cost, granted. But, Gen. Truscott later told me that he had not realized this, but that it was really worthwhile it had turned the Germans from directly through Bourg toward the more westerly route of retreat, Lyon to Chalon and Dijon, which gave the American forces a greater opportunity to move forward and harass them. However, I must take exception to the paragraph on page 439, because it is directly contrary to fact.

The battle of Montreval was one of the major beatings which our unit took. I would like to say that at Montreval it wasn't that the vehicles were captured, that is, our vehicles. It was that the fact that the armor and the heavy weapons, including artillery trained on us in the town, was so severe that the vehicles were destroyed and a good deal of personnel with them. It is worthy to note here that the commanding general of the Eleventh Panzer Division sent me a message through a doctor whom we had left in Montreval when we pulled out the first time to retake the town.

The commanding general said, "We just don't believe that there is a small armored force here. We believe it is a big operation, and when we found out that it is only a squadron, we were utterly amazed, and would you please convey my congratulations to your commanding officer, who is putting up the worst fight that we have had in the war."

The one company and a half, as quoted, was approximately right in the losses, and I must say that the Sixth Corp got us vehicles so that we could continue the pursuit and the battle going north. But instead of having the new light tanks and new armored cars, they gave us six-by-six trucks, which was quite a come down for our men, who were used to riding in armored vehicles. We reorganized on our particular mission after Montreval, quickly and while en route, and I will never forget the detail of black drivers who brought our new trucks up. There were, I would imagine, about twenty-four of them, and they did a splendid job.

I told the sergeant commanding them, "You know that you are going to stay here; you're assigned here; and you're going to drive these trucks, and this is no picnic. This is no transportation job. As far as you're concerned, these trucks are tanks and

armored cars. What is your feeling on it?"



*Entrée
Chemin
de Ronde.*

A squadron M5 knocked out in Montreval.

And with a very proud bearing, he informed me that they were there; they knew that they were going to be attached to it; everybody knew of us; they were proud to serve with us; and he would see to it that his men would operate as gallantly as we had done. It was my pleasure at a later time, when they had returned to their transportation corps, to have them up forward end to decorate eight of them for bravery and for their attention to duty that had been displayed during this very onerous task on the part of these drivers. If any of them read this book, they will understand, and my compliments to them.

Referring back to the incident of Montreval, it is possible in times of moving combat to have an order given by a commanding general to a staff officer and to have the order changed to a considerable degree by the time the staff officer has sent it out. I am sure this is what happened at Montreval, and while it inflicted severe casualties on us, the attack on Montreval—not at the rear of the Eleventh Panzers, but right smack at their front—

it was an attack worthwhile, as I say, because it did divert them to the west, thus gaining more time for the American forces to move up east of them. I am emphasizing this because it is important.

We continued our moving operation to the north, and proceeded along the road to Doarl and then further on up to the town of Gray, which is on the Soane River. Our movement to this area as a series of small engagements, with nothing resembling determined resistance, rather a small delaying and harassing action on the part of the Germans. It was at the town of Gray where we hid some small opposition, but not very much. We moved in there in the evening, and I remember an incident I think would be of interest to readers.

I was asleep on the floor of the railway station in the town of Gray, as we were all very tired, and I was awakened about 2:00 a.m. by one of the sergeants in my headquarters. He said, "Colonel, at the post on the river (which was on the River Saone) we have just picked up a boat in which there is a dilapidated looking Frenchman who says he is part of the FFI (the French Force Resistance). He has an important message for you which he can give only to you."

I said, "Where is he?"

He said, "He is under guard just outside the door. Will you see him?"

I said, "Yes, I will. Bring him in."

This dilapidated-looking Frenchman identified himself and said,

"I am a messenger from Colonel Booth."

We had been so busy that I had forgotten all about the name Col. Booth. It had been given to me, you may remember, as we were landing in Southern France, and honestly, the action that had taken place had displaced any thought of Col. Booth from my mind.

I said, "Well, where is he?"

He said, "He is on the other side of the river (which, incidentally, was all controlled by the Germans), and he would like to meet you at your river's edge tomorrow night or tonight at midnight for a conference."

While we were not operating behind the lines as we had been during the early weeks of the invasion, we were nevertheless the forward elements of the advancing American army, and we had probed way into German-occupied territory. So, we were very skeptical of any unsolicited messenger moving into our headquarters. However, the Frenchman had identified himself sufficiently, and he hadn't seen too much of us, so we let him go back and arranged to be at the river's edge at midnight that night. We had some fire fights going on around us in the town of Gray, but before I get into the meeting at midnight that day, I would like to give an illustration of how savage people can be.

The town of Gray had been occupied by the Germans, and as usual, there were some German sympathizers or German agents of French nationality. The retreat of the Germans after we had captured the town left these agents and sympathizers in the town to shift for themselves. Most of them were French women who had been keeping company with the Germans and in some cases with Gestapo agents. The French civilian treatment of these women is almost beyond description. The first punishment the French gave them was to shave their heads and then to unclothe them and march them through the streets. They also did other things which were degrading to a human being. I came upon a commotion in town, and this is what it was. They were mistreating these women in an unbelievable fashion, and I put a stop to it immediately, and sent in a platoon of soldiers to take the women away, put their clothes on and then we reported them and took them back to the FFI, who had a military status at that point. The French elements commanding in that area had worked it out so that any spies or sympathizers were handed over to them.

My point here is that the women who undoubtedly were spies and who had given information to the German forces, were guilty as all getout, but no human being should be subjected to the indignities to which they were subjected. They were turned over to the FFI, and I feel they received a trial, although rather a summary trial, and were shot, which I can find no fault with. But it is an evidence of how thin the veneer of a human being is when savagery takes over.



Col. Waller Booth

At midnight that night I was at the river's edge and onto shore came a dark, hand-powered boat with the same Frenchman who had appeared that morning and an American officer. The American officer identified himself as Colonel Waller Booth, and explained to me that he was the commander of a team of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), which had as its mission being dropped behind the German lines to aid and to organize the French forces of resistance and also to plant demolitions for destruction of German dumps and so forth, when possible. Col. Booth obviously appeared to be an American, but one under conditions such as that does not automatically take the_ word. The normal type of procedure was to inquire of baseball teams and of those things typically American, which would aid you in determining your decision as to whether this was an American or not. In this case, we even got into where he had gone to school, and he replied Princeton. I thought if he was lying now I would have him, since I knew a lot of them, including my beloved partner Russell Forgan, who I had heard at that time was in command of the OSS on the continent. Booth said he had to send a message via London by short wave radio, and I said before he sent it I'd like to know what he wanted us for and just exactly what he was doing there. His response was that he wanted help from us. The regiment of soldiers facing us on the

other bank of the river were all Ukrainians who had been impressed into the German Army by the Germans, but whose non-commissioned and commissioned officers were from the German Army, while the body of the command were Ukrainian. Booth went on to say that at 0700 hours the next morning, the Ukrainian regiment was going to revolt and to destroy their officers. And that certainly it was expected that the other German forces in the area immediately would put in an attack or a counter attack. He said that he had heard of us and that he had been given my name; that we would be the forward elements; and that he would like to have some help the next day.

Our position was that we were carrying on three or four fire fights around Gray on the east side of the river, and we were in no position to help anybody. However, I said, "I'll tell you what we'll do, Colonel. If, you identify yourself through these messages, we will aid you in whatever way we can, but not for long because we've got to get out of here."

He sent his messages, and he said, "I am going to [word missing] this with the head of the OSS."

I said, "What's his name?"

He said, "Colonel Forgan."

I said, "What's his first name?"

He said, "It is Russell." Again, I thought I had him because Forgan's name was James Russell, but he was called Russ.

Col. Booth thought for a moment, then he said, "Well, his real name is James Russell Forgan, and that's who I have to report to."

I said, "Okay, you're cleared. Go ahead and send the message, but put in a little added comment which says Charlie Hodge sends you his best and wishes he were here."

Believe it or not, Forgan got the message in London. This detachment of OSS that Booth had with him was composed of a captain with the French Army who had been working closely with the FFI and who had been dropped by parachute with Col. Booth. Booth also had with him a lieutenant of the US Navy, who turned himself in to us in a peculiar sort of way. He was picked up by a sergeant with a patrol, and as he was captured, of course, without resistance, he identified himself as Lt. Michael Burke, USN, and he was, believe it or not, in a Navy uniform with a Navy helmet.

He was brought up to me and he said, "Sir, Lt. Burke, US Navy, reporting."

This was rather surprising, and I said, "What the hell are you doing here?"

He said, "I am part of Col. Booth's mission, and I'd like to join your outfit. We've completed our mission here."

He was a very attractive man and obviously a courageous one, and of us liked him immediately. We took him in to feed him and to do whatever we could for him. He later turned out, as I

understand, to be the manager of the Yankee baseball team, and I'll bet he was a good one.

I want to add now that I shall refer to a book which was written by Col. Walter Booth and which has two or three references to his association with us during the next thirty to thirty-five days. I'm going to hold that for a moment, but the name of the book is "Mission Marcel Proust," copyright 1972, published by Dorrane, Philadelphia. The story is of the OSS detachment serving with us is one of itself, and I am going to hold that and treat it as a separate series of incidents. I believe that readers will find this to be very interesting.

I would like to offer a few remarks on the incident in which the Ukrainian regiment revolted and destroyed their so-called imposed officers. At 0700 hours on the fateful morning of the revolt, we heard a substantial amount of small arms fire, and we knew that the revolt was taking place. As per our offer to aid Col. Booth, and the Ukrainian soldiers, we had agreed to put artillery fire just forward of their position, to forestall or to aid in defeating any attack or counter attack by the other German forces in that area. I believe my memory serves me accurately when we agreed to make artillery fire available to them for approximately thirty minutes to forestall the immediate counter attack.

The operation worked pretty well, however, there was one unforeseen complication. That was the First French Army which at that point was moving north and which had forces in the vicinity of the small towns of Mirebeau and Pontellier. The French forces obviously had no knowledge at that point of the revolt by the Ukrainian regiment, and when they saw a substantial number of personnel coming down at them in German uniforms, they obviously took action. It was not a serious error, in the sense that it was soon righted by Booth and his people.



Seasoned troopers

The OSS and the 117th

This is a good spot in which to explain to you another unusual incident or series of incidents having to do with the detachment of OSS which we picked up at Gray. We had quite naturally housed, fed and loaned the OSS detachment several vehicles. This detachment, of only three men-represented certain capabilities and characteristics.

The commanding officer of the detachment, Col. Sooth, was indeed a brave man, and he begged to be allowed to enter this type of warfare, of the OSS, even though he was substantially over age for to is type of work. In case he reads this, I don't mean to say he was an old man, but jumping behind enemy lines by parachute normally was reserved for men younger than Col. Booth. He was a very persuasive man, and as I understand it from my partner Forgan, nothing would do but that he be allowed to jump. He won out and he did.

Capt. Henri Comu, a native French officer, was of tremendous help, not only to his OSS detachment, but also to us in his knowledge of the terrain, the characteristics of the people of the area of Alsace-Lorraine, into which we were going, and his extraordinary courage under all conditions.

Mike Burke of the Navy I really believe thrived on danger, and he represented the type of officer who was best qualified for dangerous assignments. We all soon got to admire this OSS detachment, and we had reason to believe that they liked us. Col. Booth came to me and said, "Col. Hodge, we would like very much to remain with this unit, as we now see what you are doing, and it is our cup of tea. We would like to remain with it and to continue to help you in the coming campaign in the Vosges Mountains and in Alsace-Lorraine . We think we can be of substantial help. Can you arrange it?"

I said, "Col. Booth, we would like very much to have you, but sometimes the OSS and the Army pursue different paths. As you know the Army sometimes frowns on the cloak and dagger stuff, and I'm sure that the OSS considers the Army rather stodgy when it comes to tactics and even battle intelligence."

We just kept them for a while and finally made it official two or three weeks later, but the point then became pertinent, as to what they were going to use for vehicles. They needed a few more people in their detachment, as well. Col. Booth, with his normal convinceability, soon had that in hand, and the OSS agreed that they would send up some other personnel with jeeps and uniforms and so on, to outfit the small detachment which was with us.

I have forgotten to mention a very important member of the OSS team, who was one of the great Frenchmen I have met. He was a nobleman, but did not serve under his own name. He had an extraordinary dedication to France and a hate for the Germans which lay within his soul. He was a tiger; FFI loved him, and his aid was tremendous. Unfortunately, he was killed while serving with us.

Booth had discussed with me the various ways in which he thought they could be of great help, such as passing through the German lines in the various defense positions in towns which were going to face us in our operation through the Vosges mountains and into Alsace on Strasbourg. Hopefully, they would bring back from inside the German positions the locations of important military points, such as artillery positions, concentrations of forces, machine gun positions and so forth. One does not have to be a military tactician to realize that if one knows exactly where these points of defense are, the attacking force has two or three choices to eliminate those important points.

One of the first and least costly is to pinpoint artillery fire. Another one is to know the covered avenues of approach far patrols in force, combat patrols and then to eliminate those positions. Another choice is an attack and force, that force relative to the defensive position's position. That will assure liquidation of those positions. And the last one, of course, is using close ground support or destruction of the position by air, weather permitting at that point,

I believe it is fair to say that Col. Booth is the one who described to us what he thought that detachment could do for us, and

it resolved itself into really intelligence and spy work beyond the German positions of the towns which the Germans held. It was a risky business and only could have been carried out by men with an intense desire to forward our movement, or by men such as Cornu and the young Count, who were dedicated with their lives to the elimination of the Germans from their beloved country.

The type of missions, then, that were to be performed were set. Arrangements were made by Col. Booth and with our aide to coordinate all of their missions and to give them help where we could. In all honesty, the only help that they could be given was by themselves after they had passed through the German lines. It is proper to say that they did provide themselves with a lot of help, because once they had entered into the town behind which the Germans occupied, they soon found their own way to centers of rabid, anti-German FFI members, including many of the storekeepers who provided them with accurate information of the dispositions of the German troops in town, the artillery positions, and so forth. The information which came from this detachment absolutely was astounding and unbelievably accurate. Some of the towns were St. Loup, Bains les Bains, Xertigny, Epinal which was an important point on the Moselle River in the foothills of the Vosges mountains. The crossing of the Moselle was, in my memory, handled by the Forty-Fifth, under the command of Gen. Eagles. The aide with the OSS detachment gave to the One-Seventeenth, which of course was passed on, accurate information which was a splendid help. I'm sure it resulted in the saving of many casualties.

An important event took place just about this time, and it was were when our patrols moving from the area of St. Loup to the northwest town of Darney. That important incident was the meeting of the forces coming up from the Invasion of Southern France with the Second Armored Division French, commanded by General Le Clerc. The forces met in Darney. This was the linking up of Anvil and Overlord, Overlord being the name for the great invasion in France from England. The Second French Armored Division was part of the Third American Army, commanded by General Patton, and most of you realize that his Third Army was made up principally of armored division; support and had a terrific striking force and a capability of rapid movement. It was a great day when we realized that we had linked up with the invasion forces.

I believe at this point or later on, Le Clerc's division was attached to the Seventh Army for s reinforcement for our Alsace-Lorraine campaign, with our objective at that point being Strasbourg. At this point we were attached to the Forty-Fifth Division, as mentioned in the capture of Epinal. I think that it is time to label the next period of operations as the Vosges Mountains campaign.

The One-Seventeenth was still attached to the Forty-Fifth, whose commander was Gen. Eagles. It was a division really from Oklahoma and a good one. Our next main effort in moving into the Vosges was at a town called Rambervillers. This town was an important road junction

and the center of a road extending in all directions, including directly into the Vogue and north to Baccarat and Lunevilles. Another nasty little place, just to the southeast of Baccarat was Raon-1'Etape. Our first major confrontation was at Rambervillers, when we participated with the Forty-Fifth in taking that town. We had a substantial fight at that town and when it was secured we stopped for a while to consolidate and to make further arrangement's for the move higher into the Vosges Mountains, and then across the Plains of Alsace to Strasbourg.

It was at Rambervillers, when just after Gen. Eagles and I had met on the outskirts of town and had a final discussion on the movement further, that Gen. Eagles jeep hit a land mine, and he was very severely injured.

At Rambervillers we were in the town and my headquarters was just on the outskirts in a little suburb where we were conducting our planning for further movement. I should like to recite an incident at this point which I suppose I could be criticized for, but here's what happened.

The requirement for junior officers, that is, platoon leader type, in all units of the Sixth Corp, were very severe. Because we had had a great many casualties in platoon leaders, which is not unusual in long, extended fighting such as we had been doing since August 15, the Sixth Corps was short on junior officers. Incidentally, this was around the beginning of November, 1944, when we were at Rambervillers.

The town was being shelled heavily, practically at all times and at least nine or ten times a day. When this happened the soldiers got pretty well used to the timing because the Germans were so methodical and we could find ourselves reasonably well protected behind hills and so forth. However, as I mentioned, the Sixth Corp was so in need of officers that Gen. Truscott, our Corp commander, called me in and said, "Charlie, how many good sergeants can you recommend for battlefield promotions to the rank of second lieutenant?"

I said, "General, I could say that off-hand there are eleven that I would feel completely qualified to command a platoon. I assure you they all have had extraordinarily long combat experience."

General Truscott said, "How soon can I get them?"

I said, "That's up to you, General. They've got to pass the Board, and they don't have much time to study if you're thinking of commissioning them in the way they do back in the States."

"But, I'm not thinking about that," he said. "I want your recommendation, and if you will recommend them, I'll have a Board up here his evening or this afternoon to meet them and pass them. They'll be leaving here immediately. "

I said, "That's fine by me, General."

So sure enough, up came a Board of two officers to interview and to investigate as best as they could the sergeant personnel who had been selected for battlefield promotions. They all were good men, honest, great American young men, and I can't say too much for them.

However, after the Board had been up and had passed every one of them for battlefield promotion to an officer, the Board went back and said they would send the papers up later and then it would be official when the papers were signed.

In the meantime, a wonderful looking young man, Sgt. Kelley, was one of the sergeants selected. He left my headquarters and went back to his own troop, as we called them, and while moving out to get some mess, he was hit by shrapnel from a bursting shell and seriously hurt. We did not know what the extent of his injuries were.

I philosophized with myself and searched by conscience, and in my opinion, the sergeant had been passed, recommended, all papers were in order, except the signature, making him an officer, even though it practically was a sure thing that he would not be capable of serving any further. If this was dishonest to the government, then I was dishonest, but I did have the privilege of sneaking back to the hospital where it had been determined that he was paralyzed from the waist down for life and I pinned his gold bars on his hospital gown on the cot in the hospital. He was then an officer.

The economic result of a thing like this to himself and to his family was substantially advanced from the rank of sergeant. On the other hand, that man had fought all through North Africa, Italy, France, and would have been made an officer. So as I said, I did it.

When we were on the north flank of the Forty-Fifth, holding Ramberviller and preparing ourselves for an attack toward Baccarat, there was not too much pitched fighting at that point because we held the town. But there was severe patrolling back and forth. And patrolling a close situation such as this became quite hair-raising, if you were one of the patrolees. This incident I want to recite is one of a great man, a Jewish sergeant; big man, big nose, big mind, big heart.

His name was Mo Parsoff and Ho was a kosher butcher in the Bronx. He was a natural born leader and had some of the greatest humor that it ever has been my pleasure to be-connected with. I'll never forget that when he had his patrol out one night and he was hit, I think for the fifth time, I saw him coming back—he wasn't badly hurt—but I said, "How do you feel?"

He said, "I'm glad to be back, Colonel. As I was lying out there a Kraut got us from their patrol, firing into ours. I just laid perfectly still as if I were dead, because I knew that if they stopped to investigate me and ran their hand over my nose because it was night, they'd know I was one of those people they were after, read I'd have very little chance of getting back to my unit. Believe me, I don't think I even breathed while they were looking around me."

Of course, sometimes the humor got a little rough. There wore several remarks from some of the other soldiers who said, "So, you're going to the hospital now. See if they can't cut your nose down a little before you come back." Mo was just chuckling away, and I loved the man.

Another interesting meeting which I think will be pleasant for the readers to hear was when we were detached suddenly from the Forty-Fifth Division and were attached to the Second Division, French Armored, under General Le Clerc. The purpose of this attachment was that Gen. Le Clerc had been assigned to move with all speed possible after the hesitation on the Rambervillers-Luneville line. Our mission was to be on the right flank of the Second Armored Division after we moved further into the Vosges Mountains, and I was ordered to report to Le Clerc.

I think I mentioned that Le Clerc was a *nom-de-guerre*, as he was a French nobleman of some standing. He was the general who brought the first operation parts of the New French Army up from Lake Chad in Africa to meet the British Eighth Army and the Americans in Tunisia, and who joined them at the Mareth Line. Gen. Le Clerc also was obviously, a devoted Frenchman and was one of the most clean-cut men and gentlemen whom I ever have met. I went to Luneville to lunch with him and his staff, and we were sitting in a small house, in a dining room, where we were having luncheon. As with most of the towns in that area, Luneville was being shelled several times a day. When a soldier gets used to artillery fire he knows without formal instruction when an incoming shell is going to be close or not. If it is not, you'll find that the soldier pays no attention to it. But he knows immediately if it is headed for his vicinity, and if so there's a mad scramble to duck.

We were having luncheon, and we could hear a shell coming in. Everyone at that table, knew that it was going to be a close call. At that point, off she went—"Wham"—right in the doorway of the entrance of the house. It was one of the bad moments of my life, I and another officers had heard it and knew when it was about to strike and went down under the table. When I arose, I saw Gen. Le Clerc just sitting there, never batting an eyelash, continuing his lunch as if nothing had happened. As a matter of fact, the sentries at the front door were killed and a jeepload of French soldiers right outside the entrance also were destroyed. However, the coolness of Le Clerc warmed my heart. I was kind of sorry that I ducked, but I did.

Gen. Le Clerc said, "Col. Hodge, I have asked for your unit because we must take the next town of Baccarat, for a jump-off place for the Alsatian Plain. And while you may have some other chores, we'll hope that you'll be with us when we get into strategy. In the meantime, We should take Baccarat on about the ninth of November, and don't forget, Col. Hodge, Armistice Day is November 11. So we will get in there in time to have a celebration of Armistice Day in Baccarat.

He said, "You take it from the south; we'll take it from the north, and we'll meet you in town.

I said, "Yes, Sir. Very happy to serve with you," and off I went to my own headquarters at Rambervillers.

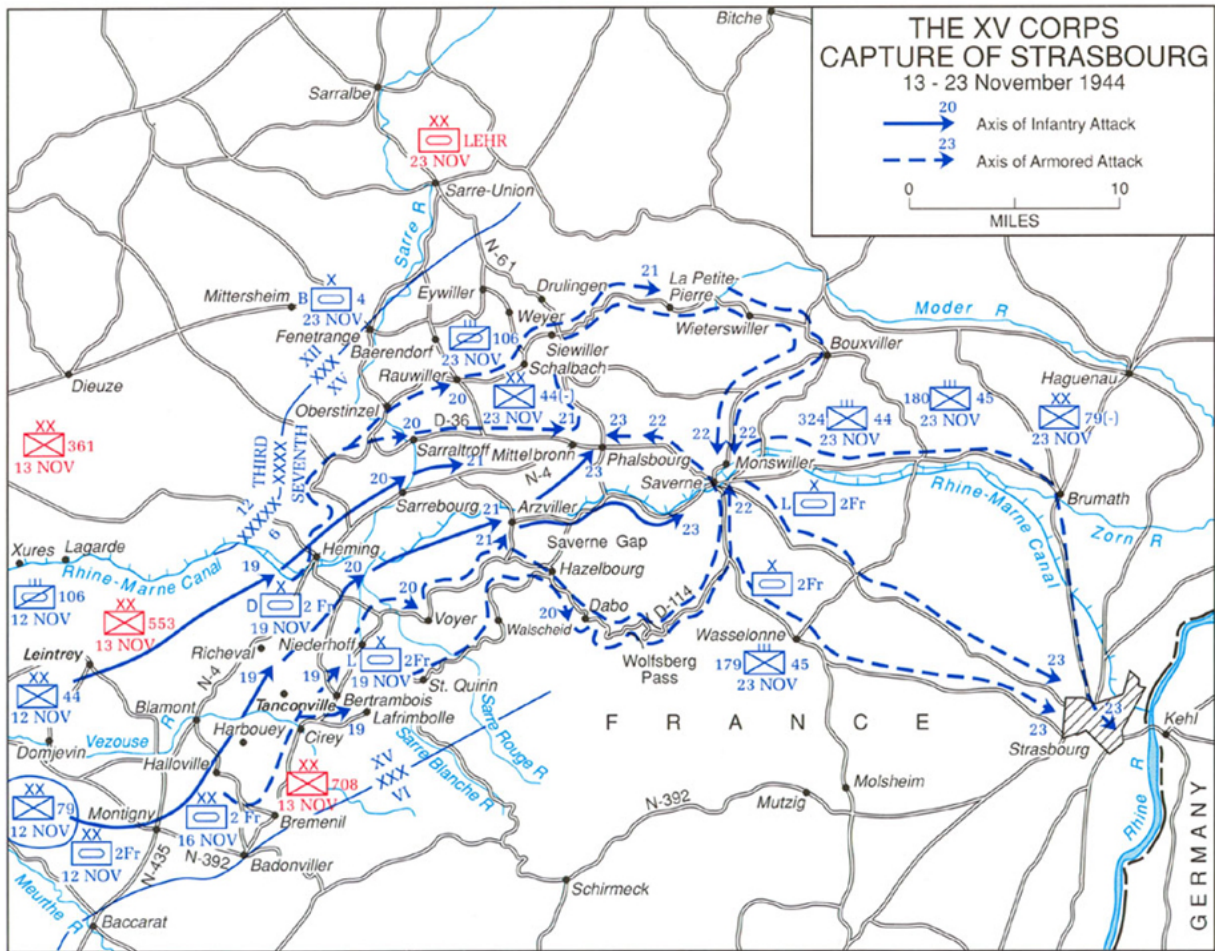
Baccarat was one of the towns in which the OSS detachment provided us with absolutely the most accurate information that I had

seen during the war or since. They gave us exactly the positions of what machine guns we would have to put out of business first and where the artillery was. We walked in there, not without fighting, but nowhere near what it would have been otherwise. I think Gen. Le Clerc was greatly surprised when he came tumbling into town from the north, and there we were in town.

One of the things that I had promised the OSS detachment when we took Bacarrat was that I would certainly send troops to protect certain people in the town who had been associating with the German Gestapo. It was a popular town because of the crystal factory there, but the rest of the townspeople blamed some of the merchants for associating with the Germans. But the fact of the matter was that they were pulling all the information they could get from the German officers. One of the main espionage efforts was done by the baker in town, a very good baker, who had two daughters. He was really withdrawing information from the Germans that you would hardly believe possible. Of course, in the excitement of taking Bacarrat, I temporarily forgot it and my staff officer, who was responsible for seeing that the baker's family was 'protected, was absent on other duties somewhere along the line. When I realized this, I immediately sent a platoon down to the baker's and threw a guard around the home until I got there. Then through an interpreter, Henri Cornu, I explained to the crowd that indeed the baker and his family were stalwart French citizens, and that if the crowd knew what I knew, they would feel indebted to them to a very great degree. It all ended happily, and the baker and his family became great friends of ours. I must say that they baked some buns, the likes of which I have not tasted since I left Short Hills, New Jersey in 1941.

Across Alsatian Plains

In planning for the continuation of the objective of Strasbourg, my unit, the One Hundred Seventeenth Armored Cavalry, was attached to the One Hundredth Division. The One Hundredth Division and ourselves had the mission of operating on the north flank of the Sixth Corp. On our immediate left were elements of the Fifteenth Corp, and that corps contained the Second French Armored Division, commanded General Le Clerc. I have referred to Gen. Le Clerc and have explained how we operated with him in the taking of the town of Bacarrat. The battle plans for the One Hundredth Division were to move from the town of Bacarrat, across some very high mountains from Badonviller, through the Col du Donon, which is a gorge-type of terrain feature leading into the town of Schirmeck. Schirmeck is just east of Badonviller and east of Bacarrat.



MAP 26

Our own mission was to conduct an armored movement at night through the roads leading to Schirmeck and to be in the town by daylight the next day, hopefully with the town in our hands. This was to be a bold move, because a movement at night by armor is a very difficult movement indeed, especially when troops are moving into the attack and the seizure of an important town. The Hundredth Infantry was to move by foot over the hills into the town of Schirmeck and hopefully would be there to back us up by the time we either attacked the town or secured it.

The commanding general of the One Hundredth Division, General Brooks, was a fine and good tactician. In laying out his plan with his staff, he had called me in and had asked me if we thought we could pull the night attack off as a surprise movement. After careful thought by my staff and myself, we thought that the element of surprise would be so great at this point that we could get away with it. We did not anticipate that there would be enough snow or ice on the roads to hinder our operations, but that the surprise element contained in this move would far outweigh the risks that might come up. When we had informed Gen. Barnes that we thought we could do it,

he was delighted and very happy. You may remember that the One Hundredth Division had just been brought into the lines after we had secured and captured the town of Baccarat and were really being led into battle by ourselves.



The movement took place as planned, and I believe it was one of the remarkable, small movements in our sector. We truly surprised the enemy, in the sense, that we came upon road blocks which were formidable at times. The Germans were so surprised by the force of the armor and the capability of destruction which this armament carried with it that we really swept the roadblocks away and moved into the town of Schirmeck about three to four in the morning. The town was so surprised, as were the German garrisons, that while there was some infighting later, especially as the infantry came up later to aid us, it was not the determined resistance that one would have expected in this town, an important defense point to the Alsatian Plains and to Strasbourg.

An interesting point about Schirmeck was that, it was the first atrocity camp which we had come across. While we knew it was there and some of the soldiers had seen it or, of course, were told about it by the population, we nevertheless did not have time ourselves to pay much attention to it, knowing that the higher headquarters would move up and would take care of it themselves,

I'm sure that there was some deep hate built up within the Soldiers of our unit by the very small amount of evidence that they saw at that point. Later, as it developed, Schirmeck was one of

the main atrocity camps which did not receive as much publicity as Dachau, but which nevertheless was as effective.

After securing the town of Schirmeck, we pushed forward rather rapidly to the towns of Kolsheim and Wasselonne. This allowed us to be in a good position for the jump off with Gen. Le Clerc to cross the plains of Alsace to the east to Strasbourg. We were, at this time, ordered to cooperate fully, which in effect meant attachment to Gen. Le Clerc's Second Armored Division. He was a very relaxed man, and his orders were given in a conversational, quiet tone and almost an affectionate type of conversation.

He said, "Mssr. Le Col. Hodge, we intend not to deploy, but we intend to make a frontal attack, right into Strasbourg, destroying everything we see. There will be no holding back until we are in the town and have it secured as well as we can. Are you in accord?"

You can guess that this question, "Are you in accord?" was a pleasant way of saying, "Here are your orders; get at it" I responded in the affirmative.

From the moment that we took off in this frontal attack of Strasbourg, it was one of the really heavily armored attacks on a center such as Strasbourg. It was magnificently successful, and as in any fast-moving attack where troops can use the firepower which has been given to them, we had not too many casualties. We had some, of course. All the same time, the afternoon we took Strasbourg, I believe it was quite remarkable, that is, the rapidity and the destruction of the forces as we moved into the town.

Strasbourg, as some of my readers may know, has a divided population. Some of the population hated the French, and others hated the Germans, which is a natural consequence of forced political consolidation. The result of this was that the German Army, many of whom were likened to Alsatians, were difficult to identify. German was spoken fluently in certain parts of Alsace and of Strasbourg, as was French. Therefore, there was no way to say, "there's a German soldier," especially as a good many of them went into civilian street garb.

The bridge over the Rhine River at Strasbourg had been destroyed, as had others in the area. From the standpoint of tactical and strategic position, it did not mean too much, as the bridges over the Rhine at that time would have led troops right into the large area of the Black Forest, which itself was a natural defense. Therefore, I could not conceive of a major offensive into the heart of Germany being launched through the Black Forest. It would have been the Germans forcing us to fight where they wanted us to fight, not where we wanted to fight. The main objective of the taking of Strasbourg was the destruction of the German forces in that area and also the political consideration that would give France itself a new pride in life.

I had a sergeant by the name of Luigi, who used to run the staff mess and who, I must say, was a very good cook. So, I called him in,

and I said, "Luigi, this area provides, in my opinion, the best breed of dogs in the world, namely the black and tan Alsatian shepherd. (These dogs are renowned for their ability to work the herds and the community farms, and they're really fantastic animals.) They are trained to care for animals, as well as to watch carefully anything they are taught to guard. I want you to get me one of these dogs."

Luigi said, "I'll have to be away for awhile to find the right dog."

I said, "Don't bring me back any dog but a thoroughbred. I want him to sleep right beside me. I want, him to be clean looking, with a massive head."

He said, "I understand."

Luigi was gone for four or five days, and he finally returned one evening about nine o'clock. It had been cold, and he had on his Eisenhower jacket. He also had something else on, and that was what we called a "bun." In other words, he was intoxicated. And this is not an exaggeration when I say he was intoxicated, because he hardly could stand up. But out of his Eisenhower jacket—which you remember was a short-waisted jacket—tumbled this little ball of black fluff. He was as black as the ace of spades, and obviously a very, very young puppy. He was so black that I immediately decided to call him "Sambo."

Luigi really was not too competent to talk at that point, because of his overindulgence. He said, "Shir, thish ish the bosh dog'n Strashbourg."

I started to look at the puppy, and around the puppy's neck was some bright colored silk ribbon, to which were attached the pedigree papers of the dog named Sambo.

I had my suspicions that Luigi probably had met a very attractive Alsatian lady, who proved to be a dual interest for him: one, to get him a dog, and the other to comfort him in her own way. At, any rate, he he'd performed the mission very, very well, had gotten back safely, and I might say that Sambo and I were the closest of companions from that point on . . . through all kinds-of shelling and small arms fire. An animal like that you just can never, ever forget.

Having taken Strasbourg in the early part of December, at this point I hope that readers will remember that we had launched the assault in August 1944. We had been fighting ever since—in reality, never out of contact with the enemy; had had ourselves semi-destroyed and had regrouped in movement. We were very tired. But, it seemed that units of our size, which could be moved about freely, were not taken care of as far as rest was concerned, as were some of the larger units. By this time, the Forty-Fifth had been in rest billets, the Thirty-Sixth had been in rest billets, and the Third Division had been given the job of garrisoning Strasbourg. We just kept on getting orders to move out and to continue fighting, and because we were easy to move and carried a lot of firepower, we were used as real shock troops at times.

I'm going to inject here an incident which is meant to be somewhat humorous, which happened when we were attached to the Forty-Fifth Division in the town of Faucogney. Faucogney was a small town in the Vosges Mountains, northeast of the town of Vesoul. The fighting in the area had been somewhat static, and it was miserably rainy and cold, and everyone's morale was pretty low. Not only were there substantial casualties, but there also was a great deal of pneumonia and influenza.

The British had taken over the supply of some alcoholic beverages to the Office of Personnel, and the organization which was distributing this to all officers was N.A.A.F.I. N.A.A.F.I. was something like a travelling PX. Since we had been in combat, we had never been serviced by them because we were always much too far forward and in too much combat to have pleasant things like this happen to us,

Faucogney was an important town, and it was being shelled constantly. As I came back from being up in the outpost one day, about noon, I saw this very small British truck, I saw the driver stop, hop out, drop a little box of bottles, sigh and get back into the truck and drive away quickly. He didn't even stop to have it secured or anything else, because he had not realized that Faucogney was as far forward as it was. In this box there were about six bottles of Scotch or gin—I forget what it was—and it made us all feel very bad: to think that a thing like this would happen; that there had been no thought of the other personnel. It made us a little dubious, and it made me mad. Granted, every officer on the staff who received a bottle put it where everybody could reach it, so anybody who wanted to could have a drink within the staff confines.

Just prior to this, we had captured a German PX or mobile post exchange, and in the boxes we captured from this travelling store were a great deal of good French francs. When money is captured during a war, it must be reported in a book which is kept in the unit headquarters and, at that point, it becomes the property of the Treasurer of the United States.

About the time all of this happened, as I have mentioned, morale was very low, and we really had a lot of illness and casualties, and to make it worse, we were fighting on foot and in foxholes. This was terrible for a cavalryman. We thought we were above that, even though we knew that the doughboys had lived that way.

I also had a standing verbal order, given to all company troop commanders, that in areas where we were in combat, the fact that we were in combat was no excuse for the mess sergeants and mess officers not to get the hot food to the fighting front. I also had ordered that any unit which did not serve at least one hot meal a day in marmite cans, at the front, would have to report to me by letter why they had not done so. I hasten to say that the kitchen personnel were proud of the fact that they would get the hot food up to their buddies whenever possible, regardless of the conditions, and they did very well. By the

way, a marmite can is a large food container, which will maintain a level of temperature, whether it is hot or cold. It was used to carry food forward after it had been prepared in an area just immediately behind the combat line. It worked very well. We could send four or five cans forward to a unit, and the soldiers could stop off in the various positions, outposts or roadblocks, and they could eat hot food. This was a little unusual, I believe, for troops in combat.

But when I had experienced the shock of seeing six bottles of alcohol dropped off for us officers, I became very much self-conscious, and very much ashamed that we would get something that the normal soldier would not. So I called Capt. Cornu, who, if you will remember, was part of the OSS detachment which had been dropped by parachute and with whom we had worked. And Cornu was very familiar with the drinking habits of the Alsations.

I said, "Henri, what do they drink up in the Vosges Mountains?"

He said, "Well, they drink schnapps."

I asked Cornu if it was possible to buy it. He responded by saying, "You can buy anything in Alsace, if you can pay for it."

So I said, "Here are a bunch of good French francs which we took from the German PX. Go out and buy all you can."

I must say, he was a little astonished, but he never asked a question, took the money and off he went. He came back in about twenty-four hours, and he had quite a few kegs of schnapps. What we did with the schnapps was to mix it with powdered, evaporated milk, heat it up, put a little nutmeg in it, and send it out in the marmite cans on those cold, wet, winter days. By golly, those soldiers knew that we were all thinking about them, and that we were all working together, I like to believe that it saved a lot of illness, but I am sure of one thing, it certainly made me feel better that they knew that we were taking care of them.

The completion of the schnapps story is that an inspecting general—or at least an officer in the inspecting general's department—from Corp Headquarters came up to inspect our books in the unit. I might advise readers that this goes on all the time—combat or peacetime—and no question about it, it is a necessity that cannot be overlooked.

This officer—a nice guy—found everything very satisfactory, and finally said, "By the way, Charlie, I'd better take the money you have on hand back with me." (You remember that I told you that it was all recorded.)

I said, "I'm sorry, Colonel, I can't do that." He said, "What do you mean, you can't do that? Where is it?"

I said, "I spent it."

He said, "You spent it? What in the world did you spend it for?" I replied, "Well, I spent it for schnapps." He said, "My God. Schnapps? Nobody could drink that much schnapps."



Trooper faced frigid conditions in the Vosges Mountains.

I said, "Well, Colonel, what we did was to buy it by the keg and issue it out as hot milk punch to the poor so-and-sos fighting in these hilly, mountain foxholes. I like to think it did some good."

He smiled, but he said, "You realize that I have to report this to the Corps Commander."

I'm afraid my answer to him was quite frank, since I didn't care much who he reported it to, because it was done, and there it was.

He said, "All right, but I've got to report it to Gen."

Truscott."

I heard nothing more about it for about two or three weeks, until one day the Corps Commander, Gen. Truscott, was at my headquarters when I came back from the front.

He was just leaving, and he said, "Well, Charlie, I found everything in excellent order. Congratulations, you've done a fine job." Then he added, "By the way. . ." and I thought here came the schnapps story.

He said, "Charlie, have you any milk punch left?"

And that was the last I heard of that one. That's the kind of guy that Truscott was.

I hope that enough time has elapsed since 1944 that I'll not be held accountable for the French francs we used out of the German PX.

After the taking of Strasburg, we were attached to the Third Infantry Division, and we prepared for a movement of all of our forces north to the French-German border, otherwise known as the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line.

But prior to going into the movement, securing Hagenau and then moving to the German border, let me recite another human incident. We became attached to the Third Division, and you remember that we had fought with the Third Division before and that we had found them to be one of the strongest, hardest-fighting units of the American Army, commanded by "Iron Mike" O'Daniels.

Iron Mike called me to his headquarters one day, and he said, "Charlie, why have you not been back to Paris? We've been looking over the books, and you are due for a rest."

He said, "You've been fighting a long while, and I'll give you your choice. You go to Paris for three days, or you go to the hospital for a three-day rest."

I said, "General, I'll go to Paris, but it's a long way to drive in a jeep."

He said, "I'll loan you my sedan. You provide the driver, and you can take whomever you want."

I instructed the adjutant to run down five sergeants, by selection, on the basis of who had been wounded the most times. He had no trouble, and he came back and gave me the list. Then all six of us took off for Paris in a very high-grade, high-ranking officer's limousine, driven by the sergeant I mentioned earlier, Mo Parsoff. He had been wounded five times, but still retained his marvelous sense of humor and could tell a Jewish story so hard that it made the war seem a long way away

Well, off we piled. I'll never forget: I figured, "I'll be back in Paris, and I'm going to just raise Cain." Unfortunately, I had forgotten what nature does to you when you become fatigued!

I had been instructed to go to the Crillon Hotel, where quarters would be provided for me. This sounded fine by me; the other men had billets all arranged for them, too. When I got to the Crillon, I was dead tired, but there was a note for me, instructing me to go with the

driver of a car who had been waiting for me, and he would drive me to Versailles, which you probably know is where SHAF, Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Forces, was housed. The note said I was to report to Gen. Brown. I did that—I didn't even go to my quarters at the Hotel Crillon—but drove out to Versailles, and I was ushered immediately into Gen. Brown's offices, as he was the Commandant of SHAEF. Gen. Brown had been Col. Brown in No. Africa, and he gave me a real, old-fashioned welcome and said that SHAEF had followed us all around from No. Africa and was proud of us. He wanted me out there because he wanted to do whatever was possible for me while I was in Paris.

I said, "Gen. Brown, I don't know what to say."

He said, "I know what you're going to do. You're going to take Paris apart, but believe me, that's not the way it works. You'll probably sleep for forty-eight hours."

Well, to make a long story short, he provided me with some clean clothes, because mine were filthy, and then he said, "Some alcoholic beverages will be in your room when you get back, and as soon as you get rested, you call me, then come out here for dinner. "We'll see that you have a very good, restful time." I think that was one of the nicest things that happened to me during the war,

When I got to the Crillon Hotel, in my quarters was a hot bath and clean sheets. I got up once in awhile to eat, but I literally slept for forty-eight hours. Then I called Gen. Brown, and I said, "I'm rested."

And he said, "Come on out."

I went out there, and we had a wonderful, marvelous time at Versailles. But the following day I went back to reality, fighting our way up to the Maginot and Siegfried Lines to continue our offensive.

Upon my return to my unit from Paris, in the area of [illegible],

I found that things were less stable and less sure than at any time during our French campaign. The next period of interest will be the move into the Maginot Line, around the town of Bitche, and into the forward positions of a mountainous type of terrain, where we were to be part of Task Force Hudelson.

When we joined Task Force Hudelson, and were on their left flank, with the One-Hundredth Division being on our immediate left, I soon realized that we had gotten into a situation where the corps commanders, General Brooks and his staff, just did not have the experience that had been provided to the Two Corps and the Sixth Corps commanders and staff in their long combat dating all the way back to North Africa. I am going to be quite critical of this operation in the following pages.