

THE STORY OF THE
80th INFANTRY DIVISION

PREFACE

The story of the 80th Infantry Division briefly relates another gallant chapter in the colorful history of the American soldier and his heroic struggle against those forces which seek to destroy man's inalienable rights.

Through its baptism of fire at Argentan, the sweep across France, the crossing of the Moselle, fighting into besieged Bastogne and twice shattering the Siegfried Line, the division never once failed to seize its objective.

This book is dedicated to the memory of our fallen comrades. We must and we shall press on to complete the unfinished task for which they have given so much.

H. L. McBride
Major General, Commanding

Thunder of artillery occasionally broke the stillness of the murky night. Suddenly at 0200 Feb. 7, 1945, the entire front burst into flame. Artillery shells screamed towards Germany's "sacred soil" in a crescendo, drowning out the maddening din of men going into action.

The battle-tested 80th "Blue Ridge" Division again was moving forward, having helped smash the southern flank of Field Marshal von Rundstedt's Luxembourg salient. The "impregnable" Siegfried Line was to feel the onslaught of the men who in two World Wars had never failed to take an objective and never retreated from what they had gained.

To reach Nazi fortifications, the Our and Sauer Rivers had to be hurdled. Constant rains, melting snow from surrounding hills had transformed them into raging torrents.

War Correspondent Gene Curri van described the action as follows:

"The boys trudged doggedly through the woods and down a steep slope to the river. It was a rugged crossing ahead... Long before they reached the river they fell on their faces a dozen times as screaming meemies tore through the magnificent coniferous forest over their heads...

The river was swollen ten feet above its normal level and the current was so swift that many empty assault boats were swamped on the return trip. Machine gun fire and artillery fire from over the hill made the operation difficult, but by the aid of a smoke screen which made the river disappear in a dense fog, the assault craft managed to get across carrying the boys into Germany."

Despite heroic efforts of engineers, racing flood waters, continuous rain of enemy artillery, nebelwerfer and small arms fire prevented construction of a bridge. Only infantrymen could be ferried across in rubber floats and wooden boats.

Doughs had to do it again the hard way, alone. No easy job faced them as they hit the opposite bank.

Enemy forts, situated on heights overlooking the river, were organized in depth and sited to support one another with interlocking fields of fire. Many enemy positions were cunningly camouflaged as houses, garages, and similar structures. Booby traps, mine fields were added hazards.

Faced by murderous fire, doughs stormed up the precipitous incline. Overcoming fanatical resistance, they knocked out one pillbox after another. The going was rough but Blue Ridgers never had been stopped. They were not going to be stopped now.

Nazis had been ordered to die at their posts. Men of the 80th did everything possible to help them fulfill their orders.

That night Wallendorf was cleared by the 319th Inf. More pillboxes, more hills, then Beisdorf fell Feb. 10 to the onrushing 318th. The bridgehead was swelling in size. The first bridge was constructed at Wallendorf 0700, Feb. 12. Immediately troops, tanks, guns, supplies poured into the Fatherland. Rate of PWs rose from a mere handful during the first grueling hours to more than 400 daily.

By Feb. 15, the main band of Siegfried Line defenses had been shattered. The vaunted West Wall was soon overrun; the 80th poised itself for the march on the Rhine.

Largely composed of men from the "Blue Ridge States" of Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, the 80th Inf. Div. was originally activated at Camp Lee, Va., Sept., 1917. After training there for nine months, leading elements sailed from Newport News, landing in France, May 9, 1918. The rest of the division disembarked at the ports of Brest, Bordeaux and St. Nazaire May 30-31 and June 8-9, 1918.

The division moved to the Samer training area where British experts trained Blue Ridge doughs in the latest developments of trench warfare. Side by side with the Tommies, Blue Ridgers struck their first blow against the Hun in the British Somme Offensive. The division joined the newly created First American Army, Aug. 25, 1918, and participated as Army reserve in the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient.

Outstanding accomplishment of the 80th in World War I occurred during the defeat of the German Imperial Army in the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne. Marshal Foch, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, had ordered an American-French attack to cut the vital German supply line - the Carignaw-Sedan-Mezieres Railroad. So important was this railroad to the German High Command that four systems of field fortifications had been built to protect it.

This offensive, destined to break the back of the Kaiser's Armies, began early Sept. 26, 1918. Three times the spearheading 80th was called upon; three times it took its objective. Prior to being relieved by the 1st Div., Nov. 8, 1918, Blue Ridge infantrymen, along with other Allied divisions, had shattered the whole German defense system.

Excellent leadership and thorough training had paid off. The division could boast of having captured two Germans and one machine gun for each 80th man wounded. Little wonder that it was rated the best National Army division of World War I and that numbered among its many distinguished veterans are such leaders as Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, CG, Army Ground Forces, and Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hurley, Ambassador to China.

The 80th Div. was reactivated at Camp Forrest, Tenn., July 15, 1942, under the command of Maj. Gen. Joseph D. Patch, Present CG, Maj. Gen. (then Brig. Gen.) Horace L. McBride, commanded Div Arty.

A visit by the late Pres. Roosevelt, April 18, 1943, highlighted the first year. Lt. Gen. Ben Lear, then commanding the Second Army, chose the division as the training center for the first tough and realistic Ranger School.

June 23, 1943, the division left Camp Forrest for the Tennessee Maneuver Area south of Murfreesboro. Long marches hardened the men for the days to come. Culmination of this training was the fast moving maneuvers against the 83rd Inf. Div.

Blue Ridge men moved to windswept Camp Phillips, Kan., Aug. 25, 1943. Range firing and grueling marches highlighted the three months' stay. Nov. 17, the division once more pulled up stakes.

Battle Worn



International News Photo from Yank Magazine.

STUDY IN FATIGUE. His body sagging with

This time it was the California-Arizona Maneuver Area. After further preliminary training followed by strenuous combat problems, the division carried on extensive maneuvers against the 104th Inf. Div. near Palen Pass, Calif., from Feb. 13 to March 5, 1944.

Following maneuvers, Div Arty took Army Ground Forces' Artillery Test at Iron Mountain, Calif. The late Lt. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, then CG, AGF, commended Div Arty in a letter for attaining the highest score. Battle performances in France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany have in every instance borne out the record achieved in those tests.

The division arrived for a short stay at Fort Dix, N. J., April 5, 1944, then shifted to Camp Kilmer, N. J., during the latter part of June. The advance party sailed for England that month followed by the division early in July. Arriving in Scotland, the 80th proceeded to its assigned training area near Northwich, Cheshire, England.

TIGHTENING THE NAZI NOOSE AT ARGENTAN

Aug. 3, 1944 (D plus 58), less than one month after landing in the British Isles, the 80th found itself for the second time on French soil, ready to assist in the destruction of the new German dream of world domination.

Landing at Utah Beach, the division was destined to play an outstanding role in exploiting the famed Third Army breakthrough at Avranches, which was beginning to assume the proportion of a major catastrophe for the Wehrmacht.

Guided by the 80th MP Platoon, Blue Ridge organizations were directed from the beach to the assembly area near St. Jores. The night of Aug. 7, all units were assembled, the division was ready to strike its initial blow against the enemy.

Next day, the 80th was given its first combat mission; to assist in stemming the powerful armored counterattack by five panzer divisions which desperately sought to cut Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's tenuous supply line at Avranches. On this day Lt. Lloyd C. Bloomer, Osborne, Kan., 314th FA, captured the division's first prisoner, a German airman, at St. Hilaire.

Arriving too late to participate in smashing the short-lived Nazi thrust, the Blue Ridge Division, under new orders, swept eastward to seize Evron and Ste. Suzanne from the rapidly retreating Germans, Aug. 10. The 319th Combat Team was detached from the division Aug. 10 to 28 while it did outpost duty at LeMans, Angers and Orleans.

Continuing the advance, hindered only by small, isolated pockets of resistance, mine fields and demolitions, the 80th seized the communications center of Sille le Guillaume without opposition, Aug. 11.

Two days later Villains was liberated from an enemy rapidly withdrawing to avoid entrapment by the swift Allied advances.

While the 2nd French Armd. Div. continued northward in the 80th's former zone of advance pursuing the fleeing Nazis, the division, minus CT 319, was assembled near Alencon preparatory to participation in the famous battle of the Argentan-Falaise Gap.

Nazis were fighting a desperate rear guard action to save the Seventh German Army from annihilation in the slowly closing noose near Chambois, east of Argentan.

A part of V Corps of Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges' First U. S. Army for this operation, Blue Riders received orders Aug. 17 to seize Argentan and the high ground north of the city.

These German strongpoints were held by elements of a panzer division, a German Air Force battalion and a detachment of storm troopers supported by artillery and numerous self-propelled guns. The enemy had ample time to dig in, prepare mine fields and booby traps.

Despite determined resistance, the 318th Inf., stormed into the small town of Bordeaux just east of Argentan at 0905, Aug. 18. By 1533 the neighboring town of Sai was cleared.

Col. Harry D. McHugh, Devil's Lake, N. D., 318th CO, led his troops through their baptism of fire. For his inspiring leadership, Gen. McBride awarded him the division's first Silver Star.

Imbued with self-confidence, the 318th forged ahead next morning against terrific enemy infantry and armored re-

sistance. Later that day, the 317th Inf. passed through the embattled 318th by battalions and rammed forward into the face of withering fire toward the high ground north of Argentan. By nightfall, the 317th, supported by the 318th's fire, had shattered the fury of the Nazi defenders and occupied the commanding terrain north of the city.

During this attack by the 317th, T/4 (then PFC) Hoyt T. Rowell, Buchanan, Ga., 305th Medics, earned the division's first Distinguished Service Cross. Completely disregarding his own safety, Rowell rendered aid to the wounded of two front line companies under a hail of enemy shells and bullets. When friendly artillery began to fall close, he raced across an open field to an artillery observer and lifted the fire. Returning across the same exposed terrain, he continued to aid wounded 317th doughs.

Just before midnight Aug. 19, seven battalions of the 80th Div. and attached artillery blasted the city with five volleys, setting it afire. Amid unbelievable carnage, Nazis began evacuation of the shell-torn city. Seven miles to the east the Allied pincer movement at Chambois sealed the doom of retreating German forces now caught in a ring of steel.

Sweeping aside light enemy forces, the 317th and 318th Regts. seized Argentan, Aug. 20.

Surging north along roads luttet with battered enemy vehicles and equipment, Blue Ridge doughs had a field day mopping up the wreckage of the once proud, invincible Seventh German Army.

Lt. Gen. L. T. Gerow, then V Corps Commander, summarized this initial combat experience of the 80th in a letter of commendation to Gen. McBride:

"Upon the relief of the 80th Infantry Division from attachment to the V Corps, I desire to express to you, and through you to the officers and men of your command, my personal thanks and appreciation of the excellent manner in which they functioned under my command.

The fight put up by the 80th Infantry Division in the Alencon-Argentan area was a most gratifying one, resulting as it did in the destruction of such a large portion of the enemy forces... The division is to be commended on the excellent manner in which it carried out its role..."

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF AT ST. MIHIEL

After this stunning blow to the Wehrmacht, the division moved to a concentration area south of the Argentan-Exmes Road and engaged in a series of problems on latest methods of armor-infantry coordination.

Once again a part of Gen. Patton's Third Army, the Blue Ridge Division swung south of Paris and side by side with the 4th Armored, spearheaded the Allied drive across France.

German forces rapidly withdrew, hoping to establish a defense line east of the Marne River. However, after crossing the Seine and Aube Rivers, the division hotly pursued fleeing Nazis across the Marne into Chalons-sur-Marne, Aug. 29 before they could consolidate a defensive position.

So swiftly did forces move that supply lines stretched thinner and thinner. The last 25 days in August alone, the truck fleet of the 80th QM Co. travelled more than 165,000 miles to supply the tremendous needs.

Near Chalons-sur-Marne, the 80th struck it lucky. More than 80,000 gallons of gasoline were seized in the nick of time. Vehicles now could continue their dash to the east.

Hard on the heels of still retreating Germans, the 317th and 318th Regts., followed by the recently returned 319th, crossed the Meuse River and seized Commercy, Sept. 1. Gasoline once more was the captured prize; it aided materially in carrying the division to the Moselle River.

History repeated itself the following day when the 319th Inf. rolled into St. Mihiel where 26 years ago during the same month the division had participated in the famous reduction of the St. Mihiel salient.

The advance to the heavily fortified Moselle River began immediately after the liberation of Commercy and St. Mihiel. Third Bn., 319th Ins., commanded by Lt. Col. Elliott B. Cheston, Annapolis, Md., reached the bank of the Moselle River north of Toul at 1130, Sept. 4. On the opposite side of the river, elite Nazi paratroopers were preparing defenses.

Nazis were to get another sample of Blue Ridge teamwork in the next few hours. Capt. Alferce E. Wrenn's Co. C, 305th Engrs., immediately went to work with floats and bridge building material. At the same time, Lt. Col. John W. Browning's 905th FA Bn. knocked out six machine guns, blasted the way for the infantry's crossing.

Preparations were completed at 1345. Infantry loaded on engineer rubber floats at a concealed location on a small stream that runs into the Moselle River. So swiftly and unexpectedly was this assembly completed that one entire company in the first wave slipped down the stream, crossed the river and hit the other side before the enemy was aware of impending disaster. Third Army's spearhead had hurdled the Moselle without a shot being fired.

Thirty minutes after the first boat of the first wave started across, the last fighting elements of Col. Cheston's battalion were scrambling up the opposite bank. The operation was accomplished without a single casualty.

By next day the battalion, with jeeps, ambulances, trucks, ammunition and rations had crossed by floats, two power-driven ferries and over a partially repaired bridge. The first bridgehead across the Moselle River was firmly established.

Fighting their way step by step under continual harassing fire of small arms, mortars and artillery, 319th doughs captured two anchors of the enemy line, Fort de Villey le Sec and Fort de Gondreville. Later they cleared the Forêt de Haye and were advancing on Nancy as part of the newly-formed task force by Brig. Gen. Sebree, Asst. Div. Commander, 35th Inf. Div., when they were ordered to rejoin the 80th.

Meanwhile, stiff enemy resistance and unfavorable terrain combined to defeat all efforts to make crossings north of Toul in the strongly held Dieulouard and Pont-a-Mousson sectors. Germans were registered in on the area. From their OPs on the high hills east of the Moselle River, they had a commanding view of the entire valley. Enemy artillery fire was quickly brought on any movement along the river.

Just before dawn, Sept. 12, the 317th Inf. crossed the river at Dieulouard in assault boats under a storm of enemy fire. While the 317th was battering towards high ground beyond, the 305th Engr. Ban. and the 1117th Engr. Gp. spanned the Moselle with ponton bridges, disregarding continuous hostile fire.

The 318th Inf., less its 1st Bn. which was attached to the 4th Armd. Div., crossed on these newly constructed bridges, seized Loisy and prepared to strike north to Mousson Hill.

In the afternoon, 313th FA crossed to give close support to the infantry. Germans, trying desperately to destroy the bridges, unleashed a cyclone of heavy artillery. Across, the battalion, ignoring the rain of enemy artillery and mortar shells, dug in and fired incessant barrages, some point-blank, on the fanatically resisting enemy.

Early Sept. 13, Germans massed available armor and infantry, then launched a series of high-powered counter-attacks beginning at 0555. Striking hard, they broke through the perimeter defenses of both the 317th and 318th Regts., recaptured Loisy, penetrated the 318th Inf. CP and nearly reached the bridges at Dieulouard.

But doughs, swiftly recovering from the blow, halted the Nazi advance by 0825, knocking out a large part of the rapidly dwindling hostile armor. All lost positions were regained before nightfall.

Maj. Karl B. Nuessner's 3rd Bn., 318th Inf., moved out of Loisy early next morning and attacked north toward towering Mousson Hill. Crowned by a ruined castle, rising above the town of Pont-a-Mousson, this high vantage point was the key to the Moselle River in the 80th's zone of advance.

Overcoming heavy opposition, the battalion seized the town of Atton at the foot of the hill, by 1350 had stormed up the steep slope and reached its crest.

Brig. Gen. Edmund W. Searby, Div. Arty Commander, accompanied attacking front line infantry. Anxious to take this high terrain feature vital to artillery observation, he was the first to reach the summit. Acting as forward observer, he directed fire missions which caught German forces by surprise, resulted in the complete destruction of two enemy artillery batteries.

Before infantrymen could consolidate their positions, Nazis counter-attacked in force, supported by heavy concentrations of artillery and mortar fire. An enemy tank plunged as close as 150 yards from where Gen. Searby was urging on hard-pressed doughs. After a shell stopped the tank, the crew emerged, sprayed doughs with automatic fire.

Disregarding his own safety, Gen. Searby retrieved the rifle dropped by a wounded GI and opened fire on the crew. In the ensuing fight, the general was killed.

MAKE WAY FOR THE INFANTRY!

Early Sept. 15, Germans launched another strong counter-attack. This time Nazis succeeded in cutting the extended supply line of the 3rd Bn. by recapturing Atton.

Surrounded and outnumbered, Maj. Nuessner's men stubbornly repelled all enemy attempts to dislodge them from the hill. Div Arty liaison planes, braving intense flak, dropped urgently needed ammunition, food and blood plasma to the beleaguered men.

Meanwhile, the 319th Inf., as part of Task Force Sebree, had swept through the Foret de Haye to within sight of Nancy, was recalled and rushed north to reinforce the hard-pressed bridgehead. Attacking north from Loisy, 1st Bn., 319th, retook Atton and shattered the encirclement of the 3rd Bn., 318th Inf., just before dark, Sept. 16.

Aiding in the relief of troops on Mousson Hill was the 1st Bn., 318th Inf., with a company of medium tanks of the 4th Armd. Div. Having fought its way back from Arracourt where the 4th Armored, with 318th's 1st Bn. attached, had knifed its way far behind German front lines, the reinforced 1st Bn. stormed up Ste. Genevieve Hill which overlooks the bridges at Dieulouard. Caught from the rear, bewildered Nazis were overwhelmed.

After clearing the enemy from this key terrain feature, the battalion attacked north through the Foret de Facq, cleared the Germans from the concealed supply and assembly area used as a base for their attacks on Mousson Hill.

Assisting in this drive through hostile territory was Lt. Philip H. Wagner's 1st Platoon, 80th Rcn. Troop. Three days before the platoon was ordered to reconnoiter the area east of the division's hard-fought bridgehead, Lt. Wagner's men had hammered through to the rear of the enemy lines, engaged the enemy on 15 separate occasions, radioed back valuable information, then assumed the point position for the 1st Bn., 318th Inf., as it advanced toward Ste. Genevieve Hill. During the recon platoon's hit-and-run mission only one man was wounded.

Gen. McBride repeatedly visited foremost units on the east bank of the river during the critical days of the bridgehead.

After strengthening positions on the high ground running from Mousson Hill, Ste. Genevieve Hill, Landremont Ridge and Falaise Ridge, the 317th and 318th forged ahead through the Bois de St. Clement. In the meantime, the 319th on the north flank expanded the bridgehead to include the small towns of Lesmenils, Mor-ville-sur-Seille.

A thunderous bombardment on hostile positions by heavy weapons paved the way for the infantry's advance. In addition, two batteries of four barreled .50 caliber machine guns from the 633rd AAA Bn. flashed 79,500 tracer bullets into enemy positions on Mt. Toulon and surrounding areas.

This terrific concentration of fire power under the direction of Brig. Gen. Jay W. MacKelvie, Div Arty Commander, dazed the Nazi defenders and opened a path for the infantry, which jumped off at 0600 to win a complete victory.

The 319th Inf. Regt. raced ahead, seized commanding ground on Mt. Toulon in less than an hour. Benicourt, Clemery and Manoncourt-sur-Seille fell to the 318th Inf. by 1135.

Bitterly defended positions on Mt. St. Jean slowed the advance for a while but were overrun by the 317th Inf. before 1530. More than 1260 glum-faced "Supermen" virtually the entire force occupying the objectives, were captured.

Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, XII Corps Commander, paid the following tribute to the rapid advance across the Moselle River:

"Since the 19th of August, the 80th Infantry Division has smashed the enemy back and back in one successful operation after another. It seized Chalons-sur-Marne and Bar-le-Duc. It routed the Boche from his stronghold west and north of the Moselle from Toul to Pont-a-Mousson, and then crossed and established a vital bridgehead over the Moselle which it has secured, defended, and enlarged against vigorous enemy counter-attacks. All members of the division have conducted themselves in a manner of which they may well be proud."

THROUGH THE MAGINOT

INTO THE SAAR

From Oct. 10 to Nov. 7, 1944, the 80th Div. held defensive positions west of the Seille River and prepared for the great Third Army sweep into the industrially vital Saar Basin. Supplies, ammunition and gasoline were massed for the mighty drive.

A bombardment of savage intensity by all available weapons, including captured German 81 mm and 120 mm mortars, repaired by the 780th Ord. Co., heralded the jump-off of Blue Ridge men at 0600, Nov. 8. Germans were caught off-balance again. They did not think doughs would attack in such unfavorable weather, attempt to cross the rain-swollen Seille River.

Hurdling of the river was accomplished at fords, and by engineer craft, foot and ponton bridges. Resistance was thin. By nightfall, the high ground across the Seille was firmly held.

Nov. 9 saw the 80th pushing forward, stampeding all opposition. That afternoon, the division's front faced Delme Ridge, a bald plateau 1380 feet above sea level, approximately four miles long, sitting squarely across the pathway to the Saar Basin. Its importance was summarized by The New York Times: "The ridge was one of the most important objects in Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's attack and just had to be taken if the Metz-Nancy line were to be straightened."

His platoon hit by murderous machine gun cross-fire during an advance near Craincourt, S/Sgt. Gilbert G. Montemayor, Brownsville, Tex., Co. B, 319th, tossed a grenade at the nest, then bayoneted the crew. With one nest out of action, another was easy pickings for his platoon. For his action, Montemayor won the Silver Star.

By 1600, the 319th Inf. Regt., supported by tanks and a devastating artillery barrage, had swept over the bitterly resisting Nazis entrenched on the forward slopes and were storming up the critical heights of Delme Ridge.

Despite the arrival of German SS troops to stem the advance, the 318th cleared the remainder of the ridge the following morning. The 80th continued the drive to the northeast, and the German rout shifted into high gear.

So confused were Nazis by the swiftness of the move that onrushing doughs overran rear installations of the 48th German Div., capturing headquarters and supply personnel as well as replacements who had arrived on the scene less than an hour before they were taken prisoner.

On Nov. 11, the 1st Bn., 317th Inf., reached a point about one kilometer from the bridge across the Nied Francaise River near Han-sur-Nied. By 1300, Maj. (then Capt.) James A. Craig, New Cumberland, Pa., Co. A CO, had led the 1st Bn. advance elements to the last covered position before the river. The approach to the river was a long gentle slope. Enemy observation from the high ground beyond the town of Han-sur-Nied was excellent.

Paced by Maj. Craig, Co. A rushed the bridge, seized it intact. Although raked by enemy fire of all types including ack-ack, the major and 18 doughs entered Han-sur-Nied. For almost four hours, the small group valiantly withstood all enemy effort to destroy the vital bridge until reinforcements could be brought up. As a result, the continued rapid advance of the 317th Inf. Regt. and the 6th Armd. Div. was made possible.

This deep penetration outflanked the great fortress of Metz and opened the way for its capture by the 5th and 95th Inf. Divs.

Arriance, Chemery, Adelange, Boustroff, and Viller fell before the surging advance. When his platoon was held up by machine gun fire near Eincheville, Pfc Alphonse F. Jankunas, Elizabeth, N. J., Co. B., 319th, braved a hail of bullets to knock out the gun and its crew. Spurred on by his grit and courage, Jankunas' mates assaulted and took the town. For his action and leadership in the assault which netted 32 PW's, Jankunas was awarded the Silver Star.

Despite heavy artillery and mortar fire, demolitions and road blocks, the 80th plunged across the Nied Allemande River to roll back a badly shaken enemy from the important mining town of Faulquemont.

Before the Blue Ridge men lay the "invincible" Maginot Line. Now the forts were being used as CPs, supply centers and troop shelters by defending Germans. Field fortifications were prepared around these strongpoints. Manning the reversed line were newly arrived Nazi units.

Early Nov. 25, men of the 80th under cover of an artillery barrage ripped into the attack. A German commander, whose battalion was ground to bits soon after the assault got under way, described the attack as remarkable. He was amazed by the skillful utilization of tactical advantages, and the cooperation of infantry and armor with all supporting heavy weapons.

Fort Bambiderstroff was taken an hour and 15 minutes after the jump-off. Soon Forts Laudrefang, Teting Woods Kerfent, Bambesch, Kinseling, Einseling and Quatre Vents crashed under the powerhouse drive of the 317th, 319th, and 318th Regts.

Paced by 90mm self-propelled guns of the 610th TD Bn., which shattered more than 13 reinforced pillboxes, Blue Ridgers smashed completely through the Maginot Line, Nov. 26, to stand before the industrial heart of the Saar Basin.

Overwhelming strongly held enemy positions, the 80th ploughed forward, capturing Nov. 27, the key city of St. Avold, one-time German Army Headquarters and a coal center for the Nazi war machine.

Seizure of St. Avold was hailed by New York's Daily News, commenting on Third Army's dash through the Saar, as the place where "Gen. von Rundstedt suffered perhaps his greatest defeat of the present campaign."

The division continued the attack, Dec. 4, steamrolling through Farebersviller, Tenteling and Cocheren. The important town of Merlebach was liberated Dec. 6.

The drive of more than 40 miles beyond the Seille River was carried out despite swollen rivers, flooded fields, constantly adverse weather conditions. More than 4000 prisoners were taken in less than a month.

In the mud and rain of the Maginot Line, 314th FA made its biggest haul of PWs when Sgt. William H. Whiteside, Seattle, Wash., descended into the depths of a fort near Bambiderstroff and emerged with 63 prisoners.

Before they were relieved by the 6th Armd. Div., leading elements of the 80th penetrated the German frontier less than five miles from Saarbrücken.

The division enjoyed a rest period Dec. 7, after being in continuous contact with the enemy for 102 days.

RACING TO THE RESCUE AT BASTOGNE

Leaving the rest area, Dec. 18, Blue Ridge troops slipped southeast near Rohrbach to prepare to breach the Siegfried Line. They barely had time to move into this new position when the German counterattack and breakthrough in the Ardennes assumed the proportions of a major offensive.

Spearheads of German armor were heading towards Liege and the vital port of Antwerp, Dec. 19. The 80th was given the mission of protecting the City of Luxembourg from the rapidly advancing German columns.

Tribute to the 80th's stamina was expressed by the New York Journal-American: "The 80th Division performed a feat as remarkable as any of Stonewall Jackson's foot cavalry. It was ready to go into the fighting line south of Saarbrucken when orders came to go northward, and it went 150 miles swiftly to get into action."

Arriving north of the City of Luxembourg, the division took up positions before launching an attack early Dec. 22. In Ettelbruck almost a battalion of enemy artillery was destroyed. Other targets were promptly disposed of by trigger-quick infantry and artillery. The German advance on Luxembourg City was stopped.

Continuing to drive into the southern flank of von Rundstedt's salient, the 80th next day seized a four-mile stretch of the main supply road from Trier to Bastogne. This further disorganized westbound Nazi troops. Among the 390 Nazis seized was the 10,000th PW nabbed by Blue ridgers in this war.

Essential to the success of the German penetration was the seizure of Bastogne. Capture of this vital communication center meant Nazi forces could fan out along an excellent road network.

Onrushing German armor and infantry roared by both sides of the city, but the stalwart 101st Airborne Div. and other American troops held firm as Nazis circled the stronghold. Success of von Rundstedt's plan was wavering in the balance.

Meanwhile further to the east, the 80th was cutting deeper into the left flank of the German salient. The 318th Inf. Regt., minus the 3rd Bn. occupied at Ettelbruck, was motorized and rushed 22 miles to join the 4th Armd. Div. in the relief of Bastogne.

Typical heroism was exhibited by Pfc Augustus G. Means, Essex, Mass., Hq. Co., 318th, who stood up and fired four clips into the enemy position when his company was halted by intense machine gun fire. Wounded, he hurled a grenade into the nest, silencing the gun and killing the crew. Means was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Christmas Day, side by side with tanks of the 4th, 318th doughs began to batter ahead through murderous opposition. Over frozen, snow-covered terrain, the attack gained nine bitter miles despite constant machine gun and mortar fire.

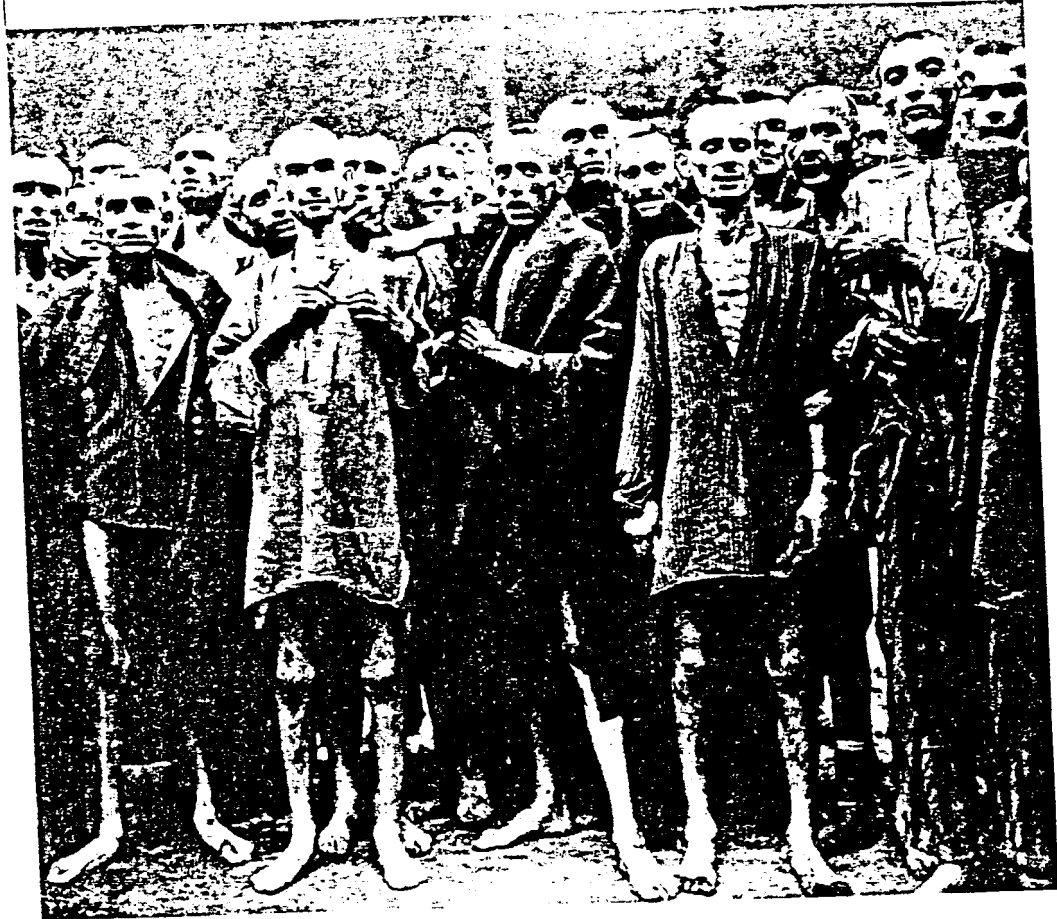
Next day the gap between rescuers and besieged had been reduced to 4000 yards. A coordinated plan of action for both now was necessary; means of communication had to be established.

First Lt. Walter P. Carr, Huston, Miss., 2nd Bn., 318th Inf., leading a four man patrol, undertook the hazardous night mission of slipping through the ring of steel into Bastogne. The patrol reached an engineer outpost in the besieged city 0430, Dec. 27.

"They did everything but kiss, they were so damn glad," Lt. Carr said later. "I told them how the relieving forces were progressing. I felt like a GI Santa Claus."

After an exchange of information at the 101st Airborne's CP, Lt. Carr and his small patrol returned to their own lines with an overlay of defense positions within the city and a situation report of the 101st. Lt. Carr delivered the documents, then rejoined his outfit in time to attack with his unit at 0800.

Aided by the detailed information of the Bastogne situation, Blue Ridge doughs and 4th Armored tankers plodded forward through withering artillery, nebelwerfer and small arms fire. Driving Nazis from one position after another, 2nd Bn., 318th, finally knifed through to the lines of the 101st, Dec. 28 at 1000. Relief of Bastogne was completed; von Rundstedt's hope for a major breakthrough had collapsed.



It was an emaciated group of survivors from one of Nazi Germany's largest concentration camps that greeted their liberators, the 80th Division of the U.S. Third Army, in Ebensee, Austria, May 7, 1945.

A letter of commendation signed by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., Third Army; Maj. Gen John Millikin, III Corps; Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, XII Corps; Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, 4th Armd. Div. attested to the spirit of Blue Ridge men at Bastogne.

Lt. Col. Harry E. Brown, 4th Armd. Div., paid this tribute to the men of the Blue Ridge: "The 80th's doughboys did themselves proud. You can't say too much for them.

Having stormed across the historic Rhine River, the last great German defensive barrier, the 80th Inf. Div. now has driven deep into the hear of the Reich. Proud of their record and with complete confidence in ultimate victory, Blue Ridgers repledge themselves to their Motto: "The 80th Only Moves Forward."

This is one of a series of G. I. Stories of the Ground, Air and Service Forces in the European Theater of Operations, issued by the Orientation Section, Information and Education Division, ETOUSA., Major General H. L. McBride, commanding the 80th Infantry Division, lent his cooperation ~~to~~ to the preparation of the pamphlet, and basic material was supplied to the editors by his staff.