

Through Fire and Water-and Mud, to the Siegfried Line

The evening of Nov. 7, the 314th moved from Belleau to just north of Lixieres and made preparations to support the 318th's attack the next morning to cross the Seille River and seize the ridge line one mile east of Phlin between Saily and Thezy St. Martin. Although only there for a short while, Fred Reitler says: "I well remember the area near Lixieres and Mannoncourt, because a French woman there made the best potato soup I had ever eaten."

Finally, "duff sitting" time was over. Supplies were once more available and Third Army was ready to attack. On Nov. 8, after a one hour artillery preparation, the 80th launched a coordinated attack across the Seille River and liberated six towns. During this engagement, Lt. Ray Dickson (A Btry FO) was killed by sniper fire and Lt. William Black (B Btry FO) and Lt. Julius Spitzberg (B Btry FO) were wounded.

This attack is vividly recalled by John Ruyan. "On Nov. 8, 1944, we jumped off to capture the high ground east of Nomeny. It had rained for several days prior to the attack causing flooding conditions on the small river we had to cross (the Seille). I remember the date very well because on that day it seemed that the Germans had but one mission and that was to kill me. First it was artillery, then sniper fire and finally several thousand rounds of machine gun fire. As we proceeded up a finger of land, the high ground east of Nomeny was under heavy fire. Our casualties were great. Late that afternoon, Capt. Roy, the S-3 of the 1st Bn., was ordered by the CO, Col. Tosi, to take over one of the companies that had lost all of its officers and had less than 25 men left. The fighting continued through the afternoon and on into the night. At nightfall Col. Tosi and I, with our respective radio crews, found refuge in some German trenches and we established wire communications with the leading troops some 200-300 yards to our front.

"About 2300 that night I heard a slight whistle over the sound-power phone. I lifted the receiver and heard Roy say: 'Hey John, get ready, a company of Germans are coming your way.' I asked 'Why didn't you intercept?' There was no answer. Soon we could hear the hob-nailed boots of the German company passing a short distance off to our left. We were afraid to breathe for fear of giving our position away. They marched on toward Nomeny to support the German troops they thought were still there, little realizing that our 1st Bn now occupied the town. After they passed, I whispered to Col. Tosi that we had better be ready because they will pass us again after they bump into the road block at Nomeny. Soon all hell broke loose at the road block. Machine gun and rifle fire turned the Germans back. Sure enough we soon heard their boots beating a rapid retreat. I picked up the receiver of the phone and whistled very lightly. Capt. Roy answered and I said: 'Roy, we gave them a noisy reception. I thought it would be a good idea if you gave them a parting shot with a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle). Capt. Roy replied: 'Go to hell, John. I've had enough fighting for the day. They didn't bother me, so I'm not going to bother them.'"

After a five minute artillery preparation, the attack was renewed the next morning at 0630 (Nov. 9) and many additional towns were liberated. In the early afternoon, the 314th displaced about two miles to the south edge of Nomeny.

The attack in the direction of Saareguemines, the Division objective, was continued on the 10th. In spite of adverse weather and road conditions, all elements advanced approximately eight miles. By evening of the 11th, all regiments were in position along the west bank of the Nied River. After crossing the Nied on the 12th, the Division expanded the bridgehead over the next few days. On the 15th, the 313th attacked toward Chemery and encountered very heavy enemy artillery concentrations but at the end of the day reached the town. By evening of the 16th, all MLR positions were secured and five towns, including Chemery, had been taken. Then for the next three days the Division occupied defensive positions, protecting the left (north) flank of XII Corp.

The attack on Chemery is well remembered by Leland Treap (C Btry FO crew). "The infantry we were with was following a tank unit. Enemy tanks were firing down from a hill up ahead, and we were getting the flak from the shells meant for our tanks. It was snowing, muddy, and cold.

"We moved off to the side to a stretch of woods which looked like good temporary cover. But the woods proved to be treacherous because of 'tree bursts.' We were heavily shelled, and when the shells hit the trees they exploded and everything sprayed down. Lots of guys were calling for the Medics. I was hit in the left arm but at the time it did not seem too serious.

"Some hours later we left the woods and moved through a vineyard towards the objective. By that time my arm was badly swollen and along with three other wounded men I was ordered to the rear. Because we were able to walk, we were told to return on foot and take with us some 25 German PW's, including one on a stretcher.

"By late afternoon we started rearward and were in an open field when the Germans started shelling again. We wanted to lay low and spread out but couldn't because we had to guard the prisoners. It was scary.

"Once we got back through the forest we had no idea whether we were heading in the right direction to get back to our outfit or not. Somehow we made it, turned over the prisoners, and had our wounds treated."

From Nomeny, about noon on Nov. 10, the 314th displaced three miles to Phlin. When moving into the new position "A" Btry captured a German soldier in its area and Sgt. Martin Burke and Pfc. Paul McAndrew captured two Germans in the "Hq" Battery area. S/Sgt. Gerry Rebensdorf also had a pulse quickening experience on this day when his Liaison plane developed motor trouble and he was forced down. Fortunately he was able to land in the 317th sector near Luppy.

Art Lindberg recalls: "My last day as an aerial observer occurred a couple of days after the November offensive started. With Kenyon as pilot, we were flying north of Tragny when we both noticed sunlight flashing off of something above us. It was a flight of B-17's, hundreds of them. We learned later that it was a 1,000 plane raid into Germany, and on their way had dropped a portion of their bomb load on the German troops east of Metz. It was a terrifying sight. Then we knew what 'Cobra' must have looked like."

Frank Lankford remembers: "We were picking up supplies from QM trucks that were parked in the edge of a woods when I heard some planes overhead. I looked up and saw a four-motor bomber with two of its motors dead. It was so close you could see the two feathered props. The most interesting thing was that there were two of our fighter planes flying circles around the bomber, mothering it home just like an old hen with her injured chick."

Frank also observed that: "There was one thing that always was a welcome sign to me as we drove over a strange road. If we had not been over this particular stretch before, I would be very leery of land mines and would lean forward to look on each side of the road to see if I could see the tell-tale cables or telephone lines along the side. Only after I saw them would I feel at ease for I knew our wiremen had been that way before me."

"One day," Frank says, "we were driving along a road when we came to a truck that had stopped and was partially blocking our progress. We asked the driver what was wrong and he told us that the small truck nearby in the field had just run over a mine. The right front wheel and the rider on that side had been blown to bits. I could see several men picking up body parts and putting them in a basket."

"When we moved on we only had a short distance to go to the firing battery where we were to deliver the rations. It was on the edge of a small patch of woods. While my driver was backing up towards the kitchen truck, I was mulling over what we had just seen and trying to picture what had happened -- the right wheel (where I was sitting) ran over the mine and then . . . WHAM . . . away went the wheel and the man. Just as the thought 'Wham' went through my head, one of the howitzers, a short distance off to my right, let go. I literally climbed up on my driver's shoulder trying to get away."

As the infantry continued to move forward, the 314th displaced to Tragny on Nov. 11. When it did, 16 Germans were captured in the vicinity of the CP by the attached "A" Btry of the 633 AA Bn. On Nov. 13, the Battalion left Tragny and moved first to Morville-Sur-Nied, then on to Vatimont. From there it displaced to Thicourt on the 15th and remained there until the 21st, when it moved to Chemery.

Paul Bassett (Ln O) recalls: "As you know, the men in the 318th had a saying: 'If you live, you get promoted.' One time when I was with them as Liaison Officer, the Battalion Commander asked me if I could get to a certain town. I said I had never been there but I could get there using a map. He could not read a map. I hoped I'd not be with his Battalion again. The Germans would likely shoot at me, not the two guys on the point!"

It is not known if the foregoing has any connection, but it is obvious that someone incorrectly reported the extent of the infantry's progress in the Thicourt area.

Francis Neighly tells us: "The No. 2 gun section had gone to a forward position in order to register. The nearby town, which I believe was Thicourt, was supposed to have been taken. We had just gone into position when our tanks started attacking the town. We were in front of the tanks, the

infantry, everybody. We didn't know whether to dig in or go blind (or whatever that popular expression was). Then our prime mover came roaring back. We hooked up the gun and got out of there in a hurry."

Simeon Hutcheson likewise remembers the area very well. "The base piece from each battery moved to a new forward position so that we could register on a base point before the batteries advanced. We had no trouble getting there, but soon after we arrived the shells started coming in thick and fast. We were ordered to pack up and get out fast. We had not seen anyone when we came through the nearby town but when we returned there were dead soldiers lying in the street. This was the only time we ever retreated to our old position."

And Jim Trestik (Hq Btry) tells us: "When Capt. (Robert) Thurston took an advance party to Thicourt to reconnoiter for a location for the CP, I went along representing the Motor Section. A room in one of the buildings was selected for the motor crew and I got to work and boarded up the windows. There was a room upstairs where one of the other sections was going to stay.

"From an upstairs window, facing north, I could see one of our tanks and the Germans were zeroing in on it. The first shell hit short and the second came closer. Before the third shell was fired, the tank luckily moved from its position for the shell hit the spot right where the tank had been. The Captain thought it was premature for the battery to move up at this time, so we went back to wait another day.

"If I remember correctly, we did move up the next day. I went upstairs to the window from which I had seen the tank the day before. In that interim, a shell had hit the window sill and caused considerable damage to it and the wall. But all was quiet on this day.

"No so the next morning, however. While breakfast was being served we were shelled and suffered a number of casualties, including Ted Sersen, who was killed. We were having pancakes for breakfast and the motor section was seated around the table in our room enjoying them. I believe it was Edward Schmidt who was sitting next to me when a shell landed just outside our window and fragments came through the boards and hit him in the back. Fortunately, he had on so many clothes that the shell pieces did not penetrate them and he was not injured.

"However, the explosion caused the light in our room to go out and when it did everyone took off fast for the cellar. That is, all but me. For some reason I didn't go right away. When I did decide to go and started toward the front door, I stopped just short of it. Then another shell landed just outside the door. Had I taken one more step I probably would have been hit. When the shell exploded Arthur Reese was going up the stairs in front of the doorway. He let out a yell and I don't remember if I saw him after that."

The Battalion After Action Report notes that on Nov. 16, Sgt. Montgomery Long and Cpl. Leland Treap, both of "C" Btry's FO Crew, were wounded. Then on the 17th, T/5 Ted Sersen was killed and the following were wounded when the CP area was shelled by enemy artillery: T/5 Arthur Reese, Pfc. Richard Henry,

Cpl. Terry Cunningham and Pvt. Steve Wolesecky. Cpl. Walter Mandabach (B 3try) was also wounded while on Special Duty with the S-2 Section.

About the middle of November, each unit started inspections to check for immersion foot (trench foot) because the weather had been wet and cold for a protracted period. Harry Rockwell recalls: "It was several weeks after the attack across the Seille River that we started to have foot inspections. By that time my feet were so solidly frozen that I felt like I was walking on two solid chunks of wood. When the Medics pulled off my shoes for an inspection they quickly determined that I had 'trench foot' and put me on a stretcher to be evacuated. About that time 1st Sgt. Frank Knott walked up to me and said the nicest thing I ever heard: 'Harry, I think you are going to make it home.' I was hospitalized for six months and discharged in July 1945."

From Nov. 20 through the 24th, in preparation for continuing the attack eastward toward Saareguemines, all regiments sent out patrols to determine enemy positions and widened the bridgehead north and northeast of the Nied Allemande River.

Mike Heneghan says that: "Whenever I would go on reconnaissance I would pick out a nice house in every town we went through and put a little sign on the door 'Reserved for Capt. Heneghan'." Sometimes if we went into position nearby, I would go back to one of them to clean up or sleep, but usually we just kept moving on.

"One time I was going to the rear and noticed a house that still had my name on the door, so I stopped. It was occupied by a bunch of AA officers. One of them asked if I was Capt. Heneghan and had I put the sign on the door. Then he asked 'Why didn't you clean the Germans out of the basement? There were still a whole bunch of them down there when we came. They didn't put up a fight though and were glad to surrender.'"

"I wonder how many houses I put my name on still had Germans inside. And I wonder if there are any houses that still have my name on them."

The 314th left Chemery on Nov. 22 and proceeded six miles to Crehange in direct support of the 318th holding the sector from Tritting to one mile southwest of Haute-Vigneulles. At this position, the gun batteries were on the east side of the Nied Allemande River and the CP was on the west side. Two days later, on the 24th, the CP displaced across the river to the north edge of the town to facilitate communications and travel between the CP and the batteries. From Crehange the battalion supported the 318th's attack on Sambiderstroff.

Sandwiched between those moves was Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 23), which was a day of comparative inactivity for the Battalion. An excellent turkey dinner was served after the kitchen crews had worked all night thawing out the frozen turkeys. A general church service of thanksgiving was held in the village (Crehange) church by Captain Vincent F. Hart, the Division Artillery Catholic Chaplain.

"One time in late November," says Hubert Kenyon, "Lt. (John) Simonson was flying with me as observer. We climbed to about three thousand feet over some big, billowy, white cumulus clouds that were so soft looking we felt like jumping right out into the middle of them. Suddenly, an American P-51 Fighter zoomed down over our nose from the rear. It just about scared us to death. Lt. Simonson stammered 'What, what, what, what if that had been a German fighter.' I thought if it had been we probably wouldn't be talking about it."

Following a five minute artillery preparation, the Division attacked the Maginot Line at 0800 on Nov. 25, with the three regiments abreast. The first major breach in the Line came when the 318th took Ft. Bambiderstroff, just 85 minutes after the attack began. After the breaching of these forts, Sgt. William Whiteside, a member of the Liaison Section attached to the 2nd Bn, entered Ft. Bambiderstroff to find a suitable place to establish a CP. Bill carried with him only a candle, his carbine having been placed beside his radio. Once inside the Fort he started down a flight of stairs and continued going down for 14 flights. Enroute he picked up a discarded German bayonet. At the bottom he heard voices speaking in German. He blew out his candle and called out to the occupants. He placed the point of his bayonet in the back of a German soldier he discovered down there and started to march him upstairs. Then his prisoner informed him that there were many other Germans down there. When he was through, Bill had captured 63 Germans and a quantity of small arms and other equipment.

On Nov. 26, the 314th displaced from Crehange to positions at Ft. Bambiderstroff. From this site it would support the attack on Hill 410 and the Forest de Longeville.

"It was in the Bambiderstroff area," says Manly Overstreet, "that we were doing a survey in a large field of some 20 to 35 acres, when word came over the radio that there were German planes in the vicinity. About the same time several of the planes came at us at tree top level from the tree line at the far end of the field. Sgt. James McClure and I both started to run away from the jeep then dropped to the ground. Fortunately, they didn't fire. I guess we weren't a good enough target for them."

A ten minute artillery preparation proceeded the renewal of the attack the next morning. Although hampered by swollen streams and blown bridges the 317th took Vaimont and Falschviller, the 319th advanced to within 1500 yards of St. Avold and the 318th seized Hills 345, 322 and 405. In doing so the 318th successfully repulsed five counterattacks. A sixth was forming about 1700 but an artillery TOT with six battalions was placed on the assembling troops. The counterattack did not develop. During the day the 314th fired a total of 14 missions on counterattacks or assembly points.

Paul McAndrew believes it was in this area that: "One night I went back to the CP from the infantry with an overlay for some harassing fires to be used that night. I made it to Headquarters all right but on the way back to the infantry I must have made a wrong turn somewhere - it wasn't easy driving with those 'cat-eyes' - for out of the darkness a foreign sounding voice suddenly called out 'Halt!' I didn't know whether to stop or to give it the

gun and take a chance. I decided it was better to become a POW than to get killed needlessly. It turned out that the foreign voice was French and the road I was heading down was heavily mined. I thank God that I decided to stop or I probably wouldn't be telling this today."

Continuing the attack on the 27th, the 80th gained approximately seven miles and liberated five towns including St. Avold. During the advance, Div Arty fired 120 missions and was credited with destroying four enemy batteries.

At 1915 on Nov. 27, 1944, the 314th FA fired the first shot into Germany by the 80th Division Artillery, under the direction of Capt. Michael F. Heneghan. The shot was fired by the 2nd Gun Section of "C" Btry which had been moved forward to register in the Battalion's designated new position. At 1915 Capt. Heneghan plotted a target on the map, all the men signed their name on the projectile and it went winging across the border to land in Germany. In addition to Capt. Heneghan, the others involved were: Sgt. Freed Woody (Chief of Section), Cpl. Richard Grunow (Gunner), Cpl. William Adams (Instrument Operator), Pfc. William Spanier (No. 1 Cannoneer -- the man who pulled the lanyard) and cannoneers Pfc. Ira Miller, Pfc. Stephen Morrison, Pfc. Francis Neighly, Pfc. Joseph Scepita, Pvt. Andrew Bock, Pvt. Casimer Baka, Pvt. Clarence Fulford and Pvt. Wilbur Keech. Also present and signatories to the event were: S/Sgt. John Malagise, T/4 Stanley Wilson, Cpl. Warren Piatt and Pfc. Russell Simpson, all of "B" Btry.

This historic event is vividly recalled by Francis Neighly. "We (2nd Section, "C" Btry) had gone forward to an advance position to register on a base point. The rest of the battery was to come up later. We set up in back of a house. We were just starting to dig in when several German soldiers came running down the road in front of the house. They were moving pretty fast and not looking around so they didn't spot us.

"Not long afterwards Captain Heneghan showed up and said: 'Captain Boston isn't going to like this but we're close enough that we could fire the first round onto German soil.' So we carried a shell into the house, put it on a table and the entire crew signed their name on it. We then took it back to the gun and shot it into Germany. It was quite a thrill."

The next day, Nov. 28, eight more miles were gained and four additional towns liberated. The 318th was then motorized to pursue the retreating Germans. To support the advance, the 314th left Sambiderstroff in the early afternoon and travelled 15 miles to Guenviller. Then a change of plans was received from Division, the 318th became Division Reserve, and the 314th was assigned General Support of the Division. The 314th remained at Guenviller until Dec. 4.

Continuing the next day (Nov. 29), the 319th liberated Beningen, while the 317th engaged hostile forces in the vicinity of Farbersviller until relieved by the 318th.

Having advanced eighteen miles in six days under adverse weather conditions and against determined and bitter enemy resistance, the 80th halted from Nov. 30 until Dec. 4 to rehabilitate personnel and equipment.

In support of the advance during November, the Battalion traveled 65 miles. All marches were made under the most difficult conditions imaginable, with the roads often a veritable sea of mud and clogged with vehicular traffic of all kinds pushing towards Germany. At times, double columns of tanks, half-tracs and tank destroyers, as well as trucks, jeeps and other military vehicles seemingly blocked the way of the Battalion as it endeavored to move forward to new positions. But in every case the difficulty was surmounted and the Battalion rolled forward. Positions for the guns became increasingly difficult to find because all fields were covered with water and mud from the incessant rains. Digging in these morasses only complicated matters in most instances. During the month the 314th fired a total of 9,450 rounds.

The month of December began with the 314th in position at Guenviller in direct support of the 318th which held the sector between Benning-Les-St. Avoird and Henriville. This brief period of comparative inactivity was utilized to devise a system of building parapets to protect the guns because after two months of almost continuous rain it was no longer feasible to try to "dig in" the positions.

Dec. 3 was a memorable day for Sgt. William T. Martin, Jr. for he received the Battalion's first battlefield commission when he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant.



"Oh, a fella soon gets used to slopping around in the mud!"

Following an artillery preparation of 15 minutes, the 313th, on Dec. 4, launched an attack and seized Farbersviller, Tenteling, and Kochern. In this action, Pfc. Alphonsus O'Donnell of "B" Btry's FO Crew, was wounded. After the attack the 314th moved to Farbersviller where it remained until Dec. 18.

Having taken its objective, the Division organized defensive positions and held them until the 7th, when XII Corps ordered the 80th to a rest area in the vicinity of St. Avold. The Division's front line units were relieved by the 6th Armored, but three artillery battalions (314th, 905th, 315th) remained in position in general support of the 6th Armored. The 313th moved to Fontenay to participate in a demonstration of the new proximity fuse. This relief of the 80th terminated 102 consecutive days of contact with the enemy.

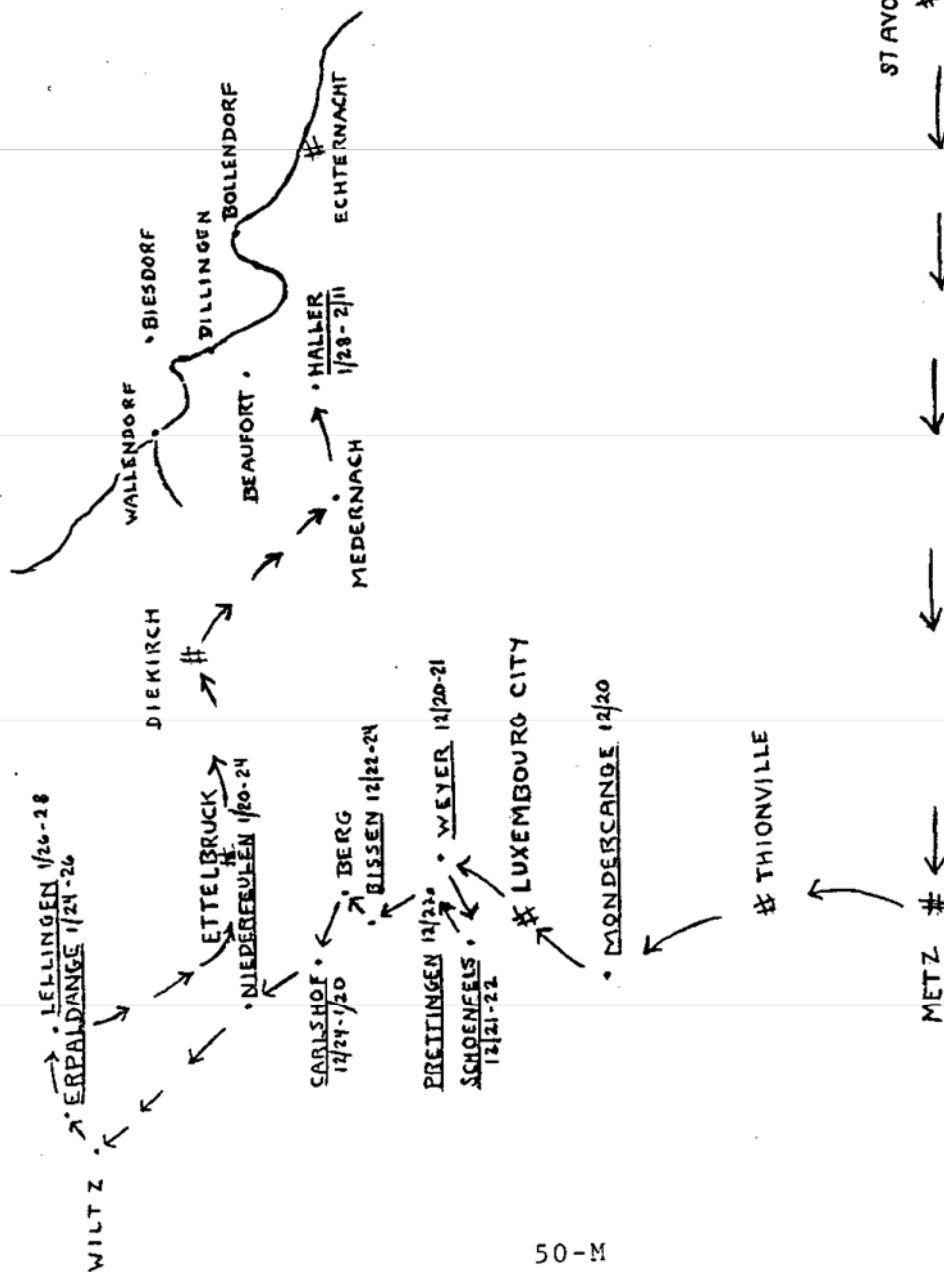
While enjoying a brief period of comparative inactivity, the main topic of conversation throughout the Battalion was the departure on Dec. 10 of Sgt. William Whiteside ("Hq" Btry) and Sgt. Montgomery Long ("C" Btry) on a 30 days furlough to the United States. These two men had been chosen from the entire Battalion as the most deserving of this reward.

After a brief respite, the Division was ordered to prepare for an attack to the north to breach the Siegfried Line in the Zweibrucken area. Movement to a forward assembly area in the vicinity of Binning began on Dec. 16. On the 18th, the 314th travelled some 32 miles from Farbersviller to Dehlingen.

The 319th had already moved into jump off positions for the attack when new orders were received from XII Corps alerting the Division for a movement to the north to concentrate in the vicinity of Luxembourg City and assist in repelling a major German offensive in the zone of VIII Corps of First Army. The Division began movement to the north on the 19th and was assigned to III Corps to participate in what became known as the Battle of the Bulge.

This sudden change of missions necessitated some very rapid planning by all staffs from Division down to battalion. It also required maximum efficiency and the cooperation of every man in every unit in order to assure that the rigid timetable was met and the mission was accomplished.

Nevertheless, there was confusion in carrying out the plan. Russell Litchfield remembers: "On Dec. 18 we had to unload our trucks of all ammunition and send them to move the 318th from the vicinity of Freyming to Bettviller for the intended attack on the Siegfried Line. When the trucks returned we reloaded the ammunition and moved from Flombourg-Haut to Dehlingen for the attack scheduled for early on December 20. This required unloading ammo again at the gun positions and drawing a second supply from the depot. Early on the 19th we were told to unload and go draw a third load. This we did, but when the Ammo Train returned to the "Sv" Btry area, orders were to take back what we had just picked up to the Corp depot and also to return the second load we had picked up. When this was done we were to pick up the first load that had been delivered to the gun positions. All of this was to be done by 1600. Needless to say the ammo handlers doubted whether the Army knew what it was doing and were very vocal in saying so."



Path of the 314th FA Bn
 Dec. 19, 1944 - Feb. 11, 1945

Not to Scale
 Locations Relative Only