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COMPANY "B", 117TH INFANTRY, 30TH INFANTRY DIVISION - TENNESSEE NATIONAL GUARD

BY WARREN C. GILES

PREFACE

This is a narrative of events of Company "B", 117th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division, Tennessee National Guard, from April 1921 to November 24th 1945. This account includes the combat service of Company "B", through World War II.

The material for this history was obtained from the history of the parent units, personal interviews with Glenn R. Aytes, James E. Barclay, John M. Calhoun, William H. Cate, Roy B. Duggan, John I. Elkins, John B. Owen, Jr., Charles P. Robinson, Karl D. Saulpaw, Zebulon V. Sherrill, Edgar H. Tutterow, other individuals and the personal knowledge of the writer.

Signed,

Warren C. Giles

COMPANY "B", 117TH INFANTRY, 30TH INFANTRY DIVISION

When the 3rd Tennessee Infantry was called into Federal service during World War I, Tennessee was left without National Guard troops, and subsequently the 4th Tennessee Infantry, Tennessee National Guard was organized as the only Infantry Regiment in the State of Tennessee. The 4th Tennessee Infantry Regiment was redesignated the 117th Infantry Regiment, Tennessee National Guard in April of 1921.

Company "E", 117th Infantry, Tennessee National Guard was located in Athens in the Armory over Horton's Drug Store on the south-east corner of the court house square. Captain John B. Elliott was Company Commander, Hermon L. Moses, 1st Lieutenant, Frank K. Boyd, 2nd Lieutenant and John S. Kelley was 1st Sergeant. Company "E", 117th Infantry was given Federal recognition on April 1, 1921. Federal recognition was withdrawn on April 18, 1922 but was restored on April 30, 1923. At that time the Armory was located in the Doctor Beard Building on North Jackson Street. Company officers were Captain Hermon L. Moses, Company Commander, 1st Lieutenant Frank K. Boyd and 2nd Lieutenant Robert C. Hornsby. The senior enlisted man was John S. Kelley, 1st Sergeant.

Company "E" was redesignated Company "B", 117th Infantry, Tennessee National Guard on May 1, 1938. At that time the Company officers were Captain Hermon L. Moses, 1st Lieutenant Walter E. Moses, 2nd Lieutenant Glenn R. Aytes and the senior enlisted man was 1st Sergeant Warren C. Giles. The authorized strength was three officers and 61 (enlisted) men. Company "B" was the only National Guard unit in McMinn County. The Company had enlisted men from Etowah, Englewood, Niota, Riceville, Calhoun, Meigs County and Monroe County, but most of the enlistments were from the Athens area.

The authorized strength had been increased to five officers and over one hundred enlisted men by September 16, 1940. Company "B" was a part of the 117th Infantry, 30th Division. The Division was later designated 30th Infantry Division and consisted of National Guard units from Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, The Division was a large multi-state unit. The 30th Infantry Division was ordered to active Federal service for a period of only one year on September 16, 1940. However, war clouds continued to rise in Europe and the Pacific. As a result, the Division was retained on active Federal service until November 24, 1945. It was deactivated on November 24, 1945 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Company "B" was ordered into active Federal service along with the Division on September 16, 1940. After the officers and enlisted men received physical examinations and were found physically fit for military service, the unit moved by train to Fort Jackson, South Carolina to join the Regiment and the Division.

At the time of induction into Federal service on September 16, 1940, the roster of the officers and men of Company "B" consisted of :

CAPTAIN

Moses, Hermon L.

FIRST LIEUTENANT

Walter E. Moses, Mess Officer

SECOND LIEUTENANTS:

Aytes, Glenn R. Giles, Warren C. Sherrell, Zebulon V.

FIRST SERGEANT MESS SERGEANT SUPPLY SERGEANT:

Pierce, Only M. Robinsons, Charles P. Lay, Carl E.

SERGEANTS Carmichael, Frank C. Miller, William C. Stalcup, Gene S. Harmon, Kinzel I. Rowden, Garnett M. Womac, James D. Lansford, Jack P. Simpson, Joseph E.

CORPORALS

Barclay, James E. Carmichael, Earl W. Peck, John L.
Bell, Jack A. Hamby, William E. Richeson, James M.
Benton, Robert L. Jiles, Neil L. Saulpaw, Karl D.
Brock, Hugh C. Melton, Clyde R. Trusley, John F.
Owen, John B., Jr.

PRIVATES FIRST CLASS

Anderson, Carl A., Jr. Giles, Jesse N. McMahan, Harry
Calhoun, John M. Goins, Issac V. McSpadden, James H., Jr.
Clayton, Jefferson C. Hamilton, Lloyd V. Teague, Leonard E.
Clayton, Arthur R. Hughs, Charles A. Tutterow, Edgar H.
Elkins, John F. Jenkins, Otto K. Walker, Henry E.
Milton, Maurice D.

PRIVATES

Bain, Vernon T. Hicks, Ross Stamey, Henry W.
Brewer, Virgel J. Hicks, Paul Stanfill, Odis C.
Cate, William H. Hutsell, James D. Stansberry, Gordon B.
Chambers, Rolf C. Lingerfelt, Roy L. Stephens, Hugh, Jr.
Coleman, Robert V. Lingerfelt, William L. Stevens, Luther L.
Cunningham, James G. Lingo, Hamit Stone, William B., Jr.
Cupples, James E. Malone, Arnold L. Teague, Jesse M.
Derrick, William A. Manry, Millard D. Thompson, Hubert G.
Dodson, Alto P. Mason, Clyde Tuell, Thomas Reed
Duckett, Lloyd G. Moore, Donald E. Underdown, Thomas H.
Duggan, Roy B. Moses, George A. Underwood, Edsel W.
Elliott, Amos C., Jr. Mulkey, Jimmie R. Wade, Bernard W.
England, James T. McCarty, Dennis J. Wade, Harold William
Ferguson, Jack A. McKenny, Fred Wade, Ross C.
Frase, Spencer M. McNelly, Jesse W. Walker, Joe A.
Freeman, Elbert J. Philpots, Earnest Walker, Robert L.

Garwood, E. B. Queen, Samuel G. Ware, Alvin H.
Giles, James E. Raper, Charles B. Whaley, Ernest J.
Giles, Quayle B. Raper, Jay C. Wilson, Carolos
Ghann, Charles L. Sexton, Fred Winder, James O.
Goodwin, Wayne H. Sexton, Horace G. Witt, James P.
Graham, Golue Richard Stamey, James L. Womac, Elbert
Hamby, Theodor C.

This roster includes eight groups of brothers as follows:

Earl W. and Frank C Carmichael
Arthur R. and Jefferson C. Clayton
James E., Jesse Neil, Quayle B. and Warren Giles
Theodor C. and William E. Hamby
Paul and Ross Hicks
Hermon Lee and Walter E. Moses
Henry W. and James L. Stamey
Henry E. and Joe A. Walker

On the 24th of September, the Company arrived at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and started training. The enlisted men were housed in squad pyramidal tents and the officers in small two men wall tents. Later, wood frames and floors were provided along with a small Sibley stove in the center of the tent to knock off the chill of the winter cold. During the middle of October, the Company began to receive men to bring it to full war strength through Selective Service. Most of the men were from the Knoxville area.

Construction started in a big way. Latrines, bathhouses, mess halls and supply and administrative buildings were built. The Company furnished several non-commissioned officers and two officers to form a training cadre to administer basic training to the new men.

Company "B" had been at Fort Jackson only a short time when Staff Sergeant Charles P. Robinson, mess sergeant, established a reputation of operating the finest mess in the entire Division. Colonel Grant A. Schlieker, assumed command of the 117th Infantry on August 12, 1942. Within a few weeks he moved Sergeant Robinson to Regimental Headquarters to operate the officers mess. He did such a superior job that he had more influence with Colonel Schlieker than any officer or man in the entire Regiment.

Before December 1941 Captain Moses was sent to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. When he returned, he was promoted to Major and assigned to the Third Battalion as Executive Officer. The remainder of the Company officers were sent to the Infantry School. When they completed the school they returned to the unit, but by the spring of 1942 they had all been reassigned. Major Moses was cadried to the 77th Division; Walter Mosses to the 100th Division, Aytes to the 89th Division; and Sherrell to the 78th Division. Giles was reassigned in the 117th Infantry as Company Commander of Company " L", 117th Infantry. Twenty-two enlisted men of the original company attended Officer Candidate School and became officers.

On May 27, 1941 the Company moved by motor convoy from Fort Jackson with other units of the Regiment and the 30th Division to the vicinity of Dixie, Tennessee to participate in the VII Corps maneuvers. Upon completion of maneuvers the Company returned to Fort Jackson on July 5th. The remainder of 1941 was spent in field exercises with the 117th Infantry, the balance of the 30th Division and the 9th Division of Fort Bragg, N. C., in the First Army maneuver area in North and South Carolina. The Company returned to Fort Jackson and did corrective training based upon deficiencies noted in maneuvers.

On September 12, 1942 Company "B", along with the remainder of the 117th Regiment, was detached from the 30th Division and ordered to Fort Benning, Georgia. Its mission was to furnish troops for demonstration purposes and to

assist instructors in the training of officers' classes and Officer Candidate Classes at the Infantry School. The movement was made by motor convoy with all organizational equipment.

On September 17, 1942 three working days after arrival at Fort Benning, Company "B". assisted in a problem "Battalion in River Crossing" before an audience of four officers classes, two officer candidate classes and several dignitaries of the Post and Infantry School. Later, Company "B" again assisted the battalion, establishing a Post record in the construction of the footbridge across the Chattahoochee River which was a part of the same problem. The Company furnished daily details for the demonstration. The details ranged in size from one man to the entire Company. Performance ratings given by the instructors from the Infantry School were 42 percent Superior, 50 percent Excellent and 8 percent good.

The Company along with the rest of the Regiment, rejoined the Division at Camp Blanding, Florida on February 28, 1943. There it underwent training especially designed for physical hardening in preparation for maneuvers.

On September 7, 1943 the Company with the remainder of the Division, moved to the maneuver area near Camp Forrest, Tennessee. There they participated in maneuvers with three Infantry Divisions and the 2nd Armored Division. On November 14, 1943 the Company moved to Camp Atterbury, Indiana and completed the final phase of training before being ordered overseas.

The Company departed from Camp Atterbury, Indiana on January 27th, 1944 and arrived at the staging area at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts on January 29. The Company sailed from the Boston Port of Embarkation aboard the USS John Ericsson on February 12 and disembarked in Liverpool, England on February 24.

The convoy was an impressive sight, with ships spread out over the ocean as far as the eye could see, shepherded by battleships and by destroyers frisking around the edges of the great pattern of ships.

From February 25 to April 5, the Company was quartered in Nissen Huts near Petworth, England, where unit training was conducted. From April 6 to June 14 Company "B" was billeted in the town of Berkhamstead, England, and completed their final phase of training before entering combat in Normandy. By this time the Company was composed of men from practically every state in the union. The Company was introduced to the air war during their stay in England.

In March 1944 (two months before the actual Normandy Invasion) an armed officer-courier delivered to the 30th Infantry Division Headquarters a bundle of documents published by the U. S. First Army containing a plan known as "NEPTUNE". The object of "NEPTUNE" was to secure a lodgement area on the continent from which further operations could be developed. It was a part of a large strategic plan designed to bring about the total defeat of Germany.

The First Army was to land on "D" Day, H-Hour. At Utah Beach, on the east side of the Cherbourg Peninsula north of Carentan and at Omaha Beach facing north into the English Channel just east of Isigny. The VII Corps would assault Utah Beach. The V Corps, led by the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions would assault Omaha Beach. Two Airborne American Divisions would make vertical envelopments behind the western assault area. The British would attack with three divisions initially, the first objective Caen and Bayeux. Overwhelming air and naval power would support the assault. The 30th would land on Omaha Beach as part of the XIX Corps, after the initial beachhead had been established. The XIX Corps on landing would consist principally of the 30th Infantry Division and 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions. After they were all ashore it was contemplated that the XIX Corps would pick up the 29th Infantry Division and lose the 2nd Armored Division.

This was a secret the 30th Division guarded zealously and effectively. A planning room was set up under armed guard. A special list was made of those who could enter the room and consult the document there. It was a very restricted list of personnel who were allowed to know and study the plan. In the 117th Infantry Regiment, the Commanding Officer, the Operations Officer and the Intelligence Officer were the only officers in the Regiment that were allowed in on the initial Planning. Major Warren C. Giles was Regimental Intelligence Officer and was in on the initial planning. (This information is mentioned so as to give the reader a picture of the grand strategy of the Allied Forces for the initial invasion of the continent).

There were two things particularly noticeable on Tuesday, June 6, as the troops "woke up and looked outside". The first important thing was that there was sunshine and the skies were clear, a welcome sight after having so many days of bad weather. The second thing was the sky was filled with more planes than anyone had ever seen before, not the four motor bombers of normal time, but light twin bombers. All of them carried black stripes on the underside of their wings. The invasion was on.

On "D-Day" (June 6, 1944) the 30th Infantry Division was alerted for movement to France. The Units moved to a staging area in Southern England and were briefed on the situation. They then moved to Southampton docks and loaded into transports.

The First Battalion, under individual company control, crossed the channel at night. Weather in the channel was rough. Continued enemy air action made the crossing hazardous but it was completed without serious mishap. Daylight found the improvised harbor at Omaha Beach filled with vessels of all descriptions and sky dotted with big anti-aircraft balloons.

Company "B" went into an assembly area with the First Battalion, near Lison on June 16.

The Company remained there until July 2, while in the assembly area they received a baptism of fire from the German 88mm's and suffered some casualties.

The Battalion had been scheduled to be the assault battalion for the Vire River crossing, July 2. However, when it looked as though the heavy weapons of the battalion, which had been delayed at the beach, would not arrive the plan was changed and the Battalion was scheduled for reserve. The code name of Company "B" was Curlew Baker.

The First Battalion relieved the Third Battalion along the Vire River on July 2. The crossing of the Vire was re-set for July 7 and patrols were sent out. A particularly unfortunate patrol was made up of a group from Company "B"s First Platoon under Lieutenant Wilfred Ruffley. As they waited on the night of July 3/4 while the rest of the patrol reconnoitered forward, eight men were ambushed by a German patrol. Of the eight, some were killed and some captured. Sam Queen, who was a member of the patrol, was captured.

At 4:30 A. M. July 7th, 1944 the Vire River crossing was made and the initial battle to break out of the Normandy beachhead was underway. Company "B" led the First Battalion across the Vire River and Baker Company continued the lead in the rainy attack toward Les Landes east of Saint Jean-De-Daye. Late in the afternoon Captain Edward R. Friday, Company "B" Commander, was wounded and Lieutenant Daniel L. Sullivan, Jr. assumed command.

By nightfall Company "B" and the remainder of the 117th Infantry had firmly established its bridgehead. The Germans counterattacked but were repulsed. On July 9 the Germans counterattacked again, combining infantry and tanks from the Panzer Lehr Division. Again they were repulsed with heavy losses.

In spite of the increased "know-how" the Company had not become accustomed to hedgerow fighting. The thick earthen walls of the hedgerows were so restrictive that rapid and large advances were virtually impossible. The trouble with the hedgerows was not so much the hedgerows themselves as the fact that they were planted on high earthen walls (5 to 8 feet high), which surrounded every field.

The Company by this time had learned some important lessons: The ability to distinguish sounds that occur in battle, the ability to evaluate the relative danger of different types of fire, and to remain cool in the face of fire. They were also learning the nature of fear and how to handle it. It had been found that the battle-worth of a man was utterly unpredictable. Many poor garrison soldiers made good fighters and many good garrison soldiers made poor fighters. The previously strict "rules and regulations" type of discipline was being replaced by a much stronger one based on respect and battle necessity.

On July 12 the First Battalion jumped off toward the south and received heavy resistance. They advanced slowly across hedgerow country. By early afternoon, the Battalion reached Hauts-Vents, a settlement at the junction of five

roads. It sustained many casualties from the terrific shelling and small arms fire. Lieutenant Sullivan was wounded and Lieutenant Robert C. Spiker, from Morgantown, West Virginia assumed command of Company "B".

On the 13th, 14th and 15th the Company and the Battalion sustained heavy casualties. On July 16 Capt. Robert A. Gelwick was assigned to Company "B" and assumed command.

From July 18 to the official end of the Normandy Campaign on July 24, the entire 117th Infantry Regiment was in Division reserve. While in Division reserve near Pont-Hebert, Company "B" led the usual life of a unit sitting Division reserve. Hot meals were served, hot showers were made available, haircuts were given, equipment was cleaned and letters were written. During this period Company "B" received its first wholesale lot of replacements.

Although it rained a good bit, Company "B" members had learned more and more to put tops on their foxholes as protection against both weather and shrapnel. The Company received intermittent shelling and a few casualties were sustained almost each day.

On the night of July 20, a rumor that had spread like wildfire all over Normandy hit the Company with a wallop: The jerries were using gas. A mad scramble for gas masks resulted but the rumor, like a thousand others proved false.

Although the Normandy Campaign technically ended July 24, 1944, Company "B" still had plenty of rough hedgerow fighting ahead. Of the five weeks Company had been in France, virtually all of the period had been spent in contact with the enemy and the casualty total was comparatively high. By veteran standards, Company had not performed brilliantly but it had done well. If the measure of a new combat unit, however, is the speed with which it learns, Baker Company had excelled.

Operation Cobra was tailored to meet these conditions. VII Corps was to make the main effort along the St. Lo-Perriers highway just west of St. Lo. The primary job was to drive clear through the enemy's crust-like defensive position before he could reform. For this purpose, the Army planned a saturation bombing by fighter-bombers, mediums and heavies over an area from the front lines back through the enemy's artillery positions. Following this bombing, three battle-tired divisions, the 4th, 9th and 30th, were to attack southward on a narrow front, clearing the way for three entirely motorized divisions which would then pour through the opening, the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions and the 1st Infantry Division. The VII Corps, was to advance rapidly south then to the southwest into the rear of the forces opposing the VII Corps along the western position of the Cotentin Peninsula.

The 30th Division plan called for an assault by two regiments abreast, the 120th Regiment on the right, on the axis of the main highway to St. Gilles; the 119th Regiment on the left, with Hebecrevon the first objective. Two Battalions of the 117th Regiment were loaned to the attacking regiments. The remainder of the 117th Regiment was to be in reserve initially, prepared to pass through on the left to clear out the curve of the Vire River opposite St. Lo.

The air preparation was a key factor of the assault plan. Air enthusiasts in particular felt that a massive carpet-like air attack before the ground troops jumped off would virtually annihilate the main enemy positions by reasons of concussion or sheer destruction, so that the attacking infantry could swiftly secure the breach and hold it for the following armor and motorized infantry. The air plan called for 350 fighter-bombers hitting the enemy front lines, then by 1500 heavy bombers assigned a target area 2,500 yards deep and 6,000 yards wide. This was to be followed by a 350 plane dive-bombing raid on the enemy front lines. The final air assault (as the troops moved forward) was provided by 396 medium bombers hitting the rear portions of the target area for forty five minutes.

For their own protection, assault troops were to withdraw 1,200 yards behind their lines of departure before the heavy bombers attacked. Front lines would be marked with panels and smoke. The attack was first scheduled for the 18th of July, but was postponed due to bad weather to the 21st when the weather forced another postponement.

July 24th, the first of two terrible days which opened the St. Lo breakthrough, dawned clear with a slight haze over the ground. At 11:30 A.M., on schedule, the 350 P-47's arrived for their preliminary dive-bombing, followed by the heavy steady drone which signaled the approach of the 1,500 heavy bombers. Scarcely had the men in the rear echelons

caught sight of the seemingly endless tight patterns of heavy bombers glistening in the sun when the first alarming reports began to arrive. Some of the dive-bombers were hitting friendly troops. One heavy squadron dropped its bombs squarely on friendly troops, and in twenty minutes the entire bombing had been called off.

New orders were given for the 25th. The Infantry attack would start at 11:00 A.M. Artillery would concentrate on no man's land from which the troops were to withdraw prior to the bombing. July 25th proved to be even more of a slaughter than the 24th. The 30th Division suffered a total of 814 casualties including 64 killed in the bombing. Lt. General Lesley J. McNair, who had come to Europe from his post of Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, to take a new assignment in Europe, was killed in the 30th Division area but is not included in the division total killed.

The portion of the bombing which fell on the Germans shook some of them up and caused some damage. They had the advantage of shelters deep enough to withstand the heavy concentrations which seemed to characterize American artillery tactics. When the assault troops approached they found enemy "doing business at the same old stand" and using the same tactics with dug-in tanks and infantry. The enemy artillery was still falling on the main routes of approach.

By July 26th the 117th Infantry was given the mission of taking the high ground overlooking St. Lo. Thus a protective screen was provided for other American Troops advancing on the city. Having attained this highly desirable objective, the 117th Infantry was returned to Division Reserve. Captain Gelwick was wounded in this attack and Lieutenant Spiker assumed command of Company "B".

After the breach of the German defensive positions at St. Lo, the 2nd Armored Division and the 4th Infantry Division were committed through this hole and advanced to the south.

On July 27, the entire 117th Regiment made its longest continuous march of the Normandy Campaign under most harrowing conditions: Through darkness, over poorly graded roads jammed with armored vehicles and other traffic, and with enemy bombers overhead.

The troops reached the vicinity of La Gonnivierre before daybreak and "dug-in" during and before the early hours of dawn into defensive positions. Company "B" and the remainder of the 1st Battalion were on the move again attacking south toward Mesnil-Opac. By August 1, most of the Germans had been cleaned out or had withdrawn to another defensive location. By this time Company "B" had reached the vicinity of Tessy-Sur-Vire.

During the period August 1 to August 6, Baker Company effected a reorganization. Many replacements filled depleted ranks. Captain Fredolph A. Hendrickson was assigned and assumed command.

At 1:30 A. M. August 6, 1944, the 1st Battalion, 117th Infantry, received orders to move southwest to the vicinity of Brecy, France, and relieve elements of the First Division. The quartering party left for the new area at 2:30 A.M. By 5:30 A.M. the Battalion had cleared the area and were moving by motor to the new area. Guides from the 26th Infantry, First Division were picked up at Brecy by the First Battalion of the 26th Infantry.

The Companies took over positions of the other Battalion. Orders were given immediately to dig in for a defensive situation. The troops had hardly gotten into position before a group of enemy ME-109's were overhead strafing and intermittent mortar and artillery fire harassed the Company for the remainder of the day, making it difficult for them to finish their defensive positions.

Just at dusk, two German motorcycles were seen along the road north of Company "B" area. As soon as it was dark, it became apparent that there were Germans in great strength arrayed against the First Battalion. The men stated that they appeared to be madmen. During the night they heard and saw enemy troops yelling and laughing. It was later believed that the German troops were drunk, gaining courage and fortitude for the attack that was to start early the next morning.

The 3rd platoon of Company "B" had set up a roadblock near Le Bois-du-Parc. Baker Company got its first real taste of the coming Battle of Mortain about 1:00 A.M. August 7, when a main column of crack troops from the First SS Adolph Hitler Division, approaching the battle area ran smack into the 3rd Platoon roadblock. The anti-tank guns were quickly knocked out and the roadblock Platoon was forced to pull back. From 12:00 midnight to 4:00 A.M., August 7, 1944, the whole 117th Regimental area was blanketed by intense and devastating mortar and artillery fire. Artillery personnel supporting the First Battalion were being bombed and strafed by enemy aircraft as they tried to register their fire on enemy tanks and infantry.

The enemy kept pecking at various points along the entire front during the night. Civilians, sneaking through the line, reported the enemy to have a great number of tanks and infantry. When attacked at dawn in the exceedingly thick fog, the tanks and troops were upon the First Battalion positions before they could be seen. The attack came in several waves. Company "A"'s roadblock was knocked out first. Then another finger of the German drive hit Company "C"'s roadblock, out on the right flank, but it held. The attack seemed to pause briefly. Then about seven German tanks and a company of infantry started on Company "C" again and, despite stubborn resistance, penetrated. Company "B" was in reserve and was ordered to aid Company "C" with one platoon, which had hardly gotten ready to move out before the full force of the attack hit the Battalion from several different directions. Company "C" was disintegrated and Company "A"'s main line of resistance was broken.

The situation became extremely "fluid" and all the events that followed are still not clear. Saint-Barthelemy appeared to be swarming with enemy tanks by 7:00 A. M. Before mid-morning, the bulk of the town was in German hands. Companies "A" and "C" had stuck to their positions doggedly and heroically, but in vain; the tank destroyers supporting the First Battalion had been wiped out.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Frankland, commanding officer of the first Battalion, 117th Infantry, watched a Jerry tank move up beside the house (in Saint-Barthelemy) he was using as his observation post (OP). When he saw two of his men, hands up, walking out the rear door in front of two Germans, he pulled out his pistol, ran to the door and shot the two Germans dead. One of the GI's got back inside safely. An immediate withdrawal of the OP group was ordered and the exit was made through a rear window.

The First Battalion's Command Post was re-established near the 117th Regiment Command Post (OP) at La Rossaye. Colonel Frankland was contacted by Colonel Walter M. Johnson, 117th Regimental Commander and was told that he had received orders from Division to hold at all costs because virtually nothing existed past the First Battalion to stop the Germans from advancing directly to the sea.

A new line of defense was established on a sunken road bi-sected by the highway from Juvigny to Saint-Barthelemy and situated on a hill overlooking Saint-Barthelemy. On the left side of the highway the defense line consisted of Company "B" and portions of Company "D". On the right side, clerks, cooks, messengers, etc. of both the Battalion Regimental headquarters groups quickly assumed refilemen's duties and dug in a defense line along with the remnants of Companies "A" and "C".

The First Battalion had been under continuous, murderous shelling for more than 15 hours. Only one Company in the Battalion showed a semblance of being in fighting shape and that was Company "B". The only weapons remaining for tank defense were bazookas. Due to enemy airplanes, our supporting artillery was not able to deliver effective fire support.

Late in the afternoon of August 8, after consolidating its capture of Saint-Barthelemy, the Germans launched a fresh large-scale attack employing numerous tanks with infantry. Despite terrible odds, the First Battalion stopped the assault cold. German infantrymen were stopped by determined and stubborn riflemen and machine gunners, primarily from Company "B". Captain Hendrickson was wounded during the battle and Lieutenant Spiker again took command of Company "B".

Late afternoon saw the Jerry counterattack smashed, but the enemy still had much superior power as it regrouped for a new assault. The German potential at Saint-Barthelemy soon was crippled, however, thanks to the

brilliant performance of a group of British RAF Typhoons. About 6:00 P.M. the British airplanes suddenly appeared from nowhere, swooped down to the tree tops and accurately strafed German troops as close as one hedgerow from Company "B" riflemen. Spouting rocket fire, the planes also knocked out many enemy tanks stacked up behind the crippled lead vehicles. The RAF men performed with a disregard for danger and with an accuracy almost unparalleled by Allied airmen in World War II.

Company "B" and the remainder of the Battalion fought courageously and intelligently. An instance to show how every man contributed to the stubborn defense by not only doing his job but by doing as many other jobs as possible, is the story of Pvt. Timothy L. Birt of Company "B". He was a platoon runner but had to double as runner to all 4 platoons. Through the heavy enemy fire he carried messages, orders, ammunition, rations and mail from Company "B" Command Post to all platoons. On six different occasions he repaired the telephone line between the Company CP and the platoons, and once he helped evacuate a seriously wounded man from an open field. Twice he went with liter bearers to help evacuate the wounded, and once served as observer and adjusted the Company's 60 mm mortar fire. It sounds as though he played Superman that day, but so did all the men.

The battle for Saint-Barthelemy and Mortain was a crucial battle of World War II according to three top German Generals: Jodl, Keitel and Von Kesselring. Interviewed after the war, they state that this engagement was one of the two critical operations leading to the defeat of Germany in the west. The main drive of the German Army was absorbed mainly by the First Battalion, 117th Infantry at Saint-Barthelemy.

On August , Company "B" received orders to attack and retake Saint-Barthelemy. However, the Company was so depleted that the going was very slow; but by August 11 it was obvious that the Germans had been defeated and they were withdrawing.

Then on August 12, the Third Battalion 117th Infantry passed through Company "B" and re-took Saint-Barthelemy. Colonel Walter M. Johnson, Regimental Commander and Major Warren C. Giles, Regimental S. 2, were the first to re-enter Saint-Barthelemy August 12 and make a survey of the situation.

On August 13, the First Battalion pulled back to the vicinity of la-Baurpolin for a day's rest and re-organized. The filing of NCO vacancies proved to be a problem due to the heavy casualties suffered during the past few days. One private for an example, had hardly arrived at the front before he was made a Technical Sergeant. Company "B" received replacements of 3 Lieutenants and 70 men.

The First Battalion entrucked on August 14, and moved to the vicinity of Rouelle where Domfront could be seen perched on a hill. As German artillery fire began coming in near the head of the motor column the troops detrucked and proceeded to move forward on foot to the high ground overlooking l'Onlay-l'Abbaye. The next day the First Battalion relieved units of the 28th Infantry and the 3rd Armored Division. From August 16 to 19, the battalion rested in reserve.

Domfront, Alencon, Belleme, Longny-du-Perche and Senonches were the principal towns through which the First Battalion motor convoy sped on a 124 mile move on August 19. The Battalion left l'Opine-l'Obiere at 3:00 A.M. and soon found themselves in the wide open spaces. No one felt a moments regret at leaving hedgerow country. Along with the remainder of the Regiment, the First Battalion was in Division Reserve and Corps Reserve. While in Corps Reserve, Tennessee's 117th Infantry was entertained by a Tennessee Girl, Dinah Shore. The popular singer sang a number of songs in a USO show staged in front of a Chateau.

The Seine River, which had been such a strong barrier to the Germans in their movements both toward and away from the battlefield, was proving no real obstacle to the Allied advance. The First Battalion along with the rest of the 117th Regiment crossed the Seine River near Mantes-Gassicourt some 25 miles west of Paris and was ordered to relieve portions of the 79th Division, which had established a bridge-head across the Seine River. Northeast of the Seine there were two ridges more or less paralleling the course of the river. The one closest to the Seine towered 600 feet above its banks. The second ridge was slightly higher. These ridges were important not only because they covered the Seine, giving the Germans superior observation and cutting off the Mantes bend in the river from the area above it, but because they dominated the rolling plains northward.

Two days of fighting were required to make a clear breakthrough of the enemy position, and by the 30th of August, the First Battalion, along with the balance of the Regiment, was moving just about as fast as their legs would carry them. The crumbling of enemy opposition that had happened on the battalion front had been duplicated all along the battle line: the enemy was in headlong flight. The whole United States First Army, therefore, was going to advance northeast as far as its gasoline supply would permit and as fast as the enemy opposition would allow.

The 30th Infantry Division received orders about midnight August 31/September 1, from XIX Corps, making it clear that this was no ordinary drive forward. The Division was ordered to an assembly area just north of the French-Belgium border, near Tournai, Belgium as soon as possible. On the 30th's left was The 29th Division of V Corps. The Division would use a single route through Roye, Peronne, and Cambrai.

A task force was set up under the command of Brigadier General William K. Harrison, Jr., Assistant Division Commander for the 30th Division. The task force consisted of the 125th Cavalry Squadron, 30th Reconnaissance Troop, the 743rd Tank Battalion, 1 Battalion of Infantry (entirely motorized), the 118th Field Artillery Battalion, Company "A", 105th Engineer Battalion and Company "A", 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. This force was powerful and highly mobile, just the thing to rapidly knock out anything but really strong opposition. The Division followed Task Force Harrison in trucks, leaving the 117th Regiment in reserve, as there just were not enough trucks to go around.

On September 4, the 117th Infantry Regiment traveled 128 miles by truck in one day to catch up with the advance column. It crossed the Somme and the Oise Rivers, passed the historic towns of Cambrai, Valenciennes, and St. Amand and entered Belgium at Tournai. The 30th Infantry Division was the first American Infantry Division to enter Belgium.

The 117th Infantry bivouacked near the famous Waterloo Battlefield southwest of Brussels, Belgium.

The next day they marched to Lauminais, Belgium, and on the 6th of September motored 90 miles more to a position behind the Second Armored Division, where the entire 117th Infantry went into an assembly area near Ceroux-Moustie. Only a critical shortage of gasoline prevented additional progress at this point.

On September 8, the regiment began hiking, marched 27 miles the first day, 22 miles the second day and 15 miles the third, and "wound-up" in an assembly area near Houtain St. Simeon, Belgium within sight of the renowned fortress Eben Emael. Company "B" and the balance of the Battalion bivouacked near Houtain-Saint Simeon, a town about six miles north of Liege. At Houtain, the Battalion spent September 11 nursing their feet, which were not in particularly good shape after 64 miles of hiking in three days.

The First Battalion moved out at 3:30 A.M. on September 12 and crossed the Albert Canal and the Meuse River just south of Vise, Belgium; then moved north toward the Holland border. Very little resistance was received until they reached the Holland border. Here the Germans had set up a defense. This opposition was overcome and the First Battalion, 117th Infantry was the first Allied Unit to enter Holland.

By the 13th of September the First Battalion had moved up to the outskirts of Maastricht, Holland and the balance of the 117th Infantry moved in and took that portion of Maastricht east of the Meuse River. On the 14th of September, that portion of Maastricht west of the river was cleared out by the 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry.

During this engagement, Lieutenant Elwood G. Daddow, of Company "B", captured an enemy situation map from a German Officer, thought to be a Division commander's aide. The map and accompanying papers revealed pertinent data concerning the enemy in the zone, including the German plan of withdrawal to the Siegfried Line and its occupation. At the time it was felt that these documents contained the most important information of immediate value that had been captured in the war.

After the battle of Saint-Barthelemy (Mortain), Company "B" got a welcome honeymoon period during the Northern France Campaign. In the four weeks between the departure from the French hedgerow country and the movement into Holland, Company "B" soldiers did not dodge a single 88mm shell. The easy 500 mile drive gave the Company a chance to break in gently its many green troops and leaders. Under the expert guidance of such combat-wise

leaders as Captain Spiker, 1st Sgt. James E. Barclay, Staff Sgt. Roy B. Duggan, Sgt. Lloyd V. Hamilton and others, these replacements learned well. Roy B. Duggan later received a Battlefield Commission of 2nd Lieutenant.

On September 18, Company "B", led the 1st Battalion northwest through Windhagen, and by late afternoon had reached the residential section of Heerlen, a neat industrial city, where they received a liberator's reception in a Dutch manner. The Hollanders lined the streets and gravely waved at the liberating heroes. The soldiers who had become accustomed to the hysterical joy of the French and the enthusiastic welcoming of the Belgium's, did not quite know what to make of this solemn reception. Actually, it turned out, the serious Hollanders were as happy as anyone to see the GI's but simply were not as demonstrative as the French and Belgians.

The attack was contained and Heerlen was taken and the Battalion continued on to the German border in the vicinity of Scherpenseel, Germany. As the troops approached the homeland of the Germans, the enemy fire became more intense from 155mm enemy artillery. By late afternoon on the 19th of September, Company "B" led the Battalion across the German border into Scherpenseel, which had all aspects of a ghost town. The place had been vacated except for "a handful of civilians". Here the Battalion received detailed instructions for a September 20 attack on the Siegfried Line, which was invincible according to Nazi propaganda.

The Siegfried pillboxes in the area faced Scherpenseel on the northeast and southeast sides just across the Wurm River. Plans called for a tremendous air strike on the fortified area to the southeast and obliteration of the towns behind (Palenberg and Ubach). Cloudy weather prevented the use of airplanes and, since they were believed essential, the attack was called off. The next morning plans were completely changed. XIX Corps, with its lines stretched dangerously thin, had decided to wait until another division could be brought up to its sector before breaching the Siegfried Line.

The First Battalion spent the next two weeks rehearsing in detail for the assault on the Westwall. The training required considerable manipulation since most Battalion members were on the front and the enemy was sending in artillery barrages from time to time.

An elaborate sandtable was constructed in the Battalion command post showing all terrain features in connection with the assault. The sandtable was studied carefully by each unit of the First Battalion, and every member was thoroughly briefed on all phases of the attack plan.

Since the First Battalion was making the assault for the 117th Regiment, the Second Battalion relieved the First Battalion on the morning of September 25, and the Battalion marched about three miles to the rear to near Reeweg, Holland. There training became more intensive as various units went through "dry-runs" of the attack. Considerable practice was gained in the use of such specialized weapons as flame-throwers, pole charges and satchel charges. The outfit returned to Scherpenseel early in the evening of September 26.

During the pre-Siegfried period, reconnaissance patrols went out almost every night. The first patrol to cross the Wurm River, situated between Scherpenseel and the Siegfried Line, was from Company "B" and led by Lieutenant Robert P. Cushman. The group gained invaluable information about the nature of terrain and enemy fortifications. Reconnaissance missions were flown by the artillery observation planes who took aloft the various leaders later involved in the actual operation.

Manning the Scherpenseel defense was a comparatively pleasant duty. Few casualties occurred and a rotation system was established among the front-line units whereby men could be sent, in trucks, to take an occasional hot shower at a coal mine installation in Heerlen, Holland. Hot meals were served three times a day and movies were shown almost nightly in a schoolhouse in Scherpenseel.

The XIX Corps plans called for the 30th Division to breach the Siegfried Line and the 2nd Armored Division and the 29th Division to follow through and help exploit a breakthrough. The 30th Division plans called for the 117th Infantry to assault the Westwall in the Scherpenseel-Palenberg sector. The 117th plans called for Regiment to attack in columns of Battalions, with the First Battalion spearheading. The First Battalion plans called for Company "B" to attack on the left and

seize five pillboxes in that sector, and Company "C" to attack on the right and capture four pillboxes. Company "A" was to remain in reserve in Scherpenseel, ready to take over any mission in the attack at a moment's notice.

Company "B"s plan called for two assault platoons attacking abreast, and one in support. Each front-wave platoon, scheduled to take two pillboxes, had an assault detachment and supporting element. The Assault detachment, a 16 man unit, carried such equipment as a flamethrower, pole charge, extra bazookas and plenty of grenades. The detachment also had three specially-constructed ladderboards 15 to 20 feet long and 4 feet wide, to be used in crossing the Wurm River. The boards could be made into a simple but effective bridge using a procedure developed and promoted by Lieutenant William J. O'Neill, Battalion Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon Leader. Two of the boards were to be thrown into the water from opposite banks of the river forming a V-shaped base, and the third was laid on top as a walkway. The support element of each assault platoon consisted of almost two squads equipped with extra Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR's) for extra fire power.

The line of departure for the First Battalion operation was a north-south path, several hundred yards east of Scherpenseel. The zone of advance, about 500 yards wide, extended from the line of departure 2400 yards eastward to the pillbox area. The first 1200 yards of the zone was an open beet field bounded on the left the Scherpenseel-Marienberg road, and on the right by a barbed wire fence denoting the German-Holland border. The next 300 yards of advance was a series of woods, slopes, hills, quarries and houses south of Marienberg. This area extended frontally to the Marienberg-Rimbürg road. Sloping downward from the road were several hundred yards of open ground leading to the Wurm River, a muddy brook with steep banks. Another slope extended up from the river several hundred yards to a double railroad track. Sloping upward until a few more hundred yards was a beet field beyond which was the objective, the pillbox area. The fortifications were clustered around a central crossroads south of Palenberg. The pillboxes were of exceedingly thick reinforced concrete and had apertures for five machine guns in one or two directions. Living facilities for small groups of soldiers were provided inside the installations. The structures were so arranged to take the best advantage of the terrain so that they could support each other. The pillboxes were abetted by connecting trenches dug in surrounding areas.

The attack was set for 11:00 A.M., October 2. The scheduled two-hour saturation bombing preceding H-Hour proved disappointing. Of the nine groups of medium bombers slated to wipe out such rear-area targets as the town of Ubach, only four reached their objectives and the final effect was negligible. Two groups of fighter bombers came next and did an excellent job of bombing the pillbox line. Since most enemy troops were safely inside the concrete structures, however, the fighter planes effect was also negligible.

Supporting artillery was considerable and did its usual thorough job. The close supporting fire was furnished by the Regiment's 118th Field Artillery, as well as by the 92nd Chemical (4,2mm) Mortar Battalion.

The assault platoons for Company "B" jumped off at exactly 11:00 A.M. and advanced at a rate of "a fast walk and a dog trot" to keep ahead of the enemy artillery barrages. Initially the units moved astride the Scherpenseel-Marienberg road but at the near edge of Marienberg they swung right and proceeded down a draw south of the town. Still moving quickly, the lead platoon wheeled southeast from the draw and headed straight for the Wurm. There the improvised bridges were quickly put into position under the supervision of Lieutenant O'Neill, who accompanied the initial elements to the river. Although, Company "B"s assault-riflemen had already rushed across more than a mile of territory and were tired, they continued at a fast pace up to the railroad track, where they began coming under considerable fire. After a barbed wire along the railroad was cut, the spearheading GI's worked their way up to the pillbox area. The First Platoon got the day's bag by reducing five pillboxes, the two assigned, and three in Company "C"s area. The Second Platoon seized its two scheduled pillboxes, both situated near Palenberg. The two assault platoons performed brilliantly, accomplishing their missions in less than two hours.

First Battalion 117th Infantry, which included Company "B", was the only lead battalion in the entire Division to accomplish its mission the first day. The First Battalion had cracked the Westwall for the entire XIX Corps.

October 2, was a big day for Company "B" in the assault of the Westwall, but it saw another week of rough fighting before its part in the Siegfried operation was completed. On October 5, Ubach, jammed with troops from the

30th and the 29th Infantry Divisions and the 2nd Armored Division, received one of the heaviest German artillery concentrations ever witnessed on the western front.

By October 28, in addition to protecting the breach in the Siegfried Line, the 117th Infantry constituted an important segment of the American Forces encircling the city of Aachen. Units of the 117th Infantry had reached the town of Schaufenberg, Germany, which represented the deepest penetration of the German homeland up to that time.

In the great offensive that carried the Allied Armies to the banks of Roer River, the 117th, in the initial assault, carried out what was termed by higher headquarters as the perfect Infantry attack with artillery, tanks, direct fire, and other supporting weapons, all faultlessly coordinated.

The First Battalion was placed in XIX Corps reserve on November 21, and they settled down for four weeks of rest. It was the first long period in which the outfit was out of any contact with the enemy. The system of sending old combat men home for rotation was inaugurated when a handful of lucky GI's departed from the Company on December 9, 1944 for a three month trip to the States.

The units had learned some new tricks in their attack of the Siegfried Line and the drive to the Roer River. The outfit found, for example that detailed planning and rehearsing for an attack with the aid of a sandtable paid big dividends, as evidenced by the very successful assault on the Siegfried Line. The use of houses for certain defensive and attacking purposes was also found highly practicable.

In mid-December 1944, the quietest sector of the Western Front was the rugged 60 miles along the German border between the tip of Luxemburg on the south and the headwaters of the Roer River on the north. There, where the Belgium Ardennes merged with the German Eifel, the American drive during the fall of 1944 made contact with the log bunkers of the Siegfried Line and stopped. Defensive positions for the winter were set up on the hills along the mountain roads. With difficult territory to the front, the Allied Expeditionary Forces high command deemed this area unworthy of serious offensive effort and was diverting troops to the Aachen area in the north and to the Alsace-Lorraine battle area in the South. The principal American Units left on the line were the 99th and 106th Infantry Divisions under V Corps in front of Malmedy, and the 4th and 28th Infantry Divisions under the VIII Corps to the south. They were connected by a calvary group. Both the 99th and 106th Infantry Divisions were getting their introduction to combat in this quiet sector. The 4th and 28th Infantry Divisions were resting after heavy duty in the Hurtgen Forest. Behind the latter two divisions was the 9th Armored Division, newly arrived in the battle area.

At 5:30 on the morning of December 16, these divisions had new troubles on their hands. For several days, their widely scattered outposts had been plagued by persistent German infiltration behind their positions. Also, in addition, their front-line troops were reporting heavy incoming artillery from the east and what appeared to be reconnaissance in force at several places. By nightfall communications in many forward positions had been cut, strong points had been isolated, and withdrawals of up to three kilometers had been made on a 10-kilometer front. Six new enemy divisions, including the 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions, were identified in the action. The Battle of the Ardennes, the most massive German effort of the Western Campaign and one which would eventually involve 29 enemy divisions, was under way.

During the night of December 16/17, the Germans dropped a large number of paratroopers with sabotage missions in the Eupen-Malmedy area, and on the next day began introducing more of their armor into the struggle. The German operation was under the capable direction of Field Marshal Von Rundstedt. He planned to drive to the great communications center of Liege, capture the huge Allied dump of gasoline and ammunitions there and split the Allied Forces.

The 30th Infantry Division was ordered to an assembly area near Hauset. Belgium; while the 117th was stopped enroute by the Assistant Division Commander and directed to proceed to Malmedy and Stavelot to block the powerful German breakthrough attempt. Enemy planes strafed and bombed the troops as they moved toward Malmedy. The First Battalion was ordered to retake Stavelot, a town on the Ambleve River. As they moved toward their new assignment, men with radios in their jeeps heard Axis Sally, the infamous German propaganda woman, tell of a huge German counterattack

through the Ardennes Mountains which she said could not possibly be stopped. "The fanatical 30th Division, Roosevelt's SS Troops, are enroute to the rescue, but this time it will be completely annihilated", Sally said soothingly.

The First Battalion was ordered to relieve Company "A", 526th Armored Infantry Battalion, a green unit hastily sent there the day before to try to hold the place. Since the Malmedy-Stavelot highway had been cut off. The First Battalion, moving by truck, had to go north to Francorchamps and then south to Stavelot.

The Battalion detrucked about 2 miles north of town, where they found some of the armored infantrymen sitting around eating K-rations. "The Germans ran us out", the men said. The mission of the First Battalion abruptly changed from one of relief to one of assault. The Battalion then advanced with Company "A" on the right and Company "B" on the left of the highway leading to Stavelot. Along the road large dumps of gasoline cans, set on fire to prevent Germans from coming up and utilizing them, were burning brightly.

As the troops approached the town they could see huge Tiger Royal (Mark IV) tanks. Assault riflemen infiltrated into the center of Stavelot, where the town square was situated. A platoon of Company "A" and the First Platoon of Company "B" took the square but were unable to move further due to several tanks that blocked their advance.

The riflemen were able to hold the Tiger Royal tanks at bay by firing rifle grenades and bazookas. The First Platoon of Company "B" set up the rifle defense of the square and coordinated the tank destroyers (TD's) and machine guns as well as mortar support.

Two American jeeps and two half-tracks overflowing with Germans dressed in GI uniforms sneaked through the front line and roared into the middle of the square with guns blazing. At first the daring assault caused considerable confusion, but the GI's quickly regained their poise and proceeded to annihilate all the Germans and capture the vehicles.

The next morning the attack was renewed, the Battalion's mission being to push forward about two hundred yards and set up a defense along the Ambleve River, which flowed north-south across the eastern part of Stavelot. The bridge across the river was blown by the Battalion's Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon.

December 20, was a rough one for the First Battalion. The enemy made repeated fanatical counterattacks in a desperate effort to recapture Stavelot. The First Battalion was again pitting itself against the 1st SS Adolph Hitler Panzer Division, which it had met and defeated at Mortain. Stavelot, like Mortain, was the key to the First SS drive, the main effort of the 1st SS Corps, which in turn was the spearhead for the Sixth SS Panzer Army.

The enemy apparently gave up hopes for retaking Stavelot after their six fanatical counterassaults of December 20th had failed. The First Battalion had defeated the First SS Adolph Hitler Division again. It was estimated that at least 1,000 German dead lined the banks of the river, mute testimony to the heroic action of the First Battalion. This entire operation was accomplished with about 1 foot of snow on the ground.

The next operation for Company "B" and the First Battalion was the Saint Vith offense to straighten out the bulge that had been created by the German offense. On January 14, the First Battalion entrucked and moved to an assembly area near Malmedy. At 2:00 P.M. the Battalion headed south, moving through Geromont, Baugez, Ligneuville, Recht, and finally taking Rodt on the 24th of January. The Germans had no organized defense but relied on road blocks and other delaying tactics. Company "B" encountered very little trouble from the enemy since their troops in the area were spread thin. However, heavy snow (18 inches) and cold weather more than made up for the lack of opposition. The terrain traversed was rough with very few houses where troops might have rotated for a brief opportunity to warm themselves. A foxhole could not be made warm in the snow and frostbite alone accounted for more than 100 casualties in the Battalion during this operation.

On January 26, 1945 a Regiment from the 17th Airborne Division relieved the 117th Infantry, and on January 28, the First Battalion entrucked and moved through Vielsalm to Grand Halleux. This town, like most others, was battle-scarred but the soldiers soon had the houses in comfortable shape for a few days rest. While in this rest area the men

were issued new clothing designed specifically for winter campaigning. However, the clothes were a little late since, even as they were being issued, the snow on the ground showed signs of melting.

The 30th Infantry Division had been assigned to the First Army during the Battle of the Bulge. It was relieved of that assignment on February 2, 1945 and returned to the Ninth Army. Assigned to the XIX Corps as Ninth Army reserve, it was moved to the vicinity of Aachen, Germany. The First Battalion, 117th Infantry, moving by night, arrived in Verlautenheide, Germany about 2:00 A.M. February 3. The next morning the troops found enough basements and rooms partially intact to make reasonably decent living quarters. The Battalion then moved to their "old stomping ground"; Warden, Germany, a town in the Siegfried Line which they had taken. The Battalion was in Warden about two weeks training for the next operation, the crossing of the Roer River. On February 19, The First Battalion was presented the Distinguished Unit Citation by General S. Leland Hobbs, Commanding General for the 30th Infantry Division for their Saint-Barthelemy (Mortain) performance.

The 30th Infantry Division was awarded the Belgian Fourragere, for its performance in the Ardennes and for its part in the liberation of Belgium September 4 - 10, 1944.

The crossing of the Roer River was originally planned for February 10, 1945, but due to flood waters caused by the Germans blowing the dams of the upper Roer River at midnight February 8, the crossing was postponed until February 23. The Division designated the 119th and the 120th Infantry as the assault troops, and the 117th was designated Division reserve initially.

The crossing began during the pre-dawn hours of February 23rd and the first notice the enemy had of the attack came at 2:45 A.M., when all of the cannoneers along a 25 mile stretch of river (from south of Duren to north of Linnich) began a pounding that would last 45 minutes to H-Hour. That barrage was the biggest ever used on the Western Front in World War II. On the 30th Infantry Division front, covering 8,000 yards of enemy front lines, the Division artillery was reinforced by 3 Battalions of artillery of the 2nd Armored Division's self-propelled artillery as well as Corps and Army battalions for a total of 246 tubes in action, or one for every 32 yards of front. In addition to 36-4.2mm chemical mortars fired high explosive shells. The 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion's 36 guns, also participated in the preparation.

The 119th and the 120th Infantry established a bridgehead across the Roer and 117th, initially in reserve, was committed through the forward units of the Division at 4:30 P.M. February 24th. The First Battalion remained in Regimental reserve, and in late afternoon, moved to the 119th crossing site near Schophoven. After crossing the river, they returned southward to Krauthauzen and northeast to Niederzier and stayed in the buildings there while waiting further commitment. Company "B" leading the Battalion, left at 1:45 A.M. February 25th and moved northeast along the highway toward Steinstrass, through the die Burge woods. The mission of the First Battalion was to protect the right flank of the 117th Infantry which also was the flank of the 30th Infantry Division, XIX Corps, Ninth Army and the 21st Army Group.

The First Battalion received orders to take Oberembt and Kirchtroisdorf at 8:30 P.M. under the light of a half-moon. The Battalion jumped off with Company "B" on the left and Company "A" on the right and each Company was paced by a tank-mounted rifle platoon. Companies "B" and "A" moved rapidly and cleared out the towns, and by midnight the defense of Kirchtroisdorf was completed.

By this time Company "B" had become very efficient in night attack using the tank infantry teams. They had found that on a moon-lit night, by using tanks with infantry they could move faster and with fewer casualties.

On February 27, elements of the 83rd Infantry Division and the 2nd Armored Division passed through the 30th Infantry Division to exploit the Roer breakthrough. The First Battalion stayed in Kirchtroisdorf several days. On March 2, word was received that the Germans had penetrated the right flank of the 83rd Infantry Division across the Erft Canal. The 117th was to move up and get the situation under control. The First Battalion entrucked at 2:00 P.M. and sped north 14 miles, detrucked and worked their way forward into Hemmerden. They then moved on and recaptured the town of Kapellen, situated on the Erft Canal with Company "B" leading the Battalion attack.

On the 6th, the First Battalion began a long motor movement through Julich, Aachen and Heerlen to Linne, Holland; then to a point several miles south to Roermond. After Lt. Col. Frankland, Battalion Commander, persuaded higher headquarters that his troops should have the best of quarters, the First Battalion had the privilege of occupying good housing in a good section of Roermond. The troops experienced one of the most pleasant 10-day periods they had while in combat. (The purpose of moving back to Holland was to train the Battalion intensively for assaulting the Rhine River, which was the next operation)

One note of tragedy marred the training. On March 11th, a boat containing one squad of Company "B" capsized in the Maas River, where the training was taking place. Most members were saved, but three were drowned in the swift current.

The 30th Infantry Division was again put on the secret list, and Company "B", along with the First Battalion, moved on the night of March 18th to an assembly area southwest of Wesel near the Rhine River.

When the battalion moved into the assembly area near the Rhine, it had seen little rough fighting for almost three months for the last hard fight was at Stavelot, Belgium, during the battle of the Bulge. The GI's of Company "B", however, were sweating out the Rhine crossing. The elaborate preparations were too similar to those before the Siegfried Line operation.

About 10:00 o'clock on the night of March 23rd during a break in the movement of the First Battalion to an assembly position near the Rhine, General Eisenhower, who was observing troops in Company "B" and the rest of the Battalion, chatted with several members. General Simpson, Ninth Army Commander, was also in the area. He asked Tech Sergeant LeRoy Summers, head of Company "B's 2nd Platoon, if he thought he would make it across all right. "General" the sergeant replied, "if Company "B" can't make it tonight you can give up hope for the whole Ninth Army".

Again the First Battalion was selected as the assault Battalion for the crossing of the Rhine. The third Battalion, 117th Infantry carried all stormboats to the river's edge in the dark so that the troops selected for the crossing would be fresh for the assault. On March 24th, at exactly 2:00 A.M., the assault platoon shoved off: Company "B" on the right and Company "A" on the left. At H minus 5 (H-5), the second wave of stormboats carrying the remainder of the assaulting companies moved out. These stormboats were equipped with motors. Some boats landed at points far from where they were supposed to land but the troops were so well briefed they could almost have felt their way in the dark to their respective rallying points. On the whole, little resistance was encountered. Company "B" was the first unit to clear its obstacle, a dike (by 2:10 A.M.): it reorganized, and then moved on and took the town of Ork. One hundred fifty prisoners, most of them cowering in cellars were captured. The operation was possibly the smoothest ever performed by the First Battalion, but light opposition made such smoothness easy.

Shortly after midnight on March 25th, the First Battalion moved on through Stockum, to a "Built-up" area west of the Autobahn, on the Hunxe. Next morning (March 27th) Company "B" on the left and Company "C" on the right took a German Airfield; then set up a defense of the area utilizing the German barracks just north of the landing field.

On March 28th, an English Armored Division passed through for a proposed exploitation of the Rhine bridgehead. The First Battalion then spent a couple of days in Regimental reserve.

The 30th Division had been assigned to XVI Corps for the Rhine River Crossing and, on March 31st, reverted back under the control of XIX Corps with the mission of racing toward Berlin with the 2nd Armored Division.

At 6:00 A. M., April 1st the First Battalion entrucked and crossed the Lippe Canal and motored 55 miles to Brensteinfurt, where they spent the night in scattered farm houses at the edge of town. During the first day's dash, the battalion's GI's got a good idea of what the "track meet" would be like. Streams of Allied prisoners, thin as skeletons, were liberated from German prison camps as were slave laborers from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia and France. The Battalion also passed droves of German soldiers, with their hands up, running toward POW cages to the rear. German civilians en route gave the conquering Americans a welcome of a peculiar sort. Beneath white flags draped from their windows, the civilian would wave their hands listlessly, usually with expressions of fear, or anger on their face.

The month of April was a period of fast and continuous movement with the 117th Infantry traveling over 250 miles eastward to positions in the city of Magdeberg on the west bank of the Elbe River.

The First Battalion moved through Oerlingshausen, Pansheide and Hastenbeck on the bank of the Weser River near Hamelin, the Pied Piper town. Hamelin had been bypassed by the 2nd Armored Division and the 117th was given the mission of taking it. Company "B" and Company "C" jumped off at 6:00 A.M. April 7th to take the town. They experienced little difficulty in their attack and captured hundreds of prisoners. The noted commentator, Lowell Thomas, visited the Battalion while it was in Hamelin.

April 10th found the First Battalion moving eastward again, following a screen by the I & R Platoon, 117th Infantry, 125th Cavalry and 30th Reconnaissance Troop. Company "B" reached the Weser-Elbe Canal about 6:00 P.M. There a civilian met them with the news that the German General in command of that sector wished to surrender his troops. Arrangements were made to have General Hobbs, 30th Infantry Division to meet the German General at the canal at 7:00 P.M. This meeting was disappointing since the German General would not accept unconditional surrender. Fighting was therefore resumed.

The attack toward Brunswick started from the Weser-Elbe Canal 8,000 yards from the city. Brunswick, a city of over 250,000 population, was a large manufacturing center, producing optical instruments and numerous small mechanical parts for German weapons. The city was also the site of a German artillery school, a replacement center and an aircraft research laboratory which included research on the German's V-2 weapon. Brunswick also had its strategic value, and after its capture the path was open for a rapid advance to the banks of the Elbe River.

Taking the city of Brunswick was not much of a problem. By April 12th, the city had been cleared and the Battalion had moved eight miles east of the city where they entrucked and moved in convoy to Calverde. Arriving after dark, they set up a defense near a canal on the eastern edge of town.

April 13th, proved to be the First Battalion's big day in the fast moving "track meet". The Company rolled northeast through huge Forst Letzlingen, passing, en route, an extensive ordnance proving ground of the German Army. The drive was headed for Tangermunde but at Huselitz they received notification of a change in Corps boundary. The advance was then directed sharply toward the south. The Battalion moved on and took the town of Loitsche, a town near the Elbe River, some six miles away.

The next day, April 14th, Company "B" attacked Heinrichsberg, a small town on the Elbe River. They remained there two days, while the rest of the battalion remained in Loitsche.

Company "B" and the remainder of the Battalion, on the 16th of April, moved south to Hermsdorf and Hohenwarsleben where the units went into an assembly position in preparation for the attack on Magdeburg. The assault plan called for the 30th Division to attack on the left and the 2nd Armored Division on the right. The First Battalion's zone of advance was through "almost-the-center" of the city.

On April 17th, preceded by a heavy bombing, the Battalion jumped off at 3:15 P.M. After running into considerable opposition in a housing project at the outskirts of the city, the Battalion pushed forward and was half way through Magdeburg by nightfall.

The advance was resumed at 6:30 the next morning with Company "B" on the left and "A" on the right. Company "B" reached its objective on the Elbe River shortly after noon. The Company threw up a line of defense on the Elbe River and held up their advance.

With the scheduled drive to Berlin cancelled, Company "B" and the remainder of the Battalion sat in place for three weeks awaiting the Russian Army and the end of the war. Displaced persons (DP's) rather than German soldiers, offered the greatest problem. The former slave laborers were centralized in large camps for feeding and control. Although the DP's were watched closely, they often managed to slip out in groups and raid the homes of their former masters.

Another problem was caused by civilians and German troops streaming into the American sector from across the Elbe River. These groups were fleeing from the Russians, who did not arrive at the east bank of the river until May 4. V-E Day was declared, May 8, 1945.

During the combat Company "B" had sustained 386 Casualties representing about 200 per cent of the table-of-organization strength. Casualty breakdown was as follows:

WIA 269; KIA 60; POW 31; MIA 26; for a total of 386.

Out of the original group leaving Athens in 1940, there were five killed in action; James Evans Giles; William Carl Miller; Harry McMahan; Joseph Earl Simpson and Odis C. Stanfill.

In summary, Company "B" was the most aggressive Company of the First Battalion and it proved this at Saint-Barthelemy and Stavelot. The Assault on the Siegfried Line was Company "B"s "Show" and its biggest triumph. The Company captured eight of the ten pillboxes in the First Battalion sector. The Company accomplished the ultimate aim of any unit in combat by getting the most objectives in the quickest time with the fewest casualties.

Company "B" was lucky to have good combat leaders. Captain Robert C. Spiker, who joined the unit as a 2nd Lieutenant when the unit first entered combat and became an outstanding leader. He was promoted to Captain on September 2, 1944. First Sgt. James E. Barclay, was a big contributor to the success of Company "B". He was promoted to First Sgt. in the summer of 1942 while the unit was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and served under several Company Commanders. He not only served under them, but helped guide many of the young Lieutenants and Captains in combat. Roy B. Duggan, received a battlefield commission in September 1944, and proved to be a great combat leader. There were many others that contributed to the success of Company "B".

On May 27th, British troops occupied Magdeburg and the 117th Infantry moved about 150 miles south to Oelsnitz and Bad-Elsren, Germany, near the Czechoslovakian border, for occupation. Company "B" was near Bad-Elsren. While here, orders were received that the 30th Infantry Division would be redeployed to the Pacific Theater of Operation for the Japanese War. On June 29th, Company "B" exchanged all high-point officers and enlisted men for low point-men of the 417th Infantry, 76th Infantry Division. At this time most of the officers and men who had fought through the war were transferred.

On July 31st the Company boarded the Liberty Ship Marine Wolf. They arrived in Southampton, England to wait for the British liner Queen Mary.

The Queen Mary docked at Ocean Pier in Southampton on August 13th. The next day troops started embarking, but before sailing, news of the Japanese surrender was received and redeployment plans were cancelled. On August 17th, the Queen Mary pulled away from England to dock at Pier 90, New York City. Five days later Company "B" returned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina and was inactivated from Federal Service November 24, 1945.

On November 24, 1945, when the company was inactivated, only one original member of Company "B" still remained in the 117th Infantry and that was William H. Cate, who had been transferred to the Service Company 117th Infantry and assigned to Personnel Section. He assisted in the inactivation of the 117th Infantry.

DECORATIONS AND AWARDS

Company "B" along with the First Battalion, 117th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division, fought in five campaigns (5 battle stars) Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes, and Central Europe. It received two DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATIONS, one for their Saint-Barthelemy (Mortain) performance and one for their outstanding performance on October 2, 1944 in cracking the Siegfried Line, where Company "B" excelled and was the first to crack the west wall.

In summary, Company "B" produced many good officers, out of the original group leaving Athens in September 1940. Many of the officers remained active in National Guard, Reserve and a few in the Active Army and Air Force. A roster showing the highest rank reached as follows:

MAJOR GENERAL BRIGADIER GENERAL COLONEL
Warren C. Giles John M. Calhoun Carl A. Anderson, Jr.
Carl E. Lay Glen R Aytes
Jack P. Lansford

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MAJORS CAPTAIN
Jack A. Bell Roy B. Duggan William E. Hamby
Earl W. Carmichael Frank C., Carmichael Neil L. Jiles
Walter E. Moses Hermon L. Moses William Carl Miller (KIA)
Hihn B. Owen, Jr. Gene S. Stalcup John L. Peck
Karl D. Saulpaw James Duff Womac
Zebulon V. Sherrill
John F. Trusley LIEUTENANTS
James E. Giles (KIA)
Lloyd V. Hamilton
Onley M. Pierce
Edsel W. Underwood
Joseph E. Simpson (KIA)

This letter was received by the Commanding General 30th Infantry Division and was reproduced from the History of the 117th Infantry.

16 March 1946
Dear General Hobbs

Now that I am leaving the service, I thought it might be well to give you the following information for whatever satisfaction you may derive therefrom.

I was historian of the ETO. Toward the end of last fall, for the purpose of breaking the log-jam of paper concerning division presidential unit citations, General Eisenhower instructed me to draw up a rating sheet on the divisions. This entailed in the actual processing that we had to go over the total work of all of the more experienced divisions, infantry and armor, and report back to him which divisions we considered had performed the most efficient and consistent battle service.

We so did, and we named certain infantry divisions in the first category and the same with armor and we placed others in a second category and yet others in a third.

The 30th was among five divisions in the first category.

However we placed the 30th Division no. 1 on the list of first category division. It was the combined judgment of the approximately 35 historical officers who had worked on the records and in the field that the 30th had merited this distinction.

It was our finding that the 30th had been outstanding in three operations and that we could consistently recommend it for citation on any one of these occasions. It was found further that it had in no single instance performed discreditably or weakly when considered against the averages of the Theater and that in no single operation had it carried less than its share of the burden or looked bad when compared with the forces on its flanks. We were especially impressed with the fact that it had consistently achieved results without undue wastage of its men.

I do not know whether any further honors will come to the 30th. I hope they do. For we had to keep looking at the balance of things always and we felt that the 30th was the outstanding infantry division of the ETO.

Respectfully yours,
S/ S.L.A. Marshall
Colonel S. L. A. Marshall, GSC
Historian of ETO
324 Trinity Place
West Palm Beach, FL