



University of Texas at Tyler  
Scholar Works at UT Tyler

---

History Theses

History and Political Science

---

Summer 7-2017

# HELL IN THE SNOW: THE U.S. ARMY IN THE COLMAR POCKET, JANUARY 22 - FEBRUARY 9, 1945

Clinton W. Thompson  
*University of Texas at Tyler*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.uttyler.edu/history\\_grad](https://scholarworks.uttyler.edu/history_grad)

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Thompson, Clinton W., "HELL IN THE SNOW: THE U.S. ARMY IN THE COLMAR POCKET, JANUARY 22 - FEBRUARY 9, 1945" (2017). *History Theses*. Paper 9.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10950/612>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History and Political Science at Scholar Works at UT Tyler. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at UT Tyler. For more information, please contact [tbianchi@uttyler.edu](mailto:tbianchi@uttyler.edu).



HELL IN THE SNOW: THE U.S. ARMY IN THE COLMAR POCKET,  
JANUARY 22-FEBRUARY 9, 1945

by

CLINTON THOMPSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of History  
Department of History

Matthew Stith, Ph.D., Committee Chair

College of Arts and Sciences

The University of Texas at Tyler  
September 2017

The University of Texas at Tyler  
Tyler, Texas

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of

CLINTON THOMPSON

has been approved for the thesis requirement  
for the Master of History degree

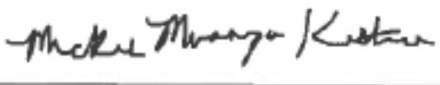
Approvals:



Thesis/Dissertation Chair: Matthew Stith, Ph.D.



Member: Colin Snider, Ph.D.



Member: Mickie Mwanzia Koster, Ph.D.



Chair, Department of History



Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

© Copyright 2017 by Clinton W. Thompson

All rights reserved.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures	..ii
Abstract	...iii
Introduction	..1
Chapter 1 The Struggle in Alsace: The Formation of the Colmar Pocket and "Operation Grand Slam"ö: January 22-January 27, 1945	...8
Chapter 2 Closing In: Blood and Fire, "Operation Kraut Buster," and the Seizure of Colmar	48
Chapter 3 Death of the Pocket: The Final Push to Neuf-Brisach, February 1-9, 1945	.90
Conclusion	...115
Bibliography	119

## List of Figures

Figure 1. The ETO from the Swiss border to the English Channel in the winter of 1944-1945	2
Figure 2. Lt. General Jacob "Jake" Devers, Commander of the U.S. 6 <sup>th</sup> Army Group	9
Figure 3. The Colmar Pocket at the beginning of "Operation Cheerful"	11
Figure 4. Soldiers in the Colmar Pocket dressed in winter camouflage	20
Figure 5. Pfc. Jose Valdez, winner of the Medal of Honor	30
Figure 6. The bridge at the the Ill River	34
Figure 7. Lt. Audie Murphy, winner of the Medal of Honor	45
Figure 8. Technician Fifth Grade Forrest Peden, winner of the Medal of Honor	98
Figure 9. Ariel view of Neuf-Brisach	108

Abstract

HELL IN THE SNOW: THE U.S. ARMY IN THE COLMAR POCKET,  
JANUARY 22-FEBRUARY 9,1945

Clinton W. Thompson

Thesis Chair: Matthew Stith, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Tyler  
September 2017

In December of 1944 and January of 1945, as Allied forces fought to slowly regain their footing in the Battle of the Bulge, another fierce engagement raged to the south in Alsace and became known as the Battle of the Colmar Pocket. Although overshadowed by the more famous fight to the north, the Colmar Pocket nevertheless played a pivotal role in the war in Europe. Yet the engagement which made Audie Murphy famous remains at the periphery of our understanding of the intense fighting in the winter of 1944-45. This thesis is about the overlooked story in the Allied struggle against Germany which provides an important window into wartime strategy and diplomacy. This thesis also addresses the struggle the average soldier went through is and how they dealt with their own personal struggles. The research gathered included oral histories, as well as manuscripts, books, after action reports, etc., which give the reader a full understanding of what took place in the Colmar Pocket as the U.S. Army attempted to push the German Army across the Rhine River.

## **Hell in the Snow: The U.S. Army in the Colmar Pocket, January 22-February 9, 1945**

We lost more tanks than you could shake a stick at. Dead bodies lay everywhere, and wounded men, and not a thing I could do about it. I wondered how come guys got their bodies blown apart while mine stayed intact, and how come guys got killed while I lived.

Gene Palumbo<sup>1</sup>

In early 1945, Allied Forces in Belgium fought against the remnants of the German Army who had launched a surprise attack through Ardennes Forest, which became known as The Battle of the Bulge. As they fought, another fierce engagement raged in Western Europe. Although overshadowed by the more famous fight to the north, this battle nevertheless played a pivotal role in the war in Europe. This was where Adolf Hitler desperately tried to hold on to the Third Reich's last bit of territory in France. The Allied leadership did not overlook this area. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower himself saw the importance. Eisenhower, along with SHEAF (The Supreme Headquarters for the Allied Expeditionary Force), viewed this 850-square-mile area along the Rhine as the Allies' last major obstacle in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

In the scope of World War II history, the Colmar Pocket has been lost in the shadow of The Battle of the Bulge (Fig. 1). A town since medieval Europe, Colmar is in the French region of Alsace along the Rhine River. In the last months of the war in Europe, as the Soviet Army pushed toward Berlin from the East, the United States 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group moved into the "Pocket" around Colmar to break through the remnants of the German 19<sup>th</sup> Army. Here, the Germans

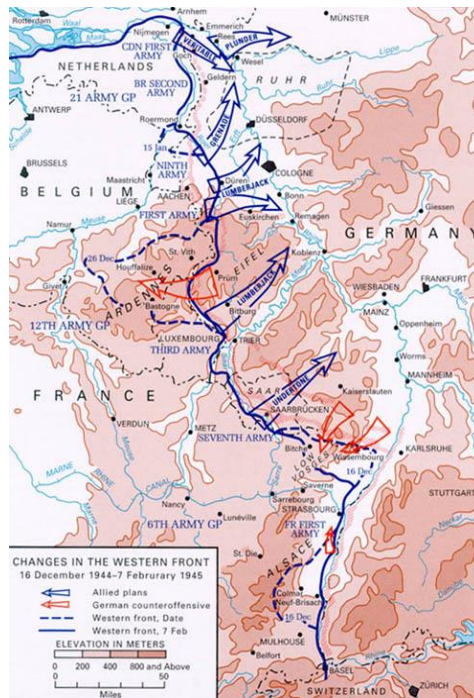
---

<sup>1</sup> Gene Palumbo, *Load Kick Fire: Fighting with the 756<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, B Company, on the front lines during WWII* (Published by the Author, 2012), 83.

<sup>2</sup> David Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg: Ike's Strategic Mistake to halt the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group at the Rhine River* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 190.



made their last stand in a desperate effort to keep their last foothold in France. Many American soldiers who had previously fought in numerous campaigns across Africa, Italy and France, state plainly the nineteen days of combat to collapse the Colmar Pocket, starting on January 22, 1945, and lasting until February 9, 1945, was the hardest, most challenging part of their entire war experience, such as Frederick Kroesen when he said, "There were many other dangerous occasions during that war, but I never seemed to be as close proximity to danger as I had been in Colmar and the Siegfried Line."<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1. Comparison of the Battle of the Bulge (top dotted indentation) and the Colmar Pocket (bottom Indentation).**

<sup>3</sup> Ted Ballard, "Changes in the Western Front," *Rhineland*, U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed August 28, 2017, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/rhineland/rhineland.htm>; Frederick Kroesen and Clayton R. Newell eds., *General Thoughts: Seventy Years with the Army. Writings of General Frederick J. Kroesen, United States Army, Retired.* (Washington: Association of the U.S. Army, 2003), 11.

Unfortunately, there are stories that are not told. Is it acceptable this moment in world history be forgotten? There is already too much history being lost because of old age and death without being heard. This event does not need to fade away due to the passing of the Greatest Generation. There is a need for more written work about the subject. Most memories and available material are in archives and depositories that are hundreds of miles away from public eyes and are only assessable to the handful of people who make the trek to uncover material about history.

\* \* \*

The winter of 2016 marked the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of The Battle for the Colmar Pocket. In the time since the end of the war in 1945, there have been countless works about World War II regarding specific battles, people, inventions, and operations. Most scholarship about the war in Europe focuses on the broader conflict in the ETO (European Theater of Operations). Writing on smaller engagements, how they related to, and how they influenced the larger conflict is necessary, because they had to be achieved to win the war, just like the larger battles. The vicious fight at the Colmar Pocket is an ideal candidate for such an investigation, yet it has been largely overlooked in literature. For example, in John Keegan's landmark *The Second World War*, the Colmar Pocket fails to make the index. In Martin Gilbert's similarly titled *The Second World War: A Complete History*, he gives a day by day account of the conflict. While he does mention the Colmar Pocket, Gilbert only briefly addresses the campaign and Audie Murphy's much-lauded role. Charles B. Macdonald, in his book *The Mighty Endeavor: American Armed Forces in the European Theater in World War II*, provides a brief three paragraph summary of the Colmar Pocket, but downplays its significance, and gives no acknowledgment to the

struggles faced by U.S. troops. In *The Supreme Command: United States Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations*, Forrest Pogue installs only two brief paragraphs in which he surveys the final campaign in France in half a paragraph, hardly conveying the full reality of what happened. In his book *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945*, Stephen E. Ambrose, possibly one of the best-known World War II historians, states his work is about the U.S. soldier in the ETO. While he admits his work is not a compressive narrative about the European War, Ambrose mentions the Colmar Pocket only three times--mostly about the struggle between Generals Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and George Patton, to move troops to eliminate it.

One older historian who gives some attention to the Colmar Pocket, albeit minor, is Russell Weigley. In his book *Eisenhower Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany*, Weigley gives a summary of the campaign in the Colmar Pocket, comparing the area to a tumor being removed. Despite the brevity in his work, Weigley does give the Colmar Pocket more recognition than other notable World War II historians.<sup>4</sup>

Only recently has newer wartime literature shed light on the events around Colmar. One of these is *The Guns at Last Light* by Rick Atkinson, first published in 2013. *Guns at Last Light* describes the Allied struggle from D-Day to the surrender of Germany. Atkinson briefly discusses the Colmar Pocket by describing the struggle to finish the campaign in December 1944, as well as briefly discussing the fall of the Colmar Pocket, which is more than other earlier works. *First to the Rhine: The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group in World War II* by Harry Yeide and Mark Stout

---

<sup>4</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981),596-599.

and published in 2007, which analyzes the offensive of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group from Southern France into Germany, is more gracious, dedicating an entire chapter to the operation.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the engagement that made Audie Murphy famous remains at the periphery of our understanding of the intense fighting in the winter of 1944-45. There is not a lot of material the general public has easy access to, despite the fact Eisenhower and Gen. Omar Bradley viewed the Colmar Pocket as the more serious threat in Europe. Donald Taggart, the historian of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, adds to the mystery: "Following the elimination of the Colmar Pocket, comparatively few persons on the outside knew Colmar-if they knew it at all-as anything more than the name of an upper Alsatian city whose liberation came after a lengthy period of waiting."<sup>6</sup>

Why the lack of study in the public? Historians often look for works written about significantly by those famous individuals who were there, and thus they use their guides as a reference. Take for instance General Dwight Eisenhower's work *Crusade in Europe*. Out of 500 pages, Eisenhower sums up the fall of the Colmar Pocket in one paragraph. Just one.<sup>7</sup> It is understandable why historians pay no attention to the situation if Eisenhower himself did not spend substantial time to discuss the action, even though he thought it relevant.

But the Colmar Pocket was and is an important moment in our understanding of American involvement in the Second World War. This thesis is about an overlooked story in the Allied struggle against Germany which provides an important window into wartime strategy and

---

<sup>5</sup> Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 474-477, 531-533; Harry Yeide and Mark Stout, *First to the Rhine: The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group in World War II* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2007), 308-339.

<sup>6</sup> Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 191; Donald Taggart, ed., *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 283.

<sup>7</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1949), 374.

diplomacy. This thesis also addresses the struggle the average soldier went through is and how they dealt with their own personal struggles. This is the story of the American GI in the Colmar Pocket, both those in command and those on the battlefield. This is not a work about tactics and military maneuvers. This is a study of the soldiers. Each man who held a rifle or threw a grenade at the enemy has a story to tell. These include interviews, memoirs, questionnaires, historical reports, as well as published material. The story is important to them. Even though all stories and memories from World War II and the Colmar Pocket cannot be told, unfortunately, these are some which have been found. Not all the experiences are positive. Some instances show men at the breaking point, forced to do things that they would rather not do, or ever thought they would do. Throughout the offensive, all men had to dig deep and overcome adversity. Other experiences are humorous, something seldom seen on the battlefield. All these experiences affected them, both positively and negatively, for the rest of their lives. Whatever the circumstances, they are memories worth telling. This thesis is an intervention to an untold story.

Chapter 1 explores how American forces faced peril as they fought against a determined enemy with the terrain and weather on their side. They not only had to overcome Germans but also tactical errors which posed a serious threat to the outcome of the campaign. Chapter 2 continues the story and examines how units new to combat experienced this test for the first time. They had to overcome their shortcomings by taking a strategic defensive position that more hardened men thought they were incapable of doing. Other units, such as the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, took the task to capture the city of Colmar after being told they were strictly for the reserve because of the tremendous losses they suffered in the Battle of the Bulge. Finally, Chapter 3 describes the final push to collapse the Colmar Pocket as men reached the breaking

point, causing many to retreat to a more barbarous form of warfare. Taken together, these chapters elevate individual soldier's narratives into a scholarly framework that has too often been otherwise dominated by high military strategy and diplomacy, and the books created do not convey the experiences of the regular soldier. Those soldiers who fought and died in the heretofore overshadowed Colmar Campaign have important stories worth narrating and situation into the grand scheme of the war in Europe. What follows also shows the fight at the Colmar Pocket provides a useful reflection in a microcosm of the nature of warfare in its last months. Brutal fighting in bitterly cold conditions rendered what many Americans saw as imminent victory into something less than glorious. Perhaps in no war is the tension and fear among its combatants so great as in its last months, and this bears out with American soldiers at Colmar. No matter the challenges they faced in the Colmar Pocket, they triumphed, and they took their lessons they had learned as they plunged deep into the heart of Germany in the Spring of 1945. This is their story.

## Chapter 1

### The Struggle in Alsace: The Formation of the Colmar Pocket and “Operation Grand Slam”: January 22-January 27, 1945

As long as the German bridgehead across the Rhine River in the Colmar area remained a constant threat, no major offensive could be launched by the American Seventh Army to breach the Siegfried Line.

Alexander “Sandy” Patch  
Commander, U.S. Seventh Army<sup>1</sup>

To grasp the situation that ultimately developed inside the Colmar Pocket in early 1945, it is important to contextualize the event within the broader course of the war in France in the summer of 1944. Many people know well the daring Normandy landings on June 6, 1944, better known as “D-Day” or “Operation Overlord”. Overshadowed by D-Day, many are unfamiliar with a second amphibious assault which took place in France along the coast of the Mediterranean near Marseille on August 15, 1944. Code-named “Operation Dragoon”, this assault eventually landed 94,000 troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army, which later became part of the 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group, under the command of Lieutenant General Jacob “Jake” Devers (Fig. 2).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Gen. Alexander “Sandy” Patch to Gen. Norman Cota, October 12, 1945. Quoted in *Historical and Pictorial Review of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1946,1980), 36.

<sup>2</sup> David P. Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg: Ike's Strategic Mistake to Halt the Sixth Army Group at the Rhine in 1944* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 31-32; “Jake Devers,” *explorepahistory.com*, accessed August 28, 2017, <http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-2E0>.



**Figure 2. Lt General Jacob “Jake” Devers, Commander of the U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group.**

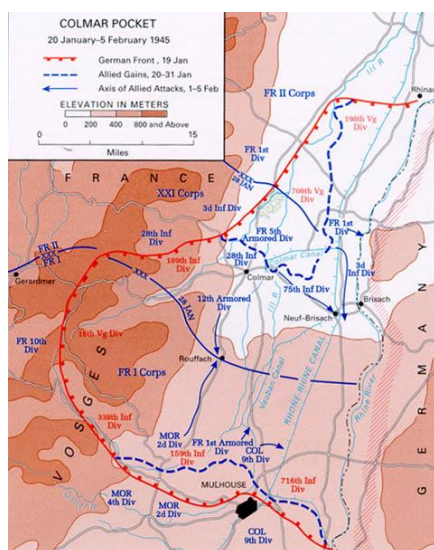
While Omar Bradley, Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Army, and George Patton, Commander of the U.S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, fought their way eastward across the European mainland, the 7<sup>th</sup> Army steadily moved north, and eventually joined with other U.S. and French forces into the 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group. They turned east and moved across France toward the Rhine River. If the Rhine River was the finish line, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group won the race. French troops who made up portions



of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group reached the city of Strasbourg, located along the Rhine River in Northern Alsace, on November 19, 1944. To add further insult to the German's retreat, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group pushed them in rainy conditions and mountainous terrain with many water obstacles. During the advance, the Allies destroyed virtually all the German 19<sup>th</sup> Army. The Germans burned everything around them to deprive the Allies of material. Because of this, French refugees choked the roads. To hold the last piece of French territory, the remnants of the German 19<sup>th</sup> Army proceeded to defend an 850-square mile perimeter which backed up to the Rhine River(Fig. 3). In the center was the medieval city of Colmar. This is where the Germans in France chose to make their last stand. The Allied objective to advance to the Rhine River, and to exploit a crossing had been clear ever since the Allies landed in Normandy on D-Day, and the remnants of 19<sup>th</sup> Army was given the unenviable task of keeping the Allies in Southern France on the west side of the Rhine.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Jeffrey J. Clark and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1993), 434; J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections of Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958, 1998), 5; Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 190, 17; Roger Cirillo, "The Colmar Pocket," *Ardennes*, U.S. Army Center of Military History, accessed August 28, 2017, <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/brochures/ardennes/aral.htm>.



**Figure 3. The Colmar Pocket at the beginning of “Operation Cheerful.”**

Devers had other plans, however. What he and his 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group had accomplished was the goal of every Allied commander since June 6: get to the Rhine River and cross into Germany. Even many Germans agreed a Rhine crossing meant all hope was lost for the Third Reich. Devers immediately went to work and readied his men for a cross-river attack. Devers’s goal, once they crossed, was to swing around and sandwich the German forces that opposed Patton’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the north. In October, Devers wrote in his diary once they crossed the Rhine, the Allied march on to Berlin should be easy. Devers was also quite certain if his plan worked, the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army could defeat the Germans who defended the Colmar Pocket if they were even still in France and had not already fled back into Germany.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 95; Jacob Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers* (U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center), October 5, 1944. Also quoted in Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 100; Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 442.

For all the preparation, Devers's plan ran into a roadblock, namely, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower, in his book *Crusade in Europe*, wrote, "I visited Devers to make a survey of the situation with him. On his extreme left there appeared to be no immediate advantage in pushing down into the Rhine plain." From the viewpoint of Eisenhower, he dealt with the situation with minimal debate; It was his way. This is only half of the story, however. On November 24, 1944, Eisenhower traveled through the area to meet with his subordinate commanders. At the headquarters of the XV Corps, within the command structure of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army, Eisenhower first heard Devers's plan to cross the Rhine. Once he heard the news, Eisenhower traveled to Devers's headquarters and immediately put a stop to it. He wanted the 7<sup>th</sup> Army (which was part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group) to turn north and reinforce Patton and his 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, who was held up in Northern France. If the reinforcements worked, Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army could move to the Rhine. Devers wrote in his diary "Both (General Alexander M.) Patch and I were set to cross the Rhine and we had a clean breakthrough. By driving hard, I feel that we could have accomplished our mission." From Devers's perspective, one could view Eisenhower's desire as a major problem. Devers tried to explain his position, but Eisenhower would not budge. "Why they do this, I do not know," Devers wrote. Devers would go and continue to say, "The decision not to cross the Rhine was a blow to both Patch and myself for we were really poised and keyed up to the effort, and I believe it would have been successful. The Germans are certainly disorganized and the German 19<sup>th</sup> Army is practically destroyed." From Devers's perspective, the Allies' primary goal since before June 6, for all intents and purposes, was now wasted. It was not until March 1945, four months later, the Allies would be able to

again cross the Rhine River when parts of Omar Bradley's 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group made the celebrated capture of the Ludendorff rail bridge at Remagen.<sup>5</sup>

Even though he had not planned this to happen and conducted the war the best way he knew how, with this one order Eisenhower made the Battle of the Colmar Pocket a certainty. Devers was sure the Colmar Pocket would not have existed if Eisenhower had let him attempt to cross the Rhine. Jeffrey Clarke and Robert Ross Smith in their work *Riviera to the Rhine* add to the argument by saying that if the 7<sup>th</sup> Army been allowed to cross the River, the German forces in the Colmar Pocket would be needed elsewhere, and Hitler could have been more willing to a retreat across the Rhine River.<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower, however, did not have the luxury of hindsight, and in his opinion, he did what he thought was best for the Allied advance in Europe.

Now that the Germans established the defensive line in the Colmar Pocket, it would need elimination. The task to eliminate the German resistance fell to the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army. [I] Feel sure the French are going to bag the five German divisions which were on their front, Devers wrote. Among the French in the Colmar Pocket, there was also an American infantry division attached to the French. This was the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, originally the Texas National Guard. As the 36<sup>th</sup> Division pushed east from the Vosges Mountain into the plains around Colmar and the Rhine River in December 1944, the experiences they brought back with them were vivid. It was a strange, naked feeling to look out across the open plain after months of nothing but high

---

<sup>5</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City: Doubleday & Sons, 1949), 331; Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 134-135; Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers*, November 24 and 26, 1944; Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Colley, *Decision at Strasbourg*, 190; Clarke and Ross, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 445; Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers*, November 27, 1944.

forested mountain ahead of us,ö Lt. Col. James Critchfield remembered. öWe had no idea of the bitter fighting that was in store for everyone.ö<sup>7</sup>

For the better part of December 1944, the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, along with the French, slowly moved east, taking one town after another, but they also sustained large losses due to vicious German counterattacks. On December 14, Devers met with Maj. General John Dahlquist, commander of the 36<sup>th</sup>. Dahlquist explained to Devers his division had been on the line for 120 consecutive days and had not the chance to rest and reorganize off of the line. Devers agreed and moved the 36<sup>th</sup> off the line. In their place, Devers moved up the well-rested and well supplied 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, known to the Germans they faced in Europe as öThe Blue and White Devilsö because of their shoulder insignia and their tenacious fighting reputation that followed them across North Africa, Italy, and France.<sup>8</sup> The attacks on the Colmar Pocket in December were short-lived, however. On December 19, in a meeting with Eisenhower, he disappointed Devers a second time. As the Battle of the Bulge raged 200 miles north of their position, Devers still believed an assault across the Rhine could work. With Germans preoccupied in the Ardennes, he wrote in his diary:

Events at this moment prove that that maneuver, thoroughly planned and taken boldly, would have been successful. I am also confident that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, debouching from the Vosges Mountains, with direct orders to cross the Rhine, would have forced the bridges at Strasbourg before they could have been blown there. This would have automatically relieved the Colmar pocket and given the French an opportunity to close on the river.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Vincent M. Lockhart, *T-Patch to Victory: The 36<sup>th</sup> Division from the Landings in Southern France to the End of World War II* (Canyon: Staked Plains Press, 1981), 187.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Watters, *Letter to the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center*, January 2, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers*, December 14, 1944.

Devers further believed if he pressed the issue, his line would free up the German defenses, as well as being able to gain the Colmar Bridgehead, and stop the German divisions being transferred from the Eastern Front into the pocket. Again, Eisenhower had none of it and ordered portions of Devers's army north to aid those in the bulge, as well as sending the rest of Devers's forces back to the Vosges Mountains in defense. This gave up valuable ground gained.<sup>10</sup>

With the retreat to the Vosges, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group's advance halted when it possibly could have exploited the German defenses. The halt in the Allied advance caused additional problems for Allied forces, and allowed Hitler to launch his last offensive in the west, called "Operation Nordwind." Portions of the German forces which made up this attack came from, not surprisingly, the 19<sup>th</sup> Army out of the Colmar Pocket, who attempted to link up with other German forces moving south from Northern Alsace. Nowhere near the level of the Ardennes Offensive, however, the Germans failed to reach their objective, the city of Strasbourg. Allied forces pushed them back into the Colmar Pocket. As January 1945 continued, after one attempt to collapse the Colmar Pocket failed and ultimately called off, as U.S. forces retreated to the Vosges Mountains, and then had to fight their way back, the subject of the pocket still lingered. Eisenhower later analyzed the collapse of the Colmar Pocket in one paragraph. The highlight of his analysis was simple: "In January, with the Germans recoiling from their disastrous adventure in the Ardennes, I turned my attention to Colmar. The existence of this German position in a sensitive part of our lines had always irritated me and I determined that it was to be crushed without delay." After briefly mentioning the efforts of the Allies to eliminate the pocket, he

---

<sup>10</sup> Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers*, December 19, 1944.

sums the effort up with as much enthusiasm as a person would say if they had not actually been in the fight by stating, "Colmar surrendered February 3 and by the ninth of the month such Germans as survived in that region had been driven across the Rhine."<sup>11</sup>

There was more to the story, however. All the fighting that took place in one of the worst winters in European history in tandem with the removal of the last Germans in France cannot merely be summed up so simply in one small paragraph by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force. This was not a simple operation to defeat a whipped and demoralized enemy. During the first phase to eliminate German forces from the Colmar Pocket, U.S. forces found a determined enemy who had the weather as well as the terrain on their side, as they tried to repulse the joint U.S.-French offensive. The U.S. soldiers who took part in the offensive found unique and horrendous situations, which they had to face and persevere in their own way. Some of the GIs experienced combat for the first time. Hardened veterans of numerous campaigns had yet another challenge before them. Despite their combat experience, these veterans still had to face circumstances which challenged them, both physically and mentally.

From the beginning, the task to eliminate the Colmar Pocket fell to the commander of the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Marshal Jean Lattre de Tassigny. Traveling to Vitel on January 11, 1945, de Tassigny met with Devers. At the meeting, the two men drew up plans to use both French and U.S. forces. "As usual," Devers wrote in his diary, "we are short of tank destroyers throughout the Sixth Army Group, as well as tank battalion. We have not even received replacements for the ones we have." To de Tassigny's delight, Devers asked from Eisenhower and received additional divisions. Among these units included the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, who had fought in the

---

<sup>11</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 373-374.

Ardennes. Eisenhower made it clear the 28<sup>th</sup> should only be used on the defensive, if at all, due to their state of exhaustion from the Ardennes fighting. Additionally, Eisenhower said he might be able to spare the U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division if they became available.<sup>12</sup>

As preparations for the offensive began, planners noticed all the challenges the Colmar Pocket held. Command estimated there were at least eight infantry divisions facing the Allies. In basic terms, the Germans outnumbered the Allies. Marshall De Tassigny also noted the difficulty the Allies faced with respect to the winter:

As for the weather it is impossible to imagine it more frightful. Though smiling on fine days, the Alsatian plain resembled an immense city of the dead, covered with a thick shroud of snow, from which emerged the skeletons of trees, haunted by croaking clouds of crows. It was 20 Centigrade below zero, the wind howled and there were over three feet of snow. Anyone with a roof over his head-and that was not the attacker-had a master card in the struggle.<sup>13</sup>

To add to the weather, the Allies faced terrain suited perfectly for the German defenders. For those GIs in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, the route they had to take, which ran from the town of Guemar to their final objective, the fortress city of Neuf-Brisach, the ground they fought over was as flat as the plains many of them grew up on back in the United States, with many water obstacles in the way. There was one advantage, however. The Allies had in their favor as many as four and possibly five armored divisions (depending on if the U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division moved to the area) up against possibly only one Panzer division. Intelligence estimated the opposing German forces were equal to twenty-five 500 (12,500) man battalions, each varying in fighting strength and morale. These included inexperienced, as well as veteran combatants. Other historians such as Russell Weigley believed the Allies were up against as many as 50,000

---

<sup>12</sup> Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), 335.

<sup>13</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army*, 337-338.



men. Devers noted, "I believe we will have a tough 4-5 days but that we will be able to outlast the Germans and thus get out of our difficulties."<sup>14</sup>

The route the Americans took through the Colmar Pocket was not lost on the German defenders. Before the attack, Helmut Thumm, a general serving in the German 19<sup>th</sup> Army, saw three distinct possibilities for an American attack into the pocket. Out of the three possibilities, only one gave him real concern: an attack along the Ill River. Thumm ascertained if an attack through this area were successful, the Allies would have a clear shot to the Rhine, not to mention the city of Colmar could be seized after being surrounded. Additionally, the supply route for the Germans through Neuf-Brisach would be threatened. Thumm knew his front lines could do an adequate job of defending the perimeter, but he lacked reserves to hold up for an extended period. Thumm therefore requested to shrink the defensive line to adequately defend the perimeter. Not only was this idea rejected, Berlin actually ordered Thumm to expand the size of the perimeter. Inside the defensive position, the Germans had at their disposal only about 30 to 40 percent of their anti-tank weapons, as well as only about 65 tanks. Despite these shortcomings, the Germans did have a few advantages. In addition to the terrain and weather, the Germans had plenty of small-arms ammunition, as well as a shorter line of communication to coordinate attacks.<sup>15</sup>

\* \* \*

---

<sup>14</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army*, 343; G-2 Section Headquarters, *Final Report: G-2 Section Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> US Army Group*, 21; Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 597; Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers*, January 19, 1945.

<sup>15</sup> Helmut Thumm, *LXIV Corps: 6 Dec 44-28 Jan 45* (Historical Division: Headquarters, United States Army, Europe), 2-3; Henry Yeide and Mark Stout, *First to the Rhine: The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group in World War II* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2007), 308.

In the northern area of the pocket, preparations were ready for the offensive to begin. Time to departure was three hours after sunset on the evening of January 22, two days after the French began their attack in the southern part of the Colmar Pocket. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division's task was a relatively simple one from the outside: capture crossings along the Fecht and Ill Rivers around the towns of Guemar and Ostheim, then swing south and capture crossings along the Colmar Canal, and isolate the city of Colmar. Once they accomplished this objective, there were two possibilities the division could take next: capture Colmar and block the Fecht Valley west of Turchein, or to assist the 5<sup>th</sup> French Armored Division at the fortress city of Neuf-Brisach. This plan of attack went along the thought process developed by General Thumm, as well as other German commanders inside the Colmar Pocket. Even though this route taken by the Allies worried the Germans the most, they also knew this was not going to be easy for the Americans because of the terrain they had to cross.<sup>16</sup>

Instructions were more complex in the lower ranks as each unit had an individual mission to carry out. Personnel painted all the vehicles in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division white, in addition to the men being dressed in mattress sheets and pillowcases to conceal themselves in the snow (Fig. 4). "Operation Grand Slam," what the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division referred to as the plan of attack, commenced. As the evening of January 22 arrived, the entire division, about 15,000 men strong, was on the move. The usual fighting complement of foot soldiers usually consisted of the 7<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments. During the Colmar Campaign, however, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division received additional

---

<sup>16</sup> Rupert Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 307; Donald Taggart, ed., *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 302; Thumm, *LXIV Corps*, 8-9.

reinforcements. The 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, normally of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, was temporarily attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 4. 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry soldiers on the move in the Colmar Pocket. This shows an excellent example of the white “spook suits” worn by the soldiers.**

The men who made up the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division were mostly replacement troops. Company E, for example, had in its ranks exactly two men who had been with the company on D-Day. The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had held the line along the Colmar Pocket since December 30 to prepare for the attack. They knew what was to come. Days earlier, the men came off the line to rest. What told them an attack was imminent was the presence of Red Cross girls there

---

<sup>17</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 307; Stephen J. Ochs, “Medal of Honor Recipient Michael Daly: Heroism in the Colmar Pocket,” *War History Network*, last modified April 5, 2017, accessed August 28, 2017, <http://warfarehistorynetwork.com/daily/wwii/medal-of-honor-recipient-michael-daly-heroism-in-the-colmar-pocket/>; Robert Curley, ed., *The Science of War: Strategies, Tactics, and Logistics* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2012), 84.

handing out doughnuts and coffee. "They were regarded as the harbinger of bad news, because we saw them only when we were going into combat," one veteran remembered. Kitchen companies were also brought up, which allowed for three hot meals a day before the attack but also caused most the men to come down with diarrhea.<sup>18</sup>

As preparations continued, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment learned their initial plan of attack was to cross the Fecht River, south of Ostheim. These plans proved fruitless, however. Patrols found crossing the river where it was first proposed a disadvantage. The banks were too steep for a feasible crossing. Therefore, planners chose to cross the river below the town of Guemar, which was in Allied hands. The start time for their part of "Operation Grand Slam" was scheduled for 2100(9 p.m.) hours on January 22. The march up to the assembly positions was a treacherous one. German observers witnessed the movement of American troops across the river and unleashed artillery in the GIs. The men were not deterred, however, and continued to move into position, past red patches in the snow stained with blood where their comrades had fallen. By 2100 hours, the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division were in place to attack.<sup>19</sup>

The tense situation of combat became clear as soon as the men crossed the river. About 100 yards south of the crossing, men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion encountered a minefield undetectable because of the snow. This resulted in several casualties. Even though many were not sure where the source of the explosions came from, many dropped to the ground. This proved the wrong

---

<sup>18</sup> Charles K. Blum, *The Operations of the Third Platoon, Company E, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (Third Infantry Division), East of Ostheim, in the Colmar Pocket, Alsace, 22-23 January 1945(Alsace Campaign), Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader* (Fort Benning: Academic Department, The Infantry School), 2-3; Edgar B. Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment, 22 January-8 February, 1945: The Colmar Pocket* (Seventh U.S. Army, March, 1945), 7; Quoted in John C. McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage: The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's Combat Experience, 1812 through World War II* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates,2009), 481.

<sup>19</sup>Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 8; Blum, *Operations of the Third Platoon*, 15.

thing to do, since soldiers dropping to the ground made a bigger footprint on the frozen ground, and therefore ran the chance of setting off more mines, risking serious wounds or death. Others froze in their tracks to prevent themselves from setting off the mines around them. These men were typically the hardened veterans of numerous campaigns and therefore knew what to do in this situation. They waited for the scouts to make their way through the mines. As the scouts slowly moved forward, the others followed, making sure they walked in the tracks of the men before them. As they traversed the minefield, other men avoided the mines and proceeded to move around the field and engaged the enemy. This caused the German defenders to leave in confusion, abandoning much of their weapons and equipment.<sup>20</sup>

As 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment moved through the woods, they met sporadic German resistance. Company A received casualties, which forced them to bring the wounded to an abandoned German bunker. Inside the bunker, hot food on the stove greeted the GIs, as well as Schnapps, evidence the Germans made a hasty retreat. As the aid men set up their triage area, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion carried on with the attack. A few minutes later the aid men heard a bullet enter the bunker. Assuming the bullet was from the Americans, one of the aid men shouted, "Stop the shooting—we're GIs!" Upon that reaction, someone threw a hand grenade through the door. Miraculously no injuries occurred when it exploded. As they looked out the window, the aid men saw several German soldiers. As they realized the situation they were in, the aid men shouted, "Kamerad," stating their intention to surrender, and quickly abandoned any German souvenirs they had acquired. The Germans brought inside two wounded and asked the aid men to care for them. The aid men assumed the Germans knew they were behind American lines, hence

---

<sup>20</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 10&12; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 482.

their positive behavior. After about 30 minutes, some of the aid men persuaded the Germans to allow them to go to the American lines and bring back stretchers for the wounded. As the medics made their way to the American lines, they explained their predicament to their superiors. To keep from losing more men, their superiors ordered them not go back to the bunker. Despite this, Americans eventually found the bunker, and after some debate, the Germans took off and the wounded, both American and enemy, went to the hospital together.<sup>21</sup>

Around 0400, Company A was given orders to enter the town of Ostheim (also known as Brunwald). Once inside, they contacted men of Company C. Shortly afterward, Company A encountered a German machine gun emplacement. As the fire kept them pinned down, two German tanks approached undeterred by rifle fire from the U.S. soldiers. As they waited for U.S. armor, two bazooka men approached the tanks close enough to take out one of them and caused the other to withdraw. Upon the arrival of U.S. armor, they.<sup>22</sup>

Other units of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment also had extreme difficulty. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moved into the fray. As they moved through Colmar Woods around Ostheim, the men of Company E found their progress impeded due to the thick undergrowth. This caused the platoons to lose contact with each other. At 0700, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion contacted the Germans, which led to a tense situation. As they moved forward, the column heard the command to halt, which began low but as it traveled throughout the column it ended too loud and gave away their position. Upon hearing the noise, a German machine gun opened on them. The German troops waited until the last possible moment to open fire to ensure the maximum number of casualties. The German bullets tore into the GIs, who sank into the snow, and somehow hoped they would be protected

---

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 13-16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

as the German fire showed no signs of stopping. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon commander ran among his men, begging them to move forward. This drew the attention of the German machine gunners in the vicinity, who turned their full attention upon 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon. The German sprayed the area with machine gun fire at knee-height. The platoon commander, in an act of desperation, moved out in front of his men. After about ten yards, the ground gave way and he fell into a ditch. Seeing the protection the ditch could give his men, the platoon commander yelled for his men to move forward into the position. One man, Pfc. Stephen Ludlum, moved forward and fired on the German machine gun position. Ludlum fired all his rifle grenades and then continued to fire his rifle at the German position. Being the lone man firing attracted the attention of the Germans, however, who quickly shot Ludlum through the forehead. Trapped in the ditch, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon was down to around five men. As their clothes became saturated with icy water, they moved from one spot to another, until they were utterly exhausted. Their feet and toes were numb, as well as their fingers. In a futile attempt to warm them, the men would take off their gloves and rub their fingers to restore circulation. Their movement was very slow. After two hours, they had only managed to move about 100 yards. Lying on their sides and backs to help relieve their frozen muscles, they still had to keep low because bullets whizzed just inches above them.<sup>23</sup>

During this entire engagement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion commander Maj. Jack Duncan watched in absolute shock as the scene unfolded. Calling in artillery, relief overcame Duncan when he saw the shells land among the Germans. Duncan then implored his men to move forward. Some were too shocked to move, but other managed to get to their feet and charged the enemy. This

---

<sup>23</sup> Blum, *Operations of the Third Platoon*, 17, 22-25, 27; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 483.

moment, however, took the GIs directly into the friendly fire of the U.S. artillery, wounding several men. Those German still in the position had either been killed or surrendered.<sup>24</sup>

Over the next two days, the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment succeed to clear out the areas around Ostheim. In the early hours of January 24, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion began their attack on the Chateau de Schoppinwihr, a large mansion and farm complex outside of the town. Once they succeeded to eliminate the chateau as a defensive position, the main road into Colmar would be threatened. Not only that, but there were rumors the chateau held various items which could be taken as souvenirs for the GIs to take back home. The attack began with Company A moving down the main highway, which led to the chateau. As they moved, they came upon a group of soldiers wearing white clothing, which was the same as the personnel in Company A were wearing. There was something, about their demeanor, however, which was not quite right. Sending one man forward to verify, he called out to the men and asked if they were GIs. In response, the unknown men jumped into prepared positions and fired on the Americans, revealing they were German. In a bad situation, the commander of Company A sent for reinforcements. Reinforcements arrived in the form American armor. The tanks fired upon the Germans, killing some and causing the rest to scatter. These men were easily eliminated once they were out of their defenses. German forces in the chateau then opened fire, forcing Company A to abandon their attack. Responsibility for the attack upon the chateau fell to Companies B and C. The attack required them to move across the open field leading up to the chateau. As they advanced without cover, the men almost made it to the chateau when they were suddenly fired upon by German defenses. Urging his men forward, Company B commander Richard Kerr got

---

<sup>24</sup> McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 483-484.



his men to the highway which ran beside the chateau, where they took cover along its elevation. As they took cover, the officers in Company B moved about and tried to get their men to spread out to limit the number of casualties.<sup>25</sup>

Company C also met very stiff resistance. Pvt. W. Bert Craft had recently volunteered to lug the heavy B.A.R. (Browning Automatic Rifle) into the fight, which weighed twenty pounds. The heaviness of the weapon made him instantly regret the decision. But the heavy firepower proved a lifesaver when his squad ran into a group of Germans. According to Pvt. Craft, the situation became tense:

We were in a bad way. We were disorganized, we didn't know where we were, and Colen (a buddy) had been hit and was lying down across the calves of my legs. I was lying on the ground. This German turned around and filled Colen full of bullets. Not a one struck me. There were men crying. There was this boy from Florida, crying and carrying on, "Oh, Lord, we are going to be killed," and I dressed him down. I told him we had to fight and for him to quit being a baby.<sup>26</sup>

Craft's B.A.R. jammed during the fight. In desperation, he crawled to his company commander, Capt. Beverly Hayes. Craft remembered, "I tried to talk to [him], and I couldn't get a response, just a grunt." Hayes was dying and soon perished in the snow. The Germans then turned the heavy machine gun fire into the GIs, and wounded several men, but not Craft. As they approached the ditch where the GIs were, the Germans began to lob hand grenades in the GIs position. Craft continued:

They would come back and say, "Come surrender." There was one GI who jumped up to surrender, with his hands up, and they shot him down. I vowed then, that I wouldn't surrender. They kept coming up, throwing grenades, and they threw one

---

<sup>25</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 21-24.

<sup>26</sup> W. Bert Craft. *Agony of Hell* (Paducah: Turner Publishing Company, 1994), 74. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 485.

that exploded on my helmet. My ears were ringing. I couldn't hear anything. The concussion shook me up. There were only six of us left.<sup>27</sup>

Along with another man, Craft decided to run for it. As he pulled the pin on his last grenade, Craft looked over the ditch and spotted three Germans standing together. Craft threw the grenade, which landed right in the middle of them. Craft took off while the other man covered his escape. As he ran the Germans opened fire. Feinting being shot, Craft fell to the ground and played dead. As he got loose of his equipment, Craft tried to make another break for it. "I could feel the bullets whizzing by me. I had only one weapon that night, the Lord," Craft later wrote. He played dead a few more times but finally made it back to the American lines. As he approached the lines, a fellow GI challenged him and demanded the password. Craft responded incredulously, "I don't know the damn password. I'll tell you what Buddy. I'm from the state of Mississippi and Mount Olive is my hometown." The man let Craft in, and at the aid station, the medics diagnosed him with a concussion. He stayed on the line, however, and helped the remnants of his company move mortars until he could replace his rifle.<sup>28</sup>

\* \* \*

All alone, Lt. Kerr of Company B realized something needed to happen if his men were to survive. He rose to the top of the highway and yelled, "Let's go!" Inspired by his actions, the men followed "yelling at the top of their lungs."<sup>29</sup> Terrified, some of the Germans threw down their weapons. The GIs threw grenades and poured point-blank rifle fire on the rest. The momentum of Company B could not be stopped; An hour later they had eliminated the chateaux

---

<sup>27</sup> Craft, *Agony of Hell*, 74. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 485.

<sup>28</sup> Craft, *Agony of Hell*, 76-77. Also quoted in McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 485-486.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 25.

outer defenses. By the evening of January 24, the chateau, as well as the surrounding woods, was in American hands.<sup>30</sup>

After an afternoon of counterattacks, the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment moved towards their next objective the following day: the village of Houssen. The attack required the efforts of all three battalions and took off around 0600 on the morning of January 25. It was the job of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to attack from the north. To soften up the defenses, American artillery staged timed barrages against the German defenses in the open areas outside of Houssen. As they moved closer to the town, the battalion came under fire from German machine guns. To bypass the Germans, the battalion swung around the defensive position. After an hour of crawling and dodging fire, they reached the outskirts of Houssen from the west.<sup>31</sup>

While 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moved on Houssen, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion faced similar adversity, as well as an unusual encounter with the Germans. While the assault moved forward with relative ease, despite the morning fog, the forward elements of the assault became separated because of the smoke screen the artillery had laid down. In the confusion, unbeknownst to the GIs, German soldiers infiltrated the Americans. As he marched along with other GIs, Tech Sgt. Robert Higgins noticed something unusual about these new arrivals, and called out to a fellow soldier, "That's a Kraut in front of you?" The soldier immediately noticed the problem but hesitated to fire his weapon, because he had a rifle grenade attached to the barrel. One German did not hesitate. Turning around, he promptly killed the GI before he disappeared in the fog.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 23-25.

<sup>31</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 31-33.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

Once Houssen was in American hands, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment continued to mop up sporadic resistance. In the field northeast of the town, American armor harassed the German defenders. During the battle, a lone German managed to make it out of the field and surrender. He indicated to the GIs there were several more Germans who wanted to surrender but were apprehensive about it unless the Americans came out for them. Pfc. Graham Stewart took the prisoner out as the other men covered his advance. The prisoner motioned to his comrades to surrender. Twelve Germans emerged and gladly surrendered. After major operations in Houssen ceased, German stragglers appeared off and on throughout the day to surrender. The Americans set up an OP(outpost) inside the church steeple in town. From this vantage point, the Americans observed the German retreat into the city of Colmar.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the next four days, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment continued their advance to take the Station de Bennwihr and the village of Rosenkranz. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved out towards the Station de Bennwihr from the Chateau de Schoppinwihr, which they held while the other two battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> assaulted Houssen. As the GIs moved forward towards Rosenkranz, they encountered German soldiers who refused to surrender. Hand grenades tossed into the bunkers persuaded them otherwise. The Germans emerged from their hideout shouting, "Fuck Hitler!" as they made slashing motion across their throats.<sup>34</sup>

The Germans then counterattacked. A solitary tank came into view of a six-man outpost of GIs. Pfc. Jose Valdez (Fig. 5) opened fire with his B.A.R. and caused the tank to retreat. He then saw three Germans sneaking up on their position, and killed all three attackers. The

---

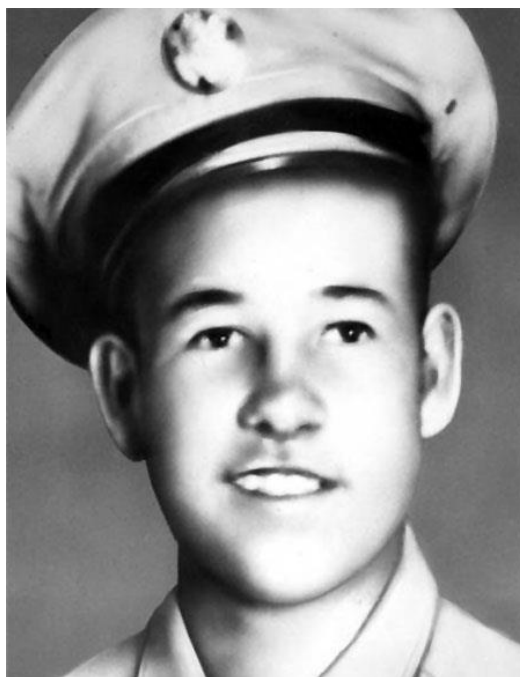
<sup>33</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 40.

Germans then assaulted the OP with two full-strength companies of infantry. The small group of GIs managed to hold out against the overwhelming force for approximately fifteen minutes until the Germans began to encircle the position. As the patrol leader ordered the men to withdraw, Valdez volunteered to stay behind. Valdez fired into the Germans as the other men ran one at a time towards American lines. Despite this, three of the GIs received wounds. Valdez himself was also seriously wounded when a bullet hit him in the stomach and exited out his back. Despite the extreme pain, Valdez continued to fire at the Germans until the other men in his patrol made it to safety. Valdez then called down artillery and mortar fire on the German, sometimes to within fifty feet of his position. Due to the fire, the Germans were unable to advance any farther. Valdez's heroics allowed the rest of Company B to move forward and add further fire on the Germans, completing halting their attack. Despite his wounds, Valdez dragged himself back to American lines.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> McManus, *American Courage American Carnage*, 487; "Jose Valdez," *Third Infantry Medal of Honor Recipients*, <http://www.stewart.army.mil/moh/recipientCitation.aspx?recID=4176>, accessed August 28, 2017; Taggart, *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*. 310; *Medal of Honor Citation for Jose Valdez*. February 8, 1946.



**Figure 5. Pfc. Jose Valdez**

Four men carried Valdez back to the aid station. "He'd been paralyzed from the waist down," Pvt. Stephen Kovatch recalled. "[We] carried him back to the railroad station. He was in bad shape then. I knew he wasn't going to live." Valdez held on until February 17, when he succumbed to his wounds. He was later posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his courage.<sup>36</sup>

Over the next four days, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment continued the attack and captured nearly 400 German prisoners while suffering about the same number of casualties. Between January 26 and 27, the 7<sup>th</sup> was relieved by the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the newly arrived 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. From here, they prepared for their next phase of the offensive.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Quoted in McManus, *American Courage American Carnage*, 487; Allison Oligschlaeger, "Utah Medal of Honor recipient recognized by Reyes," *Desert News Utah*, Feb. 17, 2015, Accessed October 1, 2016, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865622182/Utah-Medal-of-Honor-recipient-recognized-by-Reyes.html?pg=all>.

<sup>37</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 39-40&47.

\* \* \*

For all the adversity faced by the soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in the early part of the offensive, what they faced was nothing compared to the other units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, the 30<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments. At 2100(9 p.m.) hours, on the night of January 22, the 30<sup>th</sup>, under the command of Col. Lionel C. McGarr, crossed the Fecht River at Guemar. To achieve surprise, the men moved forward without artillery preparation. By 2200, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions had successfully crossed the river.<sup>38</sup>

Near sunup on January 23, elements of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion reached the Maison Rouge, a red farm complex with a bridge nearby, which could allow them to cross the Ill River. To their relief, the GIs found the bridge, which was medium-sized and made of wood, to still be intact. While the bridge could support infantry across the Ill, it needed reinforcement with metal braces placed by engineers for armor to cross the river. The men of Company A began to secure the area west of the bridge, to prepare for an assault by men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion around mid-morning of January 23. By noon, the bridge was in American hands, and GIs had moved across the Ill River into the Riedwhir Woods. Beyond the bridge, however, they were in a dangerous position. The section of the woods they were in exposed the men to German armor and infantry. They were so close one man remembered, "The Germans made a lot of racket; they talked loud as hell. We stayed there for several hours and fortunately were not spotted. The ground was too hard for digging. If they had known we were there, they would have really blasted us."<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Rupert Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 308.

<sup>39</sup> Taken from Combat Interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, "La Maison Rouge-The Colmar Pocket 22 Jan-8 Feb," National Archives and Records Administration. Quoted in Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 317.

Not content to stop in open ground, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion moved forward and took the bridge across the Colmar Canal, below the village of Holtzwihr, as fast as they could. By 1630 (4:30 p.m.), the battalion secured Holtzwihr and set up defensive positions in the town. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moved across the bridge and into the Riedwihr Woods. The need to capture and move across the Colmar Canal was paramount. Aside from the Riedwihr woods, the area around the bridge at Maison Rouge up to the second bridge was flat and offered little cover in the way of defense. The absence of American armor became a major concern to the exposed men. One GI remembered Companies A and B were seeing "too much enemy armor" out towards Riedwihr. Those at Regimental Command promised 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion armor was on the way, and they needed to seize the bridges across the Colmar Canal that evening. The commander of Company A responded, "I hope to hell our tanks get here before we have to go to Riedwihr."<sup>40</sup>

With men of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment across the river and unprotected, an extremely bad command and engineering mistake occurred. For the armor to cross the bridge, the engineers used metal tread ways to strengthen the bridge. When these tread ways were laid, however, the engineers realized they were too short. Not having the rest of the tread ways available until dark, as well as dealing with pressure from command to get armor across to support the men on the other side as fast as possible, those in command made the decision to allow tanks to cross. According to the engineers, even though the reinforcing material was shorter than anticipated, they felt confident in the job they had done. To test the bridge, the engineers had a 10-ton construction truck cross the bridge and then return, thus proving to them the stability of their repair job. The first tank made it

---

<sup>40</sup> Rupert Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 308-313; Clark and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 543; Taken from Combat Interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, "La Maison Rouge-The Colmar Pocket 22 Jan-8 Feb," National Archives and Records Administration. Quoted in Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 317-318.



to the center when the bridge collapsed, dumping the tank into the river (Fig. 6). Because of this major miscalculation, the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment now found themselves completely cut off from armored support. To make matters worse, the expected German counterattack on the towns of Riedwihr and Holtzwihr began about ten minutes later. The counterattack could not have come at a more advantageous time for the Germans. One American officer noted it was "As if they had a liaison officer with us."<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 6. The collapsed bridge and tank at the Ill River crossing.**

The German attack caught the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment who had entered the towns completely by surprise. Most were unable to dig into defensive positions. Even though he was not caught up in the fighting just yet, Audie Murphy described the action as only an infantryman

---

<sup>41</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 314; Lasky, Melvin, *La Maison Rouge: The Story of an Engagement*, 4. See also Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 319; Richard Toomey, "Combat Photos," *Pictorial History of the 63rd Infantry Division in Combat*, Richard Toomey Collection, accessed August 28, 2017, <http://www.63rdinfdiv.com/pictorialhistorypage54.html>.

can. "The third battalion is hit by ten enemy tanks and tank destroyers," Murphy recalled.

"Against the armor our men have no defense. They might as well be tackling crazed elephants with their bare hands. Even if they had time to dig in, our men could hardly make a dent in the frozen ground. They are completely without cover."<sup>42</sup>

When the counterattack began, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was on their way to Riedwihr, totally out in the open and exposed to German fire. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was not much better off, as they only just began their defensive preparations in Holtzwihr, and were still clearing houses of Germans. As the Germans began to work their way back into town, they began to take American prisoners who thought it was the Germans who were clearing the houses out, instead of the other way around. In one house, they captured the company commanders of both Companies I and K, who were discussing the operation together. German tanks soon appeared and drove the survivors back into the woods. Once inside the woods, the men knew they were in trouble. One Lt. remembered, "[W]e could hear the infantry getting off a tank when it would stop. They were laughing and joking and talking loud. They didn't have a care in the world. They must have known they had us by the balls." Most of the men of who remained from Companies I and K retreated across the open fields around Holtzwihr. Many could not believe they managed to make it without getting killed. One officer recalled, "we kept milling around, keeping out of the way of the [German] infantry, and praying it gets dark." Capt. Warren Stuart, commander of Company I, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, whose men were in reserves, managed to cross the Ill using a smaller footbridge. There he noticed men running everywhere. Trying to stop the flow of the retreating men, and to get a sense of the problem, Stuart finally grabbed a man and asked what the situation

---

<sup>42</sup> Audie Murphy, *To Hell and Back* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949), 229.

was. The soldier said, "Beaucoup Mark VIs up there." When pressed for further information about how many "à beaucoup" was, the soldier responded, "About a half-dozen." Upon asking how many actually had been sighted, the soldier relented and said, "I seen only one! but he was coming straight for me!" Once darkness fell, officers on the far side of the bridge noted it was extremely difficult to keep the men together. Small groups of men would take off towards the Ill River. Most of them made it back safely to the bridge at Maison Rouge, and to the other side of the Ill.<sup>43</sup>

Despite being cut off, the men on the west side of the Ill tried desperately to support those cut-off on the other side. Artillery support was the strongest it had been since the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division fought at Anzio in Italy in 1944. Around 2000(8 p.m.) hours the order was given to fall back across the river, giving the bridgehead back to the Germans. Casualties for the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were extremely high as a result of the counterattack, losing 350 men, most of them captured by the Germans. The average company fell from around 111 men to about 73. Companies I and K were virtually wiped out, with over 100 men alone captured when the Germans overran Holtzwihr.<sup>44</sup> The men who made it back to the river were a miserable sight. Lt. Melvin Lasky of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry described it best:

"Safe" in the forest of the west bank, groups began congregating and searching for a way back to "The House." Now 15 and 20 men together, they appeared like "a great disorganized mob." Combat jackets were drenched, and the cheese-cloth of the white camouflage capes were freezing into weird drapery. There(sic) were still mumbling about tanks everywhere, as the men, frightened and dazed, began to be rounded up by officers and non-coms in the woods and taken back for warmth, and reorganization, and reissue of equipment.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 314; Quoted Lasky, "La Maison Rouge," 4-5; Taken from Combat Interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, "La Maison Rouge-The Colmar Pocket 22 Jan-8 Feb," National Archives and Records Administration. Quoted in Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 319-321.

<sup>44</sup> Taggart, *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*, 308; Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 319, 325.

<sup>45</sup> Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 5.

Even though it seemed hopeless for the men of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, out of the chaos came examples of bravery and sacrifice. In one example, a platoon sergeant would not allow his men to retreat until they had used up all their ammunition. In another instance, a lone radio operator managed to drag his radio back to the Ill River. While the most of 30<sup>th</sup>'s equipment was left on the east side of the Ill, numerous men used their brains and stored their weapons in dry wells, or buried them in snow banks, allowing them to later be retrieved.<sup>46</sup> As midnight approached, one Army combat historian described the mess around the Maison Rouge as "a great vortex for hundreds of scared, cold, often wounded, and in many cases defenseless men." Another officer described it "like a God-damned scene from Civil War days. Men were lying right next to each other along the road. Officers were running around."<sup>47</sup>

Companies G and C were protecting the bridge, as well as the river crossing at the Ill River at Maison Rouge. Even before the first German tanks appeared, men in Company G started to retreat. As a result, the men in Companies C and G were now thoroughly mixed. When the German tanks and infantry arrived at the bridge around 2130(9:30 p.m.) and took out the American antitank defenses, the line collapsed. Lt. Wright, a platoon officer in Company G, sent not only his platoon sergeant, but any other sergeants from the company to gather as many men as they could. After a short time, the sergeants returned with 21 men. Wright gave orders to follow him, and they moved out. After a short distance, a runner came up to him and reported the men were dispersing and falling back towards safety. Wright ran back and observed, "blurred shapes moving a good distance down the bank and going fast." After an all-out sprint, Wright

---

<sup>46</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 316;

<sup>47</sup> Taken from Combat Interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, "La Maison Rouge-The Colmar Pocket 22 Jan-8 Feb," National Archives a Records Administration. Quoted in Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 321-322.

managed to catch the retreating men. He rounded up an additional 11 men. Before they started out again for their original objective, Wright remembered, "I told them I was putting a sergeant in front of them and was bringing up the rear and that I would shoot anyone who turned back because I was pretty pissed off that they'd run off on me that way." They moved out and then dug in the northern section of where Companies C and G had originally defended the crossing on the Ill.<sup>48</sup>

Everything might have been lost except for one figure on the west side of the Ill River. That figure was Col. Lionel McGarr, commander of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. According to the official history of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment:

Colonel McGarr was assembling in the Colmar Forest a group of two hundred men lost from their units, giving them talks of encouragement and making arrangements for their re-equipment and prompt return to their organizations. He next toured the entire front of the Regiment, stopping at each foxhole, encouraging each man, re-disposing men to improve positions and inspiring all whom he contacted by his own courage and disregard enemy tanks and machine-gun fire that literally covered the 5,000-meter sector over which he walked during the five-hour period that night.<sup>49</sup>

McGarr, who graduated from West Point in 1928 and eventually rose to the rank of Lieutenant General, simply did what his training required him to do: be a leader. He worked so close to the action he was almost killed by a bullet that ricocheted off a tank. Despite the close call, he continued to move about, and personally inspected the positions of his battalions. Calls for tents, stoves, blankets, and hot coffee went out, since most of 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment were wet, cold, and traumatized.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Taken from Combat Interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, "La Maison Rouge-The Colmar Pocket 22 Jan-8 Feb," National Archives a Records Administration, Quoted in Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 322-323.

<sup>49</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 315.

<sup>50</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 315; Taggart, *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II*, 308.

As the 30<sup>th</sup> was reorganized, the men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment prepared to move into action. On the west side of the river, small arms fire returned to the German side. Equipment left by the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was hastily set up. One officer came upon a ready machine gun nest that the 30<sup>th</sup> abandoned and fired on two Germans caught outside of their tank. He was soon assisted by another soldier who fed the belt ammunition into the weapon. As the Germans returned fire with their main guns, the first explosions fell short and knocked the GIs and their gun of their perch. The men repositioned and returned fire, along with four other men, bringing the total number of men defending the crossing to six. A second shell directly hit the machine gun emplacement, and again knocked the officer back but this time sent a piece of the machine gun barrel through the head of his assistant.<sup>51</sup>

By 2030(8:30 p.m.) on the night of the 23, with the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment regrouped on the west side of the Ill, Gen. John ðPappyö OðDaniel, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, ordered the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment into the disaster to regain the bridge at the Maison Rouge. To regain the momentum, the regiment put the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion on alert. They also sent two companies of men to retake the bridge. At around 0500 the two companies, I and K, managed to remove the small unit of Germans who held the bridge and rescued several 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry men who had hidden out. After they seized the bridge, the two companies were to hold this position, as well as the crossroads nearby. The men knew they were in a tough spot, and tried to dig through the frozen ground. ðItö suicide,ö one of Capt. Stuartö platoon leaders, Lt. Eugene Koschkin, shouted to him. ðA man hasnö got a chance out here.ö Stuart agreed and radioed a request to move back behind the road embankment which provided a better defensive position. Command

---

<sup>51</sup> Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 7.

denied his request but promised armor support for them. As daylight approached, one of the company first sergeants went on an inspection of the line. Upon seeing the difficulty his men had in the frozen ground, he yelled, "Get those God-damned holes in the ground. We're going to catch hell!"<sup>52</sup>

Soon after the sergeant's inspection, the Germans launched another counterattack to retake the bridge around daylight of January 24. Capt. Stuart screamed into the radio for the armor, which had not arrived. Friendly artillery on the other side of the river dispersed some of the attack but a few German tanks continued to push on toward their positions. Some of the men became frightened and fled on their own. Those who remained were ready to go even though they chose to follow orders and stayed. "We had practically one foot out of the foxhole," one sergeant recalled.<sup>53</sup>

At approximately 0800, Company I of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was overrun. Numerous men became crushed under the treads of German tanks. Even though they dug their foxholes to prevent such a thing from happening, the shallowness of the foxholes in the frozen ground turned their trenches into ready-made graves. The Germans shot others as they attempted to surrender. One of the men shot was Lt. Koschkin, who said remaining in their position was suicide. Others ran for it, "hollering and screaming like they were scared to death." Those GIs taken prisoner were marched to the German rear. As they moved out, other 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry men in

---

<sup>52</sup> Clark and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 545. Quoted in Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*; Taken from Combat Interviews, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, "La Maison Rouge-The Colmar Pocket 22 Jan-8 Feb," National Archives and Records Administration. Quoted in Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 324.

<sup>53</sup> Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 13. Quoted in Clark and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 545.

the Maison Rouge command post observed their plight. "There goes Itemö (Company I), We better start practicing our -Heil Hitlers,ø someone remarked.<sup>54</sup>

Those who survived managed to retreat into the defenses of Company K, and, along with the company, tried to hold the bridge. The defense of Company K was not long, however, and they had to retreat back to the Ill. Most commanders had withdrawn to the other side of the Ill to reorganize a defense. Out of an original force of 150 to 200 men, only about 60 were left when the German attack commenced. With only a small amount of men from Company K staying to hold the line, those inside the Maison Rouge found their situation precarious. Many abandoned the loot they had seized from German prisoners; noting if discovered it would be bad for the potential prisoner. A search of the house had turned up a bottle of whiskey, and the men passed it from person to person.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the setbacks, the efforts of the handful of GIs holding the resistance, as well as the artillery being called down upon the Germans, was having a noted effect on the speed of the German advance. Even though the advance slowed, many believed the holdup was only a temporary one. "By God," one soldier said, "when they come in here Iø'm going to give up." The officer in charge of the artillery fire responded, "When they come in here, Iø'll bring our fire right down on the house!" When asked later about his comment the officer remarked, "I had a couple of drinks, and nothing to eat for 36 hours, so what the hell Iø'm a hero." At around 0930 American artillery began to arrive in large quantities. Fear of capture quickly dissipated in the Maison Rouge. The dazed sense which had overcome the Americans in the past few days soon fell to the Germans, who began to wander in a confused fashion, while the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry

---

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 17,22&24.

<sup>55</sup> Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 17, 22&24; Yeide and Stout, *First to The Rhine*, 324.



Regiment's men and artillery fire did not stop (one artillery blast blew a German soldier 20-30 feet into the air). American armor finally managed to cross the river, thanks to a quickly constructed bridge. At 1430(2:30 p.m.), 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion counterattacked, and finally took the bridgehead once and for all. As they advanced back out to their old positions, they came across Pvt. Harry Smith, who had never left his foxhole during the entire engagement. With his foxhole mate dead from machine-gun fire, Smith had to play dead, which fooled the Germans. Even though he was alive and physically unharmed, some men noticed that due to the whole affair he was "practically a gibbering idiot."<sup>56</sup>

Even though there were major setbacks for the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the adversity they faced was something they could recover from. Despite the fact GIs left the vast majority of their equipment (80%) on the east side of the Ill, whether through haste or negligence, the Germans made no efforts to round-up the abandoned items. If not for this oversight, the 30<sup>th</sup> might have needed removal off the line to reorganize and resupply. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division G-4(supply) pulled through this crisis exceptionally well and made sure the men received dry clothes, hot meals, as well as new equipment and vehicles to replace those permanently lost.<sup>57</sup>

According to Lt. Lasky of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the engagement at the Maison Rouge "might easily become" and as a matter of fact did become "the distributing point for American forces pushing to the Rhine." Many men who served in both Italy and France described the engagement at the Maison Rouge as every bit as tough, if not tougher, than the landings at Anzio just a year earlier. Even though they faced extreme adversity at the Maison Rouge, the men of the 30<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments were not only able to overcome their

---

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 25-26, 30; Clark and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 546.

<sup>57</sup> Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 325; Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 316

losses, but persevered, and continued to carry out their part of "Operation Grand Slam." Gen. O'Daniel, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, took full responsibility for the Maison Rouge and the disaster at Riedwihr, but was "determined to carry on."<sup>58</sup>

\* \* \*

As the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment struggled at the Maison Rouge, other elements of the 15<sup>th</sup> were just as unfortunate to receive German attacks as well. At around 1200 hours on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved across the Ill River and to move south, which put them in a position northeast of the Village of Riedwihr. And just like the men of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, it ended in disaster for them, forcing their withdrawal. "This stunt," according to Guy Rocco, who served in Company B, "in my opinion, was rather stupid. In the middle of the afternoon, in broad daylight, we were ordered to withdraw across an open field. We looked like a flock of scared sheep running across the field as fast as our legs would carry us." Other companies in the 15<sup>th</sup> also had similarly bad luck. Both Companies A and C ran into enemy infantry and tanks, which resulted in disorganization. Michael Daly, a platoon commander in Company A, later said this was his most desperate moment of the entire war, whether to stay and fight, or watch his men get killed. Reluctantly, Daly chose to pull his men back. With bridges that could support armor finally ready on the morning of January 25, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion could now move on Riedwihr. The advance to Riedwihr was slow, however. The men literally had to fight their way from tree to tree to advance. Casualties for Company B were horrendous; 102 men of 120 were either killed or wounded before they even reached their intended positions. Out of the 18 men who were not hurt, there was only one officer left. As they reached the edge of

---

<sup>58</sup> Lasky, *La Maison Rouge*, 1-2; Devers, *Diary of Jake Devers*, January 24, 1945; Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 547.

the Bois de Riedwihr, what was left of the company now had to defend the position greatly under strength. They commenced the arduous process of digging foxholes in the frozen ground. At around 1400 hours, six German tanks, along with numerous infantrymen, emerged to attack the American lines, with intentions to surround the American positions. Once surrounded, the Germans could regain the road which ran from Holtzwihr into the woods behind the Americans.<sup>59</sup>

Among those Americans who defended the position was a young man who was originally too small for the army. His young looks earned him the nickname "Baby." This boy made a name for himself on the battlefield, and eventually earned a battlefield commission, as well as numerous other medals and citations. The person in question was Audie Murphy (Fig. 7), the only officer from Company B left as before mentioned, who was now, due to attrition, the company commander. Murphy saw the need to hold the line at all cost or face the loss of the Regimental Headquarters to their rear, where the Germans were directly headed. German fire raked his men and knocked out the two tank destroyers there in support. Desperate times called for desperate measures. As he ordered his men to fall back, Murphy stayed behind to call out to artillery positions in support. When he ran out of ammunition, he proceeded to run, along with the phone, to a burning tank destroyer, which still had a functioning machine gun and several cases of ammunition. As he climbed on the tank, Murphy noticed the tank commander hanging out of the hatch, dead with a wound to the throat. He dragged the body out and dropped him into

---

<sup>59</sup> Guy T. Rocco, *Handwritten Account Regarding Audie Murphy and Company B January 18, 1946*. Quoted in Daniel R. Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers: The Story of B Company, 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, From Fedala to Salzburg: Audie Murphy and his Brothers in Arms* (Bennington: Merriam Press, 2011), 177; Stephen J. Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self: The Journey of Captain Michael J. Daly, World War II Medal of Honor Recipient* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012), 101; Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers*, 178-181; Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, 8, 238.

the snow. Sgt. Elmer Brawley remembered the scene well when he wrote in his report of the event. "Silhouetted vividly against the nude trees, dark evergreens, and deep snow, without cover of any kind, he stood there, as the flames moved closer to the gasoline tank and ammunition in the tank destroyer. All around him, 88mm, and bullets from machine guns, machine pistols, and rifles, shook the forests and sent up flurries of snow and dirt."<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers*, 181; *Murphy, To Hell and Back*, 241; "The End of a Soldier's Long March: The Crash of Audie Murphy's Aero Commander on Brush Mountain, Virginia," accessed August 29, 2017, [http://www.check-six.com/Crash\\_Sites/Audie-Murphy-N601JJ.htm](http://www.check-six.com/Crash_Sites/Audie-Murphy-N601JJ.htm); Elmer Brawley, *Complete Description of Services Rendered* (Company B, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, March 1, 1945), 2.



**Figure 7. Audie Murphy, the most decorated American of World War II.**

As he talked to his men by phone, they asked how close the Germans were. "Just hold the phone and I'll let you talk to one of the bastards," was his response, as the Germans sometimes

got to within 10 yards of the tank. Murphy continued to pour fire on the Germans, but also noted, "I remember getting the hell shook out of me, but it was nothing new. I also remember for the first time in three days my feet were warm." Murphy managed to hold off the German advance as he called down artillery fire dangerously close to his position until the tank destroyer was hit. The blast knocked Murphy off the tank and wounded him in the leg. The hit also gave him a concussion. But his efforts drove away the German infantry. With the withdrawal of their infantry support the German tanks did not push the issue and retreated as well. Murphy, covered in dirt and soot, was not finished, however. Brawley later wrote, "Lieutenant Murphy, worn out and bleeding profusely, then limped through a continuous hail of fire and brought the Company forward. Refusing evacuation, he led a savage attack on the enemy, dislodging the Germans from the immediate area. When the fight was over, he allowed his wounds to be treated in the field."<sup>61</sup>

Of the Germans who faced him outside of Holtzwihr, Murphy's assessment is clear and candid when he remembered, "I can understand why the Kraut infantry missed me. But I can never forgive the German tank-men for their poor marksmanship. It was real sloppy." Elmer Brawley gives a better reason the infantry missed Murphy. Brawley remembered clearly, "The German infantrymen got within 10 yards of Lt. Murphy, who killed them in the draws, the meadows, in the woods wherever he saw them." Brawley also added in his report of the event "Lieutenant Murphy broke the entire attack of the Germans and held the hard-won ground that it would have been disastrous to lose." Anthony Abranski, who also saw Murphy in action, was also impressed when he wrote, "The fight that Lieutenant Murphy put up was the greatest display

---

<sup>61</sup> Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, 241-243; Quoted in Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers*, 184; Elmer Brawley, *Complete Description of Services Rendered* (Company B, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, March 1, 1945), 2.

of guts and courage I have ever seen. There is only one in a million who would be willing to stand up on a burning vehicle, loaded with explosives, and hold off around 250 raging Krauts for an hour and do all that when he was wounded.<sup>62</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of Audie Murphy, as well as other members of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, on January 27, a resupplied 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment took the town of Holtzwihr. As a result, nearly every pocket of resistance east of the Ill River and north of the Colmar Canal disappeared. Phase I of the elimination of the Colmar Pocket was complete for the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>63</sup> One unit, however, who was new to the ETO, was just getting started in the war. If victory was what they wanted, the challenge they had to carry out was pivotal for Allied success.

---

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers*, 183-185; Quoted in Taggart, *History of the Infantry Division in World War II*, 311; Elmer Brawley, *Complete Description of Services Rendered*, 3; Anthony V. Abranski, *Complete Description of Services Rendered* (Company B, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, February 27, 1945), 3.

<sup>63</sup> Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers*, 187.

## Chapter 2

### Closing In: Blood and Fire, “Operation Kraut Buster,” and the Seizure of Colmar

The person that is not willing to fight and die, if need be, for his country  
has no right to life.

Col. James Earl Rudder  
Commander, 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment  
January 31, 1945<sup>1</sup>

As the Allies pushed their way in the Colmar Pocket, the French citizens kept an eye on the events around Colmar. They feared the German salient would become wider due to counterattacks. In many of the homes in Alsace, French flags were ready to fly, but the inhabitants dared not display them until Colmar was in Allied hands. Many French civilians had placed maps on their walls and marked off battles as they were fought. For the French people, the Colmar Pocket was not a secondary front.<sup>2</sup>

From January 22 to January 26, 1945, the Colmar Pocket offensive proved some of the most intense fighting the U.S. troops faced in the ETO. The second phase further tested the Americans soldierø fighting ability. The adversity they faced was equally challenging as what they had faced in the previous days. Colmar and the Neuf-Brisach fortress remained in German hands. Both required capture if the Allies truly wanted to eliminate the Colmar Pocket.

Compared to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, nicknamed “The Rock of the Marne” in World War I and entering its fifth campaign of World War II, the men of the 254th Infantry Regiment,

---

<sup>1</sup> Message to the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment upon the execution of Private Eddie Slovik. Quoted in Harry Kemp. *The Regiment: Let the Citizens Bear Arms! A Narrative History of an American Infantry Regiment in World War II* (Austin: Nortex Press, 1990), 308. See also Thomas M. Hatfield, *Rudder: From Leader to Legend* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2011), 247.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar B. Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment: 22 January-8 February 1945: The Colmar Pocket* (Seventh U.S. Army, March 1945), 51.



which normally made up part of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, were new to the conflict in Europe. Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, was the home of the 63<sup>rd</sup> (motto: "Blood and Fire") until August 1944, where it was responsible for advanced infantry training for soldiers fresh out of boot camp. After the Normandy invasion, however, the army decided to activate the entire division as a fighting unit to end the war in Europe as quickly as possible. To maximize manpower, the army dissolved the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which contained men with above average IQs. As a result, many of these ASTP men found themselves in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, which subsequently became known as the "smart division."<sup>3</sup>

The 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, which soon found themselves attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, arrived in Marseille on December 8, 1944. While many in the division expected a mild Mediterranean climate, only frigid winter temperatures greeted them. As the regiment moved further inland, their training regimen intensified to prepare the men for combat. On December 28, the 254<sup>th</sup> was temporarily attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division for active duty. Pvt. Harris Peel, who later wrote the memoirs of the regiment, described the hardships of preparing for combat when he said, "An old soldier would have recognized us instantly as what we were: a fresh, green outfit -going up for the first time." Despite their inexperience, the men never stopped learning, and they were lucky enough to have excellent teachers. Throughout the period before the offensive, veterans of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division were always there and made sure the men learned what they needed to know, and what to expect in combat. Peel adds, "If we became seasoned fighters in less time than the average regiment, it was probably due to the interest taken by us in this organization." Col. James Hatcher, who served as executive officer of the regiment,

---

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Roger E. Johnson to Bernard Fauquet, April 6, 1988; Harris Peel, *The Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>: Through Blood and Fire* (World War Regimental Histories, 1945), 5.

agreed: "The majority of officers and men made every effort to be as helpful as possible in indoctrinating our officers and soldiers with their methods of combat tactics and practices."<sup>4</sup>

On January 20, two days before "Operation Grand Slam" was set to begin, the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment learned where their first combat would take place. Their target was Hill 216, a well-defended hill in the northern section of the Colmar Pocket, about four miles north of Colmar. One soldier described the defensive position there: "Hill 216 sits immutably sentinel 600-800 feet above the valley floor in the heart of the Colmar Plain." The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, the designated assault battalion of the regiment, would lead the attack. They moved to the north bank of the Weiss River, then eastward to the Fecht River. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was to hold a defensive line, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion made up the reserve.<sup>5</sup>

As attack orders filtered through the ranks, the men deliberated on the plan of attack. Some believed the attack on the hill might endanger the regiment's right flank by the Chateau de Schoppinwihr, the mansion the Germans converted into a defensive position. The chateau was in the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's line of attack, and 254<sup>th</sup> believed they would have a clear opening to carry out the flanking attack once the 7<sup>th</sup> achieved their objective. Despite the confidence of some in the unit, others noted two previous attacks on Hill 216 ended unsuccessfully. During the preparation, word came that combat medics should not accompany the attack. "It takes a long time to train a medic," John Pribram, an aid man in the 254<sup>th</sup> remembered, "and headquarters did

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Peel, *The Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 8, 13; James Hatcher, *Blood and Fire: With the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division In World II* (63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Association, 1986), 20

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 15; Robert Ross, *We Fought for Peace: World War II Memoirs*, 23; 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Attack on Jepsheim by the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division*, (UCMH: U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, printed June 3, 1945), 1.

not want unnecessary losses.ö Not wanting to abandon the men who needed them, the medics ignored the order and stayed with the men throughout the attack.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division's advance began in the late evening of January 22, the attack on Hill 216 did not start until the following morning. At 0700, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry artillery fired on the German positions to soften them up for the assault. As the big guns shelled the hillside, the men of the 254<sup>th</sup> waited in the snow to move out. At the signal, the troops moved forward into their first taste of combat. The men were soon under attack, but they could not tell what direction the German attacked from since there were no sounds of shells or mortars flying through the air. There was only the sound of explosions and screams. Then reality sank in. The men had walked straight into a field of Schu-mines. The recent snow had covered all traces of the mines, as well as the footprints of the German soldiers who laid them. As the two companies moved forward, they had to slowly advance with every footstep and probe for explosives. Finding Schu-mines was difficult, regardless of the winter conditions. Placed inside a small wooden box, the mine contained 200 grams of TNT, capable of inflicting serious damage, such as severed legs or a wound to the groin. The only metal was in the detonator, undetectable by the technology used at the time.<sup>7</sup>

The medics rushed in as soon as the mines started exploding. öNow my job as a medic began,ö John Pribram later wrote. öI was helping someone when I heard a scream. I rushed through the fog in the direction of the dying man. On the way I stepped on a -Schu-mineøand

---

<sup>6</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 1; John C. Pribram, *Horizons of Hope: An Autobiography* (Tulsa: Holbrook Printing, 1991), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 25, Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 15-17; *German Explosive Ordnance* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), 278; *The British Army in Normandy 1944*, (London: Imperial War Museum, accessed July 12, 2015, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205205977>).

was blown into the air.ö Pribram realized he was seriously wounded and quickly tried to assess the state of his injury. He feared passing out, and could only wait in the snow for help. He knew his own aid station had standing orders to avoid the minefield. The mines had been laid so extensively that even captured German soldiers said they were unable to retrieve those men wounded placing the mines. As the sun rose, this slow crawl made American troops especially susceptible to German fire, now alerted to the attack by the exploding mines.<sup>8</sup>

Col. Hatcher described this movement with the precise recollection of a combat soldier:

Each infantryman crawling forward in utter loneliness with the feeling of isolation from the world realized that the job could not be done in a matter of minutes or even hours, and that, to reach the objective, he must continue to endure punishment until, inch by painful inch, he could crawl and shoot his way across that hill.<sup>9</sup>

As the excruciatingly slow attack continued, the Germans poured their fire into the crawling Americans. Command soon gave the order to abandon the frontal assault. They instead decided to work their way to the south of Hill 216. From here the advancing companies came under attack from the chateau, which clearly had not been distracted by the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. As the Germans hammered the left flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Company A, on the right flank, had better luck despite the Schu-mines and mortars. German fire sliced through the men, but Company A pressed on. As superior firepower by the GIs tore into the enemy, the company pushed their way to the top of Hill 216 by 0900. The Americans then proceeded down the south slope where they found even greater enemy resistance. Despite many casualties, the men made it down the slope by 1230. Company A had been totally depleted. They dug in and were unable to move without sustaining further casualties.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Pribram, *Horizons of Hope*, 29; 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Attack on Jebbsheim*, 4; Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 17&19.

Despite the hard fight and heavy casualties, the 254<sup>th</sup> assault on Hill 216 was a success. They had killed dozens of German soldiers and captured 44 more. In victory, the men of the regiment now felt what it was like to experience battle. This reflection on the action was best described by Pvt. Peel:

The night following our first attack came and suddenly all the death we had seen, the noise we had heard, the fear we had felt descended on us like an avalanche, leaving us cold and wet and exhausted. Even through our tiredness we realized that each of us was wiser than he had been the day before. We knew that battle was not glorious; we knew that we had been through something that none of us would ever be able to adequately describe.<sup>11</sup>

The French 1<sup>st</sup> Army named the hill "Bloody Mountain." Col. Hatcher adds, "Remember, this was the first big league action of the regiment and it was made against a position which had been thoroughly fortified, wired and mined for defense." As a testament to the courage of the men on the assault on Hill 216, by late afternoon of January 23, reports began to arrive that approximately 80% of the combat medics within the two battalions who participated in the assault were casualties, many because of their efforts to reach the wounded men trapped in the minefields around the hill. John Pribram was one of those men. Stranded for eight hours, GIs finally came to his aid. Pribram was in bad shape. He went to a field hospital behind the lines, and then to a hospital near Marseille. For his gallantry, Pribram received the Silver Star and the Purple Heart. The price he paid for those two medals was his leg, which could not be saved.<sup>12</sup>

Other men laid trapped in the minefields overnight as well. Hatcher heard communications between a sergeant and a platoon leader over the phone, who begged for help to rescue his men. The sergeant, however, told him such men were not available and they had to do

---

<sup>11</sup> 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Attack on Jebenheim*, 9; Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 25; Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 28; Pribram, *Horizons of Hope*, 30.

get the wounded themselves. Hatcher added to this memory by saying, "It is difficult to appreciate the helpless feeling one has for listening to such a conversation between men for whom you are responsible and about injured and helpless men for whom you are also responsible, yet to this day I can think of no better advice than that given by the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant."<sup>13</sup>

Although the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment moved into a reserve role after the successful attack on Hill 216, the 30<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments continued to fight across the Ill at Maison Rouge across from the 254<sup>th</sup>. As the other regiments hammered away, 254<sup>th</sup> soldier Bob Ross, armed only with a carbine, kept expecting a German counterattack. Ross said that he "Felt naked as a new-born babe with that little short-range carbine." But the counterattack never came. As the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment cleared out most of the resistance east of the Ill River, the path was clear for an all-out assault by the 254<sup>th</sup> on the village of Jepsheim.<sup>14</sup>

During peacetime, the usual population of Jepsheim was around 1,000 citizens. Like Hill 216, the attack on Jepsheim would not be an easy task for the men of the 254<sup>th</sup>. The Germans considered the town a major point in its defensive line and would defend the town accordingly. Germans placed defenses with concrete bunkers and pillboxes. They also placed their defensive line directly through the center of town. This was in total contrast to American infantry doctrine, which stressed defensive lines be placed on the edge of town. If Americans had to fall back, they had the luxury of house-to-house fighting through the entire town. For the Germans, they believed setting up their line in town was the best defense against Allied armor.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 26; 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Attack on Jepsheim*, 11; Michael Doubler, *Closing with the Enemy: How the GIs Fought the War In Europe, 1944-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 102.

The 254<sup>th</sup>'s primary goal was to move from their departure line along the Blind River and attack with their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> held in reserve. Once Jepsheim was secure, the regiment planned to move further and take the bridges that spanned the Colmar Canal north of the town of Muntzenheim, where the Colmar and Rhine Canal merge. The Germans knew Jepsheim's importance, and they attempted to defend the town. German Gen. Helmut Thumm ordered the newly-arrived mountain divisions, fresh from Norway, to the town to hold the defensive positions. He also funneled other units into the area as well to assist.<sup>16</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions expected a relatively easy arrival into Jepsheim. They believed the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had effectively cleared out the area. Some thought they would simply mop-up sporadic resistance. Shortly after they crossed the Ill River, however, the GIs came under German fire before they even reached their line of departure. They quickly regrouped and crossed the Blind River. Here they met even more resistance. Company A had to wade across the freezing river on a night that was one of the coldest of the winter. Machine gun fire pinned them down once they emerged from the river. The actions on their rifles began to freeze. Soon weapons from the other companies began to meet the same fate. The men now were practically defenseless as they approached the German defenses. As elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions continued to move forward, they became engaged from three directions: The Bois de Jepsheim woods to the south, around the village of Grussenheim to the north, and from the defensive positions around Jepsheim to the east. The attack soon came to a standstill. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Sgt. Bob Ross of Company G attempted to help a fellow soldier to set up a machine gun. When

---

<sup>16</sup> 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, *Attack on Jepsheim*, 11; Helmut Thumm, *Foreign Military Studies: LXIV Corps: 6 Dec 44-28 Jan 45*(Historical Division: Headquarters, United States Army, Europe),10.

he suddenly slumped over Ross assumed the man had fallen asleep due to cold and exhaustion, but when Ross touched his arm and tried to talk to him, it was clear the man was dead.<sup>17</sup>

At 0300, Col. Hatcher received reports the attack had stalled. As he arrived at the scene, Hatcher came upon the two battalions which had fallen apart and retreated to the burning buildings of the Jebnheim Mill. Dazed soldiers stood around the building with scores of wounded— some with frozen limbs. “Warmth seemed to be,” Hatcher later recalled, “the one thought remaining in the minds of officers and men.”<sup>18</sup>

Realizing the danger a counterattack posed to the men, Hatcher immediately sprang into action. He tore into any officer he could find to get them to emerge from the shock they were in. In desperation, some of the men handed Hatcher their frozen weapons for him to un-jam. His efforts were just a futile as theirs had been. Despite the state of the weapons, Hatcher concluded frozen weapons used as clubs were better than no weapons at all. He then directed the men to build defensive positions. Even though the men were no longer under danger of attack for the moment, the night they spent outside of Jebnheim was nothing short of excruciating. Pvt. Peel described this anguish:

Undoubtedly, this night was the most miserable the regiment ever experienced. Each man carried only one blanket into the attack, and most of these had been soaked when we crossed the Blind. All our clothing was wet either from the stream or from the snow melted by our body heat as we lay in it. This had now frozen to our skin. No fires could be lit. Those of us on guard slept. Somehow, the night finally ended.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry, *Attack on Jebnheim* 12; Frederick Kroesen and Clayton R. Newell, ed., *General Thoughts: Seventy Years with the Army. Writings of General Frederick J. Kroesen, United States Army, Retired* (Association of the U.S. Army, 2003), 10; Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 25; Magnus Froberg, *The 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Chronicles: June 1943 to September 1945* (The 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Association, 1991), 60.

<sup>18</sup> Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 32-33.

<sup>19</sup> Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 33; Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 25.



As morning came, the men of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion faced a new problem, one which plagued U.S. Soldiers all over the ETO in the winter of 1944-45: Trench foot. For Michael Daly of Company A, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, recipient of the Medal of Honor for action in the Spring of 1945, feet presented a constant problem. Trench foot could be a nightmare. The first thing the soldier lost, and if he was lucky the only thing, was his toenails. If the trench foot worsened, a GI's feet would turn white, then purple, until they finally turned black. If the situation reached this level, the soldier would be unable to walk. Toes were lost in some instances, and feet required amputation in the more extreme cases. If the unfortunate patient began to show the symptoms of gangrene, doctors had little option but to remove the lower leg. During the winter of 1944-45, enough men to fill the ranks of three full infantry divisions (45,000 men) moved off the front lines due to trench foot.<sup>20</sup>

Because of trench foot, on the morning of January 26, the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, fell below the strength of a single company. Company A alone suffered 100% casualties, either from wounds suffered in combat or trench foot. The rest of the morning and afternoon of January 26 the regiment spent improving defensive positions, as well as evacuating the wounded.<sup>21</sup>

As January 26 moved into the evening, the regiment planned to assault Jepsheim a second time. Due to the intense fire from the Bois de Jepsheim the night before, command decided 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion should attack into the forest, while the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions continued in

---

<sup>20</sup> Stephen J. Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self: The Journey of Captain Michael J. Daly, World War II Medal of Honor Recipient* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012), 105; Albert Cowdrey, *Fighting for Life: American Military Medicine in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 267. See also Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 260.

<sup>21</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 26; Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 33.

the village. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion met little resistance as they moved through the forest. Only Company K received heavy fire. This caused them to fall back to the village of Reidwahr. As 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion launched their attack, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions restarted their assault on Jepsheim. As the battalion moved on Jepsheim, they came under fire about 500 yards before they reached the German defenses. Like the night before, the battalions faced artillery from 88s, as well as small arms from three different directions. The intense fire forced the GIs to crawl along on the ground but they managed to make headway, and they eliminated all but one bunker with bazooka fire. At last a tank destroyer emerged and took out the remaining bunker from point-blank range.<sup>22</sup>

With the bunkers cleared, the 254<sup>th</sup> moved into the town. "Like nearly all other villages in the Alsace-Lorraine area, Jepsheim consisted of a cluster of farm buildings and residences," recalled Bob Ross. "Many of the houses had cellars and it was here that the remaining village residents waited out the siege of battle. [S]ome cellars might have 10, 20, or 30 civilians." Before the battle, the Allies warned civilians to leave the town, but many chose to stay to protect their property and livestock. Others simply had nowhere else to go. Even though they hated the Germans, many civilians in Jepsheim were skeptical of the Americans. "This area had been fought over so many years they were not sure themselves what to believe," Ross said. "Most houses had two flags— French and German. The country in power determined which flag would fly."<sup>23</sup>

At midnight, eight battalions of artillery opened on Jepsheim for fifteen minutes. One soldier noted, "As we watched it seemed as if the village, lying peacefully asleep one moment, became nothing but a massive sheet of flame the next." By 0400, Jepsheim was clear to the

---

<sup>22</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 30.

upper part of the town square. Company F, utterly exhausted, set up defensive positions in the houses. Since there was hardly any action in the southern part of the town, the men believed the town was clear, apart from snipers and disorganized fighters. That notion, however, did not last long. On the afternoon of the January 27, Company G fought its way into the lower square. During the firefight, they faced house-to-house fighting. One thing the Americans noticed about the Germans in Jepsheim was their tenacity in the face of death. Col. Hatcher reported numerous instances when cornered German soldiers simply shouted, "Heil Hitler!" and continued to fight. Hatcher said the soldiers simply threw grenades at the position and moved on. The house-to-house fighting was exceptionally tenacious. GIs might clear a house and move on, only to have the German retake the house and again fire on the Americans. Bob Ross took shelter in a barn that traded hands several times over the course of the battle. Taking prisoners inside of the barn, Ross noticed one of them was an officer who spoke English. "He was very indignant that we take him prisoner," Ross said. "He said: 'you Americans have everything. You all have good homes, cars, money and everything nice. Now you even have me!' as if he was any prize to us." After they reached the upper square, Company G began to set up defensive positions. Before they were able to get into defensive positions, however, a German counterattack threatened the safety of the company. Despite the German effort, overwhelming firepower drove back the counter attack.<sup>24</sup>

The following morning, January 28, a group of French soldiers took it upon themselves to go through the town, even though it was not completely secure. As expected, they were unable to fight their way through the German defenses. At 1400, Company E resumed the attack on the southern section of Jepsheim. They gained ground in the attack and captured 115 German

---

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 28-29; Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 38; Quoted in Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 31.

prisoners. At 1700, the Germans launched a counterattack on the company and caused the GIs to move back. Lt. Frederick Kroesen called for white phosphorus on the enemy positions. The American soldiers liked white phosphorus because when they fired on an enemy position, it usually meant the position was no longer a danger. Once white phosphorus hits open skin, it sticks and continues to burn into the tissue, unless the oxygen supply is lost or the phosphorus simply burns out. The burns in the tissue can cause severe organ damage, such as heart and kidney failure.<sup>25</sup>

As the counterattack intensified, casualties mounted everywhere. Everyone who was not shooting helped carry the wounded to safety. To add to the chaos, livestock ran everywhere, with phosphorus burning into their skin. The level of the fighting in this counterattack was extremely intense. Col. Hatcher remembered:

I talked in the clear over the radiotelephone with Captain "Howdy" Wilcox of our Company E which bore the brunt of the German assault. At one time while talking with him I asked him what was the cause of the steady popping sound I kept hearing over the radio phone. He replied that it was the sound of his pistol shots; that he found it necessary to keep shooting with his free hand while he talked because at the time the Germans had succeeded in surrounding a considerable number of his men in a barn and had set the barn on fire. Of course the conversation was promptly discontinued.<sup>26</sup>

Company G moved up to reinforce and together was able to repulse the attack and continue the assault on Jepsheim the next morning. Right before the attack, three Germans entered the American lines and demanded the American surrender. They said they knew the Americans consisted of only a single company, while the Germans had at their disposal an entire

---

<sup>25</sup>Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 29; Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 67; Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, "White Phosphorus: Health Effects", 7.

<sup>26</sup>Froberg, *63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Chronicles*, 64; Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 38.

battalion. In response, men in Company E fired into the German position, signaling their answer, as well as to begin the last push to take Jepsheim.<sup>27</sup>

To finally defeat the Germans in Jepsheim, the U.S. attackers had to eliminate the German ability to resupply and reinforce the town. Beginning at 1130 on the morning of January 29, elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion moved to the south and bypassed the outskirts of Jepsheim. The goal was to take German-held houses around a vineyard south of town. As the attack continued, German resistance made things slow for Company I. The situation looked bleak. The American attackers then ran into a French tank. After a little persuasion, the tank attacked the German strongpoint.<sup>28</sup>

As 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion assaulted the vineyard, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions attacked the last German remnants in the town. As the Germans fell back into houses, they massed their fire in the areas they still possessed. This caused the 254<sup>th</sup> to commit all the remaining men in reserve to finally take the town. These efforts showed Germans the futility of a continued engagement. Around 1630(4:30 p.m.), the Germans began to emerge for their positions, first in small groups, but eventually in large numbers. The GIs captured round 450 Germans. In the two assaults by the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, they took approximately 1,100 German prisoners, at a cost of around 870 U.S. casualties. Even though a large portion of Jepsheim citizens remained in town, there were only five civilian fatalities. One of those killed was an infant girl. She died after every attempt by U.S. medics to save her failed.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 31; Hatcher, *Thru Blood and Fire*, 40; Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 30.

Of the prisoners, Bob Ross remembers one small group he had to deal with. They captured about 40 Germans, and he and his men lined them up to march when an 88mm shell landed in the middle of them. Those that were not killed scuttled for cover. Being knocked down, Ross was momentarily disoriented. In the meantime my immediate thoughts were, My God, they are getting away from us. We will have to do this all over again, he said. But he worried for nothing. The Germans realized it was only one shell, and they got back into formation and ran to the stockade. Ross added, They wanted out!<sup>30</sup>

Along with Hill 216, the men of the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment succeeded despite overwhelming odds and little combat experience. Even men of the veteran 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division doubted if the 254<sup>th</sup> could take Jepsheim. The reason the Germans held out in Jepsheim, it was later discovered, they used the village as a corps headquarters. The resilience of the regiment was best described by a private who took part in the siege by stating, If you think I was going to stay out in some damn foxhole full of snow while the Krauts were living in nice, warm cellars, you're crazy!<sup>31</sup>

The reason the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was successful in their first experience of combat comes down to two things: willingness and leadership. Lt. Kroesen, who rose to the rank of four-star general in a long a distinguished career after the war, deals with the two by stating, Leading men in combat is principally a matter of inspiration, deriving willingness to face danger, accept risk to accomplish a mission. The greatest challenge in sustaining that willingness over time as friends/buddies are lost and the task becomes never ending.<sup>32</sup> For a successful campaign by

---

<sup>30</sup> Ross, *We Fought for Peace*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Peel, *Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>*, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Clint Thompson, *Questionnaire submitted to Frederick Kroesen*, Summer 2013.

U.S. soldiers, the willingness expressed by Lt. Kroesen had to remain, not only within himself but in every man. The Germans were not quite ready to give up. Colmar had to fall. Further west, the fortress city of Neuf-Brisach waited. Here the Germans could make a stand, possibly leading to a prolonged siege. The question of not how long it would take, but what the cost would be, in both material and human lives, was still left unanswered.

\* \* \*

The difficulty to eliminate the German threat in the Colmar Pocket was still present, however, and the need of additional manpower needed addressing. In a call to SHEAF on January 22, Gen. Devers asked for more help. "I believe," he wrote, "SHEAF is now beginning to recognize the fact that we are badly overextended and have been fighting with our backs to the wall and with not much help." On January 26, 1945, General Devers oversaw a meeting with members of his staff. What he had to say to his subordinates was not good. "[The] Situation on the front does not look good. We are not making the progress we should toward the elimination of the Colmar Pocket, and this morning it looks as if the Germans were building up a truly big force to Capture Strasbourg." While it is true the progress of the Allied front around Colmar was not moving at the speed at which he intended, Devers also had another reason to move forward. The following day, Devers met in person with General Eisenhower. "In my conference with General Eisenhower," wrote Devers, "he emphasized the elimination of the Colmar Pocket; [he] said it was the one sore in the whole front; that it was his obsession with him to get it out."<sup>33</sup> Privately, others also believed there were serious problems in the Colmar Pocket. On January 23, General George Patton wrote in his diary, "the elimination of the Colmar Pocket seems to have

---

<sup>33</sup> Jacob Devers, *Diary of Jacob Devers*. (U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center), January 22-27, 1945.

developed into a fiasco. I hope I don't get sent down there to strike it. He believed by moving divisions from up north out from under his and Omar Bradley's command that SHEAF was doing what the enemy wanted; taking troops from a vital area and transferring them to an area of secondary importance. Patton also noted Eisenhower confided in him about his opinion of Devers when he wrote, "He [Eisenhower] felt handicapped by having to keep Devers under him, whom he distrusted. I told him I felt the same way about Devers."<sup>34</sup> This could also quite possibly explain why Eisenhower told Devers to suspend his plan to cross the Rhine in November when Devers had the chance cross.

Patton was not the only army commander in the field who expressed annoyance with the stalemate in the Colmar Pocket. General Omar Bradley, now commanding general of the U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, was another commander who made his opinions known. When a telephone call from the office of Gen. Harold "Pink" Bull, Assistant Chief of Staff of SHEAF, informed Bradley four of his divisions needed transfer south to Colmar, he became unglued. Patton, who was in a meeting with Bradley at the time, witnessed the entire episode. "For the first time in my knowledge he (Bradley) lost his good humor and told Whitely (Pink's British assistant at SHEAF) that if he wanted to destroy the whole operation he could do so and be damned, or words to that effect, and take *all* the corps and divisions," Patton wrote. Col. Hobart Gay, Patton's Chief of Staff, who was also present at the meeting, also described the incident in his diary. He remembered Bradley telling Pink "If you feel that way about it, then as far as I'm concerned, you can take any goddamned division and/or corps in the Twelfth Army Group, do with them what as you see fit, and those of us that you leave back will set(sic) on our asses until

---

<sup>34</sup> Martin Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, Vol. II, 1940-1945*(New York: Houghton Mifflin),628-636.



hell freezes over. I trust you do not think I am angry, but I want to impress upon you that I am goddamned well incensed.<sup>35</sup>

\* \* \*

Following their initial combat, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was moved off the line and placed in reserve for some much-needed rest after the intense fighting of the previous few days. They were still in foxholes but could go inside warming tents to help thaw out. 88 men left the line due to trench foot, but replacements arrived to take their place.<sup>36</sup>

For the rest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, it was the same type of business they had experienced over the last few days. As the 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments moved farther east, they continued to clean up sporadic pockets of resistance up to the Colmar Canal. Late on the night of January 28, the division found out that they had been transferred to the flag of the XXI Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Frank Milburn.<sup>37</sup> This fighting force, which comprised mostly American troops, included the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, as well as the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.

Because of the intense fighting of the previous days, the 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments had a well-defended bridgehead along the Ill River. The 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had taken Jebnheim by this point, along the Rhine-Rhone Canal. Further movement by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry

---

<sup>35</sup> Omar Bradley and Clay Blair. *A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983),388-389; Blumenson, *Patton Papers, Vol.II*,628-629; Hobart Gay. *Diary of Hobart Gay* (Hobart Gay Papers, United States Army Heritage and Education Center),24-45.

<sup>36</sup> John C. McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage: The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's Combat Experience, 1812 through World War II* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2009), 488.

<sup>37</sup> Donald Taggart, ed., *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press,1947), 315.

Division opened the areas south of the Colmar Canal. This canal was the last water barrier the Americans faced until they reached the fortress city of Neuf-Brisach, along the Rhine River.<sup>38</sup>

In the late parts of January 27, elements of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment eliminated resistance north of the Colmar Canal. As they advanced, they took fire from positions south of the Colmar Canal. This engagement showed the Germans were not quite ready to give in. The next afternoon, January 28, a combined French and American tank support succeeded to destroy a small bridge across the Colmar Canal, used by the Germans to launch counterattacks. The Allies succeeded, but at the cost of one French and one American tank.<sup>39</sup>

To the untrained eye, it may seem the destruction of the footbridge was detrimental to the Americans, but they had another way to cross the canal. As the sun went down on January 29, elements of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments managed to sneak to the edge of the Colmar Canal with rubber boats. This was not an easy task due to the traffic jam of French armor and U.S. engineers, as well as the command vehicles from 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Headquarters. The men had to split up and make their way around the vehicles, which inevitably delayed the attack. Reconnaissance reports stated the canal was fifty feet across and six feet deep. Despite frigid temperatures, the men found the canal only partially frozen and moving slowly. Steep sides along the canal of up to 10 feet also greeted Americans, with dirty water the consistency of slush.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 51-52.

<sup>39</sup> Rupert Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 318-319.

<sup>40</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 52-53. See also Taggart, *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*, 316; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage* 488-489; Earl A. Reitan. *Rifleman: On the Cutting Edge of World War II* (Bennington, Merriam Press, 2001), Loc. 1172, Kindle.

Unlike "Operation Grand Slam," this movement, known as "Operation Kraut Buster," began with 24 hours of artillery in preparation for the assault. Ultimately the artillery fired 16,438 rounds. Once across, the mission of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry was to push south along the outskirts of Colmar while simultaneously clearing out the Niederwald Woods to the east of the city. A smoke screen provided by the artillery would give some concealment. Two continuous days of combat for the regiment began.<sup>41</sup>

The men slowly filled their allotment of thirty boats, each loaded down with ten men apiece. Once the boats had made it across, they unloaded them as quickly as possible and pulled back to the other side by ropes that attached to the boats. As they forded the canal, German small arms fire began to open on them, but luckily it was far over their heads and did not inflict any real damage<sup>42</sup>

While the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment crossed the Colmar Canal at a decent pace, 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment faced problems to the east. The equipment needed to build a bridge to accommodate their armor support was not ready, again because of the blocked roads by armor and other vehicles. Apparently not wanting another debacle like at the Maison Rouge, Gen. Arthur Young, assistant commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, called over to the 7<sup>th</sup> and advised them of the situation, and wanted them to halt their action if possible until the 15<sup>th</sup> could be able to move. Upon the news that the 7<sup>th</sup> was already crossing, Young ordered the 7<sup>th</sup> to halt. Responding to the order, Lt. Colonel C.C. Thobro, the Regimental Executive Officer replied, "If it's an order I'll try to stop

---

<sup>41</sup> Taggert, *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*, 315-316; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 489; Earl Reitan, *A Rifleman in World War II*. Located at the United States Army Heritage and Education Center, 80.

<sup>42</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 55. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 489.

them, and he tried to make his way to the crossing site, but was held up by French armor along the road. When he arrived at the crossing, Thobro found out the crossing could not be stopped. Two full battalions had already made their way across the Colmar Canal. The two battalions, the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup>, had to wait until the artillery let up before they could make their advance. Before them, the town of Bischwihr turned into an inferno from artillery, mortars, as well as white phosphorus shells.<sup>43</sup>

The two battalions moved out when the artillery let up. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was to attack the town from the north, while 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion moved around the outskirts and entered the town from the south. As 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved on Bischwihr, enemy fire greeted them from the west. The American troops soon encountered Germans dazed from the artillery barrage. These soldiers surrendered without any trouble. Additional searches in the northern part of the town yielded no resistance.<sup>44</sup>

In the southern part of town, soldiers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had an extremely unusual encounter with a group of Germans who surrendered. As they carried out their searches of the building, the men of Company L took a group of prisoners who had hidden in a cellar. Like GIs all over the ETO, including the Colmar Pocket, the men of the company began to frisk the Germans for souvenirs. One man got more than he bargained for. When he searched one prisoner, the soldier felt inside the person's breast pocket. The soldier paused, not quite sure if what he felt was real, and then felt again. The reality then set in. "For Christ sake," the soldier exclaimed, "it's a woman!" As expected, a large group of GIs rushed to and began mingled

---

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 55.

<sup>44</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 55-56. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 491.

around the prisoners. Out of the 30 captured, 14 were women. Orville Dilly, the company commander, had to break up the scene so the sweep of Bischwihr could continue. Trying to find volunteers to escort the prisoners, however, was not an easy task, since there were numerous soldiers who were eager to perform the service. These men took their charges and began to move off, grinning "from ear to ear." The 7<sup>th</sup> secured Bischwihr shortly before midnight on the night of January 29. The efforts of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions yielded about sixty prisoners, one of whom believed the Americans had more artillery than the Germans had rifles.<sup>45</sup>

In the early morning of January 30, the German army attempted a counterattack. The attack was quickly repulsed. The Germans fell back into an open field from where they came. Soon, Allied mortar fire fell on the fleeing German soldiers, and the Americans could hear their screams east of their position. Later that morning, engineers completed a bridge across the Colmar Canal. This allowed French armor to cross in support the Americans. The following night, January 31, elements of the newly arrived 75<sup>th</sup> Division relieved the men of the 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike the two battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup>, the men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had a rather easy crossing of the Colmar Canal, making it across around midnight. As Audie Murphy and his men moved forward, he noted the immense artillery landing before them. By 0130, elements of the regiment had taken the village of Muntzenheim, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moving out and seizing the village of Fortschwihr, with minimal effort. Among the 200 prisoners taken was a 105mm gun, along with the crew, an 88mm with its men, as well as two 120mm mortars. The next two days, Murphy made sure his men moved fast, saying, "We must hit the enemy before he

---

<sup>45</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 57-58. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 489-490.

<sup>46</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 59-61.

can get to his feet.ö He and his men were filthy and muddy, and except for the helmets, there was little distinction between the Americans and the Germans.<sup>47</sup>

Their pitiful appearance came in extremely handy when they dealt with the enemy. öA Group of Germans surrenders to my company, they throw their helmets down and stand with raised hands while we shake them down,ö Murphy remembered. Murphy noted the Germansø state of exhaustion, and he and his men took a rest alongside their prisoners. As they rested, they heard tanks approaching-Not American, but German armor. When he realized it was too late to run, Murphy eyed the prisoners, who had their heads down and were unaware of the situation. Grabbing a German helmet, Murphy placed it on his head. His men did likewise. Three tanks, as well as infantry, pass within thirty yards of Murphy and his men. They waved at the Germans, who waved back, apparently thinking they were comrades. The tanks continued into the forest and disappeared. öI wiped the cold sweat from my forehead,ö Murphy remembered, öand thank God for mud and exhaustion.ö<sup>48</sup>

Another soldier of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Sgt. Troy Cox, recalled a similar situation with the Germans one of his fellow GIs experienced. Upon getting separated from his unit, the soldier approached and entered a camp filled with men. Once he got about halfway in, the soldier realized he had walked into a German camp. Unable to turn and run, Cox noted, the soldier had enough composure to simply keep walking through to the other side of the camp. He made it out and returned to his unit, no worse for wear.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Taggert, *History of the 3rd Infantry Division in World War II*, 317; Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, 255-256.

<sup>48</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 59-61; Taggert, *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*, 317; Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, 255-256&259.

<sup>49</sup> Clint Thompson, *Interview with Troy Cox*, January 2014.

In another strange encounter with the Germans, however, things did not work out so well for some men of the Company B, Audie Murphy's company. On the outskirts of Fortschwihr, Privates Hollace Ditterline and Maurice Minton were setting up a roadblock to prevent the Germans from retaking the town. As they worked, they noticed three figures approach their position. Ditterline noted, "I don't know if God talks to people, but I think he told me to tell Minton 'don't trust em'." Minton disregarded Ditterline, however, and went out to meet the men, telling Ditterline that Murphy was sending them three men to help. As they got closer, Ditterline realized they were German. It was too late. The Germans swung their weapons up and killed Minton, along with a sergeant who went out with him. "I knew the minute they shot Minton that he was dead," Ditterline said. "When a guy is killed, he'll fall a certain way that is almost unnatural; he'll fall with his arm crooked underneath him. And that's what Minton did." With his friend dead, emotions overcame Ditterline. "When your friends get killed," recalled Ditterline, "you get kind of angry. I shot all three of those Germans with my M-1, killing two and wounding another one. I would have finished off the injured soldier, except my gun was empty."<sup>50</sup>

\* \* \*

While the first two Battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the entire complement of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments quickly achieved their objectives, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> faced a serious challenge as they attacked towards the town of Wihr-en-Plaine. The sun had set by the time the men made the attack, and the Germans they expected to encounter on the outskirts of town were not there. Because the bridge they needed to bring armor support had not been built yet, armor did not follow them. As the men moved cautiously, everything seemed uneasy. Pvt. Earl Reitan

---

<sup>50</sup> Terry Murphy and Larryann Willis, "Horace Ditterline Interview," *Audie Murphy Research Foundation Newsletter*, Vol 2. Spring, 1997. Quoted in Champagne, *Dogface Soldiers*, 188.

remembered, "There was an eerie silence, broken only by the crunching of boots on the snow and the whispering American shells overhead." Maj. Jack Duncan, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion commander, also experienced apprehension. "It was too easy," he said. "I felt like we were walking into something."<sup>51</sup>

Maj. Duncan could not have been more correct about the situation. On the outskirts of Wihr-en-Plaine, the Germans saw their chance and attacked with infantry, supported by two tank destroyers. "Apparently, the enemy knew that we did not have our armor over the canal and had laid a trap," Earl Reitan remembered. Despite the white blankets and mattress covers the Americans used as camouflage, the Germans had little trouble seeing them in the moonlight. As they fired, the Americans tried desperately to dig into the frozen ground. Around 15 men died. Other wounded men were helpless as the tanks approached and fell into the path of the tanks treads and were crushed. All their fellow soldiers could do was listen to their screams. One of the enemy tank destroyers then stopped. In English, they called out for those in the foxholes to surrender. The fighting was too much for some of the men, who emerged from the foxholes with their hands raised. German machine gunners promptly opened fire. Those not killed crawled their way back to the foxhole. Others attempted to take cover in foxholes, but some fell in the snow wounded. The German tanks did not stop. Screams again could be heard as the Germans ran over the wounded. Out in the field, some of the men who were part of the OP (outpost), had taken cover behind mounds of frozen manure. Maj. Duncan later noted, "That's one time 'Tough Shit' came in handy."<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1178. Also quoted in McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 490.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 61-63. Also quoted in Reitan, *A Rifleman in World War II*, 81; Reitan, *Riflemen*, Loc. 1178 and 1185. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 490.



The surviving men of Companies F and G ran for cover in the town. Pvt. Retain recalled, "When I saw the German TDs (tank destroyers) I took off as fast as I could manage in the deep snow with my heavy load. When I reached the village, my heart was pounding and my lungs burning." He soon reached a stone wall and took cover. Other men did the same, and they called out to each other to get reorganized. Another soldier, Pfc. Ernie Boyd from Company G also experienced the utter willpower it took to get into town. "Running in that snow was hell, and really I went sort of like a rabbit," he remembered. "I was nearly done in. I felt like I was sucking in pure fire by the time I came to a low stone wall that I fell on and rolled over."<sup>53</sup>

Company E was not as fortunate. They were still pinned down outside of town. As machine gun fire continued, German tank destroyers moved to flank them. In desperation, Lt. George Kite called for artillery. When told to wait, he screamed into the radio "I want this fire more than I've ever wanted anything in all my life." The artillery finally came, but it did no good. The German armor continued to approach. As the situation looked bleak, Major Duncan called for bazooka teams from Company E to engage the tank destroyers. Crawling to the position of the manure piles, the bazooka men fired at the tank destroyers. Duncan could hear the men as they prayed for a hit. But their prayers went unanswered as their shot missed. The German armor returned fire, and they managed to kill one of the two-man bazooka teams and knocked the other down. They got up cussing but continued to fire. Thing got frantic when Pvt. Joseph Bale turned to Major Duncan and said, "Well, sir, here goes the last round." This was not an easy shot. Estimates put the tank out to 500 feet— well beyond the range of the weapon. As

---

<sup>53</sup> Reitan, *Rifleman in World War II*, 81. See also Reitan, *Riflemen*, Loc. 1192&1210. See also McManus, *American Courage American Carnage*, 491.

the round left the tube, no one spoke because they knew their lives depended on Bale's aim. "Years seemed to pass," Maj. Duncan noted. But they did not need to fear. The men broke into cheers when the round struck one of the tank destroyers, which exploded into flames. "The soldiers could not restrain themselves," Maj. Duncan remembered. "They yelled at the top of their lungs. Some unashamedly wept for joy." As the men celebrated, the other German tank destroyer picked up the survivors, who were rolling in the snow to put out their clothes on fire. The Americans wanted to fire upon the crew of the tank destroyer, but with no more bazooka rounds, they decided not to draw attention to themselves.<sup>54</sup>

Even though this had been in mid-combat, Maj. Duncan used this as a learning experience. Duncan stated, "I think it is important to note that, at last, the men had seen a bazooka stop a tank in battle. They had seen what a bazooka would do to a tank during training periods, but it took a real battle to convince them. From then on my men did not hesitate to fight tanks with bazookas."<sup>55</sup> The men soon moved into Wihr-en-Plaine. Their hands and feet were now frozen or nearly so. As they moved, they captured three Germans. Due to the firefight that had just taken place, the Germans thought their lives were over. Pvt. Dale Schumacher remembered, "The three German prisoners were very scared. They took family pictures from their pockets and held them out to us. I'm sure they felt we were going to kill them on the spot." The GIs fought their way into the center of town and cleared houses one by one. They then held the town throughout the early morning.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 64; Taggart, *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II*, 317; See also Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc 1199; Reitan, *A Rifleman in World War II*, 82; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 491-492.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 65, Reitan, Loc. 1203.

<sup>56</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 65. See also Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1216; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 492.

Other men of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion entered the town just as the Germans counterattacked. The attacking force included two Mark VI tanks and the equivalent of a company of infantry. On the east side of town and still out of bazooka ammunition, the men of Company E used rifle fire to keep the Germans outside of town. On the other side of town another Mark VI tank, as well as sixty men attacked. Unlike before, the bazooka men here had ammunition and could push the tanks back. The German infantry continued their advance, but rifle fire drove them into sheds for cover. Once they were in the sheds, the bazooka teams let loose. Despite the fire, three Germans in a Volkswagen rolled up, and American machine gun fire severed the driver's head from his body. The Volkswagen crashed, killing the other two men.<sup>57</sup>

Maj. Duncan ordered his men into buildings, and then called down artillery fire into the town. The shells exploded around the Germans, and American small arms fire prevented them from getting inside any houses. "The early morning light was brightened by the exploding shells," one American soldier remembered. "German bodies were mangled when the barrage landed. Enemy voices screamed with pain. Germans writhed on the streets in their own blood while shells continued to cut through their clothes and flesh." Pvt. Bale, resupplied with bazooka rounds, continued his fire once inside the buildings. He aimed for one of the Mark VI tanks that entered the town. To speed up his fire, Bale attempted to load the bazooka by himself, which is the job of two men. As he placed the rocket into the tube, it slipped all the way through and exploded as it hit the floor, blowing both of his legs off. Bale died from his wounds. Not only was he killed, but the explosion wounded 17 other men. The tank continued to move forward. As Pvt. Reitan took cover, he said:

---

<sup>57</sup> Reitan, *Rifleman*, 1226; McManus. *American Courage, American Carnage*, 492.

I took cover in a house with three or four others in my squad, but not before the tank driver saw us. We heard the clanking sound of the tank as it approached, then silence, as the tank stopped in front of the house. The tank fired one shot into the side of the house. The room filled with dust and debris, and there was a hole in the stone wall about a foot above the floor. Miraculously no one was killed or wounded, apart from cuts and abrasions. Whoever had built that house had built it to last, but certainly he had never imagined that it would have to withstand a German 88 fired at point blank range. I heard the tank proceed down the street and then an explosion.<sup>58</sup>

That explosion was the result of another bazooka crew taking out the tank. Pvt. Ernie Boyd had loaded the round for his partner, Pvt. Ernest Hallmark. "Hallmark put the round squarely into the engine," Boyd remembered. "And I was stunned by the fire that occurred." American troops killed all the Germans as they abandoned the burning tank. As he looked back, Boyd wondered if he had done the right thing. "I have often regretted that we did not take prisoners," he later lamented. As the morning of January 30 wore on, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion held their ground in Wihr-en-Plaine. The Germans launched additional counterattacks, but the American forces managed to hold Wihr-en-Plaine.<sup>59</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment rested in Wihr-en-Plaine for the time being, hoping they could get an extended rest. But this was not the case. Gen. O'Daniel, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, called forward and ordered the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to take the city of Horbourg, which was 200 yards away across an open field. "Horbourg must be taken by noon," O'Daniel ordered. This objective was of extreme significance since it was a suburb of Colmar. The seizure of Horbourg meant the roads that lead from Colmar to Neuf-Brisach would be in Allied hands. At this point, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had dwindled down to about thirty men per company. Command

---

<sup>58</sup> Mooney *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 69-70 Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1232 and 1240; Reitan; *A Rifleman in World War II*, 82. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 493

<sup>59</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 70-71; Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1240&1252. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 493.

picked Company E to lead the assault, with American armor in support. This was not an easy task, a fact not lost on Col. John Heintges, commanding officer of the 7<sup>th</sup>, when he called Gen. O'Daniel and said, "Horbourg is a sticky deal." Heintges let O'Daniel know he was having trouble with the French to coordinate the attack. O'Daniel told him "Continue to hit Horbourg and I'll get the French to push also."<sup>60</sup>

At about 2200(10 p.m.) that night, part of an armored infantry battalion of French appeared. The men were loud, and American Earl Reitan feared their volume would draw unwanted attention. They appreciated the additional armor, but the French in the tanks would not support the assault until the roads junctions were clear. Maj. Duncan proceeded to argue about the need for the armor, but the French commander would not concede. Company E, along with one American tank, moved to the outskirts of Horbourg, where German machine-gun nests opened on them. The tank fired upon the buildings and machine gun nests.<sup>61</sup>

The infantry began to take the buildings while other men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion followed Company E forward. They sent a runner back to get another American tank. It soon appeared and fired upon the German positions. At this point, the Americans held one side of the main street while the Germans held the other side. This situation lasted all night. Pvt. Schumacher, who was held up in a house, remembered the Germans "came in after us but we were able to drive them off. We moved back away from the street and finally ended up in the basement." Earl Reitan remembered the Germans attempted to take the American side of the street. He was upstairs in a

---

<sup>60</sup> Mooney *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 72. See also Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1265 and 1270; Reitan, *A Rifleman in World War II*, 83-84; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 494.

<sup>61</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 73. See also Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1270 and 1277; Henry Yeide and Mark Stout, *First to the Rhine: The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group in World War II* (St. Paul: Zenith Press. 2007), 333; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 494.

building when another soldier noticed a German helmet trying to look around a corner. The soldier fired, but the bullet ricocheted off the corner, and the helmet retreated. The German reappeared again and fired upon Reitan and his men. Reitan's sergeant told he and his men to move into the next house. Maj. Duncan later reported the Germans would not move.<sup>62</sup>

When the sun rose on the morning of January 31, the situation had not been resolved. In desperation, Maj. Duncan did the only thing he could think of to get the French armor into the fight: he lied to them and told them the crossroad was secure. This annoyed the French, but they attacked anyway after a short artillery barrage. Fortunately for Duncan, the French met little resistance. American infantry joined to drive the Germans out. By nightfall, German defenses around Colmar were largely eliminated. Soldiers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were now on their third day without sleep. Food and supplies were gone. The famished men had to scrounge in the houses they searched to find something to eat. On January 31, the newly arrived the 75<sup>th</sup> Division relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. From January 29 to January 31, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment captured 365 prisoners and inflicted an estimated 400 casualties. Casualties were 39 killed and 77 wounded.<sup>63</sup>

The capture of Horbourg was the end of the road for Earl Reitan. "I was totally exhausted," Reitan wrote, "and along with eight or ten others I was sent to the rear where they had a camp to give soldiers some rest and decent meals." To add to the exhaustion, Reitan had carried on the offensive with a bad knee. Complaining to a doctor about his knee Reitan can still

---

<sup>62</sup> Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1290; Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine* 334; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 494.

<sup>63</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 76-77. See also Reitan, *Rifleman*, Loc. 1312; McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 494-495.

remember him saying, "You've had enough of this, son." Elation overcame Reitan. "Heart rejoiced," he wrote, "for I knew that I would live."<sup>64</sup>

\* \* \*

As Horbourg fell, the city of Colmar itself was under the threat of Allied attack. The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and French forces were ordered to take the city. Before their assignment to the Colmar Pocket, the 28<sup>th</sup> Division operated north of the pocket in Belgium and assisted in driving back the bulge in the Ardennes. With manpower shortages all over the ETO, however, Eisenhower had no choice but to send them south. Official reports stated the 28<sup>th</sup> Division was capable of "limited offensive action." In the middle of winter, they traveled to Colmar by train on frigid French "forty and eights" railcars from World War I, made to hold forty men or eight horses.<sup>65</sup> Attempting to make the voyage in secret, William Pena, from Laredo, Texas, an officer in the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, remembered, "We were told to cover up our insignia, we had a keystone, representing the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from Pennsylvania, we were going to go incognito into the Colmar area." But Pena also conceded the plan backfired. "When we got there, the Germans ran a message to us: 'Welcome the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division!' They knew exactly who we were!"<sup>66</sup> The division was not to be put into reserve, however, but to be put right into combat. The men of the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, however, were not aware of this, and when the orders came, they were a complete surprise.

February 1 was payday for the 109<sup>th</sup>. Pena recalled, "At three o'clock in the afternoon when we were only halfway through paying the men, an order for a night attack came down to

---

<sup>64</sup> Reitan, *A Rifleman in World War II*, 84.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas M. Hatfield, *Rudder: From Leader to Legend* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2011), 335.

<sup>66</sup> Clint Thompson, *Interview of William Pena*, September 1, 2013.

the company. We were going into Colmar!ö Payday would have to wait. öAfter all the lengthy procedures in obtaining the payroll that morning,ö Pena remembered, öI practically dumped the moneybag at headquarters and drove as fast as I could back to the company.ö<sup>67</sup> Another officer of the 109<sup>th</sup>, M. Bedford Davis M.D., shared Pena's opinion when he wrote:

Our vision of sleep was shattered by the arrival of a courier at 2350, requesting that I come to the regimental CP. Once there, Col. Rudder informed us that a combat patrol had been sent out to curvet the land and the disposition of enemy troops about Colmar. They had reported back that the Germans were asleep across the barrels of their 88s. This gave us the only opportunity we had ever known to make a surprise attack on the enemy. We were to march to Colmar immediately. Fatigue and elation fought for domination in every man on the regimental staff, but we were soldiers, and an order was an order.<sup>68</sup>

The attack began as a disorganized effort. From their position, Pena and his men had to cross a forest to reach the outskirts of Colmar. It was pitch black by the time his men had entered the forest. Capt. Bruce Paul, commander of Company I, was in the lead, with Pena, who was the executive officer, at the rear to prevent stragglers. During the march, Paul moved a little too fast, and word reached Pena they had become separated. Retracing their steps, he found where they had lost Paul, and reinitiated contact. Paul, who had already committed half of the company, was not pleased, asking Pena öWhere in the hell have you been?ö The company began to receive fire. Pena and Paul both landed next to another officer. When one of the men made a noise, the officer raised his head and promptly got hit. öHe began to moan and make all kinds of noises,ö Pena said. öI kept telling him, 'Could you hold it down?ö It's funny, he's dying, but you are worried about the men

---

<sup>67</sup> William M. Pena, *As Far as Schleiden* (Houston: Published by the Author, 1992), 161.

<sup>68</sup> M. Bedford Davis, *Frozen Rainbows: The World War II Adventures of a Combat Medical Officer* (Elk River: Meadowlark, 2003), 235.



hearing that. When your men hear people wounded, it's very demoralizing, and you try to avoid that.<sup>69</sup>

As they reached a vineyard on the outskirts of town, Pena had to divide up his men in the rows to navigate. Not finding any resistance, they emerged from the vineyard to find the highway to Colmar. As they marched down the highway, units regrouped and moved to a row of trenches as they approached Colmar. They assumed the trenches would be manned with German defenders. Once they reached the trenches, however, they found them deserted.<sup>70</sup>

The 109<sup>th</sup> moved with extreme haste. This was on par with the type of training Col. James Rudder, the commander of the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, had implemented for his anti-tank units. Rudder basically trained his anti-tank units in the way of the Army Rangers. Rudder had been in command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion on D-Day when his Rangers scaled the cliffs at Point-du-Hoc. They were also trained in night operations. This company, called the Raider Company, led the 109<sup>th</sup> Regiment into Colmar, and they went faster than originally planned. This led to friendly artillery being dropped on their position. Pena remembered the artillery observer calling back to cease-fire. They had no idea the regiment moved up so fast.<sup>71</sup>

The 109<sup>th</sup> engaged in street fighting on the outskirts of Colmar. Germans fired and then dispersed, running through the streets. As they entered town French armor overtook them. In an act of diplomacy, Col. Rudder stopped his regiment to allow the French to enter the city first. Pena and his men, their objective complete, entered a home and literally collapsed around the kitchen table, too tired to move.<sup>72</sup> Their rest did not last long, Pena recalled:

---

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, *Pena Interview*.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, *Pena Interview*; Pena, *As Far as Schleiden*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> Hatfield, *Rudder*, 248; Thompson; *Pena Interview*.

<sup>72</sup> Pena, *As Far as Schleiden*, 161; Hatfield, *Rudder* 248-249; Thompson, *Pena Interview*.

A tank rattled by shortly afterwards. There was the sound of a huge explosion. We went to the door to see. A French driven tank had been hit by an anti-tank gun. As the tank commander tried to get out, a sniper picked him off. A French ambulance came whizzing down the street as if to an auto accident. An aid man got out and climbed the tank. The sniper's bullet dropped him to the ground. A French nurse in coveralls got out of the ambulance. She carried the aid man towards the ambulance where other hands took over. Then she climbed the tank, took the commander out of the turret, and methodically took him off the tank and carried him to the ambulance. She went back into the tank but came back without comment. The sniper had gallantly spared her.<sup>73</sup>

By 1130 the French armor succeeded to reduce the German resistance. By 1145 there was only scattered resistance in the city and by 1600(4 p.m.) the city of Colmar was mostly in Allied hands. The cost to the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was relatively light despite the seriousness of the mission: 125 men killed, wounded, or missing. The 109<sup>th</sup> set up a defensive perimeter south of the city in case of a German counterattack.<sup>74</sup>

Those inside the city were not out of danger, however. Bedford Davis recalled an instance when he arrived in Colmar to set up his aid station inside a very nice building. Davis remembered:

“This paradise evaporated just two hours later when French corps generals, under whom we were operating, told our colonel his command post was too plush. They made our regiment move out so they could move in. As fate would have it, word of this CP location had somehow drifted across the Rhine River and into the Black Forest. Within 45 minutes of our move to a spot about a mile away the Germans, known to have a 240mm railroad gun operating in the area, fired this huge gun twice. Both shells made direct hits on the buildings now occupied by the French corps and they ceased to exist for the moment.”<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Pena, *As Far as Schleiden*, 162-163.

<sup>74</sup> Hatfield, *Rudder*, 249.

<sup>75</sup> Davis, *Frozen Rainbows*, 236-237.

The residents of Colmar were for the most part elated at the idea of being liberated and celebrated for many hours. Many read the passage written, by Marshal Lattre de Tassigny, commander of the French 1<sup>st</sup> Army:

Inhabitants of Colmar! After four years and a half of oppression and suffering, four years and a half of a separation so cruel to our hearts, your city has found the motherland and the tricolour(sic) once more.

United in brotherhood, the French of the 5th Armoured (sic) Division and the infantry of the American divisions have today, the 2nd of February, entered the city of Colmar, which our manoeuvre(sic) has sought to spare from the destruction of battle.<sup>76</sup>

But others had different views about Colmar. Conflicting reports emerged from the city as to local feelings about liberation. Richard Johnston, a combat correspondent for the *New York Times*, said the citizens of Colmar were oddly reserved in their behavior. Johnston observed the French soldiers enjoyed the liberation of the city more than its citizens since it was French soldiers who took down the German street markers. One Texas soldier who Johnston interviewed was similarly dismayed, saying, "They don't seem to give a damn. They don't seem to appreciate how lucky this burg is. Why, we didn't even throw in artillery!"<sup>77</sup> A major question is why did the French citizens not show any emotion? Like the citizens all over Alsace, they were possibly afraid the American takeover was a temporary one, as well as the fear of reprisal against German collaborators was enough to not show any emotion. But memory can be a powerful thing. One person might observe one situation, while someone else may experience the exact opposite.

---

<sup>76</sup> Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), 24.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Richard Johnston, "Colmar Residents Calm on Release," *New York Times*, February 4, 1945, 4.

One American had a positive, if embarrassing, experiences. After setting up their triage area for wounded, Bedford Davis had his first interaction with hot water in a while and decided to take a bath. Davis remembered:

I hastily stripped off layer after layer of wool clothing we had to wear in the cold winter weather in order to survive. Right in the middle of my bath, a nurse walked into the room and announced it was dark enough to need the blackout curtains to be pulled. Much to my embarrassment, she managed to stay about thirty minutes making animated conversation. She did not seem to notice my lack of clothing. She had nothing in mind except to express the gratitude of the townspeople toward the liberators.

Additionally, regarding the townspeople, Davis mentioned:

Each of our rooms had a good hospital bed and we anticipated the best night's sleep in many months. However, we did not get to go to bed very early. The townspeople plied us with a hero's welcome just as we had been given in Paris, but on a slightly smaller scale. The mayor and town council welcomed us to the city hall. As part of the regimental staff, I was required to attend the festivities.<sup>78</sup>

Even though Colmar was in the hands of the Allies, Capt. Pena still had to deal with Germans. This occurred on the morning of February 3 when a priest came and talked to a baker with whom Pena stayed with. As he translated for the priest, the baker said there were over twenty German soldiers in a nearby cellar who wished to surrender. As Pena arrived at the cellar, he noticed the Germans were reluctant to come out fearing reprisal, but they slowly emerged from their hiding place. The Americans began to frisk them. During the event, a group of nuns spoke to the prisoners and soon pleaded with Pena not to take the soldiers' personal belongings. Pena told the sergeant not to take their things. This action satisfied the nuns.<sup>79</sup>

Bedford Davis also had an interesting encounter with a German prisoner. Davis witnessed a German Focke-Wolfe 190 fighter plane shot down by American P-47s. The pilot

---

<sup>78</sup> Davis, *Frozen Rainbows*, 237.

<sup>79</sup> Pena, *As Far as Schleiden*, 164-165.

managed to eject and parachuted to within a few feet of their aid station, where he was quickly captured. While they waited for an escort to move the new prisoner, Davis and his fellow Americans made small talk with the pilot. What struck them most was the pilot said that he did not think much of American soldiers and could not figure out how the Americans were winning battles. Despite their best efforts to dissuade him, Davis said the pilot was adamant Germany would win the war in the end.<sup>80</sup> This type of behavior is understandable; Despite things going so badly for the Germans, the pilot still believed in victory, no matter the situation. If the situation was reversed, one could argue Davis might have behaved in the same manner in the face of inevitable defeat.

\* \* \*

Reciprocity was also prevalent after the liberation of Colmar. Brendan Phibbs, a combat surgeon in the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, arrived in Colmar the day after liberation. He traveled in the back of an ambulance along with a psychiatric patient, who spent his trip curled up in the fetal position. As his column tried to make their way through the sea of people, Phibbs came across eight soldiers from Senegal, under French command. Wondering what these men were doing, it dawned on Phibbs that they were a firing squad. "Who were they shooting this soon," Phibbs wondered. "They just took the damned city." When it became clear they were executing Nazi collaborators, Phibbs passed the information on to the other Americans gathered around. They stood there stunned. One man said, "Christ, we just took the place." Other members responded: "They don't screw around with lawyers, these guys." Not wanting to witness the sight, Phibbs proceeded back to his ambulance. There he they asked Phibbs how a person would

---

<sup>80</sup> Davis, *Frozen Rainbows*, 239.

know whom to shoot. To their surprise, the psychiatric patient answered it for them, saying, "When they have traitors for next-door neighbors, of course they know who to shoot. Wouldn't you?" After coming out of his daze, Phibbs noted the man "stuffed his fingers back into his mouth and went back to his frozen contemplation."<sup>81</sup>

\* \* \*

Unfortunately, instances such as the psychiatric patient were not uncommon during the war because of the stress, as well as being away from loved ones. Troy Cox remembers a young Texan who was head over heels in love with his girl back home, whom he constantly talked about. One day, Cox noticed the man was unusually withdrawn. When asked, he said his girl had sent him a "Dear John" letter telling him she was going to marry another man. Their efforts to cheer the man up failed. The next time they went into combat, the handsome Texan walked right into the incoming German fire. His death really affected Cox and his men.<sup>82</sup>

As the stress mounted, the need to keep morale up during the war was constantly present when Cox talked about one of his friends in the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Pfc. Sam Tapp from South Carolina. "In almost every platoon there was a boy who never worried, at least on the outside," he remembered. In Cox's platoon, that person was Tapp, who always seemed to say the right thing at the right time which put the men at ease, whether humorous or insightful. His outward appearance, however, hid the pain Tapp experienced, whose hair turned completely gray from stress. Other men, such as platoon member James Elling, held onto the thought of his wife

---

<sup>81</sup> Brenden Phibbs, *Our War for the World: A Memoir of Life and Death on the Front Lines in World War II* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 1987,2002), 171-172.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Ochs, *Telephone Interview with Troy Cox*, February 8, 2010. See also Ochs, *A Cause Greater than Self*, 106.

back home. "Just the thought of getting back to you is all I am living for now," he wrote.

"However, I think that I have lived through hell on earth."<sup>83</sup>

\* \* \*

The presence of the African colonials, in the case of the Senegalese soldiers executing the French collaborators, brings another issue to the forefront; this was truly a world war being waged. People, culture, and lifestyles of varying degrees were introduced. Arguably, none were more different and bizarre to the American soldiers than the African soldiers who fought under the French flag.

These men were unlike any Brenden Phibbs had seen. One day out looking for ambulances, the combat surgeon stumbled upon a tent full of Algerians and their French officer. As he lit a cigarette, one Algerian came forward and asked him if he had any cigarettes to sell. Phibbs wrote, "Sell them, hell; I was grateful to be alive and among friends: I was ready to give them away." When he suggested this, there came a somber mood within the tent. The French officer suggested he and Phibbs take a walk. The Frenchman explained these men were mercenaries; to them war was a business. To just give the cigarettes away was an insult. They could not accept him as a fellow warrior.<sup>84</sup>

Finding another carton, Phipps followed the officer as he explained, "Bargaining is polite it's important. That carton is worth a thousand francs and you'll have to make them bargain for it. Be prepared to be hard hearted; remember, not bargaining is like spitting on your plate at dinner."<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ochs, *Telephone Interview with Troy Cox*, February 8, 2010; *Letter from James C. Elling to Katrine Irene Elling, May 10, 1945*. Quoted in Ochs, *A Cause Greater than Self*, 106-107.

<sup>84</sup> Phibbs, *Our War for the World*, 173-174.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

Once inside, the negotiations began. The Algerian began at 500 francs. Phibbs played the part well. "I clutched the carton to my bosom and looked sad," he wrote. The African slowly rose his price, but Phibbs continued his act. Phibbs continued, "I dramatized the poverty of my wife and two children in America—the disgrace in my family's eyes if I failed to generate a proper return." Throughout this performance, Phibbs noted, the platoon followed the discussion back and forth, as if they were watching a tennis match.<sup>86</sup>

They two finally settled on a price of 980 francs. Phibbs pretended to be dejected as he handed the carton over to the Algerian who coolly winked at his party. Later, Phibbs and the French officer had a discussion about the Algerians. The officer reiterated they were mercenaries, and made their living for a price. "They're brave for me, they're brave for their careers as professional soldiers. They'll go exactly as far as I lead them; if I don't lead, they don't follow. I am paid more than they are, therefore I'm supposed to be braver than they are." As they left, Phibbs gave the Frenchman more cigarettes than he took without hesitation.<sup>87</sup>

The odd behavior of the Africans probably seemed extremely odd to Phibbs and the other soldiers who interacted with the French colonials. To the Africans, the behavior of the Americans was probably just as bizarre.

\* \* \*

Despite the hardships of the war, soldiers found a few moments of downtime for reflection after the capture of Colmar. The opportunity to go to mass was present for William Pena, who attended mass every day of his life. Using the basement of the church, Pena regarded the sermon as one of devotion and prayer. Pena realized during the service that he was fully

---

<sup>86</sup> Phibbs, *Our War for the World*, 174-175.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.



armed, but this was not a problem. Two days later, on February 5, he attended a mass led by the regimental chaplain, and it was there the priest brought up the execution of Pvt. Eddie Slovik, the only American soldier executed during the war for desertion, and a member of the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The priest said Slovik was the bravest man he ever met when he faced his execution when there were soldiers in combat who did not know when their death would be. Pena also noted that the priest took offense to the Army's action for ordering the execution.<sup>88</sup>

Other men moved around town to aid the civilians. As Brenden Phibbs made rounds with a French nun and an aid man from his unit, he soon made it to a house that had a collapsed roof with an elderly woman inside. She became pinned down for two days when shelling caused the roof to fall and trap her. Her shattered femur awkwardly bent at a 45-degree angle in the middle of her thigh. Phibbs noted it was a miracle her femur had not broken through the skin. Knocking her out with chloroform, Phibbs and his assistants managed to set the leg. With a shot of morphine, Phibbs said 30 minutes later the woman was chatting up a storm about the predicament she had to endure over the past two days. While she spoke, Phibbs, who spoke German (people in Alsace are familiar with a dialect of Upper German known as Alsatian), thought he heard her say a word in Yiddish. Born in New York, where Yiddish was a familiar sound, Phibbs said to her "If I didn't know I was in Alsace I'd think I was in the Bronx. Only a Jewish grandmother could be that funny after everything you've been through." At the mention of "Jewish," Phibbs noted the woman's face turned to terror as she grabbed his sleeve, and asked him how he knew her secret. It took several minutes for her to calm down from the reassurances

---

<sup>88</sup> Pena, *As Far as Schleiden*, 164, 166.

from Phibbs that the Germans were gone. Even then she still said, "I don't believe they're gone; I don't believe they'll ever go."<sup>89</sup>

All the way into Colmar, the woman kept asking for reassurance that her secret was safe. Even though Phibbs assured her, she told him "You still can't trust them. Tell them I French, Alsatian French. Keep our secret." As they entered the hospital, Phibbs told the hospital staff the nature of her wounds. Phibbs wrote in his memoir "The old lady sank her nails into my wrist." He informed the staff that she was Alsatian French. A surprised nurse responded "Well of course she's French. We are all French, thank God." As they wheeled her around the corner, the woman gave Phibbs a wink. A young French doctor asked, "You two got some kind of secret? What's going on?" Phibbs responded, "Yes, you bet we have a secret. A big state secret. I'd be the last to tell you."<sup>90</sup>

\* \* \*

With Colmar secure, things began to fall apart for the Germans. The same day the liberation of Colmar took place, February 2, the Allies began to see a general retreat of the Germans in France. Whether it was Hitler's orders to retreat or the Germans around Colmar, no one knows. But whoever gave the order, it was hastily followed.<sup>91</sup> But the collapse of the Colmar pocket was not quite finished. The Germans on the east side of the river had not completely given up. More importantly, the fortress city of Neuf-Brisach was still in German hands. No one knew how many more casualties it would take before the city fell.

---

<sup>89</sup> Phibbs, *Our War for the World*, 183-184.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>91</sup> Yeide and Stout, *First to the Rhine*, 336.

### Chapter 3

#### Death of the Pocket: The Final Push to Neuf-Brisach, February 1-9, 1945

There was never just a -littleøbattle or -unimportantøbattle because one bullet is all it took to get you killed. You would always be hoping and praying it wouldn't be you. You were completely exhausted most of the time, but you were forced to stay alert in order to survive. You walked like you were in a trance, and kept talking to God to help you.

Troy Cox<sup>1</sup>

As the Colmar Pocket collapsed along with the remaining German defenses, American soldiers shifted their attention to the final part of their mission: to eliminate the German threat on the west side of the Rhine River once and for all. As they moved towards the Rhine, intense and near continuous combat pushed many of the men to the breaking point. Some soldiers who pressed on exhibited remarkable humanity under the pressure of vicious fighting, while many others devolved into a level of barbarism inaugurated by the total war they fought.

Since Colmar had fallen under Allied control, the Colmar-Rouffach Road became the only way for the Germans to escape the Colmar Pocket. As word of the German retreat spread, Allies around Colmar pushed fast to link up with the French I Corps. They were south of Colmar and moved northeast. The newly arrived 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division pushed south from Strasbourg, where it suffered horrendous casualties in the battle of Herrlisheim, and attached to the XXI Corps. The 12<sup>th</sup> attacked eastward on February 3, when elements of the 12<sup>th</sup>ø Combat Command B took bridgeheads at Sundhoffen and Ste. Croix-en-Plaineø both located on the Ill River parallel to the Rhine. Despite early successes, the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored managed to make it only 800

---

<sup>1</sup> Troy Cox, *An Infantryman's Memories of World War II: 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry-Third Division* (Booneville: Brown-Line Printing, 2003), 156-157. Also quoted in Stephen J Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self: The Journey of Captain Michael J. Daly, World War II Medal of Honor Recipient*. (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012), 109.

yards past the bridgeheads before the tired and dogged Germans stopped them. Due to the ineffectiveness of the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored, the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had to relieve the 12<sup>th</sup> on the morning of February 5 to keep up the attack.<sup>2</sup>

Even though Combat Command B struggled, other parts of the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division had better success. One of these groups was Combat Command A, who had only been in Colmar for a few hours. At around 1600 on February 4, they moved out to attack the town of Hattstatt. Their goal was to push through and make it to the village of Rouffach. As Combat Command A approached Hattstatt, the unit received fire. German fire took out three tanks. Despite the adversity, Combat Command A seized the town and captured around 50 troops. In the early morning of February 5, the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored began to move to the village of Rouffach, ten miles south of Colmar. Along the way, the Allies destroyed several horse-drawn transports. That same day, elements of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion prepared to assault on the town. Uneasy with the prospect of renewed street-to-street fighting, the American troops nevertheless got ready for the attack.<sup>3</sup>

Once they sealed the exit to Rouffach, the Americans slowly moved into town. Their goal was to link with the small force of French Moroccans who moved in from the other side of town. Company C of the 66<sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion entered town right before dawn but met no real resistance. All the obstacles they encountered were for show. The Allies took the town without bloodshed and captured the entire enemy force, totaling fifteen German soldiers. The French and American commanders met at 0800 at the center of town, ironically the intersection

---

<sup>2</sup> Harry Yeide and Mark Stout, *First to the Rhine: The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group in World War II* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2007) 336.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

of Adolf Hitler Strasse and Herman Goering Strasse. The Moroccan soldiers who assisted the GIs were quite different from what the Americans experienced in combat. According to Clarence Blakeslee, the Moroccan troops had mules and wore uniforms that looked like bathrobes. We were told that their wives traveled with them.<sup>4</sup>

There was no denying the feeling of the French in Rouffach: "The people lined the streets and cheered as we came in," Weston Emery, a member of Company C, 66<sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Regiment remembered, and "gave us wine and cognac." A few days later while on patrol, Emery and other GIs stopped at a small school-house near Rouffach. "We looked through the school books [and] wrote our names in the Attendance Record," Emery remembered, adding the patrol also "had a lesson on Germany, and left our thoughts of Hitler on the blackboard. Don't remember who the teacher was that day." In the three days since the 12<sup>th</sup> Armored arrived in the Colmar Pocket, they took 548 prisoners, killed nearly 300, and wounded another 850. With the capture of Rouffach, American forces had effectively split the Colmar Pocket. All along the break, the Allied forces took large numbers of prisoners. *New York Times* correspondent Clifton Daniel, who later served as editor of the newspaper, estimated the Allies had captured some 10,000 Germans prisoner since the offensive began on January 20.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

---

<sup>4</sup>Owsley C. Costlow, ed., *Combat Highlights of the United States Twelfth Armored Division In the European Theater of Operations 1 December-30 May 1945* (Prepared by G-3 Service and Education Section, July 12, 1954) 3; Weston Lewis Emery, *C-66: A World War II Chronicle of an Armored Infantry Company* (Camden: Penobscot Press, 1992) 153, Clarence Blakeslee, *A Personnel Account of WWII by Draftee #3688714* (Rockford: *The Rockford Squire*, 1998), 110.

<sup>5</sup> Emery, *C-66*, 153-155; Costlow, *Combat Highlights of the United States Twelfth Armored Division In the European Theater of Operations 1 December-30 May 1945*, 1; Clifton Daniel, "Pocket Yielding Foe," *New York Times*, February 7, 1945, 1.

With Horbourg captured, the main escape route for the Germans disappeared, which enabled French armor to move on the town of Andolsheim. By the end of February 1, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division occupied a line which extended in between the Ill River to the Rhine-Rhone Canal and stretched on a line from Horbourg to the Bois de Biesheim, and ended again along the Rhine-Rhone Canal. The further objective for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry was to continue south and seize the fortress city of Neuf-Brisach. If this action succeeded, the two bridges the Germans used for their escape would be denied.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning at 0100 on February 1, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment pushed off and moved through the Bois de Biesheim to eliminate German resistance west of the Rhine-Rhone Canal. Shortly after dawn, lead elements of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion reached their objective and fired on enemy vehicles. By noon on February 1, they had captured over 100 prisoners. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion reached their objective in the early morning as well but suffered heavy casualties when they made their way through the woods of Biesheim. Many wounds occurred from tree bursts.

Tree bursts provided an extra worry for the Americans. They first experienced this type of attack in the Fall of 1944, when American soldiers first entered the Hurtgen Forest in Belgium. As the GIs advanced in the woods, the Germans launched artillery with timed fuses, with the intent on the shells exploding among the trees above the Americans. The GIs instinctively dove to the ground, just like training dictated. By dropping to the ground, however, the GIs not only exposed themselves to shell fragments but large splinters which traveled as fast

---

<sup>6</sup> Edgar B. Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment: 22 January-8 February, 1945: The Colmar Pocket* (Seventh U.S. Army, March 1945), 78.

as a bullet that could become lodged in the skin and muscle. They learned to adapt quickly by hugging the nearest tree.<sup>7</sup>

By 1600(4 p.m.) hours, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment captured a battery of 150mm artillery guns that the Germans did not have time to destroy before they fled. At the same time, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion employed mortar fire to sink German barges tied up in the canal. Late the next night, February 2, a patrol from Company E reached the northern ramparts of Neuf-Brisach to gather reconnaissance on the height of the defenses. When the men returned, they reported the walls were 17-18 feet high.<sup>8</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment also had to cross the Rhine-Rhone Canal to meet their objective. The Germans fired on them as they approached. Since the Americans expected heavy fire, tanks accompanied them. When the German artillery opened on the Americans, the tanks backed up. Bert Craft remembered, "There was a young man who was so tired he couldn't function properly, and he didn't get out of the way of the tank and it backed over him. I will never forget the death scream he gave as he was crushed beneath the tank. It was nerve racking to know that a life had been taken so needlessly by one of our own."<sup>9</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry advanced into Artzenheim and Kunheim and opened their attack at dawn on February 2 following an artillery barrage. Despite the massive amount of fire, all the rounds landed behind the town. As they moved in, they met sporadic resistance, since many Germans

---

<sup>7</sup> Edward G. Miller, *A Dark and Bloody Ground: The Hurtgen Forest and the Roer River Dams, 1944-1945*(College Station: Texas A&M University Press,1995),33. See also Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers, The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945*(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997),167.

<sup>8</sup> Rupert Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press,1947), 319- 320.

<sup>9</sup> W. Bert Craft. *Agony of Hell* (Paducah: Turner Publishing Company,1994), 84.

had already made a hasty retreat out of the town. With Artzenheim in Allied hands, the regiment moved to the second objective, the town of Kunheim. As before, artillery preceded the assault. Unlike the previous barrage, however, the fire on Kunheim was extremely accurate. Much of the town was now on fire. The men dealt with a new enemy as they moved forward. As January turned into February, snow around Colmar started to melt, turning the region into a mud pit. As one company of the 7<sup>th</sup> moved in from the north, another company proceeded to flank the town and move in from the south. All of those on hand anticipated fire from the Germans. But Kunheim fell without a shot. American troops took several German soldiers and civilians from cellars in the town. Excited civilians presented their liberators with souvenir Nazi banners as well as eggs, chickens, and jam to the famished soldiers. As the men sat around and waited to move out again, discussions about their mission broke out. "Taking these smelly little villages was getting monotonous," one soldier stated. The next day, the 7<sup>th</sup> heard Colmar had fallen. Despite the good news, German traffic crossing the bridge at Neuf-Brisach was still very much a problem. Some GIs believed the Germans would try to make a stand before the Allies reached the town. With Kunheim secure, the men took a short rest. Many of them slept in beds with real sheets. In the meantime, engineers built a bailey bridge over a canal south of the town.<sup>10</sup>

The next task for the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was to take control of the village of Biesheim. Biesheim looked like many of the villages around Alsace. Before the war, it was the most prosperous town around Neuf-Brisach. When the Germans marched into France in 1940, most of

---

<sup>10</sup>Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 81-82; John C. McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage: The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's Combat Experience, 1812 through World War II* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2009), 496.



Biesheim's inhabitants fled, only to return once the German conquest was complete—minus the Jewish inhabitants.<sup>11</sup>

This was where the German chose to make their stand before Neuf-Brisach. Defenses for the town were like those the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment encountered around Jepsheim a few days earlier. If Biesheim fell, the Germans in what was left of the Colmar Pocket would be finished and they knew it, because communication and supply lines would be severed. The Germans had stored large quantities of ammunition and food in the town. Aerial reconnaissance showed trenches dug north of Biesheim as well as machine gun nests and reinforced bunkers. Dense grape vines north of also made their advance difficult across flat, open terrain. The attack, therefore, would be made in the middle of the night. Again, as with the other towns, artillery preceded the assault. As the artillery let loose, the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment waited in shin-deep mud for the order to move forward.<sup>12</sup>

Companies I and K made the initial advance. Some rode tanks, while others trudged through the mud, careful to stay out from behind the tanks in case they had to back up quickly, for fear of getting crushed under the treads. As they moved, the GIs passed what they thought were several deserted foxholes. As they passed the trenches, however, German fire from behind opened from the foxholes they had just bypassed. Dark conditions, in tandem with excellent concealment, had allowed the hiding Germans to go unnoticed. Their fire killed several Americans and wounded many others, who fell in the mud as tracers illuminated the darkness. Capt. Francis Kret, Commander of Company K, ordered the men to move in on the trenches ahead of them. They

---

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self: The Journey of Captain Michael J. Daly, World War II Medal of Honor Recipient*. (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012)112.

<sup>12</sup> Mooney, Seventh, *United States Infantry Regiment*, 83; Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self*, 112.

successfully reached the trenches only to find them filled with Germans equipped with small arms, machine guns, as well as the Panzerfaust, the German antitank weapon similar to the bazooka. The trenches also had angles which prevented them from shooting directly down the length of the trench. The American troops fought desperately in close-quarter combat and eliminated the resistance in a portion of the trenches. They then tossed the lifeless bodies of the Germans from the trench in order to make more room, one soldier recalled, who added, a scream would pierce the night when a soldier was hit.<sup>13</sup>

As they moved west, Company K continued to clear out German soldiers. They acted under the guise of "Take no prisoners," and shot anyone who surrendered, mainly because they did not have the manpower to deal with captives. The men who took part in this action were not the least bit bashful when they discussed the circumstances of what they had done.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 85. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 496.

<sup>14</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 85.



**Figure 8. Forrest Peden**

After several hours of especially brutal fighting, the GIs in the trenches started to run out of supplies. Medics had to treat a growing number of wounded in the mud. While these men battled the Germans in close quarters, the extraordinary heroism of one soldier emerged as they fought in the trenches. Forrest Peden (Fig. 8) was not a member of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment but was instead a part of Battery C, 10<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. As an observer, he accompanied the infantry to call down artillery. With his radio disabled, Peden sprang into action and rendered aid to two wounded infantrymen while under heavy fire. He realized the situation the men in the trenches faced if support was not brought in. He ran 800 yards through mud and heavy fire (a bullet pierced his jacket) and reached Battalion Command where he acquired two light tanks to aid the GIs. Knowing what was at stake, Peden climbed up on one of the tanks to direct them since there was

little moonlight. As they reached the ditch, the tanks prepared to engage the Germans, but the enemy was quicker. They struck the tank carrying Peden, and he died in a ball of flame. But the light the tank produced allowed other members of the battalion to come to the aid of Company K. For his sacrifice, Peden was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.<sup>15</sup>

As Company K held out, members of Company I progressed towards Biesheim in another section of the trenches. Unlike Company K, Company I advanced with tank support. This allowed them to viciously attack the enemy positions and cut down those Germans who tried to make a break for it. Others became caught in the mud and crushed under the treads of the American tanks. Company I skirted around Biesheim, and at 0400, they began to clear houses one by one. Once they broke into a house, the men of Company I had to face fire from all manner of weapons by Germans determined to hold the town. To add to this mess, they also took fire from German snipers.<sup>16</sup>

As Company I searched the town, a small portion of Company K managed to regroup with what little manpower they had and moved around the west side of Biesheim. As they entered the town, they threw grenades into houses on the outskirts of the village. This caused the Germans inside to retreat. Down to only 13 men, the GIs set up defensive positions, but they had the unknown on their side. The Germans, not knowing how many Americans there were, did not attack. Had they known, one staff member remembered, "they certainly would have charged the buildings."<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Alan Bourdius, "Technician Fifth Grade Forrest E. Pedan, USA (February 3, 1945)", *Finest Hour*, last updated February 6, 2015, accessed August 29, 2017, <http://theirfinesthour.net/2015/02/peden/>; Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment 85*; Donald Taggart, ed., *History of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 319; *Medal of Honor Citation for Forrest Pedan*, February 13, 1946.

<sup>16</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 87-88.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

At the same time Companies I and K moved toward Biesheim, other elements of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment prepared to attack. Companies C, E, and F moved across footbridges at Kunheim to attack Biesheim from the west. They encountered fire from the Germans directly south of Kunheim. As they arrived at the trench system around Biesheim, American Armor opened on the Germans. The fire from the tanks was so devastating the infantry did not have to stop and bypassed the trenches without so much as a look inside. Due to the artillery that set Biesheim on fire, the visibility was excellent. The three companies entered the town, cleared out a few houses, and set up defensive positions, and along with the rest of Company K, waited for the inevitable counterattack.<sup>18</sup>

The anticipated counterattack began around dawn on February 3 when about 50 German infantrymen advanced towards Company F's defensive position, unaware of the trap set for them in the form of two American machine guns. The two guns fired and caught the Germans by surprise. Of those that were not killed, the rest either took off or raised their hands in surrender.<sup>19</sup>

\* \* \*

Most of Company K was still inside the trench system north of town, where the wounded still piled up. Capt. Kret was down to 14 unwounded men, low on ammunition, and in desperate need of food and water. He called back on the radio in desperation, simply saying, "I'd sure like to see you guys again." Despite their precarious situation, what remained of Company K refused to give in. Germans on the road across from them opened fire, and Kret was heard to say "Ouch!"

---

<sup>18</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 93-94.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 94&97.

as he fell to the ground, wounded. Despite the wounds, he maintained the order of his men, and the line held.<sup>20</sup>

Right before dark, Maj. Duncan, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Commander, ordered elements of Company E, along with one tank, to the east of Biesheim, to aid Companies K and L. The three companies laid down concentrated fire into the northern section of Biesheim from three sides. Following the intense firefight, around 50 Germans surrendered. American troops put the prisoners in the cellar of a nearby house. Most prisoners had their hands in the air, but a member of Company I noticed one POW walk up to the entrance with his hands in his pockets. With a grin on his face he "looked like he owned the place." In response, another American exclaimed "Handy-Ho, you son-of-a-bitch!" The German began to take out his hands, but not with the speed the Americans liked. The GI proceeded to kick the German in the face, "Wiping the smile off the bastard's face." The force of the kick sent the German rolling down the stairs, to which he promptly got up and continued hands high in the air.<sup>21</sup>

The men fighting in Biesheim were not the only ones who faced a stressful situation in the attack. Russell Cloer, the commander of Headquarters Company, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, was back at Company Headquarters in Kunheim, about a mile away. Ten days earlier, Cloer went into combat with six officers of the company. Ten days later, three of the officers were dead and two others received wounds serious enough to need evacuation. By default, Cloer was now Headquarters Company Commander. Inside the Company CP, there were blackout conditions. Army blankets covered the windows. Cloer was writing a letter by candlelight. There was no electricity to light the glass fixtures above him. As he wrote, the owner of the house came up from

---

<sup>20</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 94&97.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

the cellar and talked to Cloer's sergeant. Distracted, Cloer got up to see what the discussion was about. Cloer recalled "As I got out of my chair, a shell burst in a tree outside the house. I saw glass fragments falling down on the table. A shell fragment had come through the shutter, smashed the glass lighting fixture, went through the leather back of the chair I had been sitting in and lodged in the wall behind the chair. If I hadn't moved, I would have been dead, no question about it."<sup>22</sup>

Even though Biesheim was now clear, Company K still took fire in the trenches north of town. Company L went to assist. They fired as fast as they could to trick the enemy into believing it was a larger force than it really was. They screamed "Handy Ho!" as loud as they could as they moved forward in the mud. When they heard Company L approach, the men of Company K fired voraciously and used up the last of their ammunition. 45 Germans realized the situation they were in and wisely surrendered. As Company L cleaned out the rest of the trenches, they took more prisoners, with a few wounded Germans. "We shot the wounded Germans," the men of Company L explained, "because we only had twenty men and couldn't fool with them."<sup>23</sup>

As the battle for Biesheim ended, the men who took part reflected upon their sacrifice. Casualties were 26 killed, 77 wounded, and 350 prisoners. They built fires inside the cellars to dry their clothes. One soldier summed up the struggle for Biesheim, which could probably be agreed upon by all the 7<sup>th</sup> men who took part, by simply stating, "That was a son-of-a-bitch!"<sup>24</sup>

\* \* \*

At dawn on the morning of February 3, as the men of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion struggled at Biesheim, the GIs of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion assaulted a German position that was harassing the town.

---

<sup>22</sup> Sandra Stewart Holyoak, *An Interview with Russell W. Cloer for the Rutgers Oral History Program*, September 11, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 101.

This target was ironic as the Allies fought their way into Germany in the Spring of 1945. Their objective would be the Cemetery je Juif, a Jewish Cemetery on the outskirts of Biesheim. Just getting to the cemetery was stressful for 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.<sup>25</sup> As the battalion approached the cemetery, they came under fire by the Germans. Bert Craft yelled at three of his men to separate. One of the men responded, "Aw, the hells with the Germans," Craft recalled. "And no sooner than he had gotten this out of his mouth, a mortar shell fell in between them and got all three. I don't know how many machine guns, but they were raking the open field and our guys were dropping like flies."<sup>26</sup>

Because of the fire, members of Company C withdrew 400 yards back, where they stayed for the rest of the morning. Company A was also fired upon and took defensive position along a dike around the cemetery. These men saw other troops west of their position and did not know if they were American or Germans out in the field since they did not have any field glasses. After some thought, they decided they were the enemy and fired on them. The opposing side returned fire. "That sounds like an M-1," one man said, to which the platoon leader, Lt. Albert Kelly responded, "Hell no! that's Kraut!" Company A immediately called for artillery. Falling short, the GIs called for a correction, but the fire ceased. The reason was because the soldiers Company A fired upon and called artillery fire down on *was* American. It was a group of reinforcements sent to bolster Company K in the trenches. Once it became clear, by way of the artillery, that they prepared to engage friendly troops, combat ceased. Company A attempted to make their way into

---

<sup>25</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 101; W. Bert Craft. *Agony of Hell*, 84.

<sup>26</sup> W. Bert Craft, *Agony of Hell*, 85.



the cemetery. This time, however, they met the real enemy. This halted their advance. Company B also had difficulty on the way to the cemetery.<sup>27</sup>

At around 1430(2:30 p.m.) hours, Allied artillery pummeled the cemetery. As the fire let up, Company B with tank support attacked the German position in the cemetery. They came under fire as they approached, which caused them to move back from the cemetery to their former positions for the rest of the day. Shortly after midnight on February 4, Company C tried their luck against the Germans. They climbed aboard tanks and proceeded slowly forward. As they moved forward, German machine guns opened on the tanks. "Would you believe those silly Germans opened up on us with machine gun fire," Bert Craft remembered. The tanks returned fire, and the sound they caused was deafening. "My ears were ringing, and I almost fell off the tank," Craft wrote. He dismounted and yelled at his men to move forward and get the Germans. As he reached one of the machine guns, the German had their hands in the air, ready to surrender. Craft's blood was up as he reached the guns. He went directly for the gunner. He reached over the machine gun, grabbed the gunner by the hair with his left hand, jerked him out of the foxhole over the machine gun, and took him prisoner. By dawn, they had cleared a large section of the cemetery. The rest of the battalion followed suit, and they all set up defensive positions.<sup>28</sup>

At dawn, a few hours later, members of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment relieved the men around the cemetery. Company C moved back into the town where they started from when they pushed to the cemetery. But when they got back, everyone's adrenaline was up. Sleep was out of the question. Bert Craft took a walk on his own. As he walked, a Captain drove up with a prisoner in his jeep.

---

<sup>27</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 102-103.

<sup>28</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 104; Craft, *The Agony Hell*, 86-87. See also McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage*, 497.

The Captain said, "Say, soldier, were you in the fight for the cemetery?" When Craft said he was, the officer asked if he wanted to have the commanding German officer who had put up the resistance. When Craft showed interest at the prospect, the Captain answered, "I got him in the back seat. The son of a bitch won't talk." Sensing fear in the Germans eyes, Craft said, "Well, captain, please turn him over to me, and I'll shoot the son of a bitch." The captain laughed and said he was taking him to the rear, where they would get the information out. Craft said good luck and if he needed help that he was in Company C and would love to take care of the man. This battle was one of the strangest battles Craft had participated in during the war, and one of the most brutal in terms of casualties, something he found ironic since it took place in a cemetery.<sup>29</sup>

The men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment who relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> included Audie Murphy. As he crawled over a stone wall alone to reconnoiter, Murphy realized he had entered the cemetery. He remembered, "Some of the graves are covered with mica; and the glitter with the light of the striking moon. We are in luck. The wall extends entirely around the place; and in case of attack, the tombstones and grave mounds will be handy as cover." He signaled the rest of his men to enter, and they promptly dug in and set the watch. Murphy himself took the guard on the gate. Not wanting to sit down because he was afraid he would fall asleep, Murphy leaned against a tombstone. "Once I risked closing my eyes and immediately drop off to sleep," Murphy said. "I'm awake with a jerk. I cannot take that chance again." Taking out his pistol from the holster, he held it at waist-length with both hands. That way, "The next time I doze the gun slips from my fingers, strikes my feet, and brings me back to consciousness."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 105; Craft, *The Agony Hell*, 87.

<sup>30</sup> Audie Murphy, *To Hell and Back* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949), 261.

Once the sun rose, Murphy saw what he and men were up against. As Murphy looked through a hole in the wall, he saw a group of Germans out in an open field, directly outside the cemetery perimeter. He noticed a German sergeant wake and ordered the other men under his command to get up. One of Murphy's men took notice, and as he measured the distance for fire, he said, "Dying at reveille is going to be easy, they can just turn over and go back to sleep forever." As the Germans rose out of bed, Murphy and his men counted about twenty of the enemy. The GIs fired, and several Germans dropped. As the Germans tried to get a sense of what direction the fire came from, two more Germans fell. The others wisely surrendered. "Okay men," Murphy barked, "go out and get them."<sup>31</sup> With that, Murphy and his men eliminated resistance around the cemetery.

\* \* \*

Following the brutal and costly fighting through the Colmar Pocket, there lay only one more obstacle left for the Allies in France: the fortress town of Neuf-Brisach. Founded in 1669 at the request of Louis XIV and built by the master fortress builder the Marquis de Vauban, many consider the fortress his finest work. Even though there was a town located within the walls, Vauban constructed it from a military standpoint. This included not only circular ramparts around the entire length, but inside of the fort as well. From the air, it looks almost impregnable. Also from the air, another aspect of the town becomes noticeable. The outline and layout give Neuf-Brisach the resemblance to a waffle iron (Fig. 9). The Americans nicknamed the town "waffle city." According to the official G-2 History of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group, "It's very shape

---

<sup>31</sup> Murphy, *To Hell and Back*, 261-262.

suggested an unbroken outer perimeter bristling with hostile rifles, machine pistols, and machine guns.<sup>32</sup>

From a military standpoint, it would have been insane not to fortify Neuf-Brisach to the hilt to make it the Germans' last stand in France. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian war, French soldiers held out inside Neuf-Brisach for an entire month. Since the German goal was to disrupt and harass Allied troops on the west side of the Rhine as long as possible, they had the perfect defensive position to do just that. Intelligence reports estimated there were possibly as many as one thousand Germans inside the city. Aerial reconnaissance believed the capture of Neuf-Brisach would be difficult but was ultimately inevitable. As the Allies prepared to assault the town, French First Army Commander Jean de Lattre de Tassigny mocked, "Enclosed within its ramparts, in the century-old moats and raised drawbridges, the strange military city remained enigmatical. We made ready for medieval assault, with ladders and battering rams-and, if necessary, the addition of artificial moonlight!"<sup>33</sup> Despite the joke, it was not a stretch to say the men whose task it was to take the town probably felt a little apprehensive.

---

<sup>32</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 105; *Final Report, G-2 Section, Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group* (U.S. Army Military History Institute), 51; Clarke and Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 534. See also online version, accessed August 29, 2017, <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-E-Riviera/USA-E-Riviera-29.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 105; Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), 395.



**Figure 9. Ariel view of Neuf-Brisach, showing the distinctive “waffle iron” layout.**

The plan of attack for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in the early morning of February 5 called for the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to attack straight south from Biesheim. They were between the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on the left alongside the Rhine River and the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on the right moving south along the Rhine-Rhone Canal. The 7<sup>th</sup> had been ordered to avoid the roads because they thought they were heavily defended. They therefore moved across the open fields. Jump-off time for the attack was shortly after midnight. As the 7<sup>th</sup> proceeded, they encountered trenches like those around Biesheim. Company I bypassed them and continued to move. Suddenly, fire opened from the trenches from the behind them. They fell into the same trap

Company K had a few days earlier at Biesheim. They were fortunate, however, thanks to accompanying tanks that quickly fired into the trenches. Other 7<sup>th</sup> men entered the trenches and eliminated any threats that remained. This caused somewhat of a problem when the American and German fire became mixed. After they reorganized, they continued south towards their first two objectives, a tobacco plant and a railroad station. There they captured 15 Germans along with a food cart. Their last meal had been awhile, so the cart was promptly brought into the factory, where they distributed the hot coffee and bologna to the famished soldiers. Other Germans, who were not seen in the original advance, moved towards the factory, unaware of the GIs presence. Once the Germans realized their situation, they promptly surrendered. Further searches of the factory uncovered large quantities of supplies and ammunition. Americans also discovered a supply of cognac, which they hastily seized and distributed.<sup>34</sup>

As they pushed further south, some GIs in the 7<sup>th</sup> found a warehouse and captured 28 Germans who surrendered without firing a shot. Clearing out other buildings in the area and meeting only slight resistance, the GIs, which comprised the 35 men left of Company L, made defensive positions. They soon became aware of Germans dug in all around them. They had to deal with any Germans who moved on their positions. Searchlights provided enough light for the men to distinguish when someone moved towards them, and the GIs challenged them. If they responded in German, the Americans fired. Soon after dawn, Company L observed two groups of enemies moving towards Neuf-Brisach, totaling about 60 men, all of them armed. They held their fire and waited until the Germans were about 400 yards away. The order "Give 'em hell!" was shouted; the GIs all opened up at the same time, and the Germans scattered. One German

---

<sup>34</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 106-108; G-2 Section, *Final Report, G-2 Section, Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group*, 51.

realized the hopelessness of the situation and rose from the mud, his hands in the air. Others followed suit, holding white handkerchiefs.<sup>35</sup>

While 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion seized the approaches to Neuf-Brisach, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion moved to the village of Vogelsheim, located directly west of Neuf-Brisach. Approaching the town in the mud, the GIs were on mounted armor support. As they approached the town, the GIs received artillery fire. This was not German fire, however, but from American artillery. The friendly fire caused several wounds. The advance continued, however. As they entered Vogelsheim, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion men cleared the houses of Germans, and set up defensive positions. Bert Craft had a difficult time getting his men to make defensive positions. He remembered, "Being raw recruits, my scouts we afraid. I couldn't get anything out of them. I kept yelling and yelling at them to go, to knock out windows and locked doors." After breaking windows and tossing grenades inside, Craft and his men succeeded to clear out the houses along the street.<sup>36</sup>

Close to 0100, as 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion moved to their objectives, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion jumped off and moved towards Caserne Abbatucci, a military barrack built before World War I. Companies E and G rode upon the armor, while Company F followed along on foot. After about 200 yards, Germans opened on the GIs. The Germans were in trenches south of Biesheim. This position was in the Jewish Cemetery, still in German hands at the time. The forward companies, along with the armor, pushed forwards towards Caserne Abbatucci. Back in Biesheim, Company F prepared to move. Right before they pushed off, one of the tanks in support was hit and set on fire. The fire caused enough light for the Germans to bring down artillery. The German fire confused the GIs, and it took three hours for them to regroup and make their attack. They moved on the

---

<sup>35</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 109-110.

<sup>36</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 111; Craft, *The Agony of Hell*, 89-90.

trenches which had fired on the other elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. By 0700, Company F had made contact with the rest of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.<sup>37</sup>

The next morning, Germans counterattacked Bert Craft's company. "We were looking out across a field and there was a company of Germans running towards the town, shooting and, boy, did they look awesome," Craft wrote. "I'm telling you they looked like supermen." Craft and his men fired with everything they had. He estimated he shot up half of his ammunition. While he fired, he happened to look over at one of his men, and to his surprise, he had his head down and was crying. Craft asked the man "What in the hell is wrong with you? Why aren't you shooting those damn Krauts?" The soldier in question was of German descent and said, "Oh, I can't shoot my flesh and blood." Craft threw his empty gun at the man and said, "Load it, and give me yours." Craft kept his fire up as the man loaded for him.<sup>38</sup>

The conflict the young soldier faced was a common theme throughout the ETO, even though most chose to do their duty. Why was there conflict? It was simple numbers: Of the millions of Americans fighting across Europe, one-fourth of them could trace their family back to Germany.<sup>39</sup> When the young man said he could not shoot his flesh and blood, he could have very well been correct thinking his enemy could literally be members of his own family. In the end, however what he felt was irrelevant. Whether he fired his weapon or not, the Germans would die in large numbers throughout the war.

---

<sup>37</sup> Mooney, *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment*, 111-112; "La Caserne Abbatucci", *Commune de Vogelshheim*, Accessed November 15, 2016, [http://www.vogelshheim.fr/Au\\_fil\\_du\\_temps/La\\_Caserne\\_Abbatucci.html](http://www.vogelshheim.fr/Au_fil_du_temps/La_Caserne_Abbatucci.html); G-2 Section, *Final Report, Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group*, 52.

<sup>38</sup> Craft, *The Agony of Hell*, 92-93.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 228.



After the attack, French Moroccans brought a group of German prisoners to Biesheim. A German prisoner came up to Craft and asked for a cigarette. As they talked, Craft asked the man how things were in Germany. To his surprise, the German said morale was very high, and once the Allies were across the Rhine River, the Germans would counterattack and drive the Allies back into the English Channel. All Craft could do was to laugh and tell the whipped German they lost for a second time.<sup>40</sup>

While the GIs of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment advanced south, the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had also moved in the same direction south of Biesheim. After about 800 yards, elements of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion observed a two-story structure surrounded by barbed wire, with at least 25 German entrenched. The Germans promptly opened fire. Michael Daly, a platoon commander in Company A, had to react quickly, or lose the few men he had left. As he ordered his men to fall back into a ditch, Daly stood up and drew the enemy fire, allowing his men to retreat. For the next half-hour, Daly moved back and forth in the open to draw fire. Thanks to Daly, his men could move and make their way to the company area. Daly followed his men and encouraged those men wounded to keep moving.<sup>41</sup>

As they reached the company area, Daly gave his report on the German strongpoint. The 60 remaining men in the company had orders to attack the position. They had to cross 500 yards through a field that had thawed and turned to mud. Troy Cox, who served with Daly, said, "We couldn't run in at all in the mud, and would fall because it was so soft." During the dash, Cox, who was a machine gunner, tripped and fell. His machine gun, which had numerous holes for cooling, became packed with mud. Due to the hazardous terrain, only 19 men made it to the wall

---

<sup>40</sup> Craft, *The Agony of Hell*, 93.

<sup>41</sup> Craft, *The Agony of Hell*, 93-94; Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self*, 113.

of the house. As armor support cleared a hole, the GIs made their way through and seized the house and the defensive positions around it. After the attack, Cox made his way around to the back of the house where he found a young German, bleeding badly. Not wanting the boy to just die, the GIs searched and found a German medic among the prisoners. As he looked over the boy, the medic stood up and said, "Kaput, Kaput." There was nothing he could do for the boy. Some of the Americans moved the injured boy to the porch, where he died. Cox was not at a loss for words when he described this boy's death. "You shoot the enemy," he noted, "yet sometimes, it hurts even to see your enemy die. I believe that was the first time that I had ever felt sorry for a German. I looked at the young man and thought, such a young waste of life."<sup>42</sup> Daly felt the same sadness about the boy but blamed his death to the Adolf Hitler's intent to rule the world.<sup>43</sup>

The somber mood was not felt for long. The Germans fired self-propelled artillery at the Americans to prevent the GIs from using the crossroads. Company A moved up to take more houses around the crossroads. The enemy fired on them as well. The Company A clerk later noted 25 men killed or missing that day. By that evening, however, the German fire had stopped, as the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry captured all their objectives.<sup>44</sup>

\* \* \*

The push of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment forced the Germans to destroy their bridges in the Colmar Pocket. The Germans, with nowhere else to go, moved south. Around 0800 on the morning of February 5, they began to leave Neuf-Brisach in large numbers. 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry soldiers had "a field day" as they fired on the masses as they retreated. Artillery and mortars also

---

<sup>42</sup> Troy Cox, *An Infantryman's Memories of World War II: 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry-Third Division* (Booneville: Brown-Line Printing, 2003), 104-105. See also Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self*, 114, 116-117.

<sup>43</sup> Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self*, 114, 116-117.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

responded. Bodies were literally torn apart, and along with abandoned equipment, were strewn all over the area. Screaming voices could also be heard in the German positions. Those not wounded fled in chaos. The German retreat was further compounded by the fact that they retreated directly toward French forces moving north. The next morning, February 6, U.S. infantry was ready to make an all-out assault on Neuf-Brisach. According to the official G-2 history of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group:

When fighting soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Infantry Divisions 7<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments began filing across secretly constructed footbridges over the Fecht River below Guemar on the evening of 22 January, most knew their final objective. To others would befall a triumphant entry into the city of Colmar. Men of the Third Infantry Division visualized another task-that of taking the fortified town of Neuf-Brisach.<sup>45</sup>

The task of taking the city fell to the hardened veterans of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Col. Lionel McGarr, the regimental commander, told the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion commander, Lt. Colonel Porter, that he wanted the waffle for breakfast. The soldiers had to deliver. On the night of February 5-6, a small patrol maneuvered to the northeast side of the city, with the mission to see if a railroad bridge into town was still standing. As they arrived at the bridge, the GIs found it rigged to blow, but otherwise intact. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, under the impression they would have to climb the walls of Neuf-Brisach, began to gather ladders and rope. On the morning of February 6, as the rest of the battalion prepared for the attack, a small three-man patrol reached the north wall and contacted a German machine gun. Around 1000 hours, the patrol noticed a white flag flying above the entrance to town. At the same time, another platoon moved along the south wall. As they neared the railroad bridge they observed a civilian and after they talked he reluctantly took them to a dry moat which contained a 60-foot tunnel that led directly into the city. Another group

---

<sup>45</sup> G-2 Section, *Final Report, G-2 Section, Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group*, 51.

encountered two young children who also led them into town. The Germans in town were more than ready to surrender. In one building alone, 38 Germans surrendered, while others surrendered in small groups. Out of an estimated 1,000 men Allies believed were in the city, 76 were in the town. Regarding the town's lack of defense, de Tassigny noted, "Vauban would have probably been somewhat embittered at knowing that men could fight for a day in open country in contempt of a strong fortress he had carefully constructed." In an extreme moment of irony, several of the German prisoners said the night before, February 5, the officers instructed this small group to fight to the last man. The officers then promptly took off.<sup>46</sup>

From here the noose around the Germans tightened. By February 9, they had possession of only four villages in France. That morning, the bridge across the Rhine River at the town of Chalampe blew up seconds before French troops arrived to seize the bridge.<sup>47</sup> The Colmar Offensive was over.

Even before the fighting ended, De Tassigny felt he needed to address the men with Order of the Day No.6:

Officers, N.C.O.s, corporals and soldiers, American and French, of the French First Army. I cannot await the end of this bitter and victorious battle to tell you of my joy and gratitude. For almost three weeks I have given you no respite, and night and day I have cried to you, harshly and ceaselessly: Forward! It was Necessary! Thank you my dear American comrades, who have brought us your courage and have spared nothing, neither your arms nor your blood to help us. As to you, my dear French comrades, you can claim with rightful pride that you have been the artisans of a great national event of which our children will speak with emotion and respect. The Germans have been driven from the sacred soil of France. He shall not return!<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> *Final Report, G-2 Section, Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group, 54-55; Phrome, History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II, 323.*

<sup>47</sup> Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II, 397.*

<sup>48</sup> de Tassigny, *The History of the French First Army, 399-400.*

In terms of casualties, both sides suffered. Estimates for the Americans are about 8,000 total with approximately 500 killed. The French suffered about double those numbers. German losses were much higher: 22,000 total casualties. German high officials estimated about 10,000 men got across the Rhine, but probably no more than 400 or 500 were actually combat soldiers. The 198<sup>th</sup> Division only evacuated around 500 men, with the 338<sup>th</sup> only 400. The 719<sup>th</sup> Division escaped mostly intact, only because they crossed the Rhine on February 3. The Germans abandoned 55 armored vehicles as well as 66 pieces of artillery. Regarding the level of fighting, both the French and the Americans had to deal with many obstacles to clear out the Colmar Pocket. For example, the official history of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment states, "During the sixteen-day period, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, reinforced, had captured 22 towns, more than 4,000 prisoners, and killed an enemy total disproportionately high to the total captured. It virtually destroyed the 708<sup>th</sup> VG (Volksgranadier) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountain Divisions, badly mauled the 189<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> VG and destroyed great quantities of all types of German materials."<sup>49</sup> The figures for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division are probably representative of what took place in the entire Colmar Pocket.

With the complete fall of the Colmar Pocket, the last German forces abandoned Alsace, and completely liberated France from significant Nazi scourge. Even though France was free, and the end of the Second World War in Europe was in sight, the Germans were still unwilling to completely give up. The war went on, and men needlessly continued to die. In what was known as the Colmar Pocket, the celebration continued, if only for a short while.

---

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey J. Clark and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1993), 557; Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 599; Phrome, *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*, 324.

## Conclusion

These frozen rainbows[memories] never lose their brilliance, no matter how far in the past they existed. They never fade, but force their way into my consciousness even at times they are not wanted.

M. Bedford Davis<sup>1</sup>

On February 8, 1945, French authorities celebrated the liberation of Colmar. Even though U.S. units took part in the celebration, there began to arise a misconception about who actually took the town of Colmar, as well as who liberated the Colmar Pocket. This misconception began when the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, arrived at the outskirts of Colmar. Even though the regiment was in a position to take the town, Col. James Rudder, commander of the 109<sup>th</sup>, made the diplomatic choice and allowed the French to enter the town. Lise Pommois, historian and resident of Alsace, believes the Americans made an error doing this. "It left the people with a false idea that the French had liberated themselves," she says. "Even young French soldiers entering the town thought they, not Americans, had liberated the city. The Americans and French should have entered the town together." Ten years later, when the residents of Colmar celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the liberation, they correctly invited an American delegation, appointed by Eisenhower, now President of the United States. Col. Rudder headed up this group. As time passed, however, and the children who watched the celebration in the winter of 1944-45 were now overseeing the running of Colmar, and the idea of Americans fighting in and around Colmar became a lost notion.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Bedford Davis. *Frozen Rainbows: The World War II Adventures of a Combat Medical Officer* (Elk River: Meadowlark, 2003), Foreword.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Thomas M. Hatfield, *Rudder: From Leader to Legend* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2011), 250.

As the years passed, the American effort around Colmar was further diminished. Russell Cloer, who fought with the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, came back to the area years later. "I saw several War Memorials to the gallantry of the French soldiers liberating Alsace," he remembered, "but never a mention of the Americans."<sup>3</sup>

For other GIs, the Colmar Pocket was just a small chapter in their lives. William Pena received wounds on the east side of the Rhine, and upon returning home, he became successful working for an architectural firm, traveling to different cities, inquiring about building needs. Troy Cox returned to Mississippi, taking over his father's land and became a farmer.<sup>4</sup>

But there were also hidden psychological scars that left a lasting impact. Michael Daly, who later won the Medal of Honor as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division pushed into Germany, returned home safely, but with a negative view of what happened to him. This affected his opinion of the Germans many years after the war. For the longest time, Daly refused to buy German goods, even going to the point of not riding in his stepson's BMW. John D. Erhardt, who was unlucky enough to find himself in the snow-covered minefield with the 254th Infantry Regiment as they took Hill 216, also brought back painful memories. "For many years," he wrote, "I found myself unconsciously stepping into already established footsteps when traversing snow covered ground."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Sandra Stewart Holyoak, *An Interview with Russell W. Cloer for the Rutgers Oral History Program*, September 11, 2001. Also quoted in Douglas Rice, *Through Our Eyes* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2008), 132.

<sup>4</sup> Clint Thompson, *Interview of William Pena*, September 1, 2013; Clint Thompson, *Interview of Troy Cox*, January 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen J Ochs, *A Cause Greater Than Self: The Journey of Captain Michael J. Daly, World War II Medal of Honor Recipient* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012), 116; John D. Erhardt, *Company M: A World War II Memoir* (Unpublished: Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center), 60.

For all his medals and awards, even Audie Murphy was not immune to the horrors he experienced. Years later, Murphy suffered from nightmares and slept with a gun under his pillow, and the lights on. His main problem was the life he returned to was not as exciting as the one over in Europe. "Seems as though nothing can get me excited anymore-you know, enthused?" he once told director John Ford. "Before the war, I'd get excited and enthused about a lot of things, but not anymore." He became addicted to sleeping pills, and suffered fits of rage. His first wife, Wanda Hendrix, even went so far to claim Murphy had held her at gunpoint. In later life, Murphy became a pioneering crusader for the welfare of veterans who suffered from "Battle Fatigue", now more commonly known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.<sup>6</sup>

These are just samples of the thousands of men who fought in the Colmar Pocket. Though their efforts there go largely unnoticed, their efforts to rid the world of tyranny do not, and maybe that is what is important. Whatever the circumstance, they need not be forgotten.

---

<sup>6</sup> Tom Murphy, "Audie Murphy: A Larger Than Life Legend", *American in WWII Magazine*, February, 2007, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.americainwwii.com/articles/audie-murphy-a-life-larger-than-legend/>; "The most decorated soldier in US Military history, Audie Murphy, suffered from PTSD", *The Georgia Veterans Group, Inc*, accessed November 17, 2016, [http://webpages.charter.net/llednew/georgiaveterans/audie\\_murphy\\_ptsd.htm](http://webpages.charter.net/llednew/georgiaveterans/audie_murphy_ptsd.htm).



## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### **Personal Interviews by the Author**

Thompson, Clint. *Interview of Troy Cox*. January 2014.

Thompson, Clint. *Interview of William Pena*. September 1, 2013.

Thompson, Clint. *Questionnaire submitted to General Frederick Kroesen*. September 2013.

#### **Published Works**

Blakeslee, Clarence. *A Personnel Account of WWII by Draftee #3688714*. Rockford: The Rockford Squire, 1998.

Bradley, Omar and Blair, Clay. *A General's Life: An Autobiography by General of the Army Omar N. Bradley*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983.

Brown, Al. *My Comrades and Me: Staff Sergeant AL Brown's World War II Memoirs*. Published by the Author, 2004.

Colbaugh, Jack. *The Bloody Patch: A True Story of the Daring 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*. New York: Vantage Press, 1973.

Cox, Troy. *An Infantryman's Memories of World War II: 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry-Third Division*. Booneville: Brown-Line Printing, 2003.

Craft, W. Bert. *Agony of Hell*. Paducah: Turner Publishing Company, 1994.

Daniel, Clifton. "Pocket Yielding Foe." *New York Times*, February 7, 1945. Accessed Fall of 2014.

Davis, M. Bedford. *Frozen Rainbows: The World War II Adventures of a Combat Medical Officer*. Elk River: Meadowlark Publishing, 2003.

De Gaulle, Charles. *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles De Gaulle*. New York: Carrol & Graf, Inc., 1998.

Dembo, Adolph E. and Schwartz, Bernard D. *Memoirs of Mr. D*. New York: Published by the Author, 1995.

de Tassigny, Jean de Lattre. *The History of the French First Army*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952.

- Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Crusade in Europe*. Garden City: Doubleday & Sons, 1949.
- Emery, Weston Lewis. *C-66: A World War II Chronicle of an Armored Infantry Battalion*. Mclean, VA: Published by the Author, 1992.
- Gray, Glen. *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959.
- Grossjohan, Georg. *Five Years, Four Fronts: A German Officer's World War II Combat Memoir*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1999.
- Hadden, Alexander M. *Not Me!: The World War II Memoir of a Reluctant Rifleman*. Published by the Author, 2012.
- Hatcher, James. *Blood and Fire: With the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division in World II*. 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Association, 1986.
- Historical and Pictorial Review of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*. Nashville: Battery Press, 1946,1980.
- Johnston, Richard. "Colmar Residents Calm on Release". *New York Times*, February 4, 1945. Accessed Fall, 2014.
- Kroesen, Frederick and Newell, Clayton R., ed. *General Thoughts: Seventy Years with the Army. Writings of General Frederick J. Kroesen, United States Army, Retired*. Association of the U.S. Army, 2003.
- LittleJohn, Oliver M. *The Battle of the Other Bulge: Colmar, Action at Wolfgantzen, France, January-February 1945*. Atlanta:C-291st Press, 1997.
- Lockhart, Vincent M. *T-Patch to Victory: The 36<sup>th</sup> Division from the Landings in Southern France to the End of World War II*. Canyon: Staked Plains Press, 1981.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Contest in America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862.
- Murphy, Audie. *To Hell and Back: The Classic Memoir of World War II by America's Most Decorated Soldier*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949.
- Murphy, Terry and Willis, Larryann, "Horace Ditterline Interview". *Audie Murphy Research Foundation Newsletter*, Vol 2. Spring, 1997.
- Palumbo, Gene. *Load, Kick, Fire: Fighting with the 756<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion, B Company, On the Front Lines During WWII*. Published by the Author, 2012.

- Patton, Jr., George S. *War as I Knew It*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947.
- Peel, Harris. *The Trail of the 254<sup>th</sup>: Through Blood and Fire*. World War Regimental Histories, 1945.
- Peek, Clifford H., ed. *Five Years, Five Countries, Five Campaigns: An Account of the One-Hundred Forty-First Infantry in World War II*. Munich: F. Bruckmann KG, 1945.
- Pena, William M. *As Far as Schleiden*. Houston: Published by the Author, 1992.
- Phibbs, Brenden. *Our War for the World: A Memoir of Life and Death on the Front Lines in World War II*. Guilford: The Lyons Press, 1987, 2002.
- Phrome, Ruppert. *History of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in World War II*. Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947.
- Pribram, John C. *Horizons of Hope: An Autobiography*. Tulsa: Holbrook Printing, 1991.
- Reitan, Earl A. *Rifleman: On the Cutting Edge of World War II*. Bennington: Merriam Press, 2001.
- Scott, Hugh A. *Blue and White Devils: A Personal Memoir and History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II*. Nashville: The Battery Press, 1984.
- Taggart, Donald Gilbert, ed. *History of the Third Infantry Division in World War II*. Washington D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1947.
- U.S. Army. *Historical and Pictorial Review of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*. Nashville: Battery Press, 1946, 1980.

### **Unpublished Works**

- 28<sup>th</sup>: *Roll On*. Booklet Printed by *Stars and Stripes*, 1945.
- Abranski, Anthony V. *Complete Description of Services Rendered*. Company B, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, February 27, 1945.
- Blue and White Devils*. Booklet printed by *Stars and Stripes*, 1945.
- Blum, Charles K. *The Operations of the Third Platoon, Company E, 7th Infantry Regiment (Third Infantry Division), East of Ostheim, in the Colmar Pocket, Alsace, 22-23 January 1945 (Alsace Campaign), Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader*. Fort Benning: Academic Department, The Infantry School.

- Brawley, Elmer. *Complete Description of Services Rendered*. Company B, 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, March 1, 1945.
- Chattaway, Charles. *Gentlemen from Hell: The History of the 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 28<sup>th</sup> Division*. 1979.
- Cloer, Russell W. *Infantry Replacement: The Story of My Three Years as an Infantry Officer in World War II*. 1998. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.
- Connecticut Men: 28<sup>th</sup> -Bloody Bucket Division*. September 1945.
- Costlow, Owsley C., ed. *Combat Highlights of the United States Twelfth Armored Division In the European Theater of Operations 1 December-30 May 1945*. Prepared by G-3 Service and Education Section, July 12, 1954.
- Devers, Jacob. *Diary of Jacob Devers*. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.
- Erhardt, John D. *Company M, A World War II Memoir*. 1997. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.
- G-2 Subsection. *G-2 Air: XXI Corps During the Colmar Pocket*. Prepared by G-2 Sub-Section, XXI Air Corps, APO 101.
- Gay, Hobart. *Diary of Hobart Gay*. Hobart Gay Papers, United States Army Heritage and Education Center.
- Holyoak, Sandra Stewart. *An Interview with Russell W. Cloer for the Rutgers Oral History Program*. September 11, 2001.
- Johnson, Roger E. *Letter from Roger E. Johnson to Bernard Fauquet*. April 6, 1988.
- Katz, Harvey L., ed. *We Came from the Ardennes: Part Four*. U.S. Army Military History Institute, 1945.
- Linstrom, Harold J. *A Veteran's Story of World War II*, February 1990. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.
- Medal of Honor Citation for Audie Murphy*. August 9, 1945
- Medal of Honor Citation for Forrest Pedan*. February 13, 1946
- Medal of Honor Citation for Jose Valdez*. February 8, 1946.

Mooney, Edgar B. *Seventh United States Infantry Regiment, 22 January-8 February 1945: The Colmar Pocket*. Seventh U.S. Army, March 1945.

Ochs, Stephen A. *Telephone Interview with Michael Daly*.

Ochs, Stephen A. *Telephone Interview with Troy Cox*. February 8, 2010.

Office of the Chief of Military History. *Attack on Jepsheim by the 254<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 63rd Infantry Division*. UCMH: U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center. Printed June 3, 1945.

Rocco, Guy T. *Handwritten Account Regarding Audie Murphy and Company B, January 18, 1946*.

Ross, Robert. *We Fought for Peace: World War II Memoirs*. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

*The Story of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*. U.S. Army Military History Institute. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

Stroyan, Jacob L. *Just Me Following Along Behind*. 1986. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

Thumm, Helmut. *LXIV Corps: 6 Dec 44-28 Jan 45*. Historical Division: Headquarters, United States Army, Europe. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

U.S. Army. *Final Report: G-2 Section Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group*. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

U.S. Army. *Report of Operation: The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany, 1944-1945, Vol. II*. Aloys Graf, 1946.

Valenti, Isadore. *Combat Medic*. Tarentum, PA: World Association Publishers, 1988.

Watters, John A. *Letter to the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center*. January 2, 1993.

### **Secondary Sources**

#### **Published Works**

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. "White Phosphorus: Health Effects".

- Ambrose, Stephen E. *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. *D-Day June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Ambrose, Stephen E. *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1970.
- Atkinson, Rick. *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013.
- Appel, Robert S. *The Outdoor Kids of Company B, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Third Division, U.S. Army*. Kearney: Morris Publishing, 2004.
- Ballard, Ted. "Changes in the Western Front." *Rhineland*. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed August 28, 2017. <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/rhineland/rhineland.htm>
- Bimberg, Edward. *The Moroccan Goums: Tribal Warriors in a Modern War*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Blumenson, Martin. *The Patton Papers Vol. II, 1940-1945*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- Bonn, Keith E. *When the Odds Were Even: The Vosges Mountains Campaign, October 1944-January 1945*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994, 2006.
- Champagne, Daniel R. *Dogface Soldiers: The Story of B Company, 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division from Fedala to Salzburg: Audie Murphy and his Brothers and Arms*. Bennington: Merriam Press, 2011.
- Chandler, Alfred D., ed. *The Wartime Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years, Volume IV*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.
- Chernitsky, Dorothy. *Voices from the Foxholes: Men of the 110<sup>th</sup> Infantry Relate Personal Accounts of What They Experienced During World War II*. Union Town, PA: Published by the Author, 1991.
- Cirillo, Roger. "The Colmar Pocket." *Ardennes*. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed August 28, 2017. <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/brochures/ardennes/aral.htm>.
- Clarke, Jeffrey J. and Smith, Robert Ross. *Riviera to the Rhine: The European Theater of Operations*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1993, 2005.

- Colley, David F. *Decision at Strasbourg: Ike's Strategic Mistake to Halt at the Rhine in 1944*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008.
- Cox, Edgar and Adams, Scott. *The Men of Fox Company: History and Recollections of Company F, 291<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, Seventy-Fifth Infantry Division*. Bloomington: iUniverse Press, 2012.
- Crist, Robert Grant, ed. *The First Century: A History of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division*. Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1979.
- Curley, Robert, ed., *The Science of War: Strategies, Tactics, and Logistics*. New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2012.
- Dethloff, Henry C. and Adams, Jr, John A. *Texas Aggies Go War: In the Service of Their Country*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006.
- Doubler, Michael. *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought and Won the War in Europe, 1944-1945*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994.
- Esposito, Vincent J., ed. *The West Point Atlas of American Wars*. New York: Frederick A, Praeger, 1959.
- Ferguson, John C. *Hellcats: The 12<sup>th</sup> Armored Division in World War II*. Abilene: State House Press, 2004.
- Froberg, Magnus. *The 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Chronicles: June 1943 to September 1945*. The 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division Association, 1991.
- Hall, Lawrence Percival and Hall, John Melliken. *My Brother's Letters Home: Blutiger Eimer (28th Division) Field Artillery Officer's Letter Home*. New York: Vantage Press, 1999.
- Hatfield, Thomas M. *Rudder: From Leader to Legend*. College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2011.
- The Hellcats in World War II*. Nashville: Battery Press, 1978.
- öJake Devers.ö explorepahistory.com. Accessed August 28, 2017.  
<http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-2E0>.
- Kemp, Harry. *The Regiment: Let the Citizens Bear Arms! A Narrative History of an American Infantry Regiment in World War II*. Austin: Nortex Press, 1990.

- La Caserne Abbatucciö. *Commune de Vogelsheim*. Accessed November 15, 2016.  
[http://www.vogelsheim.fr/Au\\_fil\\_du\\_temps/La\\_Caserne\\_Abbatucci.html](http://www.vogelsheim.fr/Au_fil_du_temps/La_Caserne_Abbatucci.html).
- MacDonald, Charles B. *The Mighty Endeavor: American Armed Forces in the European Theater in World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- McManus, John C. *American Courage, American Carnage: 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Chronicles. The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's Combat Experience, 1812 Through World War II*. New York: Tom Dougherty Associates, 2009.
- Miller, Edward G. *A Dark and Bloody Ground: The Hurtgen Forest and the Roer River Dams, 1944-1945*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995.
- Miller, Robert A. *Division Commander: A Biography of Major General Norman D. Cota*. Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1989.
- Monroe-Jones, Edward. *Crossing the Zorn: The January 1945 Battle at Herrlisheim as told by the American and German Soldiers Who Fought It*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010.
- Moore, William Mortimer. *Free France's Lion: The Life of Phillippe Leclerc, De Gaulle's Greatest General*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2011.
- Murphy Tom. "Audie Murphy: A Larger Than Life Legend." *American in WWII Magazine*. February 2007. Accessed November 17, 2016.  
<http://www.americainwwii.com/articles/audie-murphy-a-life-larger-than-legend/>.
- Ochs, Stephen J. *A Cause Greater Than Self: The Journey of Captain Michael J. Daly, World War II Medal of Honor Recipient*. College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012.
- Ochs, Stephen J. "Medal of Honor Recipient Michael Daly: Heroism in the Colmar Pocket." War History Network. Last modified April 5, 2017. Accessed August 28, 2017.  
<http://warfarehistorynetwork.com/daily/wwii/medal-of-honor-recipient-michael-daly-heroism-in-the-colmar-pocket/>.
- Oligschlaeger, Allison. "Utah Medal of Honor recipient recognized by Reyes." *Desert News Utah*. February 17, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2016.  
<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865622182/Utah-Medal-of-Honor-recipient-recognized-by-Reyes.html?pg=all>.
- Pogue, Forrest. *The Supreme Command: United States Army in World War II: European Theater of Operations*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1989.



- Prefer, Nathan N. *Eisenhower's Thorn on the Rhine: The Battle for the Colmar Pocket, 1944-1945*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2016.
- Rice, Douglas. *Through our Eyes: Eyewitness Accounts of World War II*. New York: iUniverse, 2008.
- Schiller, Bill, ed. and Thompson, Lisa, ed. *75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: Ardennes-Central Europe-Rhineland*. Paducah: Turner Publishing, 1999.
- Sylvan, William C., Smith, Francis C., and Greenwood, John T., ed. *Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney M. Hodges and the First U.S. Army*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008.
- Taffe, Stephen R. *Marshall and His Generals: U.S. Army Commanders in World War II*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011.
- The British Army in Normandy 1944. London: Imperial War Museum.  
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205205977>. Accessed July 12, 2015.
- U.S. Army. *German Explosive Ordnance*. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1953.
- van Creveld, Martin. *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982.
- Weaver, Michael E. *Guard Wars: The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Weigley, Russel F. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.
- Weigley, Russell F. *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.
- Whiting, Charles. *America's Forgotten Army. The True Story of the U.S. Seventh Army in WWII- and an Unknown Battle that Changed History*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Williams, Charles. *The Last Great Frenchman: A Life of General De Gualle*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993.
- Wyatt, William K. *Sandy Patch: A Biography of Lt. General Alexander M. Patch*. New York: Preager, 1991.

Yeide, Harry and Stout, Mark. *First to the Rhine: The 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group in World War II*. St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2007.

Yeide, Harry. *The Tank Killers: A History of America's World War II Tank Destroyer Force*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2007.

Zaloga, Stephen J. *Operation Nordwind: Hitler's Last Offensive in the West*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010.

### **Unpublished Documents**

Bourdus, Alan. "Technician Fifth Grade Forrest E. Peden, USA (February 3, 1945)." *Finest Hour*. Last updated February 6, 2015. Accessed August 29, 2017. <http://theirfinesthour.net/2015/02/peden/>.

Brown, Mathew J. *Strategic Leadership Assessment of General Jacob L. Devers*. U.S. Army War College, 2001.

Davis, Jefferson. *Revised History of the 75<sup>th</sup> Division, 1943-2012. Remembrances of the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 1944-1945*. Printed in 2006.

Jose Valdez. "Third Infantry Medal of Honor Recipients." <http://www.stewart.army.mil/moh/recipCitation.aspx?recID=4176>. Accessed August 28, 2017.

"The End of a Soldier's Long March: The Crash of Audie Murphy's Aero Commander On Brush Mountain, Virginia." Accessed August 29, 2017. [http://www.check-six.com/Crash\\_Sites/Audie-Murphy-N601JJ.htm](http://www.check-six.com/Crash_Sites/Audie-Murphy-N601JJ.htm)

"The most decorated soldier in U.S. Military history, Audie Murphy, suffered from PTSD." *The Georgia Veterans Group, Inc.* Accessed November 17, 2016. [http://webpages.charter.net/llednew/georgiaveterans/audie\\_murphy\\_ptsd.htm](http://webpages.charter.net/llednew/georgiaveterans/audie_murphy_ptsd.htm).

Toomey, Richard. "Combat Photos," *Pictorial History of the 63rd Infantry Division in Combat*. Richard Toomey Collection. Accessed August 28, 2017. <http://www.63rdinfdiv.com/pictorialhistorypage54.html>.

Wharton, Patricia Yearout. *Reading Between the Lines: A World War II Correspondence, May 1944-March 1945*. Located at U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center. Printed in 1999.