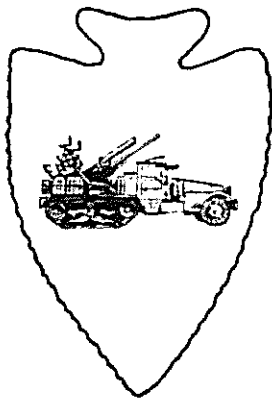


IT  
WAS  
PATTON'S  
IDEA



1942—1945

MOROCCO-ALGERIA  
TUNISIA  
SICILY

NAPLES-FOGGIA  
ROME-ARNO  
SOUTHERN FRANCE

RHINE VALLEY  
ARDENNES-ALSACE  
CENTRAL EUROPE

# IT WAS PATTON'S IDEA

THE HISTORY OF AN UNUSUAL WORLD WAR II UNIT

Based Upon

"GENERAL PATTON'S SECRET WEAPON"

by

Werner L. Larson, Lt. Col. USA(Ret)

Condensed and Edited By

John R. Fisher, Lt. Col. (USAR) (Ret)

# IT WAS PATTON'S IDEA

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P R E F A C E

*If all the men who served in the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) were able to meet together and, in some way, share and record the countless stories about what happened to them and to those with whom they shared the combat experience of the 443rd, the history of the unit would be complete. In fact, it would fill many, long volumes.*

*Since the above is not possible, I hope that readers will regard the numerous events and experiences that are included here as representative of the other thousands that did occur. I trust that this brief accounting of the combat record of the 443rd will help recall those poignant memories, both glad and sad, that mirror the real accomplishments of young American citizens turned soldier to help win the widest ranging, most devastating war in history.*

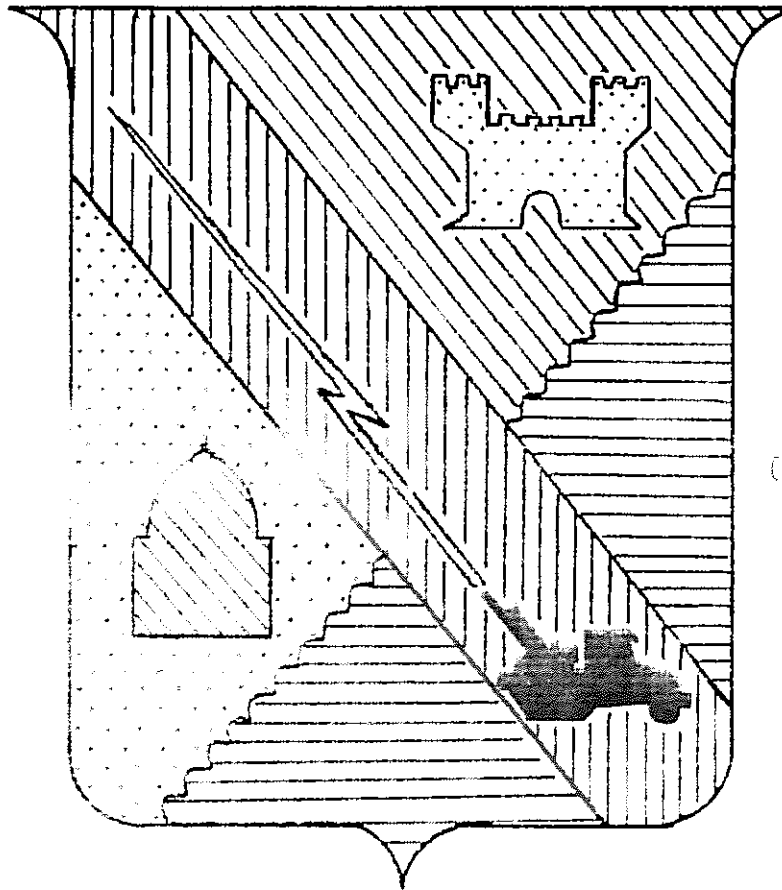
Werner L. Larson, Lt. Col., U.S. Army (Ret)

\* \* \*

ADDENDUM

*Through my many years of Regular Army service, following World War II, I have never ceased to ferret out and collect data and information about the 443rd and its record of combat. I could never forget the 1945 promise made to men of the 443rd when we were in Austria at the war's end - that I would write a history of the Battalion. The task of collecting information from many sources and organizing it into a brief but comprehensive history is done but I want to especially thank two 443rd members for their share in what became a monumental task. William S. Harvey of Sherman Oaks, California, kindly gave permission to use his fine pen and ink drawings, sketched during his experience with the 443rd in North Africa and Sicily. Finally, my thanks must go to John R. Fisher of Greensboro, North Carolina. His invaluable role in providing information and other assistance has enabled me to fulfill my 1945 promise to men of the 443rd. - W.L.L.*

443rd AAA AW Bn (SP)  
 BATTALION HERALDIC SHIELD  
 (Unofficial)



(Designed by Lt. Col  
 Werner L. Larson)

KEY

Red		Artillery	Gold		Sand - Africa
Blue		Seas - water	Black		Basic Weapon
Green		Europe	Silver		Striking Power

Mosque surrounded by sand - Morocco  
 Desert sand - Algeria-Tunisia  
 Castle - Fortress Europe  
 Three points of blue seas - Three major amphibious  
 assaults - wave line against Morocco and Europe.

IT WAS PATTON'S IDEA

INTRODUCTION

One of the little known sagas of World War II is that of the 443rd AAA AW Battalion (SP). This independent unit came into being as a result of planning by General George S. Patton, Jr. during the spring of 1942 when he identified the need for a new type of weapon designed for the kind of warfare he envisioned in North Africa, the Mediterranean area and in Europe.

The early, dark days of World War II saw the United States reeling in surprise and shock from the onslaught of Japanese forces in the Pacific. Nevertheless Allied strategists were preparing for early entry into battle against the European Axis powers. In spite of Joseph Stalin's repeated demands for a cross-Channel assault in 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met early in that year on a destroyer in the North Atlantic and agreed that the initial attack of the Western Allies would occur in North Africa against the "soft underbelly of the Axis." General Patton was named to open this "second front" as Commander of the Western Task Force.

Patton assessed the operation and quickly determined that it would require weapons and weapons systems not then available. One crucial need was for a highly mobile weapon capable of delivering high rates of accurate fire at enemy planes or against ground vehicles and armor without delay in shifting between targets. In the spring of 1942 Patton requested the War Department to provide his command with such a weapon and by August it was ready and designated T-28-E1.

Meanwhile the Continental Army Command was busy with a combat-readiness inspection of the Army's automatic weapons battalions. The 443rd CA AAA AW Battalion of Fort Sheridan, Illinois, emerged as the nation's number one unit and in August of 1942 it was ordered to turn in its towed, 37 mm. AA guns and move by train to Camp Pickett, Virginia. There it was reconstituted as the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) and equipped with 78 of the new T-28-E1 weapons. (2 were retained to be used for experimental purposes in the U.S.) This was the first step in what was to develop into a remarkable combat record through nine major campaigns and three amphibious invasions in the North African, Mediterranean and European Theaters of Operations.

(iii)

The 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) was there when the Allied "Second Front" opened in North Africa on 8 November 1942 and it continued in almost constant combat until German Army Group G surrendered on 6 May 1945. Its route led through Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia to Sicily, Italy, France, Germany and into Austria. Periodic combat reports sent to Washington by the 445rd resulted in effective redesign and improvement of equipment and to activation of standard, mobile, AAA units with the new equipment.

Only 26 of the 443rd's original T-28-E1 gun-tracks were operational when the war ended. Eight had been transferred to French forces in North Africa and the rest, destroyed or lost in combat, had been replaced with new, improved weapons.

This story about the 443rd AAA AW Bn (S) is what happened to it and to its men, living and dead, who made "Patton's Idea" work. Justice cannot really be done to the combat record of the 443rd without acknowledging the countless, selfless instances of leadership and heroism shown by enlisted men and officers alike. But a special tribute must be paid to Lt. Col. Werner L. Larson who, as Battalion Executive, brought the unit to the peak of training that resulted in its selection for the role that it was to play, and who, as Battalion Commander, imparted a fearless, intense drive for excellence and victory to a unit that attained both.

*John R. Fisher (S-3)  
Lt. Col. USAR (Ret)  
443rd Operations Officer*



PREPARATION FOR COMBAT

*FORT SHERIDAN, ILLINOIS*

None of the group of motley-dressed young civilians in their teens and early twenties had the faintest idea of what the next three years had in store for them. Coming from all walks of life they streamed off the troop train at Fort Sheridan, Illinois on 1 May 1942 and began the process of becoming one of the Army's elite battalions - one which would compile an enviable record in combat in North African, Mediterranean and European Theaters of Operations during World War II.

The unit to which they were assigned was designated the 443rd Coast Artillery AntiAircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion (SM). It had been activated on 20 April 1942 by Lt. Col. John Smith and his Executive Officer, Major Werner Larson. Now, as additional enlisted men and officers continued to arrive to join the unit, a rigorous training program began. It seemed no time at all before the well-trained 443rd was functioning like a smoothly operating machine. Meanwhile, physical conditioning continued and included calisthenics, marching, obstacle course, amphibious net training and gun drills, climaxed by a 25 mile march. Latrine rumors and gossip ran rife about the unit's future. Arctic and tropical destinations dominated the speculation which finally congealed into an expected assignment to protect the Panama Canal!

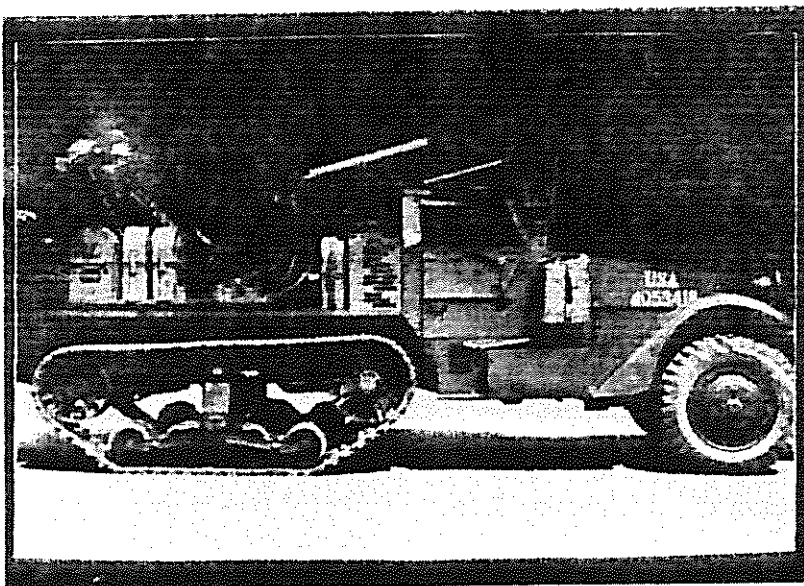
During the second week of August the 443rd was inspected by a team from Continental Army Command. Included were quarters, equipment and antiaircraft firing at towed targets over Lake Michigan. The 443rd, with its towed 37 mm. antiaircraft guns and their unwieldy central tracer control systems, was rated "Number One" in the nation and selected for a special, top secret assignment -- which was not protecting the Panama Canal. And on the morning of 31 August 1942 the first of two trains, loaded with men and equipment, pulled out of Fort Sheridan on their way to Camp Pickett, Virginia.

*CAMP PICKETT, VIRGINIA*

During the week of its arrival at Camp Pickett the 443rd was equipped with seventy-eight new, untested, experimental gun-tracks. Each was a half-track

with twin, water-cooled, .50 caliber guns mounted co-axially with an automatic 37mm gun on a revolving turret. And then as men cleaned cosmoline from the guns and became familiar with their new equipment while having no idea of where or when they would be using it, they began to develop a sense of pride in what was obviously a new weapons system and in the 443rd as a special unit. They didn't know that General Patton had requested this multi-purpose weapon for anti-aircraft and anti-tank defense during the North African Invasion and Campaign. Only eighty of these experimental weapons had been produced and all but two were issued to the 443rd - now the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP).

T-28-E1  
MULTIPLE-CL.  
ANTI-AIRCRAFT &  
ANTI-TANK  
WEAPON MOUNT  
ON HALF-TRACK



As training and conditioning continued, men practiced using the T-28-E1 telescopic sights and miniaturized central tracer control systems. The weapon had not yet been field-tested so no one knew what its performance would be in combat. The telescopic aiming system was intriguing. Sights were controlled by a miniaturized central tracer control box through which the horizontal and vertical estimated leads were transmitted. Gunners, by aiming their telescopes at the target would presumably be firing with proper lead. (This system proved to be quite useless in combat as the telescopic sights became fogged easily, smoke from guns firing would obscure the narrow field of telescopic vision, and the wisdom of having men sitting unprotected, six feet above the ground, cranking estimated data into a system that wasn't working became patently absurd). However, the firing carriage in a manual operation was capable of traversing a full

360° horizontally and from 90° vertically down to 15°. Below this point the 37mm ammunition clip would eject against the lock frame, causing a jam. To remedy this serious fault, 443rd mechanics and machinists proceeded to modify the gun carriage to permit lowering the guns to -5° - a must for the flat trajectory weapons that often would not even be on level ground when firing.

A civilian radio was provided each T-28-E1 for receiving early warning of approaching enemy aircraft. (The limited supply of Army radios, then available, had to be allocated to the amphibious units accompanying the North African invasion fleet).

The 443rd Battalion Commander had to develop a tentative Table of Organization and Equipment (T/O & E) for the four line (gun) Batteries, since none existed for the new unit. Each of the four Batteries was organized into five platoons, each platoon with four T-28-E1 gun-tracks. Battery D was assigned two, towed, 40mm AA guns to supplement its eighteen T-28-E1 gun-track allocation. The 443rd was organizing for action.

#### *FORT FISHER, NORTH CAROLINA*

On 15 September 1942, the 443rd moved in convoy through Blacksburg, Virginia to Fort Fisher, North Carolina. It was headed for a week's practice firing of the new weapons at both air and ground targets. The T-28-E1s were lined up shoulder to shoulder along Fort Fisher's Atlantic Coast Firing Range for firing at gas filled balloons. Men also had experience firing at moving ground targets, simulating armored vehicles and tanks.

By 25 September the 443rd had returned to Camp Pickett where all gun-tracks and ¼ ton trucks (Jeeps) were waterproofed by Ordnance and tested for leaks in a concrete bath. Battery Commanders and Platoon Leaders continued their frustrating tasks of trying to secure missing equipment parts and radios, before leaving Camp Pickett for staging areas. Since the T-28-E1 was an entirely new weapons system without an approved T/O & E, such work was not easy. However, on 28 September, all 443rd platoons were ordered to proceed to Forts Benning and Bragg for attachment to the units with which they were to invade North Africa. The Western Task Force, under command of General George S. Patton, was assembling for Operation Torch - the invasion of North Africa.

#### *FORTS BENNING AND BRAGG*

For three weeks the 443rd platoons, attached to the 2nd Armored, the 3rd In-

fantry and 9th Infantry Divisions ( 9th Armored Corps) engaged in obstacle course training, instruction in vehicle and personnel transport loading and anti-tank combat assignments. Practice amphibious landings were held on Solomon's Island in Chesapeake Bay. Advance personnel were sent to Norfolk, Virginia to supervise combat loading of gun-tracks and equipment and the platoons finally moved by train from Forts Benning and Bragg to Norfolk where they immediately boarded transports. From 21 to 23 October the huge armada of transports, battleships, aircraft carriers, heavy and light cruisers, destroyers, mine layers, submarines and special craft, steamed out through Hampton Roads into the Atlantic Ocean heading for the west coast of Africa. Only a few of the men aboard knew their final destination.

#### FRENCH MOROCCAN CAMPAIGN

##### CHANGING OF ALLIANCE EFFECTS

Winston Churchill had stoutly resisted Franklin Roosevelt's initial Channel Crossing strategy and master-minded the invasion of France's North African colonies. It had become apparent that the Allies were not yet strong enough for a frontal attack on the entrenched Axis powers.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower arrived at his Gibraltar Operating Headquarters on 5 November 1942 and learned of the British Eighth Army victory over the German Afrika Corps at El Alamein. He also watched two darkened ship convoys from England pass through Gibraltar Straits heading for assault landings at Oran and Algiers. At about the same time after first heading for Dakar, West Africa, in a calculated feint, Patton's Western Task Force was approaching the Moroccan coast.

During the zig-zagging convoy trip across the Atlantic, men of the 443rd manned Navy 20 mm. and 40 mm. AA guns, held classes in aircraft identification and antiaircraft firing for both Navy and Army troops, kept their T-28-E1s in combat readiness and stood submarine-watch. They also learned their various destinations, began map study, planned invasion strategy and familiarized themselves with an Army-issued booklet about North Africa and its peoples. The mission of the Western Task Force was to seize and secure French Morocco, particularly Casablanca and the southern port of Safi. The convoy detected submarines several times but destroyer depth bombs and evasive tactics by the ships avoided attack.

During the day and night prior to the invasion a severe storm buffeted

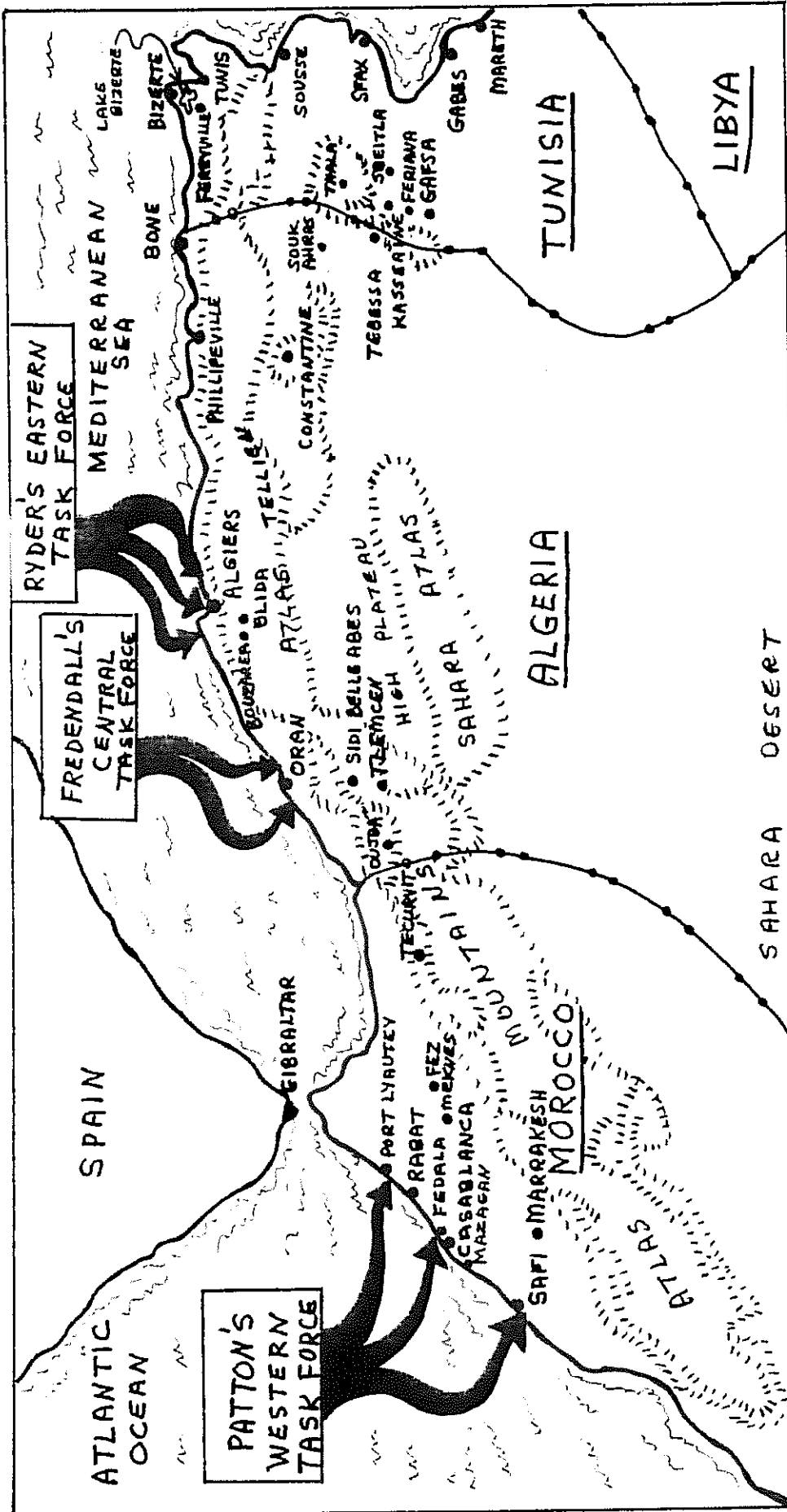
the convoy and added to general apprehension about what kind of resistance could be expected from the Vichy regime's French and Arab troops. A final dinner of turkey with all the trimmings (not enjoyed by those who were still seasick) was served on the night of 7 November. Later, during the dark, moonless night, ships moved closer to shore and men clambered down landing nets into landing craft heaving on the giant swells left by the receding storm. H-Hour was 4 am on 8 November and shortly after that time the invasion had begun. Just before the landings President Roosevelt broadcast a message by short wave to the people of France and North Africa, speaking in French: "Mes Amis", he said, "We come among you to repulse the cruel invaders --- have faith in our words -- help us where you are able --- Vive La France eternelle".

Men of the 443rd, wearing their unit shoulder patches and American flag armbands, experienced their first taste of combat; shore batteries shelling the landing forces and being silenced by naval guns, fierce and sporadic ground resistance, frequent strafing and bombing attacks by enemy planes, attacks by French tanks, artillery and infantry -- all complicated by some 443rd gun-tracks being put ashore at unplanned points as surf and high tides affected landings. Through it all, 443rd gunners began taking their toll of enemy planes, one even downing an attacking plane while firing from the landing craft on the way to shore. Many of the gun-track crews went into action not only firing at enemy planes but in anti-tank defense and in reinforcing the infantry units. Some supported artillery fire and nearly all were constantly dealing with snipers, taking prisoners and caring for dead or wounded comrades.

#### *Port Lyautey Operation*

The Western Task Force convoy, as it approached the Moroccan coast, had been divided into three separate sub-task forces for the landings at three different points. T/F "Goalpost" under General Truscott headed for Port Lyautey; T/F "Brushwood" under General Anderson steamed toward Fedala, 15 miles north of Casablanca; and T/F "Blackstone" under General Harmon went for Safi, 120 miles south of Casablanca.

The landing at Port Lyautey, about 70 miles north of Casablanca, erupted into the Western Task Force's heaviest fighting. Fierce French resistance was obstacle enough but the landing was complicated by inexperienced Navy coxswains who, in the high surf and rocky beaches, landed many of their



ALLIED INVASION OF NORTH AFRICA

8 November 1942

The Western Task Force, under General George S. Patton, sailed from the United States. The Central and Eastern Task Forces came from England.

combat loads on the wrong beaches. Three days of tough fighting ensued resulting in over 400 casualties.

The center of French resistance was the old Kasba Fort. The 3rd Infantry Division was able to secure small beachheads but faced numerous and heavy French armor, artillery and infantry attacks. With naval gunfire support they were eventually able to capture the lighthouse which provided a vantage point from which to direct more accurate naval shelling. A new weapon against tanks, the bazooka, was used in this fighting for the first time and with good effect.

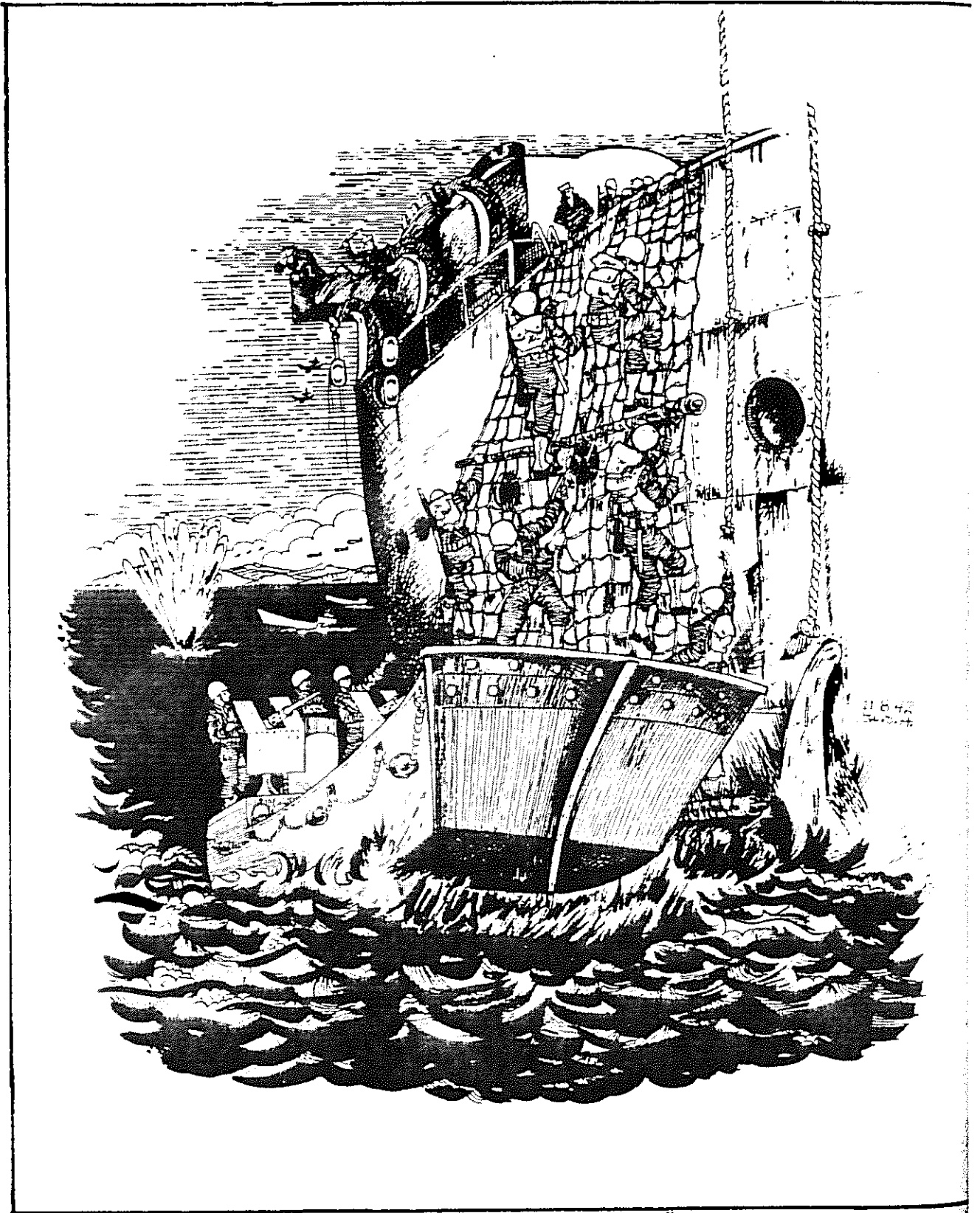
All air opposition was knocked down by AAA units ashore or on transports and after early attacks were beaten off, Gruman fighters from a U.S. carrier ruled the air. It was Platoon D-1 that in this landing, shot down a French attacking plane from the landing craft while enroute to shore. Two 443rd gun-tracks and some men of Platoon D-3 were called in to reinforce the 60th Regiment's 3rd Battalion as it hit serious resistance. In addition, men of Platoon D-3 assisted in manning two 37 mm. anti-tank guns. A Platoon D-1 gun-track moved with and protected General Truscott as he reconnoitered a valley south of Port Lyautey.

Finally an attack by the 2nd Battalion, 60th Regiment, supported by two 155 mm howitzers (SP) and naval dive bombers, forced surrender of the French garrison in the Kasba Fort. Even though surf conditions had steadily worsened and many landing craft were lost, reinforcements of tanks and self-propelled cannon, as well as needed supplies, began to arrive on the beach in sufficient quantities to enable the 3rd Division to begin advancing to secure its other objectives. At the request of the French Commander, Armistice arrangements were agreed upon on 11 November.

#### *FEDALA OPERATION*

Resistance at the fishing village of Fedala, 15 miles north of Casablanca, was also strong. As the first attack wave landed just before dawn, some troops were put ashore as much as two and three miles away from their designated beaches. Some landed on rocks and in heavy surf. Lives were saved by Kapok jackets after landing craft capsized or were grounded in the surf. The beach was intermittently covered by French coastal searchlights, artillery and machine gun fire as well as by airplane bombing and strafing.

A naval battle saw the new French battleship, the "Jean Bart", immobi-



"It Was Only The Beginning"  
(Landing At Port Lyautey Above Casablanca, November 8, 1942)



zed and three other French ships sunk or burning while the remaining four dragged themselves, crippled, into Casablanca harbor. At Fedala a plethora of events occurred. German submarines sank four U.S. transports and damaged two other ships. Two 443rd gun-tracks of Platoon A-2 were lost as the Fedala area became known as "torpedo junction". Ammunition trailers were overturned in the surf and one gun-track of Platoon B-2 broke down at the water's edge at low tide. Engineers managed to retrieve it after the Armistice on 11 November. However, crew members manned it continuously for three days during both bombing and strafing attacks and were awarded Silver Stars for the ordeal accomplished in wet clothing and C rations.

When heavy equipment and gun transport vehicles were not coming off the ships rapidly enough, some 443rd gun-tracks functioned as prime movers and towed artillery pieces into firing positions. Many of the 443rd's ammunition trailers were so heavily loaded that they were mired in sand and some of the tracks threw their treads. Men waded into the surf to remove ammunition from their stranded trailers.

Platoon B-5, attached to the 2nd Battalion, 30th Regiment, was landed in the morning on a beach which was in enemy held territory 20 miles north of the its designated landing point. The gun crews fired at strafing planes as their tank lighters approached the beach. Upon landing B-5 went into antiaircraft positions and almost at once were attacked by enemy planes with one man killed and two fatally wounded. The platoon also took fire from French armored cars on the road to the rear of the beach. The platoon Leader, after dark, went looking for help and when he returned the following morning with a few reinforcements, ran into a fire fight, capturing 10 prisoners but later being captured himself. He found that his entire 31 men men had also been captured and their gun-tracks immobilized. All were released after the armistice on 11 November.

With such needed equipment as that of infantry cannon companies, light artillery batteries and self-propelled 105 batteries, not coming off the transports soon enough to give support to the infantry elements, the 3rd Division located the Fedala harbor master and two pilots, who could bring the transport "Arcturus" into the Fedala docks and unload a combat team of the 2nd Armored Division.

Platoon B-2 Commander located his two trailers 6 miles up the beach in enemy territory. They had been stripped of everything but the ammunition which, because of heavy firing, some gun-tracks needed desperately. Two men were left to guard the trailers until they could be towed back to the gun-tracks.

but two groups of nine and sixteen enemy bombers came over the beach. Three bombs bracketed the trailers, covering the men with sand. One was dug out, alive but the other was dead. 443rd guns at a distance had fired at the bombers and one was destroyed even though the planes were really too high for effective fire.

Two tracks of Platoon B-4 lost a man killed and one injured by bombs. Platoon A-2 was also bombed and strafed and shot down one of the low-flying planes. But by 10 November, Fedala was under control and the 3rd Division was on its way to Casablanca.

#### *SAFI OPERATION*

In the Safi operation, 120 miles south of Casablanca, two U.S. destroyers, along with a company of infantry from the 9th Infantry Division, steamed directly into Safi harbor. They were guided by an infra-red lamp placed at the end of a jetty in the early morning hours by a small group in a rubber boat from a submarine. Caught initially by surprise, French coast artillery and mobile batteries violently opposed the landing. After several hours most of them were knocked out of action by the USS New York and the USS Philadelphia. By mid-afternoon on D-Day the French barracks in Safi had surrendered and as more men and equipment poured ashore, most of the beachhead resistance had ended by evening. Enemy sniping continued and 443rd men from Platoons A-4 and B-5 busied themselves in routing snipers out of houses and turning their prisoners over to the 9th Division's 47th Combat Team infantry. Gun-tracks were used a number of times to blast groups of infiltrating snipers from buildings. Effective antiaircraft fire destroyed several attacking French planes and saved Safi port facilities from serious damage. In the early morning mists of 9 November a French plane attacked the harbor area and all 443rd gun-tracks in the area fired when they could see the plane. Platoon C-3, on the docks, continued to fire even though the bombs appeared to be falling towards them. The plane came down in flames. It had hit one warehouse and damaged several transports.

Forged orders had sent a major portion of the Safi garrison to Marrakesh for maneuvers just prior to D-Day. These troops began moving from Marrakech toward Safi. Platoon C-5 moved with 2nd Armored Division's Combat Command to meet this threat. Naval air halted the French column about 40 miles west of Safi. CCB was preparing to attack the French dug-in positions when it was ordered to march on Casablanca, and withdrew.

443rd Platoons A-5 and B-5 moved to defend the Safi airport which was being used by Navy planes. Sniping continued and harassed the gun-track crews. One of Platoon C-5's gun-tracks moved close to a suspected house and put 20 rounds of 37 mm shells into it. Twelve snipers surrendered. Platoons C-3 and C-5 then moved with CCB in a blackout march to Mazagan. The next morning, 10 November, gun-tracks of the two platoons shot down a low-flying French plane. That afternoon, units were notified by the 47th Infantry Regimental Commander that a truce had been declared. By the afternoon of 11 November an armistice had been declared along the entire Moroccan front. During nearly four days and nights of action on a front extending over one hundred and sixty miles and including three major beachheads, the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) had its baptism of fire. With the four divisions it was supporting it had emerged with a record of heroic actions. It had taken a toll of enemy planes, armored vehicles and enemy troops while meeting many emergencies with timely ingenuity and improvisations.

#### *CASABLANCA OCCUPATION AND DEFENSE*

Following the armistice 445rd Platoons B-5, C-3 and C-5 moved with the 67th Armored Regiment to the Cork Forest of Marmora, near Rabat. There they set up a perimeter defense of the 2nd Armored Division. After another three weeks in Safi defensive positions, Platoons A-4 and A-5 were released from Safi harbor and airport defense with the 9th Division's 47th Regiment, and moved to join their parent Battery A, also in the Cork Forest, defending the 2nd Armored Division.

445rd Battalion Headquarters and the four Battery Headquarters units arrived in Morocco on the D + 10 convoy and for over four weeks the 443rd was engaged in a number of missions. Headquarters was housed in an orphanage three miles north of Casablanca where it set up a Gun Operations Board to plot all intelligence on enemy air or sea movement and order antiaircraft firing - both naval and land-based - in defense of Casablanca, its port facilities and its airport. The Battalion Executive Officer, Major Larson, had been placed on temporary duty (TDY) with the Artillery Section, Western Task Force Headquarters in Casablanca. There he set up and coordinated the antiaircraft and naval defense of the Casablanca area including the Harbor Entrance Control Post.

Battery B was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division for protection of the bivouac and docks at Fedala. Battery D was attached to the Provisional Bri-

gade, 9th Infantry Division, for the protection of similar facilities at Port Lyautey. Two platoons of Battery C were sent inland, one to defend a vital bridge at Meknes and the other to protect the airport and Fifth Army Headquarters at Oujda.

Not only had men of the 443rd matured as a combat unit but they discovered a new and different society in North African Morocco. A French protectorate since 1912, the country was ruled by a Sultan under direction and advice of the French Resident-General. The Sultan, who was also religious head of the Moroccans, headquartered in Rabat with his wives. Although French influence in homes and theaters was evident in Casablanca, the Arab influence was even more prominent. Most of the Arabs lived and dressed as they had for centuries. Men were entirely dominant - wives almost servants.

Many Arabs were extremely poor and stealing was a way of life for them -- many G.I.s discovered to their sorrow. Stories abounded about a number of men who had been murdered for their valuables -- including clothing. One 443rd G.I. awoke in the desert one morning to find that his boots had been stolen off his feet during the night. During the landings, the many ammunition trailers that had been landed at points distant from their gun-trails were invariably found looted of everything except their ammunition. Beggars were seen everywhere. Most of the women kept the lower half of their faces veiled in public and it was noted that various tribes were identified by tattooed markings on forehead, cheek, or chin.

Weekly market days were held at desert crossroads where chickens, goats, sheep, camels, fruits and vegetables exchanged hands. A battery of women could also be seen at these events, each sewing madly on a treadle-type, Singer Sewing Machine. One 443rd member, who spoke a little Arabic, was watching an auction of young girls, either sold by their fathers or captured by other tribes to be sold into slavery. Stripped to the waist, they would submit to arm and teeth inspection by potential buyers. Before he knew it the 443rd soldier had made a bid in Arabic and had bought a girl. She followed him around all day like a puppy dog but when evening came he managed to get away from her in Casablanca's narrow streets -- leaving her free.

What came to be called "Arab Express" buses were frequently seen barreling along desert roads, loaded inside and on top with Arabs, luggage and chickens. Due to the shortage of gasoline the buses were powered by gas from charcoal stoves. The contrasts of wealth and poverty were seen in

the Casbah (Arab quarter of towns) and the modern French section. The latter had whitewashed homes with walls that surrounded cool courtyards with beautiful shrubbery, flowers and mosaic tile fountains. The Casbah had no real street but winding alleys where one could buy anything, amid the smells of perfumes, donkeys, goats, sheep and camels as well as fish. Here, too, beggars and prostitutes were plentiful.

#### *ALGERIAN STOPOVER*

On 23 December 1942 Battery A was detached from the 2nd Armored Division and entrained on flat cars (for guns, vehicles and equipment) and loaded personnel on "40 & 8" box cars for coaches, enroute to Algiers to protect that city's airport. Enroute, orders came to turn over eight gun-tracks to French forces at Valmy. Two officers and sixteen NCO's were detached from Battery A to train the French in maintenance and operation of the gun-tracks. With eight gun-tracks fewer, Battery A reorganized into four platoons.

Battery A officers and men celebrated Christmas eating "K" rations in a little, out of the way, Arab train station. They arrived at Blida airport on 29 December in heavy rain which continued for six days. Life in the mud was miserable even with the shelters the men built of wood and canvas. Two platoons were then transferred to the Algiers docks, to counter increasing German air attacks at night and two platoons were stationed in the mountains ringing Algiers, near Bouzarea, so their firing against the night bombers might be more effective. After one night during which several bombers were shot down, the Mayor of Bouzarea brought out bottles of champagne for the 443rd men.

\* \* \* \*

#### TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN

#### *443rd PROVISIONAL BATTALION*

When part of the 443rd was ordered to reassemble and move to Algeria the men were ready to say "good-bye" to Morocco and look forward to what lay ahead. On 4 January 1943, travel orders from Western Task Force Headquarters directed the 443rd to constitute a Provisional Battalion under command of Major Werner L. Larson and move without delay to Constantine, Algeria. Some of the platoons that had been attached to the 3rd and 9th

AFRICAN KNIGHTS

Gone are days of their pomp and splendor,  
Gone are their harems and glamorous wives,  
Camels they had are replaced now by donkeys -  
All is now gone but the Arab survives.

Living with ruins of cities about him -  
Ruins so full of disease and decay,  
Children and wife and a house full of cattle  
All make their home in a room built of clay.

Still they have wives, but no women of glamor  
Now hide their charms with proverbial veil,  
Selling their souls for the American dollar  
Or even a half should the first offer fail.

Theft and deceit are an art to the Arab.  
Children are taught both to steal and to lie.  
Families result from their previous pleasures  
And are gone without grief when they suffer or die.

Tending their sheep on the hot desert mountain,  
Looking askance as the fight rages on -  
Knowing they are lords of the desert,  
The Arabs will be here long after we're gone.

*1/Sgt. Virgil G. Brock*

*MEDIEVAL AND MODERN*

445rd men were often dealing with people whose culture had changed little for centuries. In one instance, following the armistice in Morocco, Platoon A-4 was protecting the port of Safi. An elderly Arab, caretaker of a Moslem cemetery near one of the platoon's gun-tracks, wandered over the battlefield and found a fragmentation grenade - something he'd never seen before. Noting that everything the Americans ate seemed to come from tin cans, he thought he had found something edible. He took it to his small, whitewashed, mosque-like building and proceeded to try to open it with his knife. Of course, when he pulled the pin it exploded. Hearing the explosion the platoon commander and men ran to the site and found the old man stunned and with several, non-fatal shrapnel wounds, certain that the Americans had shot him. He went to the hospital and died.

Divisions were re-attached to the provisional Battalion and the unit was assigned to control of the US II Corps at Tlemcen, Algeria, and then to control of the British 1st Army at Orleansville.

Movement began at once with train #1 departing from Rabat and train #2 departing from Fedala while a motor convoy formed up from Casablanca, Fedala and Port Lyautey. Platoon A-1 was detached from Battery A and attached to the 9th Division's 39th Regiment, to provide protection for that unit's move from Souk Ahres to Tebessa, Algeria. On 5 January the Provisional Battalion was detached from the parent 443rd Battalion and came under the command of Major Larson. It was on the way to a mission of protecting a mobile armored division against the mighty German Air Force in Tunisia. The parent 443rd Battalion was expected to provide static antiaircraft defense in the Casablanca and Algiers areas and it retained the commanders of Headquarters, A, C and D Batteries.

The Provisional Battalion left Casablanca for Fedala at 7am on 5 January. It carried a bird cage with four carrier pigeons, with instructions for their release on Western Task Force missions. Battery B joined the convoy at Fedala and Battery D at Rabat. The convoy moved through Fez to Tecurvit, releasing two pigeons at each point. As the convoy pushed on over the Atlas Mountains, it experienced the hot, blistering African sun, mirages on the road and nights of bitter cold. In spite of the miles and miles of barren desert wastes of shifting sand and rocks, interspersed with scraggly desert plants, every time the convoy stopped for a break, Arab youngsters seemed to appear out of nowhere. Running in their dirty gray garments with loosely hanging hoods, they would beg for "caramel" and "chocolat". Most of these kids were in the desert tending to small herds of goats and sheep. In one village, a small boy ran, or was pushed, under one of the convoy's 2½ ton trucks and was killed - a sad but not infrequent occurrence in wartime. A French lieutenant and a French nurse, who had hitched a ride with the convoy, helped to reconcile the incident. The 443rd men also discovered that the inexpensive, Moroccan oranges and tangerines were unusually sweet and juicy and, along with eggs that could be purchased from the Arabs, were a great supplement to K and C rations.

On 10 January the convoy passed Algiers and began to observe strict blackout security. By 11 January Major Larson had reported in to II Corps Headquarters and to the 1st Armored Division in Constantine. Here the unit was placed under control of the 1st Armored Division Artillery Commander, Colonel Maraist (Uncle Bob). On the following day the two trains arrived with gun-tracks, ammunition and baggage. Without delay, work began. Intensive training in aircraft

recognition was begun and the Provisional Battalion "stripped down" for action, leaving non-essentials in "A" bag storage at the Division warehouse in Constantine, a city named for Constantine the Great who once ruled the Roman Empire which included North Africa. He built the city on the site of a previous Roman Colony. On a flat mountain top it was surrounded on three sides by steep, precipitous ravines and had a unique beauty in its ancient architecture, gardens and fountains.

#### *SATIN TASK FORCE*

By 13 January Platoon A-1 was detached from the 39th Infantry Regiment and attached to II Corps rear echelon seven miles east of Tebessa. The 443rd Provisional Battalion (minus 1 platoon) became a part of Satin Task Force which, spearheaded by the 1st Armored Division, was to move on 22 January in aggressive action to capture either Gabes or Sfax on the Gulf of Tunis and cut the German Afrika Corps' lines of communication along the Tunisian coast. Other units in the Satin Task Force were two tank destroyer battalions, a medical battalion, a regimental combat team, and a field artillery battalion. Additional support was to be given by the XII Air Support Command and the French Constantine Division. Prior to D-Day the Germans were rushing reinforcements and supplies from Italy to Tunisia by sea and by air, intending to keep the eastern Tunisian coastal plain open so the German army in north Tunisia could link up with Rommel's Afrika Corps, retreating before the onslaught of the British 8th Army. German opposition to Satin Task Force consisted of at least 170 tanks and more than 20,000 men. The enemy was west of Station De Sened and his main force was in the vicinity of Maknassey. German air activity was frequent and vigorous, and enemy air transports were bringing in reinforcements at the rate of 800 per day.

During the night of 17 January the Satin Task Force, protected by the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) Provisional Battalion, moved to the Tebessa-Kasserine-Sbeitla assembly area, 35 miles east of Tebessa. The T/F was near Bou Chebka, an area abounding in old Roman ruins. Meanwhile, seven undermanned and poorly equipped French divisions to the north were trying to fight German tanks and 88's with old rifles and a few anti-tank guns. Even the native Goum (Moroccan) troops, who specialized in cutting off the left ears of dead enemies as trophies, were unable to halt the German attacks. And by 21 January, one day prior to the Satin Operation jump off, the enemy had successfully penetrated the French front and disrupted it deep



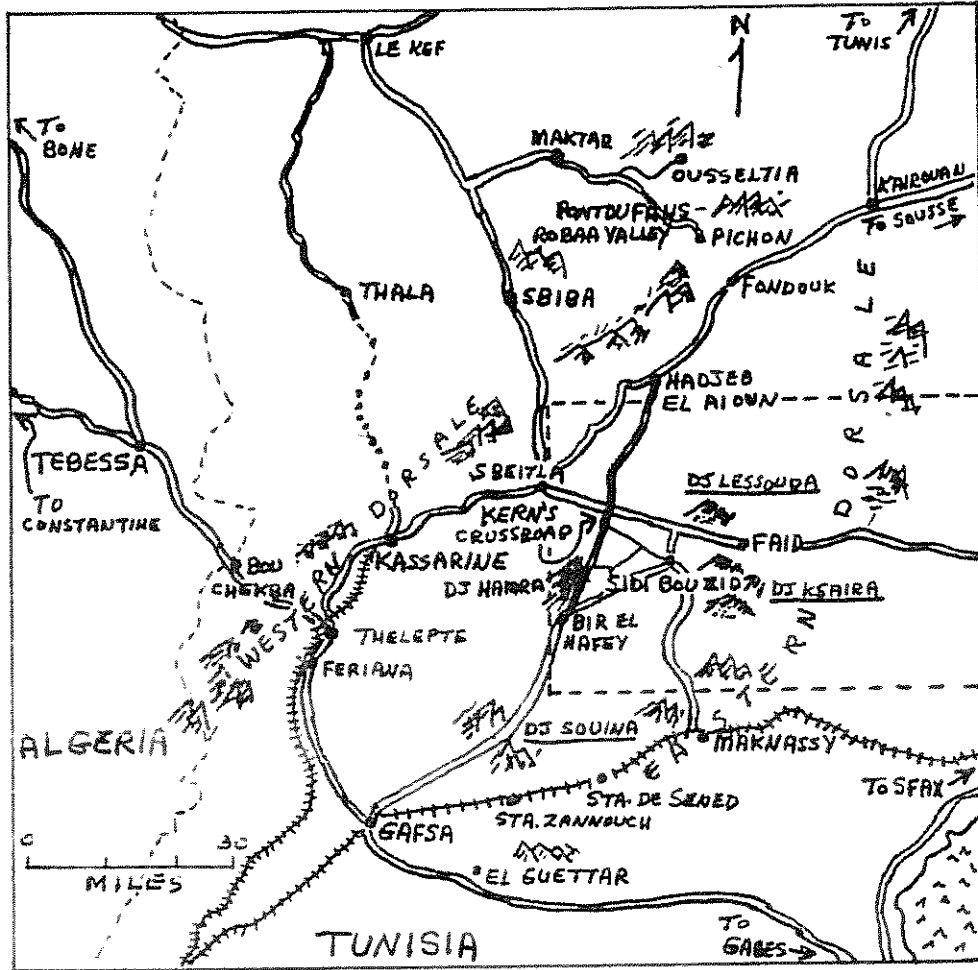
into the Pont-du- Fahs - Robaa Valley. A concentration of Allied forces became impossible and the junction of General Rommel's Afrika Corps and the Northern Tunisia German army under General Arnim became inevitable. Allied Forces Headquarters immediately postponed the Satin Operation.

#### *OUSSELTIA VALLEY OPERATION*

Following postponement of Satin, General Eisenhower concurred with General Alexander and his Combined Chiefs of Staff that the 1st Armored Division would be employed to defend southern Tunisia and deter any energetic offensive by General Rommel when his Afrika Corps arrived in Tunisia as it fell back from British 8th Army attacks.

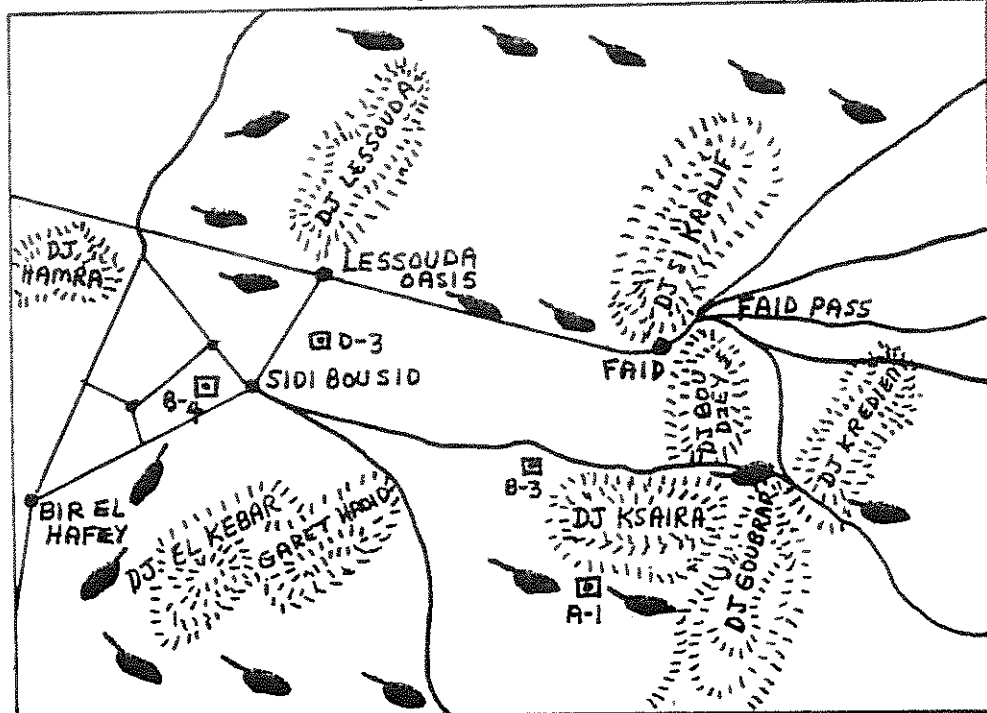
In order to extricate the surrounded French units the 1st Armored Division's Combat Command A (CCA) prepared to attack Fondouk on 23 January and Combat Command B (CCB) under General Robinett was sent to the Ousseltia Valley. The 1st Infantry Division's 26th Regimental Combat Team, protected by 443rd Platoons D-1, D-3, D-4 and D-5, attacked the ridge before Ousseltia, gradually wiping out German and Italian pockets of resistance and forcing the enemy to withdraw thus relieving pressure on the hard-pressed French units. The 26th Regiment then drove through Ousseltia Pass taking 450 Italian prisoners. During the action Platoons D-1 and D-5 engaged eight Messerschmitts (ME-109s) strafing from 1000 feet and destroyed two planes. This drive brought the Allied forces to within 40 miles of the major German headquarters and supply base 20 miles southeast of Kairouan. Thus threatened, the Germans began to retaliate viciously, first by air and then by land.

The German Air Force controlled the Tunisian skies at this point and usually attacked Allied positions around mealtimes. Stukas (JU87s) had fixed landing gear and used their screaming sirens to frighten and demoralize our troops as they dove strafing and bombing from out of the sun. Often the ME-109s would tantalize the AAA gun crews by staying just out of range of the gun-tracks but drawing their fire so that Stukas coming out of the blazing sun could strafe and bomb the tanks and infantry. Major Larson immediately secured Navy variable polarized glasses for the gunners, gun sergeants and platoon leaders. Success against Stukas increased and the 443rd's T-28-E1s became known to German pilots as the "Hornets' Nest". At other times, ME-109s would drop smoke bombs and the Stukas would come out of the smoke, laying their "eggs". Another tactic



SOUTHERN TUNISIA AREA OF OPERATIONS

FAID PASS BREAKTHROUGH-14 Feb.



0 MILES 16

□ Initial positions of four 443rd Platoons  
☛ German tanks

was for the Germans to send one or two planes in at very low altitudes, where angular speed for tracking by the gun-tracks would be the greatest, just to draw fire and determine the amount of antiaircraft defense. If they didn't draw too much flak the main body of planes would appear and attack in 10 to 20 minutes.

A sensing of the kind of combat experienced by men of the 443rd may be gained from action reports from Platoon C-4.

"During the day we were constantly on alert for planes and we moved in blackout at night, to new positions. Everyone was worn out but we kept awake. I can still see those planes overhead. We fired and fired. We were scared! There were raids every 20 minutes and we thought the day would never end. They kept this up for days but did little damage as we kept knocking them down. They began to respect our guns and stayed out of range. But those 88 mm shells! The whole crew was really afraid of them. No sooner did we move to new positions than the Germans would start shelling us and we leaped into our foxholes, saying our prayers".

Typical of the many combat moves of the 443rd platoons was that during the advance with the 26th Regimental Combat Team from Sbeitla to Ousseltia during night-time hours in January 1943. The grueling, cold, blackout move over steep, tortuous mountain passes often required the gun-tracks to back up in order to negotiate the many hairpin turns. Most unsettling was the sight of native French Army troops, with night campfires blazing away, blatantly signalling their whereabouts to the enemy. Americans, carefully schooled in the art of concealment and camouflage, could only gasp and curse at such action. But as time went by, they too developed a "what the hell" attitude but never to the extent of their French allies.

With the drive through Ousseltia Pass by the 26th Regimental Combat Team, Platoon D-1 was ordered to protect the mouth of the pass from German attempts to close it and trap the 26th. Steep cliffs at the entrance to the pass made the task almost impossible but the gun-tracks were soon in the best available positions - three in the hills at the entrance to the pass and one on the plain at the entrance itself. The 443rd men didn't have long to wait. In a morning attack, six ME-109s roared in to attack and while the planes were still out of range the anxious AAA gunners began firing even before they were spotted by the enemy. The ME-109s then broke into pairs and sprayed the gun-tracks unmercifully from several different directions. Terrain and position allowed the gun tracks, in the hills, limi-

ted fields of fire and they were unable to give protective fire to the single gun-track on the plain, at the entrance to the pass. A second attack failed when heavy AA fire caused bombs to be dropped wide of their marks. 443rd men learned a costly lesson that camouflage was important and that antiaircraft fire should not begin until either the gun-track positions were seen by the enemy or the planes were well within range of the weapons. While such tactics had been stressed in training, real and sharp learning seemed to come best in combat action. Platoon D-1 shot down two of the attacking ME-109s, at the cost of one man killed and seven wounded. Two gun-tracks were put out of action. They were later retrieved and repaired. But the Ousseltia Pass and Valley remained open and in Allied hands.

*STATION DE SENED/MAKNASSEY OPERATION*

El Guettar and Station De Sened were not permanently garrisoned by the enemy but were bases from which small patrols operated. Station De Sened was manned mostly by Italian troops with several armored cars, a battery of field artillery and some tank destroyer guns. On 23 January 1st Armored Division's CCC under General Stack, in a two day raid from Gafsa toward Sened, made enemy contact and captured several trucks and 150 prisoners. Hardly had it returned from the raid when CCC was ordered to leave from Gafsa and attack Maknassey by way of Sidi Bou Sid. On 31 January CCC was moving northeast on the Sidi Bou Sid road with orders to hit the flank of enemy forces moving from Maknassey toward Sidi Bou Sid when orders came from the 1st British Army to attack and seize Maknassey to the southeast. CCC then changed its direction of attack and had seized the north end of Maissila Pass, on the way to Maknassey, when new orders came for it to move north through Sidi Bou Sid to Sbeitla. While still enroute to Sbeitla, CCC was diverted to Hadjeb El Aioun, arriving there on 2 February to act as Division Reserve.

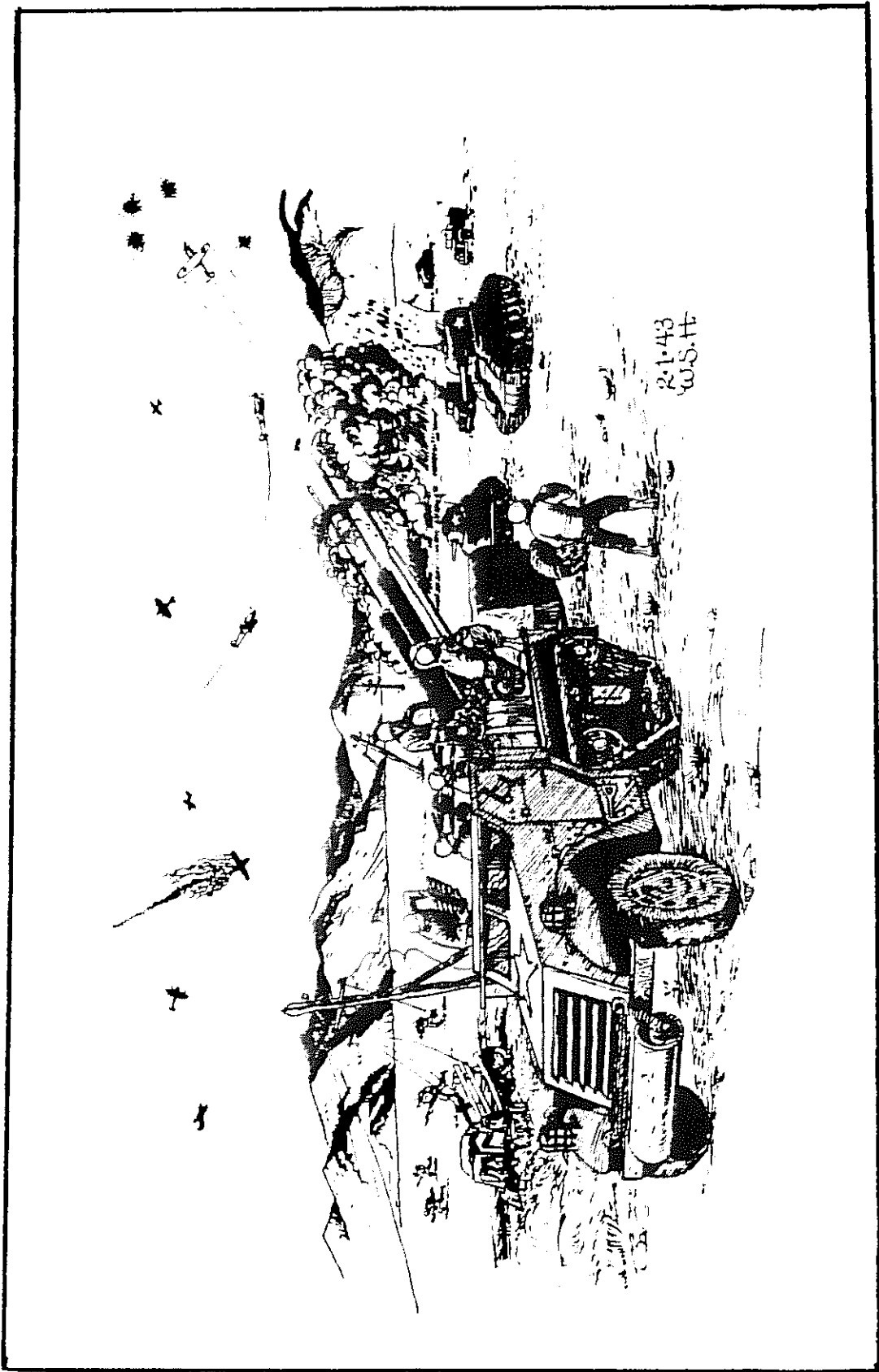
These examples of the frequent redistribution of Allied forces and the long, arduous and dangerous marches caused thereby suggest that such tactical activity disrupted coordination and communication and had a great deal of influence on the final outcome of operations in the area.

These kinds of tactical operations and movements made 443rd Provisional Commander Larson acutely aware that his total of two batteries, with eight antiaircraft platoons of four gun-tracks each (when none were disabled) was insufficient to protect the 1st Armored Division's units against increasingly heavy German air attacks. On 31 January Major Larson advised

General Ward, Commander of the 1st Armored Division, of the situation and pointed out that over half of the Battalion was still in French Morocco and Algeria doing nothing but static air defense. General Ward took immediate action and within a week the remainder of the 443rd was enroute to the Tunisian front.

About the same time the 1st Armored Division's Combat Command D (CCD), under Colonel Maraist, Commander of the 1st Armored Division Artillery, moved the night of 30/31 January on the Gafsa-Maknassey road with a mission of aggressive action to seize a ridge three miles east of Station De Sened, bypassing the town with its main force. CCD was then to attack Maknassey in coordination with CCC, coming from the northwest. However, CCC, when on the approaches to Maknassey, had been rerouted north to Hadjeb El Aioun. In the meantime, eighteen truckloads of enemy infantry had arrived to reinforce Sened positions. In spite of lack of expected support from CCC, Colonel Maraist's CCD pushed on into Station De Sened. In late afternoon, as the fighting raged, a German in an American uniform came in a jeep, from behind the American lines, shouting, " It is an order-pull back! The Germans are putting on a big offensive"! The road to the rear was soon boiling with vehicles retreating westward in the gathering dusk. But Colonel Maraist, seeing his troops falling back, seized a machine gun and ordered his units to return to the attack or he would start shooting! His action saved the day and American troops were soon again engaging the enemy. Against heavy resistance from the German and Italian defenders, CCD finally secured Station De Sened after first capturing it then losing it, and then pushed eastward nearly six miles. At that point, CCD was ordered to return to Bou Chebka and then to Sbeitla, where it was dissolved on Corps order.

Just prior to the above operations, the 1st Armored Division's Combat Command A, under General McQuillan, moved the night of 25/26 January from Sbeitla to Sidi Bou Sid just southwest of Faïd and Faïd Pass. The narrow Faïd Pass led between Djebel Si Kralif and Djebel Bou Dzey. The Germans had attacked and captured the Pass, village and surrounding hills from the French. On 31 January CCA launched a counterattack toward Faïd. It was unsuccessful due to the strong, camouflaged and well-entrenched enemy positions. It failed to relieve the encircled French at Faïd Pass. Long range, accurate artillery fire was intense. Without reserves or reinforcements, CCA was forced to withdraw into defensive positions based



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"Drive On Served With Combat Command D"

upon two, key terrain features -- Djebel Lessouda northwest of Faid and Djebel Ksaira south of the pass. General Ward (1st Armored) on 11 February was assigned responsibility for the Faid defense but had only CCA at his disposal. And CCA's disposition was specifically designated by II Corps -- an arrangement that created serious potential for delay and restraining effect upon General Ward's freedom of command in dealing with developments.

During these Combat Command operations, the 1st British Army on the north Allied flank and the French XIX Corps in the center, had operational control of 1st Armored Division units except CCA. American forces were on the south or desert flank of Allied lines. 443rd units moved constantly with the Combat Commands and forward command posts, to provide air and ground protection, and were heavily engaged. For example:

- . On 1 February Platoon B-1 (with CCD) shot down seven seven Stukas. Rates of fire were so intense that their machine guns warped and 37 mm guns jammed, putting three of four gun-tracks out of action. Whereupon Platoon D-4 was relieved from the 1st Armored Division's Command Post and it replaced Platoon B-1.
- . On 2 February, Platoon D-2 (with the 168th Infantry Regiment of CCD) destroyed five Stukas and a Messerschmitt.
- . On 27 January, Platoon B-3 (with CCA) shot down one of two Stukas bombing the Command Post.

Throughout the desert campaigns 443rd men endured many evening sandstorms when the fine sand and grit sifted into eyes, nose, food and clothing, and sand clouds were churned up during all vehicle movements. Gun crews had to constantly clean and grease the 37 mm guns, the .50 cal. machine guns and small arms. Parachute silk was cut and used as neckscarves to try to keep the sand out of clothing. Water was at a premium and baths were a forgotten luxury except for those rare occasions when old Roman baths were discovered, such as those at Constantine and Gafsa. Otherwise, the Corps of Engineers' water points strove valiantly to provide units with modest amounts of chlorinated water. Roman ruins usually had traces of old aqueducts which centuries earlier had carried water but which were no longer functioning. And even in the desert, the rocks, hills and mountains carried their own hazards. A number of accidents occurred during the night moves in blackout along roads with precipitous cliffs and hair-

pin turns--such as the Platoon B-1 gun-track that overturned in the mountains south of Maktar, killing two crew members.

#### *ANTI - PERSONNEL WEAPONS*

During Tunisian operations a number of new German anti-personnel weapons made their appearance. East of Gafsa, planes dropped metal spears made from 3/16" metal rods, sharp-pointed at one end, with fluting at the other to stabilize them in falling to penetrate helmets, equipment, tents and almost, whatever they struck. Molotov Bread Baskets were also dropped by enemy planes. Each contained 36 yellow "butterflies" that, upon hitting the ground, would slowly open their wings before exploding. The S-mine was widely used by ground troops. Buried in the sand with only three small prongs showing, it was activated when a man stepped on the hard-to-see prongs. It would then fire a cannister several feet into the air and the cannister would then explode, sending lethal steel balls in all directions. After many vehicles had run over land mines (Teller mines) causing death and injury, it became standard procedure to carry bags of sand on the floorboards, especially of jeeps. And to avoid giveaway sunlight reflection from jeep windshields, they were latched down to the hood of the engine and enclosed in a canvas cover. With the driver and passenger thus exposed to sand, wind and weather, the Germans began to string piano wire across the roads, especially in mountain passes, and at throat level. As a countermeasure, a five foot high angle iron was welded to the front of every jeep. A notched top would serve to catch and break the piano wire. This measure was entirely successful except in those few instances when an explosive charge was attached to the wire.

#### *GERMAN BREAKTHROUGH AT FAID*

General Anderson, 1st British Army Commander, in non-compliance with an order from General Eisenhower, did not bring the 1st Armored Division into a central location, from which it could operate against the enemy, under a single command. Meanwhile, General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Corps was pouring into Tunisia with General Montgomery's British Eighth Army, flushed with victory, hard on its heels. Rommel needed more operational room in order to join General Von Arnim's Northern Tunisia Army. Consequently, the Germans kept punching at the many weak points in the Allied front, trying to hide their intentions and keeping the entire II Corps off balance. By 13 February, American and French forces were thinly spread out in small,



separate units that could not possibly provide each other with mutual support.

On Sunday, 14 February, CCA was entrenched between the two key terrain features, Djebel Lessouda and Djebel Ksaira. 443rd Commander Larson and Division Artillery Commander Maraist and two others were having their second cup of coffee at 443rd Headquarters in Sbeitla when over the command radio came the voice of CCA Commander McQuillen saying that the Germans had broken out of Faid Pass and that his units and command post were being surrounded. His transmission ended suddenly. Colonel Maraist left at once for his Artillery Command Center and Major Larson left by jeep for Sidi Bou Sid.

At 6:30 am on 14th February 1943 the enemy had begun shelling the Djebel Lessouda positions and had followed up with a tank attack. Within two hours about 40 Mark III and IV tanks along with towed, high velocity 75 mm anti-tank guns, supported by artillery and infantry, were by-passing Djebel Lessouda on the north. Half of this force proceeded toward Sbeitla. The remainder, joined by 20 other tanks, including some Mark VI heavy tanks coming through Faid Pass, engaged CCA forces that were counterattacking the advance near Lessouda Oasis. The CCA armor was outnumbered two to one by mostly heavier tanks. Waves of heavy enemy bombers began attacking Sidi Bou Sid and and Djebel Ksaira. CCA began smoking the area to provide some concealment to its outnumbered forces. Continuous air attacks continued across the front all day and the Luftwaffe dominated the skies against US XII Air Support Command planes flying from Thelepte Airfields almost 45 miles away.

By mid-morning enemy tanks and infantry began moving on Sidi Bou Sid from north of Djebel Ksaira, and a large number of tanks emerged from Maizilla Pass, south of Djebel Ksaira. In spite of valiant counterattacks by CCA units, heavy casualties were being sustained in both men and equipment. (By 1 pm the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment had suffered casualties of almost 50%). The Allied effort was soon turned into delaying tactics. German tanks and infantry columns were surrounding CCA positions from the north and from the south and were threatening to close a giant pincers movement nearly 10 miles west of Sidi Bou Sid and just short of Kern's Crossroad. In late afternoon CCA was ordered to withdraw through Kern's Crossroad (nearly 10 miles west of Djebel Lessouda) and to select rallying points in the direction of Sbeitla. During the day the 3rd Bat-

talion 168th Armored Regiment, continued to maintain a strong defense while practically surrounded on the Djebel Ksaira and Garet Hadid positions. Neither of these positions was overrun.

During the hectic fighting 443rd units were highly effective. Summaries of some actions follow:

Platoon B-3, supporting the 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalion, covered the battalion withdrawal. Two gun-tracks, protecting anti-tank guns, moved north toward Djebel Lessouda and were never seen again. Another gun-track took an armor piercing shell in its gas tank and blew up, killing four crewmen. At least one Stuka was shot down in the action even though enemy tank fire was heavy and vehicles of all types were burning in the column ahead of and to the rear of the gun tracks.

Platoon D-3, Protecting CCA Command Post east of Sidi Bou Sid, discovered in mid-morning on 14 February that CCA had withdrawn without notifying the 443rd unit. Consequently, Platoon D-3 commanded by Lt. Cramer, began moving southwestward on a small trail. The entire platoon was captured in the encircling German armor movement and spent the remainder of the war in German P.O.W. camps.

Platoon A-1 was protecting the 17th Field Artillery Regiment and supporting the 168th Regiment on the southern slopes of Djebel Ksaira. The 2nd Battalion of the 17th was ordered to withdraw to the west, by leap-frogging its batteries, but it was intercepted and wrecked by enemy dive bombers. Platoon A-1 was then moved to Sidi Bou Sid where it shot down two enemy planes. With an increasingly confused situation, conflicting orders being received and continuing enemy shelling, strafing and bombing, Platoon A-1 and Platoon B-4 lost contact with the 17th Field Artillery and decided to move cross-country to Sbeitla under enemy tank fire. A-1's ammunition truck and a gun-track were blown up before the platoon column reached CCA's command post on the Sbeitla-Faid road. Twenty-two men were missing although most of them filtered into the 443rd Battalion Headquarters at Sbeitla within 24 hours.

Platoon B-4 was with CCA's supply train three miles south of Sidi Bou Sid and on 14 February was under constant air attack as well as receiving much tank fire. B-4 had two gun-tracks blown up before withdrawing toward Sbeitla. The platoon shot down three enemy planes and nineteen of its men, missing in action, escaped and rejoined the Battalion.

On 14 February American losses were 40 tanks, 15 self-propelled mounts, 7 armored personnel carriers, and many other vehicles. At least 71 men were captured. And for many days following the fighting, long lines of towed, 37mm



STUKA TIME !

anti-tank guns could be seen moving to the Allied rear. They had been proven quite useless in action against the heavily armored German tanks and vehicles.

*STABILIZING THE BREAKTHROUGH AND WITHDRAWAL*

The German breakthrough had the sobering effect of all harsh lessons learned in combat. Reconnaissance on a far wider front might have warned of the enemy attack sooner; too many layers of command and lack of adequate communication probably slowed command response to a developing situation; coordination among Allied forces needed strengthening; and antiaircraft fire needed to be held until enemy planes were well within range. But the Allies, with their available resources, took rapid action to try to rescue trapped units and to stabilize the action.

On 15th February, II Corps assigned the 1st Armored Division the extraordinary mission of trying to free the 2nd Battalion, 168th Regiment, trapped on Djebel Lessouda and the 3rd Battalion of the 168th still holding out on Djebel Ksaira and Garet Hadid. The Division ordered CCC under Col Stack to accomplish the mission with standby support from CCA, holding positions on Djebel Hamra. CCC moved toward Sidi Bou Sid, making slow progress against heavy artillery and tank fire and attacks. In addition it was subjected to numerous, intense air raids. During the action, Platoon B-2, protecting CCC Command Post, shot down seven enemy planes and badly damaged five others. But as enemy tanks pressed in from both sides, CCC's armored infantry was unable to resist and so failed to relieve enemy pressure on the forces surrounded on Djebels Lessouda and Ksaira. Patrols were unable to maintain contact between CCC's battalions because so much of the area was securely in enemy hands and was strongly patrolled. Finally, at 6pm on 15 February, CCC was ordered to withdraw to Djebel Hamra. The 168th Regiment was ordered to attempt to fight its way out but only scattered remnants reached the American lines. And the Commanding General, 1st British Army, directed that forces holding high ground west of Faid be withdrawn and the Pass at Kasserine be organized for defense.

After repeated requests, General Robinett's CCB was released by the British 1st Army to the US II Corps. It moved to the vicinity of Sbeitla to reinforce CCA and CCC which were both hard-pressed after two days of furious fighting. The 68th Armored Field Artillery and the 1st Armored Regiment moved to the Sidi Bou Sid area to receive, cover and send to the rear, any men of the 168th Infantry who were able to break through from Djebel

Lessouda under cover of darkness. About 200 of these men worked their way down Lessouda, while under constant attack. A few escaped but most, including regimental commander Col. Drake, were captured. All day on 16 February, stragglers drifted into the 443rd Provisional Headquarters at Sbeitla. Included were the following who had been listed as missing in action: 22 from Platoon A-1, 4 from Platoon B-3, and 5 from Platoon B-4.

It appears likely that as many as 130 enemy tanks were engaged in the fighting. The 1st Armored Division lost 86 medium tanks in attempting to relieve the trapped infantry on the two mountains while enemy losses were 23 tanks. During the morning of 16 February, German tank patrols began pushing west toward Kern's Crossroad and Sbeitla. These patrols continued to build in strength in spite of harassing artillery fire from the withdrawing defenders. On orders from II Corps to hold Sbeitla at all costs until 11 am on 17 February, the 1st Armored Division's General Ward threw a protective defense around Sbeitla which included all antiaircraft and artillery as anti-tank defenses. CCB moved south and southwest and CCA moved east and northeast of Sbeitla to block any enemy approach. During hours of darkness, units were to begin moving west to new defense positions just east of Kasserine. But by 2:50 pm on 16 February enemy pressure began increasing as planes began flying overhead to distract attention from more tanks moving swiftly into the action. The new arrivals included the famed, heavy "Tiger Tanks", (Mark VI), and by evening they were in the vicinity of Kern's Crossroad. There seems little doubt that General Rommell sensed the possibility of a deep breakthrough to seize Kasserine and even Bone on the coast.

U.S. armored artillery continued to hold positions and fire on the advancing enemy until forced to withdraw in leap-frogging action, often through encircling forces. By 7:45 pm, CCC was attached to CCA and occupied defensive positions east and west of Sbeitla. Shortly after dark the Germans attacked Sbeitla but withdrew after three of their tanks were destroyed. Later in the night American troops blew up the ammunition dump and the railroad bridge at Sbeitla. Again, at 9am on 17 February, the Germans attacked Sbeitla in force but were held east of the town until 3 pm. This strong holding action enabled a more orderly but still confused withdrawal to be made under frequent bombing and strafing attacks. The 1st Armored had held Sbeitla well past the 11 am time ordered.

Fighting a strong rearguard action against renewed enemy armored and infantry attacks, 1st Armored Division units began moving toward Kasserine. Enemy capture of Feriana, to the south, forced the Division to funnel through the narrow Kasserine Pass toward Tebessa. Remnants of the 443rd AAA Provisional Battalion Headquarters also moved to two miles west of the Pass. During the Division defense of Sbeitla, Platoon B-2 destroyed four more enemy planes, B-1 shot down another and B-4 destroyed three more. During 14,15 February, the 1st Armored Division was without command control of its troops and was forced to operate with a single combat command at a time, with only one battalion of tanks in contact with the enemy. It was never in a position to concentrate its force against the enemy. But when it was finally assembled as a unit, the Division functioned admirably and without appreciable loss in its fighting withdrawal from Sbeitla.

Losses of men and of gun-trucks during these battles had left an already under-equipped 443rd with even less fire power. Consequently, the Provisional Battalion Commander, Major Larson, began to search toward Tebessa for Lt. Col. Smith, 443rd Battalion Commander and his convoy, coming from Morocco. He found only wagon loads of fleeing French and Arab refugees with others on donkeys and on foot, moving toward Feriana (already captured by the Germans) and Gafsa, trying to escape the German and Italian advance. After his unsuccessful search, Major Larson returned to Sbeitla seeking to find any straggling gun-trucks as well as the Maintenance Section and other vehicles that were missing. Upon his return to Kasserine at 10 pm on 17 February, he met General Ward who asked him to unload all 443rd trucks and use them to help move as much ammunition and gasoline as possible from Kasserine before midnight. This was done and the remaining supplies were blown up shortly thereafter. At the same time, CCB had been ordered to block the Thelepte-Kasserine road against attack from Feriana where a large German tank concentration was reported.

At 3 am on 18 February Lt. Col. Smith arrived in Tebessa with the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP), having been relieved from the Gun Operation Room Information Center in Casablanca on 3 February. By rail and in convoy the remaining, scattered elements of the 443rd had come from Casablanca, Rabat, Meknes, Port Lyautey and Algiers to rendezvous with the Provisional Battalion in bivouac six miles southeast of Tebessa near Bekkaria. Lt. Col. Smith reorganized the Battalion into Batteries of four platoons with four gun-trucks each, except for Battery D which had four, towed, 40 mm guns per platoon. This action was to cope with the loss of the

and trailers during the action from Faid Pass to Kasserine. All platoons were immediately sent into action protecting the 1st Armored Division. Units of batteries B and D which had been engaged in fierce battles saw morale of the men drop as a result of this assignment. They had hoped for a period for rest and recuperation but the tactical situation did not permit such luxury. Morale of many in the newly arrived 443rd units suffered too, as they were told horror stories by those who had come through all the bitter Tunisian fighting.

It was evident that the Afrika Corps had thrown the bulk of its armor, in North Africa, into the fighting in a supreme effort to knock out the green American forces in Southern Tunisia, in order to be able to turn and successfully combat the British Eighth Army on the Mareth Line. Immediate availability of Allied replacements and reserves prevented complete enemy success. German forces had gained complete control of the Gafsa-Feriana-Kasserine-Sbiba-Pichon area and defeated in detail all II Corps elements opposing them. Capturing Sbeitla enabled the enemy to exploit their drive toward Sbiba from Sbeitla and Feriana through the Kasserine Pass. The Kasserine Valley Battle began in earnest.

#### *BATTLE OF KASSERINE VALLEY*

On 18 February enemy infantry, supported by artillery and tanks, attacked the defenses of the Kasserine Pass, with the objective of pushing through to capture Constantine and Bone. Stout defense of the Pass by the 26th Regiment, backed by engineer forces, finally gave way and German forces moved through and in the direction of the mountain fortress of Thala, threatening the right flank of the British 1st Army. The 1st Armored Division then took up defensive positions east of Tebessa, determined to prevent the enemy from reaching the American supply center in the town. Several days of rain made movement difficult and only full-tracked vehicles were able to operate cross country. On 20 February the Afrika Corps with 20 tanks and 10 truckloads of armored infantry attacked CCB defenses along the Kasserine-Tebessa road. CCB responded with tank and artillery fire. 443rd Battery A, with CCB, fought off a number of strafing and bombing attacks, destroying three planes and probably destroying two others, bringing praises from the commander of the armored field artillery. Temporarily rebuffed, the enemy forces regrouped during the night and on 21 February began an advance in two columns. One reached to four miles south of Thala during the afternoon and the other moved west but subsequently withdrew.

A night attempt by the enemy to take Djebel Hamra Pass failed and a heavy, morning rainstorm slowed a subsequent infantry attack. Wearing French and American uniforms, leading enemy elements then attacked with initial success. Concentrated, heavy U.S. artillery fire prevented enemy armor and artillery from advancing close enough to provide adequate support to their advancing troops. The German attack was disrupted and CCB immediately launched a counterattack. About 3 pm American infantry reached the enemy positions and the Germans broke and ran. Many were captured in their tumultuous flight. Scores of vehicles were abandoned and by daybreak on 22 February the American victory was complete. Rommel decided to call off the attacks and pull back.

#### *GERMAN WITHDRAWAL*

Meanwhile the British defense of Thala was a successful delaying action aided by five tank-destroyer guns of an American unit. British reinforcements were rushed from Sbiba and the American 9th Infantry Division, by marching continuously for four days and nights on the final stage of their march from Casablanca, Morocco to Tunisia, arrived in the Thala area by daylight of 22 February. Enemy pressure then began to ease off.

After four days of desultory firing and patrolling action on all fronts, strong enemy counterattacks failed to materialize. From 23 to 25 February the Germans and Italians withdrew from the Kasserine Pass leaving many mines and booby traps behind. Damage upon the enemy had not been severe enough to cause such a withdrawal although strengthening Allied forces may have raised a threat which was taken seriously. More than likely the enemy withdrawal to the Faid/Gafsa area was due to an estimate that sufficient damage had been inflicted upon the Allies in southern Tunisia to prevent them from materially affecting the coming defense of the Mareth Line against the steadily approaching British Eighth Army. American losses had been severe: over 7,000 had been taken prisoner; over 200 tanks, 50 guns, 20 anti-tank guns, 38 self-propelled mounts, nearly 300 trucks and large amounts of ammunition, equipment, clothing and supplies were lost. The 1st Armored Division, alone, lost over 1,000 men killed, wounded and missing in action.

#### *PREPARING FOR A FINAL EFFORT*

American forces began preparing and organizing for a final effort to drive



enemy forces out of North Africa. Lt. Col. John Smith was relieved from command and Major Werner L. Larson was appointed the new Commander of the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) on 3 March 1943. Two days later, Major General Frendall, II Corps Commander, was replaced by Major General George S. Patton. In compliance with 18th Army Group orders, II Corps had completed its planning for the coming operation and General Patton had only to see that they were properly implemented. As a consequence he spent considerable time in building up the morale and confidence of his troops. He ordered the elimination of sloppy appearance of both officers and enlisted men and required shiny helmets and colored neckerchiefs, representing the wearer's branch of service, worn around the neck and inside khaki shirt collars. Snappy saluting was demanded.

Shortly after General Patton took command of II Corps, he indicated to Lt. Col. Larson his pleasure at the 443rd's record of destroying enemy planes with his brain-child - the T-28-E1. He asked if the 443rd had any needs and Larson responded that he wanted to replace the telescopic, central tracer control firing system with forward area (open) sights. Said Patton, "Hell yes! Make any changes you want as long as you keep knocking down planes". Temperature and humidity changes fogged up the telescopic sights and their narrow field of vision made it impossible to focus upon and track a plane during the jarring vibration and smoke of firing. Gun crews had found the sights useless and many had been discarded during the African invasion. While in Casablanca, Lt. Col. Larson and T/Sgt. Joseph Zupancic, of battalion maintenance, had discussed an open sight and a diagram was sketched by Zupancic. However there were no suitable materials in the Casablanca. Later, shortly after the Battle of Kasserine Valley, Sgt. Zupancic and one of his men, Alex Snyder, came upon a dump of cast-off German and U.S. equipment, near Tebessa. They salvaged needed materials for building open sights. With a design for the new sights approved by Col. Larson, machinists under Zupancic went to work. Improvising jigs, they made 160 new, open sights in six days, including intricate welding by Sgt. Zupancic. In the ensuing eight days, four teams of two men each installed new sights on all 443rd guntracks scattered over the far-flung battlefield - just in time for the Southern Tunisia Campaign.

#### *SOUTHERN TUNISIA CAMPAIGN - PHASE 1*

For the final phase of the Tunisian Campaign, II Corps passed from the command of the British 1st Army to command of the 18th Army Group of General

Alexander. II Corps was then composed of the 1st, 9th and 34th Infantry divisions, the 1st Armored Division, the 13th Field Artillery Brigade reinforced by the 5th Armored Field Artillery Group, a British reconnaissance unit of two squadrons, the 1st Tank Destroyer Group (7 battalions), Corps Antiaircraft with 4 automatic weapons battalions, one 90 mm battalion, separate batteries and Corps service and supporting troops (XII Air Support Command and mobile French forces operating from the Negrine area).

Prior to the beginning of this campaign the 443rd received a letter from General Ward, 1st Armored Division Commander, complimenting and thanking the 443rd for its effective and efficient support during the preceding two months of severe fighting.

#### *DRIVE TO MAKNASSEY*

On 13 March, Colonel Benson, Chief of Staff of the 1st Armored Division, was given command of all troops in the Sbeitla vicinity. Immobilized for a week by rains, the Benson Force finally moved southeast about 25 miles while conducting vigorous reconnaissance. In spite of continuing heavy rains the night of 15/16 March, the 1st Armored Division combat commands moved out of Kasserine to Djebel Souina, 20 miles northeast of Gafsa. On 16 March, CCA found Station Zannouch evacuated. Rains continued but the Germans became nervous over the rapid American comeback and began mounting heavy air attacks. On 16 March Platoon A-1 destroyed three German planes. Two hundred twenty five Italian soldiers tried to surrender but were pinned down by German fire and were unable to reach American lines. As prisoners began to be taken, they testified to the concentrations and accuracy of American artillery fire. Col. Maraist, commanding 1st Armored Division Artillery, had an unprecedented amount of fire at his command in five field artillery battalions. The rains finally ceased, giving way to hot days and cool nights. Men listening to command radios would hear Axis Sally playing favorite American songs while telling the American soldiers about their unfaithful wives or how their girl friends were stepping out on them.

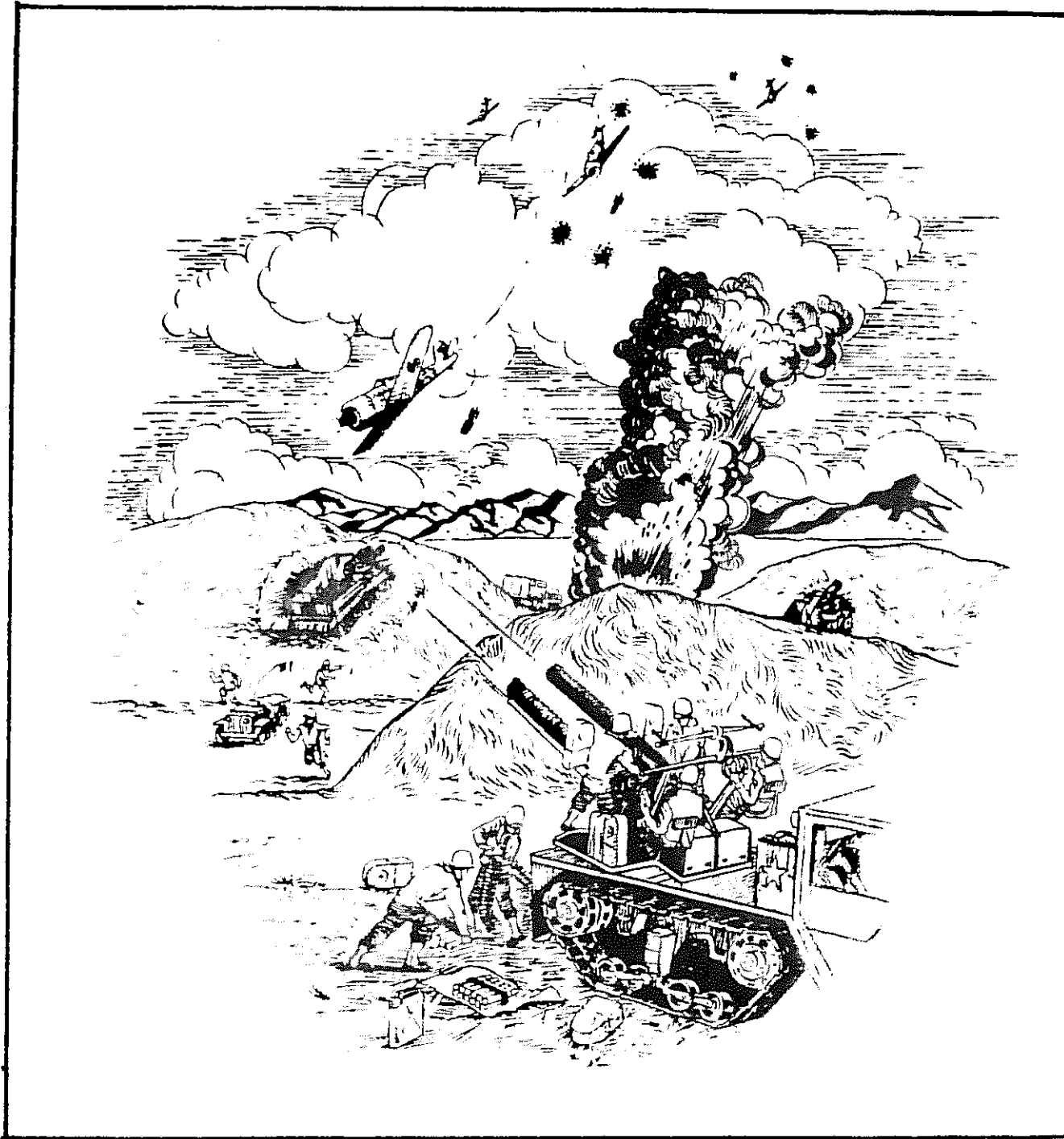
Finally the 1st Armored Division attacked but due to the continuing enemy buildup, east of Maknassey, was able to gain only a temporary foothold in the pass with both sides suffering considerable losses. Farther south, the 1st Infantry Division captured Gafsa on 17 March and the following

day pushed to secure the hills six miles east of El Guettar. The Division captured over 700 Italians of the vaunted Bersagliere Regiment and the Centauro Division. On 23/24 March enemy counterattacks, by 10th Panzer Division tanks, were thrown back with heavy losses inflicted upon the Germans. Over 600 prisoners were taken and only nine survivors of one company were seen to escape. American artillery air bursts (using time, or posit fuses) wreaked havoc upon enemy ground troops. During these actions, night-time was punctuated by the throbbing engines of the JU-87s (Stukas), the crunch of bombs, parachute flare clusters and radar-controlled salvos of heavy anti-aircraft fire. And when General Ryder's 34th Infantry Division advanced on Fondouk with little opposition, in a diversionary attack, it was the first time that all four divisions of II Corps were engaged simultaneously.

General Eddy's 9th Infantry Division had already attacked El Guettar but the enemy's well-entrenched and coordinated defenses, some blasted out of solid rock and in formidable terrain, could not be penetrated. At this point, German determination to keep the II Corps from driving to the Gulf of Tunis at Gabes was succeeding. If it had failed, the entire Afrika Corps would have been trapped between II Corps and the British 8th Army, advancing from the south and east. There appeared to be no way that the Benson Armored Force could break through to Gabes. The Fondouk diversion had not worked and the Maknassey operation was stopped. The Germans had stepped up their air attacks and sent the 21st Panzer Division to El Guettar, to counter any Allied breakthrough. In addition, roving enemy patrols were disrupting night-time movement of supplies to advanced Allied positions. Meantime, General Patton was "chomping at the bit" for the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions to move forward faster and enable the Benson Armored Force to break out on the Gafsa-Gabes road. During this difficult fighting the 443rd continued to provide superb, combat support for the divisions. On 31 March, three Ju-87s were shot down, the two man crew of one being captured and taken for interrogation.

The well-loved war correspondent Ernie Pyle, in "Here Is Your War", page 193, wrote the following about a Platoon D-3 gun track and its crew. At the time, Platoon D-3 was defending Col. Benson's Armored Force Command Post near El Guettar. The Command Post was under heavy and incessant air attack and bombing with "Butterfly" anti-personnel as well as 500 and 1,000 pound bombs. A number of men were killed and wounded.

*"Most of us found our emotions becoming jaded as month after month of war piled on us. But Lennie (Lt. Leonard Bessman) was never jaded. He had a facility for mirroring in his fertile mind every human thing*



"Fighting Those Fock-Wulfs At El Guettar"

*that crossed his path. We (American Forces) had a certain type of anti-aircraft (multiple guns), mounted on a half-track, which required two men to fire. The gunners sat in two metal, bucket seats, just back of the guns. Lennie was lying near this ack-ack outfit during a terrific dive-bombing and strafing, and he kept his eye on those two special gunners as the Stuka came right down upon them. The two never wavered. They sat there firing until suddenly, and in unison, they toppled sideways out of their seats - dead. And all within the same instant, two more Americans rose like twins from the bed of the half-track, took the seats just vacated by death and went on with the firing. Lennie was terribly moved by that little drama of duty automatically performed and he almost choked up when he told the story".*

Lt. Heisler, of D Platoon, had instructed his men to take cover after they saw an enemy plane release bombs over their position but Sgt. Steinberg's gun crew refused to leave their weapons and continued firing on the attacking aircraft. One man was killed and three were seriously wounded. When Lt. was sure that the wounded men were being properly cared for, he went for a vehicle to evacuate them to medical facilities. First his jeep was wrecked by an anti-personnel mine, then the first ambulance he found ran over a land mine and was immobilised. He finally secured a second ambulance which took the wounded men. His selfless action earned him a silver star.

#### *SOUTHERN TUNISIA CAMPAIGN - PHASE 2*

Following receipt of a message from General Alexander, 18th Army Group Commander, plans for attack were activated. The general indicated that it was felt that the enemy front would give way under continued pressure. The 1st and 9th Divisions prepared to attack in the second phase of the Southern Tunisia operation. Air Marshall Tedder, Lt. Gen. Spaatz and Brig. General Williams arrived at II Corps Command Post to confer on increasing air support in Tunisia. During the conference the CP was attacked by enemy planes and the heavy bombing killed Patton's aide-de-camp.

Enemy counterattacks and continuous heavy bombing were affecting the morale of the 1st Armored Division. To revitalize the Division, General Patton appointed Major General Ernest Harmon as Commander, replacing General Ward. On 7 April Patton ordered the Benson Armored Force to attack and drive vigorously until it either reached the Mediterranean (Gulf of Gabes) or in pushing eastward toward the sea while clearing enemy opposition, made contact with the

German main force. By 4:10 pm the same day the Benson Force had advanced 29 miles east of the II Corps boundary, captured over 2,000 prisoners and made contact with the Xth Corps of the British 8th Army, which had broken through the Mareth Line. The Benson Force then withdrew to the II Corps boundary.

Although this 1st Armored Division action had thus drawn enemy strength away from the British 8th Army, it had not been able to achieve a breakthrough to cut off and trap the Afrika Corps against the 8th Army and the U.S. 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions. American troops ceased hostilities in Southern Tunisia on 10 April and all units began working hard on maintenance, training and rehabilitation preparatory to moving to battle in Northern Tunisia.

#### *NORTHERN TUNISIA CAMPAIGN*

Changes in command occurred at this time in efforts to place responsibility in the hands of more aggressive and proficient officers and to prepare for future operations. CCA's General McQuillen was replaced by II Corps Operations Officer Col. Kent Lambert. General Patton was relieved by General Omar Bradley in order that Patton could return to Morocco and organize the Seventh Army (I Armored Corps) for the invasion of Sicily. 443rd Battery B Commander was relieved and made Headquarters Battery Commandant. Soon thereafter, suffering from combat fatigue and back trouble he was sent home to the States.

During the campaigns in North Africa, assault rations were used. Called K rations, they came in a parafine-coated box the size of a Crackerjack box - a different variety for each of the three daily meals. This was supplemented by a D Ration, a concentrated, chocolate food bar plus whatever local produce, eggs or meat might be obtained. In Tunisia, the C-Ration, which came in tin cans, was the mainstay of the troops. It had little variety and was poorly seasoned. Places against a vehicle's exhaust muffler, a can could be warmed in 15 to 20 minutes. But as the Northern Tunisia campaign opened, a new 5 in 1 ration became available. It had a day's ration for five men and included five or six varieties of food for different days. Of course, some were enjoyed more than others. Later, the ration became a 10 in 1 model. 443rd men would long remember the "desert stoves" they made from #10 tin cans, half filled with sand. Gasoline poured into the sand and then lighted, would burn for a long time and was frequently used to boil water, make coffee and poach eggs. When an open flame was unlikely to attract enemy attention the desert stoves could even make the C Ration almost palatable when salt and onions (when they could be found) were added. With scarce water supplies, warm water was welcome.

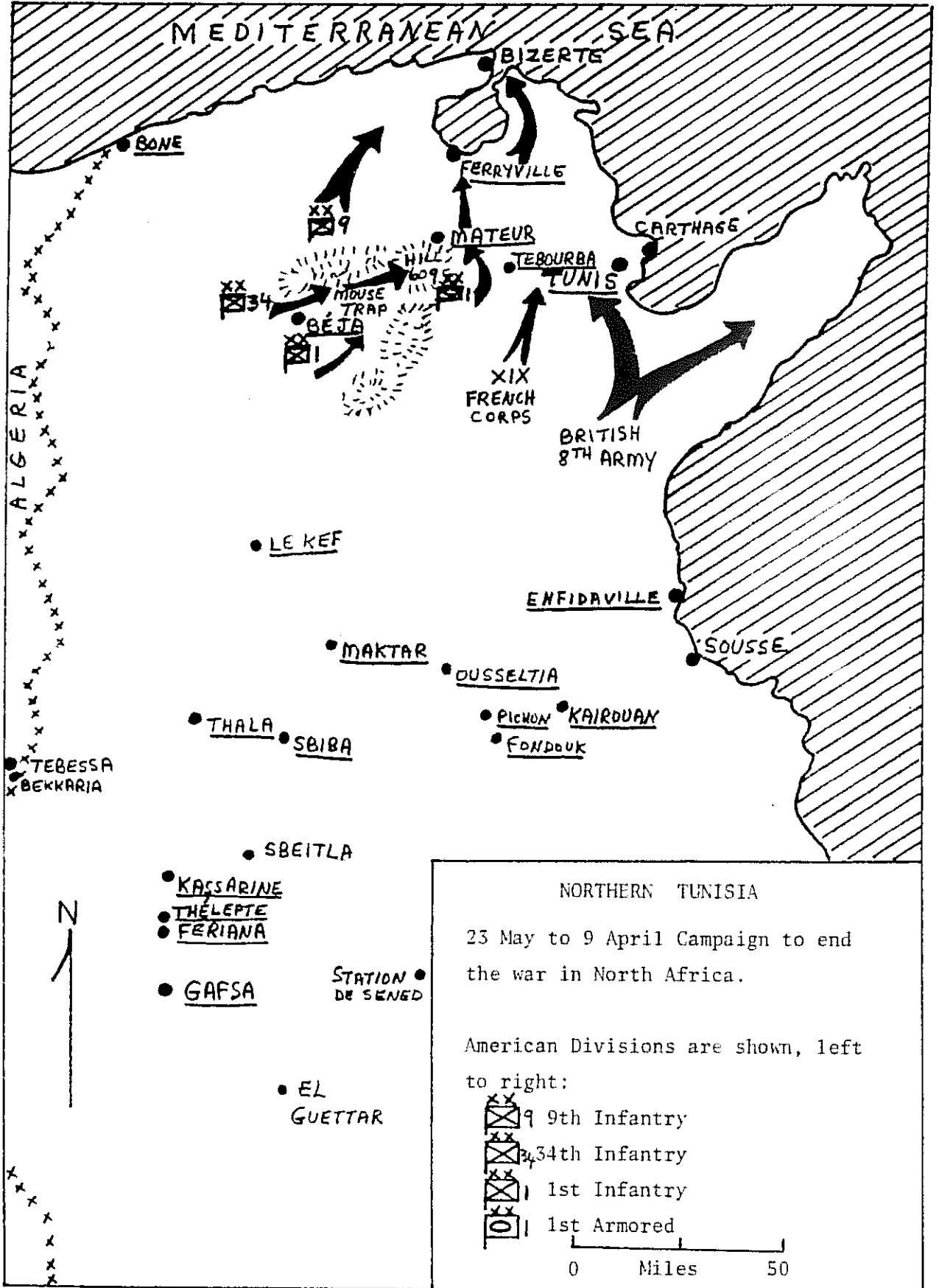
Although General Alexander had planned to pinch out the U.S. II Corps in Central Tunisia as the British 8th Army advanced northward, General Eisenhower intervened and Alexander's 18th Army Group revised its plans, giving II Corps an operating zone of its own on the north flank with the 1st British Army in support. The Fifth and Tenth British Corps were to the right of II Corps with the XIX French Corps and the British 8th Army on the right flank. As the Afrika Corps withdrew to the northeastern part of Tunisia it made prolific use of mines and booby traps to delay Allied forces. In an unprecedented action, the U.S. II Corps convoys moved at night, on 18 April, and quickly passed through the British units to assume attack positions in its new sector. The Afrika Corps, in spite of staggering losses of men and materiel, quickly organized new defenses in three general sectors: before the Corps France and the 9th Infantry Division, in the hills north and south of Ued Sed Janine, in the hills west of Mateur, and before the British 8th Army near Enfidaville.

#### *1ST ARMORED DIVISION OFFENSIVE*

Col. Maraist's 1st Armored Division Artillery Command Post moved into the hills southeast of Mateur, directly behind friendly infantry positions in defenses recently abandoned by the Germans. On 21 April the 13th Artillery Brigade moved into position west of Tine Valley where Hill 609 dominated the entire valley (called the "Mouse Trap" by the British). Behind a 30 minute artillery preparation, the 34th Infantry Division and I Company of the 1st Armored Regiment attacked Hill 609 and captured it on 30 April. With this key observation point lost, enemy resistance in the "Mouse Trap" began to collapse and in another attempt to halt the Allied advance, the Luftwaffe again resumed heavy air attacks on Mateur, its bridge and Allied troops and continued to bomb and strafe until 5 May. But Mateur had been taken and the main German defense system in the North had been broken. It was fitting that the final German collapse should come on Mothers' Day, 9 May 1943.

During the "Mouse Trap" action it was reliably reported that midnight visits to a winery in the vicinity would find British, German and American G.I.s filling their five gallon water cans at the wine vat spigots - "friends" for the moment but bitter, shooting enemies the next day.

443rd platoons continued their strong, anti-aircraft support during the northern Tunisia battles, shooting down more Messerschmitts (ME-109s) and





Focke-Wulfs (FW 190s), Stukas (JU-87s) were being seen less frequently, perhaps because so many had been destroyed.

By 9 May all that remained of the once vaunted Afrika Corps was truckload after truckload of German and Italian troops coming into Allied lines to surrender, followed by columns of others on foot. While the Germans had been able to evacuate some key personnel across the Mediterranean to Sicily and Italy, most had to be abandoned in Tunisia. Many were lost as Allied war planes shot the slow, German air transports down into the sea. And the victorious 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) men had their share of garlands of flowers fruit, wine, cognac and cookies as they passed through captured Ferryville on their way to Bizerte. Not to be overlooked or forgotten were the happy, grateful kisses that French girls, lining the roads, bestowed upon their American liberators.

By 11 am on 9 May, all Axis troops in II Corps sector had officially surrendered unconditionally. But some unit communications were poor or destroyed so occasional artillery and small arms fire was received. A major task was to secure the coastline and prevent enemy soldiers from escaping on barges, securing installations to prevent sabotage, and taking over government ration dumps so that prisoners could be adequately fed. General Harmon ordered that prisoners be used to point out and identify all land mines, booby-traps and delayed mines, in accordance with their unconditional surrender. The significance of the Allied victory can be realized by comparing the over 250,000 prisoners taken in Tunisia with the 90,000 Germans captured by the Russians at Stalingrad.

After reports that Arabs and others were pilfering German supply and ammunition dumps, an order was issued at 7 pm on 9 May to all units to take steps to guard all such installations and to shoot anyone caught pilfering.

The final operation in Tunisia from 3 to 9 May was the first time the 1st Armored Division had been able to operate as a unit and on a mission for which it was designed. It did so with tremendous success. During the Tunisian Campaign the 443rd operated mainly with the 1st Armored Division. However, at various times, platoons were temporarily assigned to protect elements of the 1st, 9th, and 34th Divisions as well as several other II Corps units. During the Tunisian Campaign the 443rd destroyed 78

enemy aircraft and probably destroyed 25 others. The Battalion had lost 13 gun-tracks as well as several trucks and other vehicles. On 27 May General Harmon praised the 443rd at a Division Assembly. And a memorandum from Colonel Robert V. Maraist, 1st Armored Division Artillery Commander to Lt. Colonel Werner L. Larson, Commander of the 443rd AAA AW Bn, stated:

*"As Division Artillery Commander of the US 1st Armored Division, I wish to extend my personal thanks and appreciation, as well as that of the 1st Armored Division, for your loyal and efficient AA support.*

*"From 7 January to the present date, when you have been attached to this Division, your officers and men have lived up to the high standard that this Division maintains and it has been a great pleasure to have had you under my command.*

*"Will you please extend my appreciation to your fine command for their outstanding support. Whenever I think of Station De Sened and other air attacks I will most certainly remember your duck hunters in action and the pleasureable sight of falling enemy planes".*

On 22 May 1943 the 443rd was detached from the 1st Armored Division and attached to the 34th Infantry Division.

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#### SICILIAN CAMPAIGN

##### *PREPARATION FOR INVASION*

The combined Chiefs of Staff, at the Casablanca Conference of January 1943, had agreed to Churchillian strategy for the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. In aiming at the "soft underbelly of the Axis" along the Mediterranean, control of Sicily was necessary because of its strategic position dominating the sea lanes between Tunisia and Italy. Invading and conquering Sicily was of paramount importance in making Allied lines of communication more secure for the conquest of Italy. In spite of devastating reverses in the Soviet Union and its stunning defeat in North Africa, the Axis managed to garrison Sicily with ten Italian and three reorganized German divisions.

It was determined that General Alexander's 18th Army Group would command the Sicilian campaign ground forces, to consist of General Patton's 7th Army on the left and General Montgomery's 8th Army on the right. The 443rd Battalion moved on 6 June, from its wheatfield bivouac four miles south of Ferryville, to be attached to the 3rd Infantry Division about 25 miles farther west, near El Alia. Two days later, Lt. Col. Larson, two other officers, four enlisted men and an Arab guide, acting quickly on information received from a French

family, searched an area six miles north of El Alia and captured a German lieutenant and nine enlisted men. They had been in hiding since the 9 May surrender, and had been attempting to contact German submarines, off the coast.

On 16 June, the 443rd began waterproofing gun-tracks and other vehicles scheduled for the assault waves in the Sicilian Invasion. Preparation also began for amphibious exercises and landing strategies.

The 443rd Commander had submitted names of all 443rd 2nd lieutenants for promotion to 1st lieutenant. But the 3rd Division Assistant Commander, General Eagles, opposed the action. Lt. Col. Larson then discussed the combat records of these officers with General Truscott, Division Commander. The General directed that the request be re-submitted at the end of the Sicilian Campaign, at which time he would approve it.

During 21/22 June, all Battalion vehicles, destined for the initial assault waves of the invasion, were loaded on landing craft in Lake Bizerte. Batteries A and B loaded on LCTs (Landing Craft, Tank) and Batteries C and D loaded on LSTs (Landing Ship, Transport), to participate in the 3rd Division's amphibious landing exercises. Following the training all personnel, except drivers and guards, returned to the Battalion bivouac. Then on 27 June, the Battalion received some badly needed equipment. It received 38 M-3 half-tracks for use as platoon, battery and battalion command and communication vehicles as well as for platoon ammunition carriers. On 30 June the Battalion was issued 19 SCR-628 radios, to be installed in command half-tracks. The 443rd, for the first time, looked forward to having adequate communication for command, control and coordination.

Preceding final embarkation for Sicily, his silver hair shining in the hot, late afternoon, African sun, General Truscott addressed all the officers of his command. He reviewed the preparations and the training, now completed, and told the assembled group that, *"We do not know the word 'failure'. We know only that we will be successful or that we will be successful beyond our utmost expectations . . . ."*. As the General was concluding his address, the Sirocco wind, hot as from a blast furnace, came from out of the desert and blew for several minutes. General Truscott, his silver hair blowing in the hot, searing wind, commented, *"We can believe in omens and this wind must be a good omen since it blows us in the direction we are going"*.

On 5,6,7 July, personnel and remaining assault vehicles were loaded aboard

ship. During the loading, enemy bombers attacked the invasion fleet but were driven off with slight damage. Three men of Battery D were slightly wounded by fragments from anti-aircraft gunfire. The Sirocco returned on 6th and 7th July causing severe discomfort as many metal objects became almost too hot to handle. And although it meant a return to combat most Americans were glad to be leaving a land of extreme heat and cold, defeats, stalemates, drudgeries, boredom, death and the excitement of battle and final victory. It symbolized another step toward home.

#### *INVASION OF SICILY*

Three convoys of LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry), LSTs and LCTs, each able to proceed at different speeds, took separate routes to deceive the enemy. They all made rendezvous on 9 July off Gozo Island near Malta - a bastion of Allied air and naval strength. Stormy weather came up during the night of 8/9 July and grew worse as the day progressed. The invasion fleet ploughed through increasingly heavy seas toward Sicily. Seasickness and its agonies made the voyage miserable for many. Prospects for a successful invasion were dimming as the storm increased in violence. But when darkness fell the ships came under the leeward side of the island of Sicily and final preparations for invasion were begun. Evidence shows that the Axis Command expected Sicily to be invaded and had alerted its defenders. However, the enemy expected the invasion to hit the western coast of Sicily. And the defenders were on less than full alert as they couldn't believe that an invasion could be mounted during such a violent storm at sea.

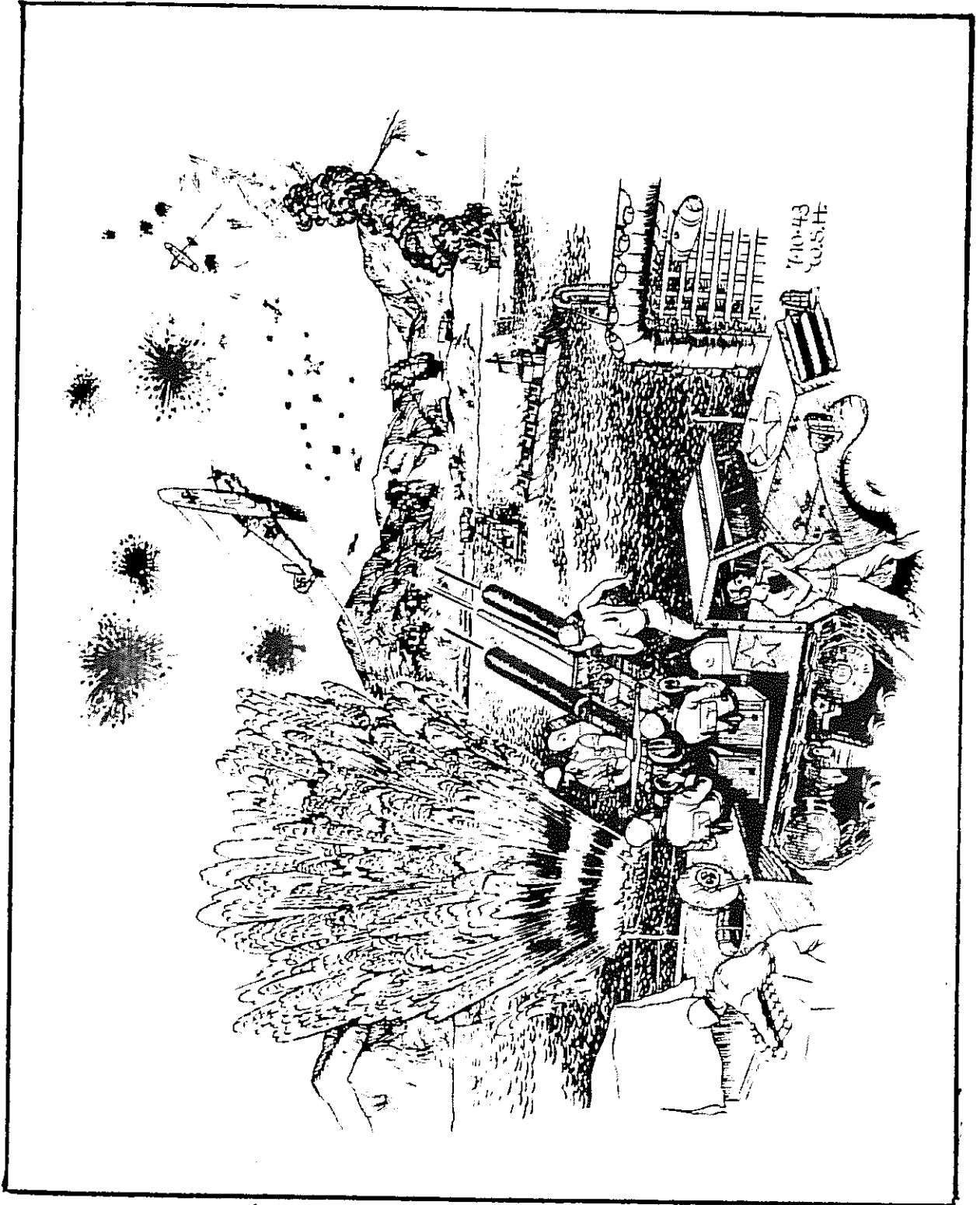
At 1:30 am on 10 July the convoy dropped anchor off the port of Licata and by 2:45 am the first assault wave was on the beaches. Enemy planes, which had attacked the convoy before it had even dropped anchor, continued to bomb the ships as well as the landing beaches. Allied naval forces had shelled the landing points and Allied air had bombed them heavily, preceding the landing. Parachutists of the 82nd Airborne Division had also been dropped with missions to seize the enemy airfield, destroy communications and harass attempts by the enemy to move reinforcements to the beachhead. Many of the paratroopers were dropped in widely scattered areas bearing little resemblance to scheduled drop zones. But this was of little consequence compared to action on invasion beaches far to the east where 23 Allied air transports were shot down by friendly troops near Gela. They had the misfortune to fly over just after a severe enemy air attack and gunners assumed that another attack was in progress.

At Licata, the enemy appeared to have been completely surprised and put up largely token resistance at the beachheads. Greatest damage to invading forces was inflicted by enemy air attacks. A ring of hills surrounded the Licata plain. They were 1,200 to 1,600 feet high and could have been made into strong defenses. The defenders did not make full use of this defense potential. Although at least 5 Italian Divisions plus corps and army troops as well as 34,000 German troops could have been made available for enemy defense against the 3rd Infantry Division at H-Hour and thereafter, only a portion of this strength was mustered at any one time to oppose the American advance. The invasion beaches at Licata received much machine gun and small arms fire but all units soon achieved their objectives and by 11 am Licata was captured.

443rd platoons of Battery B landed between 4 and 8 am, occupying their tactical defense positions at once. Platoon B-3 destroyed two enemy machine gun nests by firing at them while still aboard the LCT heading for the beach. A similar incident occurred later when Platoon D-2 destroyed an ME-109 by firing while still aboard an LCT landing craft. Batteries B and D engaged enemy dive bomber and swing-bomber missions during the morning and afternoon of D-Day. Both Batteries remained on beach defense since the Licata airfield was inoperable and no defense was needed. The airfield was still under construction.

Battery A platoons, landing between 6:30 am and 1 pm, occupied assigned positions protecting Beach Blue and by mid-afternoon had shot down an ME-109. A FW-190 was shot down by Battery C, landing about the same time.

By 11 July all enemy artillery positions had been overrun and the U.S invaders began a general extension of the beachhead to the "yellow line" -- their second objective. Stubborn pockets of German and Italian resistance were overcome. Enemy air continued to harass the beach area where supplies and equipment were being unloaded as rapidly as possible. And at 8 am on 11 July two ME-109s scored a direct hit on an LST, destroying it. After this action, heavy and indiscriminate fire from naval craft rose at every plane venturing over the area during landing operations - including even friendly aircraft - often endangering troops on the beaches and on the hills behind them. At one time, such fire was even directed at an American pilot descending in a parachute after his plane - a P-51 - had crashed. The 443rd gunners, skilled and experienced in aircraft identification, were firing only at enemy planes when they flew near enough to be reached by automatic



"That Mediterranean Cruise"

weapons and were upset and angry at such irresponsible shooting.

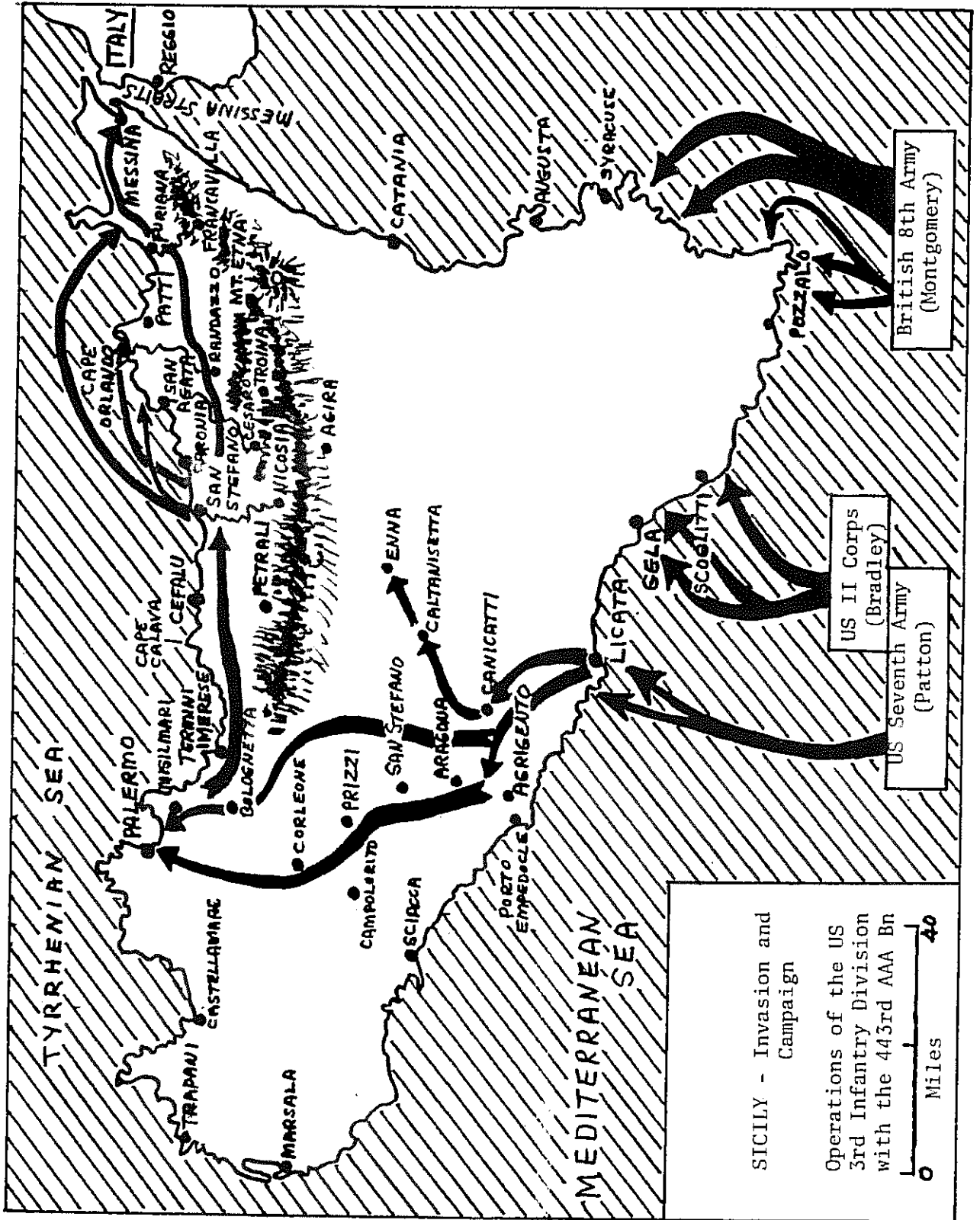
The 443rd's Battery C was attached to the 2nd Armored Division's CCA. On 11 July, as it protected its assigned unit, it shot down 4 FW-190s and one ME-109. The batteries defending the beaches, the same day, destroyed 2 FW-190s and 2 ME-109s. This ended air activity on the beaches of Licata.

Platoon C-2 moved with the 41st Armored Infantry to positions near Naro. At 7:45 in the evening six ME-109s attacked the position and one was shot down. And when American P-38s bombed and strafed the CCA convoy in error, 443rd gunners held their fire.

The 443rd Battalion Command Post just off Beach Yellow, on 11 July, saw large stores of 5 gallon gasoline cans and a supply of ammunition brought off landing craft, by truck, and stacked adjacent to each other along a railroad track very near the Command Post. Noticing that the gasoline cans were too near to the tracks, Lt. Col. Larson and C.P. personnel moved at night to a small, nearby hill. Early the following morning a locomotive came chugging around the bend and vibrated some gasoline cans onto the tracks where they were crushed and the gasoline ignited by sparks from the engine. This set off a spectacular fire which spread to the ammunition. For nearly two hours all personnel in the vicinity took cover while exploding ammunition and gasoline cans filled the air with debris going in all directions. Shortly thereafter the Command Post moved to west of Naro near the 3rd Infantry Division C.P.

#### *DRIVE TO PALERMO*

After the ancient city of Agrigento was captured by a battalion of the 3rd Division's 7th Regiment against strong resistance and artillery fire plus attacks by Italian planes, enemy forces began to withdraw northward fighting stubborn but ineffective rearguard actions. Enemy mine fields were poorly laid and road blocks were not well defended. Many anti-tank guns were not well used in defense and as U.S. forces prepared to mount their drive to Palermo on the north coast of Sicily, a number of disturbing air attacks occurred. On both 13 and 14 July, 443rd Batteries B and C reported bombing and strafing of friendly troops by American P-51s and P-38s. During 15 July on three different occasions a total of 13 P-51s strafed U.S. Infantry. Angry protests to higher headquarters served to end these incidents. In preparing to move to join the Division's attached





36th Field Artillery, a gun-track of Platoon D-2 overturned when it was being moved out of its position on a precipitous slope. One man was injured and hospitalized.

The drive to Palermo progressed so rapidly, against light and sporadic resistance, that American artillery was often unable to get into firing position before being ordered to continue the advance. So rapid was the American advance that few of the enemy were able to escape capture. Enemy air activity began to moderate and considerable equipment was abandoned by the retreating enemy. Mine fields and road blocks, intended to delay the Allied advance, were poorly defended. Many anti-tank guns, when captured, were found never to have been fired. One of the captured pieces was a half-track with a 40 mm gun mounted on it -- suggesting that the German Ordnance people had tried to make use of the T-28-E1s, captured in Tunisia, to develop a similar weapon. German pilots often referred to the T-28-E1 as the "hornets' nest" and no doubt the captured gun-tracks were the object of much testing and speculation by the Germans. The one captured in Sicily did have a gun platform, leveling mechanism which the T-28-E1 did not have. No weapons of this type were seen subsequently.

At frequent halts, during the campaign, 443rd men would occasionally listen to Axis Sally broadcasts. She had little effect on American morale. 443rd men made her the butt of jokes, scorned her amateurish, treasonable talk, and laughed at her obvious half-truths or outright lies. But they did enjoy the music she played.

The rugged but beautiful Sicilian countryside became moreso as the advance to Palermo continued. The sere and dry conditions of the south changed to a more lush and greener land in the north. Speed of the American advance saw the 3rd Division Headquarters moving three times in one day - from Aragona to San Stefano, to Prizzi and to Corleone. On 22 July most of the resistance in the 3rd Division sector collapsed and Palermo was taken, unopposed, on 23 July. It is interesting to note that at 2:45 pm on 23 July, 7th Army Commander Patton issued orders for all troops to hold their advance, at the Villabate - Belmonte - Monreale line, until further orders. This action enabled Patton's own 2nd Armored Division to enter Palermo first. In Palermo, the usual looting of warehouses was under way and continued until military intervention stopped it. The usual, systematic confiscation of food and other supplies had left the Sicilians with lack of many foodstuffs and no love for their German "allies".

*DRIVE TO MESSINA*

Without delay, the 3rd Infantry Division and its attached units wheeled right and began to drive east from Palermo, on the coast road to Messina. At one point the 443rd Commander and three of his officers took the surrender of the Paticio antiaircraft battery. In another incident at the Palermo Airport, Platoon A-1 lost one man killed and two wounded by an anti-personnel mine. Stung by the rapid conquest of western Sicily the Germans determined to keep the eastern part of the island from being taken so swiftly and marshalled their defenses. The coast road to Messina was well-defended. Roadblocks, blown bridges and mines made going difficult while units farther inland fought stubborn, rear-guard resistance over rugged, dusty, mountainous terrain with a poor, and often primitive, road net. In addition, skilled German engineers were able to blast whole road sections into the sea, along the coast. Just east of a highway tunnel on the tip of Cape Calava, the road hung like a shelf on the abrupt, rock wall and after the German demolition, nothing remained but a sheer drop of several hundred feet into the sea. Bypassing inland would have meant several days delay but the U.S. 10th Engineers, in less than 24 hours, built a replacement bridge shelf of timber, cable and steel with earth fill at both ends. In the meantime, men, vehicles and equipment were moving by sea in LCTs around Cape Calava. The Engineers played a major role in the speed with which the entire Sicilian Campaign was completed.

As the enemy withdrew along the narrow coastal road, much contact was limited to long-range, sporadic artillery fire. Some strafing attacks by German planes occurred but enemy air activity was at a minimum in the severe terrain with its single coast road. Space, defilade and deployment room were at a premium, often causing the 443rd to expose its gun-tracks and, in some instances, field artillery pieces, to enemy observation. All low priority vehicles were kept off the road but in spite of such precautions the road was sometimes blocked with traffic for as long as six hours at a time. The 443rd assigned two officers as M.P.s to help control traffic all the way to Messina.

The rugged Sicilian terrain has a high range of rocky mountains running generally east and west, thus forming the backbone of the Island. From these mountains a long series of parallel ridges and deep valleys descend to the sea in the north. These natural barriers, perpendicular to the enemy's axis of withdrawal, made northern Sicily into ideal terrain for defensive warfare.

The terrain, combined with road and bridge demolition were effective deterrents to the US advance until the final few days when the enemy was so reduced in strength and under such pressure that even mine fields could not be laid.

Very few roads and trails suitable for motor traffic existed and even mule pack trains couldn't move over some of the rough, precipitous slopes. Trails shown on maps were not always accurate. While driving blackout one night the 443rd S-3 and his Operations Sergeant suddenly saw the two, dim tracks they were following, begin to merge into one and at the same time felt their jeep turning over. Both leaped out and found their jeep on its side in a streambed far below. Scrambling down the rocks, the two righted the vehicle and drove off-cautiously. The S-3 jeep used nine replacement tires during the Sicilian Campaign - typical of the lacerating effect of the rocky terrain on vehicle tires.

The coastal highway was the only road suitable for two way traffic except for the four, main, lateral roads which connected the principal towns of San Stefano, San Agata, Capo D'Orlando and Furiana on the coast, to the inland towns of Nicosia, Cesero, Randazzo and Francavilla, respectively. Each of these lateral roads served as defense lines for the enemy.

During the 3rd Infantry drive along the Sicilian north coast, 443rd units participated in a new tactic with considerable success. To outflank the stubborn enemy defenders, amphibious moves were used. Platoon B-3 loaded two of its gun-tracks on LCTs with the 10th Field Artillery guns and made a flanking attack from the sea, in the vicinity of Caronia Marina on 3 August, forcing the enemy to withdraw beyond Caronia to the flats between the hill mass of Capo D'Orlando and the north-south ridge east of Caronia. This action probably drew some enemy strength from the San Fratello battle which began the same day. 443rd platoons were well forward in the advance in which artillery played so important a part. Consequently they were subjected to terrific counterbattery fire and suffered a number of casualties. Upon reaching the west bank of the Furiano River, the Americans found that the Germans were well entrenched on the east bank and opposing the advance with intermittent artillery fire and mortar fire from well-entrenched and defiladed positions supported by heavy machine gun and rifle fire. Heavy fighting erupted as the 3rd Division's 15th Regiment attacked on 3 August in front of San Fratello, following a two and one-half hour artillery barrage. The fighting continued until 8 August when the 15th and 30th Regiments, in a bayonet attack forced the enemy to surrender both San Fratello and Monte

Fratello. So bitter was the battle that bodies went unburied for several days. During heavy enemy shelling a prime mover, loaded with artillery shells, was hit and set on fire. A 443rd lieutenant and sergeant left their place of cover and helped carry ammunition and powder to safety, thus saving the artillery piece and averting serious danger to artillery personnel. Both were recommended for a Silver Star.

443rd antiaircraft training had always stressed the need for gun sergeants not to order firing too soon and not to continue firing too long. To do so wasted ammunition and reduced chances that an enemy plane would fly close enough for a sure kill. This practice was well learned in Tunisia where multiple targets had to be engaged. But in Sicily, the steep mountains and deep valleys plus lack of local warning facilities allowed enemy planes to fly low and suddenly hedgehop in and out in an attack. Gunners found that, most of the time, it was possible to fire only on a receding plane and, out of frustration, often fired when the plane had passed well beyond effective range. Along the coastal road to Messina, very few planes were encountered but men were subjected to intense artillery fire. As a result they had "itchy fingers" and in the excitement of firing often forgot previous training, instructions and experience. Platoon commanders continued to work to upgrade combat use of the T-28-E1s.

"IF"

(Author unknown)

*If you can strive to make yourself proficient  
In every detail of the gun you man,  
And know that that alone is not sufficient  
Unless you practice every time you can;  
If you can learn to keep your weapon firing  
By treating it as you would treat a friend,  
If failure only makes you more untiring  
To prove yourself its master in the end.*

*If you can trust the keenness of your vision  
To spot the foe that lurks about the sky,  
If you can learn to make a quick decision  
And aim your gun unerringly by eye;  
If you can curb the natural temptator  
To fire before the enemy's in range  
And face what comes with grim determination  
Then give him all you've got in fair exchange.*

*If you can keep your head in heat of action  
And calmly ply the principles you know  
If cannon-guns and bombs prove no distraction  
Because your mind is bent upon the foe;  
If you can meet the battle's fateful minute  
And shoot down as a hunter would a bird,  
Your name and deeds will both go down in story,  
The history of the old Four Forty Third.*

In Sicily, telephones to local observation posts were usually out of the question because of distances, terrain and frequent moves. Thus enemy planes could attack and be gone without any prior warning to AAA gunners. The 443rd needed radio equipment for early warning of enemy air attack, as well as for command and control. But it was not to be received in Sicily.

The German command was becoming increasingly nervous over the rapid US advance as well as over the fire support being given by Allied cruisers and destroyers, just three miles offshore from the mouth of the Furiana River. In addition, the flanking, amphibious attacks had taken the enemy by surprise and heightened his concern. So enemy planes began attacking Allied warships, as well as ground positions, in a renewed show of strength. One LST, near San Stefano, received a direct bomb hit. In spite of these attacks, Allied air reconnaissance reported considerable enemy shipping, north and northeast of Messina Straits, as the Germans began to evacuate equipment, men and supplies, from Sicily to the Italian mainland.

On 8 August, the 30th Regiment's 2nd Battalion made another amphibious attack, landing over two miles northeast of San Agata. Taking the enemy completely by surprise, (several hundred were found sleeping about 150 yards from the beach) the Americans captured many prisoners and soon made contact with the 7th Regiment, advancing east after having taken San Agata. On 11 August the 2nd Battalion repeated its amphibious maneuver to the rear of the enemy's main line of resistance between Brolo and Sinagra. Initially surprised, the Germans counterattacked from east and west, throughout the day, using tanks, artillery, mortars and machine guns. By evening, however, the Germans began to withdraw toward Capo Calava and Patti. So rapid did the withdrawal become that, at times, contact with the enemy was lost in spite of close American pursuit. Enemy planes continued sporadic harassment of advancing US units. US field artillery and signal units then began to move by sea, and with naval support, in a flanking maneuver to Patti. This increased pressure caused a general German withdrawal on 16 August. The enemy used maximum strength road blocks and demolitions covered by machine gun and rifle fire. The defense was augmented by field artillery and tanks with 150 mm guns. In spite of this action, American troops captured delaying positions near Spadafora, DuTorri and Gesso. During the day on 16 August, American 155 mm guns fired 100 rounds into the Italian mainland. US artillery continued such fire all through the night. Between 3 and 16 August, most of the Italian defenders in Sicily had fled the island in some disorder, leaving the Germans to fight an excellent, rear guard action.

By 17 August no front line existed for the 7th Army. The final enemy evacuation to the mainland across two miles of the Messina Strait had ended. During the campaign, as well as at its close, the enemy had limited amounts of transportation available and frequently abandoned the majority of Italian personnel and equipment, saving only the German troops and equipment. Thus the surrender in Messina at 10 am on 17 August was made by the senior Italian Military Authority remaining, Col. Michele Tomasello.

The 3rd Reconnaissance Troop escorted General Patton-7th Army, General Bradley-II Corps, General Truscott-3rd Division and General Fredericks-45th Division, into Messina for the official surrender. 443rd Commander Larson was one of the first to enter Messina on 17 August - his birthday. A bit later, General Montgomery-British 8th Army, escorted by his Scotch Piper Band, entered Messina to be greeted by General Patton in Messina's town square. He was amazed and chagrined since he had predicted that he would be first to take Messina.

#### *THE PATTON INCIDENT*

On or about 12 August there occurred the famous "slapping" incident involving General Patton. While visiting a field hospital supporting the 3rd Infantry Division he talked to a number of wounded men. But when he came to one young man who had no visible injuries and who was in the hospital for treatment of combat fatigue, Patton slapped the soldier several times in the presence of doctors, nurses, orderlies and patients. The story was written up by news correspondents and the resulting furor caused General Eisenhower to order Patton to apologize to everyone in the hospital and to all the divisions. After the Messina surrender, the 443rd moved on 23rd August to the northwest corner of Sicily near Trapani. There General Patton apologized to the 3rd Division and said, "I love every bone in your heads". Concluding his remarks, he walked from the stage but then turned dramatically and saluted the American flag and the Division's standard before leaving without another word.

#### *SICILY IN RETROSPECT*

After their move to Trapani for rest and rehabilitation, men of the 443rd had opportunity to reflect and trade stories about the island they had just conquered. Some could remember the cathedral at Monreale, southwest of Palermo. According to legend, William the Good (son of William the Conqueror) found his father's treasure and built the beautiful cathedral dedicated to "Our Lady". Begun in 1172, Arab, Greek, Byzantine and Sicilian masters of arts worked for 12 years to complete the cathedral,

with its beautiful mosaics and images of gold, dominating the interior. The French artist, Valadier, fashioned the all-silver main altar early in the 19th century.

Travelling along the Sicilian roads the men had seen any number of roadside shrines nestled into rock formations. Many village homes also had small shrines, built in niches facing the road, where candles were lighted to guide travellers at night.

Palermo itself was a mixture of attractive, old, turreted buildings as well as dingy, small hovels and dirty streets. Stained glass windows, broad walks, fountains and arched gateways of times past contrasted with old factories with macaroni and spaghetti hung out to dry. Street cars, electric buses and beautiful parks, carabinieri (policemen) with dark blue uniforms, gold buttons and a white diagonal across their front, gold stripes down their trousers legs and Napoleonic hats -- all made Palermo an intriguing city on the Mediterranean. It was here that 443rd men became aware of the many two-wheeled carts drawn by miniature donkeys and small Sicilian horses. Not only were the carts painted gaily with all kinds of designs and biblical or Roman scenes and events, but the donkeys wore brightly colored plumes on their harnesses and atop their heads. Most Sicilian towns cling to the tops of precipitous peaks. Even though Garibaldi, from Italy, conquered Sicily in the early 19th century, and provided a new freedom, the trappings of centuries still remained -- absentee landlords, poverty, sickness and poor government. On the road to Messina some towns were deserted and in others people were living like animals in one room homes with naked youngsters and babies living in dirt and squalor. Many were barefoot or wore sandals made from rubber auto tires. It was not uncommon to see some people sharing their lodging with poultry and pigs. And too often, fireplace smoke had left its dark smudge everywhere. Water facilities were rare, even in the larger towns, and sanitation was primitive. Clothes were always hanging on drying lines on balconies and usually, dish water was simply thrown into the streets.

Many 443rd men temporarily lost their appetites for spaghetti when they saw busy Sicilian housewives cooking spaghetti sauce and spreading it out on large boards to cure in the hot sun. Although it was soon covered with flies as well as dust from passing military vehicles, the ladies would occasionally stir the mixture and then spread it out for more curing.

The Sicilians were overjoyed at liberation, some breaking down in tears. During the previous four years their food rations had been meagre, since Mussolini had confiscated the major portion of all food raised or grown. People would pick food from Army garbage pits and most expected the conquerors to feed them. But many tried to show their gratitude by bestowing kisses upon their liberators and offering gifts of fruit, wine, cookies and vegetables. In the few minutes it took to pass through Misilmari, on the coast road, the 443rd S-3's jeep had a half bushel of hazelnuts tossed into it by people lining the road and giving the only thing they had of value. Grapes and lemons were also abundant as were the Sicilian favorites - Marsala and vermouth.

#### CAMPAIGN AFTERMATH

During the first few days the 443rd was at Trapani, messages of congratulations began to arrive, paying tribute to the victorious Americans who, in a gruelling campaign, had conquered Sicily in five short weeks. From the 18th Army Group's General Alexander, from 7th Army's General Patton, from II Corps' General Bradley and from General George C. Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff came commendations to the 3rd Infantry Division and its attached units. Most meaningful to the 443rd however was the 22 August 1944 commendation from the 3rd Infantry Division's General Truscott to the Commanding Officer, 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP):

*" The Sicilian Campaign has ended. In both phases - capture of Palermo and capture of Messina - your Battalion has played a decisive role. You have overcome natural obstacles of terrain rendered a thousand-fold more difficult by enemy demolitions and opposition. Your record during these days will be an inspiration to all Americans. Your success can be attributed to high standards of individual and organizational skill developed over a long and sometimes tedious period of training. You have accomplished the objective toward which those laborious efforts were directed. You have aided in attaining a smashing victory.*

*" The 443rd Battalion distinguished itself during the period of attachment to this command by being constantly ready for action and tactically well placed during an advance that was so rapid and so tortuous as to test the mettle of all members of your command. You have performed your assigned functions in a most commendable manner.*

*" I want to express to you and to every soldier of your command my appreciation for your efforts and your loyal support "*

While at Trapani, 443rd men were entertained for the first time since entering into combat by Bob Hope, Jerry Colona and Frances Langford. One



443rd sergeant had opportunity to talk with Miss Langford, who was from his home town.

In order to protect his command from the ravages of venereal disease, which always became worse when troops were in rear area bivouac, General Truscott ordered local girls to be hired, installed in a tent and had his medical doctors check them regularly. This program was short-lived because a report filtered back to some congressmen and the Pentagon ordered the practice stopped.

#### *REORGANIZATION OF THE 443RD*

The 443rd was given first priority for ordnance and vehicle inspection and overhaul by the 67th Ordnance Battalion. This was accomplished amid rumor and speculation that the 443rd was "hot" for another campaign. So it was no surprise when, after only one week in Trapani the Battalion, on 30 August, was relieved from the 3rd Infantry Division and moved the same day to the vicinity of Partinico where it was attached to the 2nd Armored Division. Several platoons had to left behind for a few days to complete their ordnance overhaul but the rest of the Battalion set up a perimeter defense of the 2nd Armored's bivouac along the coast road.

Then events moved rapidly. On 8 September the Provisional Corps of the 7th Army ordered the 443rd to move on 10 September to the vicinity of Termini Imerese, relieved from attachment to the 2nd Armored and attached to the 34th AAA Brigade, alerted for future operations. Lt. Col. Larson reported to Brigade Headquarters in Palermo and the 443rd was placed under tactical control of the 105th AAA Group. Batteries A and B moved to the perimeter defense of the East and West Termini airfields while Batteries C and D began training and maintenance programs.

The day after arriving in the new area, orders from Headquarters, 7th Army, relieved the 443rd from its assignment to the 7th Army and assigned it to the Fifth Army - Italy, effective 14 September. Rumor had it that General Patton had assigned the 443rd to the 2nd Armored Division for transfer to Britain and the Normandy invasion but the Mediterranean Theater Command would not approve the transfer. As a result, the 443rd was scheduled to invade Italy at Salerno with the 36th Infantry Division but due to lack of time to overhaul and regroup, assignment did not occur until after the 9 September Landing at Salerno. That landing was bitterly and almost successfully opposed by German defenders under General Kesselring. It took seven days for the Salerno beachhead to be secured.

On 12 September the 7th Army Antiaircraft officer sent a memorandum to his ordnance officer to draw in from the 443rd all gun-tracks T-28-E1 in excess of 32 and to issue 32 new gun-tracks M-13 with two .50 cal. machine guns per mount, with powered turrets. The order also included turn-in of all Battalion vehicles in excess of 35 - 2½ ton trucks, 18 M-3 personnel carriers, 94 1 ton trailers, 19 ½ ton trucks, 5 ¾ ton weapons carriers and 1 ¾ ton command car. New Tables of Organization had finally caught up with the 443rd.

The same evening, Lt. Col. Larson met with two colonels of the Fifth Army's Rear Link in Termini Imerese, to discuss the changes. He pointed out that replacing the T-28-E1s with M-13s would greatly reduce the Battalion's fire power, an essential component of effective AA fire. This discussion resulted in a telegram being sent to Headquarters, North African Theater of Operations (NATOUA) stating the circumstances and recommending that no change of armament be made at that time. No reply had been received by 17 September when a radiogram from CG Fifth Army to CG Seventh Army requested that the 443rd be equipped with both the M-13 and the M-15 (twin 40 mm) gun-tracks before leaving Sicily. Since no M-15s were available it was necessary that 32 T-28-E1 gun-tracks be retained. And since no other unit had T-28-E1s, Lt. Col. Larson on 18 September submitted a request for permission to take the Battalion's 21 excess T-28-E1s to Italy for use as replacements and for spare parts during the coming campaign. Approval of this request came on 19 September. On 20 September excess vehicles were turned in to ordnance and 32 M-13 gun-tracks were received. At the same time 32 SCR 610 radios were procured for installation in the T-28-E1 gun-tracks. This was accomplished in two days.

Because the new T/O & E (44-7S) with its reduction in equipment necessitated a reduction in personnel, the line batteries were reorganized from four to two platoons, each with four M-13s and four T-28-E1s. On 25 September, five 443rd officers and ninety-two enlisted men of the Battalion were transferred to other antiaircraft organization and headquarters units within the brigade. To accomplish the above reorganization the 443rd was on 23 September relieved from responsibility for defense of the Termini airfields. On the following day, remaining radios authorized were received. Due to unavailability of the SCR 500 series, SCR-600s were substituted.

### *MOVEMENT TO ITALY*

The 443rd began its movement to Italy on 13 October when Battery A loaded vehicles on LSTs at the Termini docks. Most of the personnel boarded LCIs. Landing was on 15 October at Bagnoli, northwest of Naples in the Fifth Army staging area. The next day saw the remainder of the Battalion's command and combat vehicles loading for departure two days later. When, at the last minute, their projected overland movement across the Messina Straits was cancelled, Battalion Headquarters Rear and Headquarters Sections of Batteries B, C, and D also loaded for sea transport.

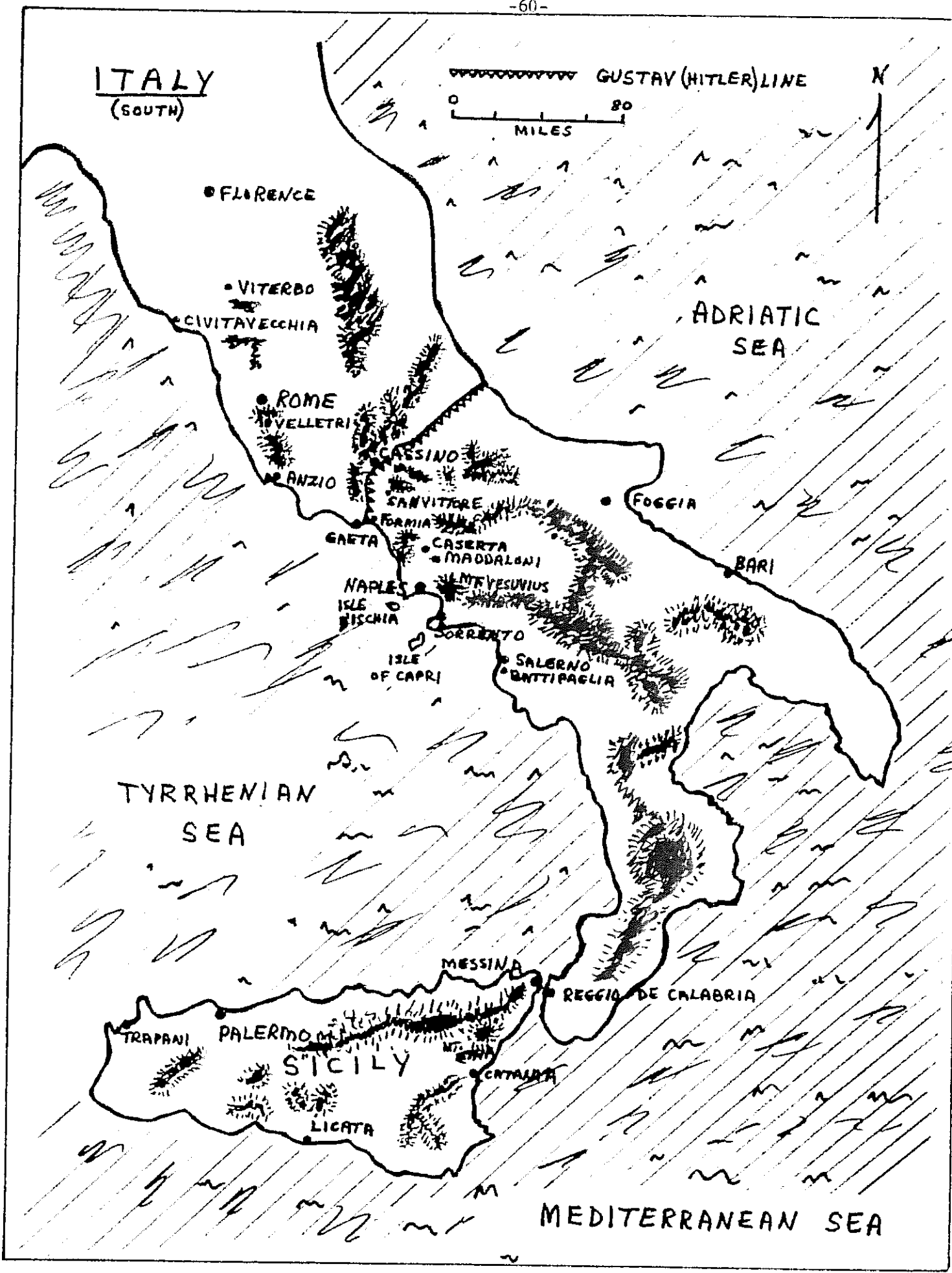
### ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

#### *INTRODUCTION TO ITALY*

As the major combat portion of the 443rd unloaded at Bagnoli Harbor on 20 October it was joined by Battery A and the Battalion moved from the harbor staging area to an abandoned torpedo factory. Earlier, completely assembled torpedoes had been moved by underground railway to a dock from which they were transferred to the nearby Isle d'Ischia, where German submarines came to be loaded.

During the 10 days the 443rd was in this location, men had many opportunities, some to meet relatives living in the area and others to visit the largest city seen since leaving the U.S. Southern Italy had been occupied at one time or another by Greeks plus Saracens from North Africa. Protruding into the Mediterranean it was fair game for seafaring adventurers plying the great inland sea over the centuries past. When one looks north to Rome and the prosperous Tiber River Valley, as well as the country beyond, the terrain while mountainous, is much kinder and the climate more favorable to agriculture. The north was invaded over the centuries by the Goths and the Vandals (Germanic tribes) and by the Huns (from Central Asia). Through the wars the pillaging and the plundering, the mainstream of history has left marks of unique experiences. Ancient cultures have left their ruins of buildings, castles, statues, viaducts and aqueducts, and Roman cobblestone roads. Monasteries and churches testify to Italy's tremendously influential religious history. Naples, even from a wartime artist's view from Sorrento, and the Isle of Capri, or the high promontory near the torpedo factory, was a beautiful sight as it overlooked the blue waters of the Bay of Naples under the warm Mediterranean sun. But a closeup look at wartime Naples was a noisy, dirty, squalid, crowded city with all kinds of smells. Home for most poor Neapolitans wastwo rooms with crowded conditions including livestock (fowl). It was

# ITALY (SOUTH)



GUSTAV (HITLER) LINE

0 80  
MILES

N

ADRIATIC  
SEA

TYRRHENIAN  
SEA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

SICILY

REGGIO DE CALABRIA

a place to eat and sleep while most social life was outside. However, in the more exclusive sections of the city the whitewashed Mediterranean villas had largely escaped the effects of the bombing and shelling. But in the city, each day began with early morning milk deliveries as cows and goats were led around the streets to be milked either by the customer or the animal's owner. Fruits and vegetables from the country were for sale, and food of all kinds was frequently cooked and eaten on the streets and in air raid shelters. Americans were intrigued by the garlic odors of such unusual foods as eels, snail soup, octopus, squid and sea urchins.

And everywhere were signs pointing to "AL Covero" - the air raid shelters, many of them being in the tunnels where streets went through the many hills of Naples. The city was Italy's third largest and its principal port. It was the gateway to the Italian Theater of Operations and Allied forces of many nations were to be seen in the streets. Allied bombing during the entire previous summer had badly damaged Naples' port facilities and reconstruction had feverishly begun. This made the port a prime target for German bombers after its liberation. Neapolitans huddled in their shelters nightly as the attacks continued for another year and the night skies were filled with a tremendous anti-aircraft barrage which rose like a lighted curtain from both ship and shore installations -- mostly too late to hit the German planes as they dive bombed the port area. U.S. 90mm AA guns seemed to be the only weapon that took a toll of attacking planes.

#### *JOINING THE 36TH INFANTRY DIVISION*

On 21 October Lt. Col. Larson was informed by the 45th AAA Brigade that the Battalion would be attached to the Texas 36th Infantry Division, which had distinguished itself in the Salerno landing and in the advance to Naples.

The II Corps commanding general had the 443rd inspected on 26 October and the unit was declared ready for combat. Its Communication Section under Lt. Cole was especially complimented. On 31 October a number of events occurred: Eight lieutenants were promoted to first lieutenant; the 443rd was assigned to the 2626 Provisional AAA Brigade, attached to II Corps but with attachment to the 36th Division remaining unchanged; and Major General Fred Walker, 36th Division Commander, visited the 443rd Headquarters. The 443rd Battalion staff began its liaison and planning with the staff of the 36th Division -- a relationship that was to continue until the war's end.

*WINTER LINE OPERATIONS / THE NAPLES FOGGIA CAMPAIGN*

On 15 November, just as the 36th Division and the 443rd were moving into combat, a message to Lt. Col. Larson was received from the 38th Evacuation Hospital Red Cross paying tribute and expressing heartfelt appreciation to the 443rd band, which had entertained the patients that day.

Between 15 and 18 November the 36th Division relieved the 3rd Division in the Mignano-San Pietro area. It was the start of the rainy season and two weeks of almost constant rain turned the front into a muddy quagmire, mountain slopes into slippery trails, foxholes into water holes and dirt roads into axle-deep mud which slowed progress of both the infantry and 443rd platoons. The cold, soaking rain caused enormous discomfort to frontline troops. The 443rd requested overshoes from the 2626 Antiaircraft Brigade (its administrative unit). Although every man in the Brigade Headquarters (well behind the front lines) was equipped with overshoes, they couldn't supply the 443rd gun crews! The Brigade offered Lt. Col. Larson a pair of overshoes for himself but he spurned the offer, saying that he wouldn't accept or wear them until every man in his command had a pair. Larson then contacted the 36th Division G-4 and within a few days had all the overshoes needed to equip every man in the 443rd. By then the 443rd Forward Command Post had moved four miles northwest of Capua, across the Volturno River.

Even though enemy artillery could not match the volume and accuracy of American artillery, it was effective against the larger targets provided by the 443rd's gun-track silhouettes in forward areas. During the final two weeks of November the 443rd's casualties and vehicle damage were heavier than any suffered since early in the Tunisian Campaign. A break in the rain on 22 November brought out German aircraft to harass the 36th Division artillery. Platoons B-1, C-2 and D-3 engaged flights of enemy planes scoring hits on several. Delaying action by German forces more than matched those of Sicily. They were helped considerably by the cold, chilling rain. "Rome by Christmas" became a receding possibility. A strong, German defense in depth faced the 36th Division in its drive up Highway 6 toward Cassino and the long, northwest valley leading to Rome. Morale of men and life of vehicles took a beating.

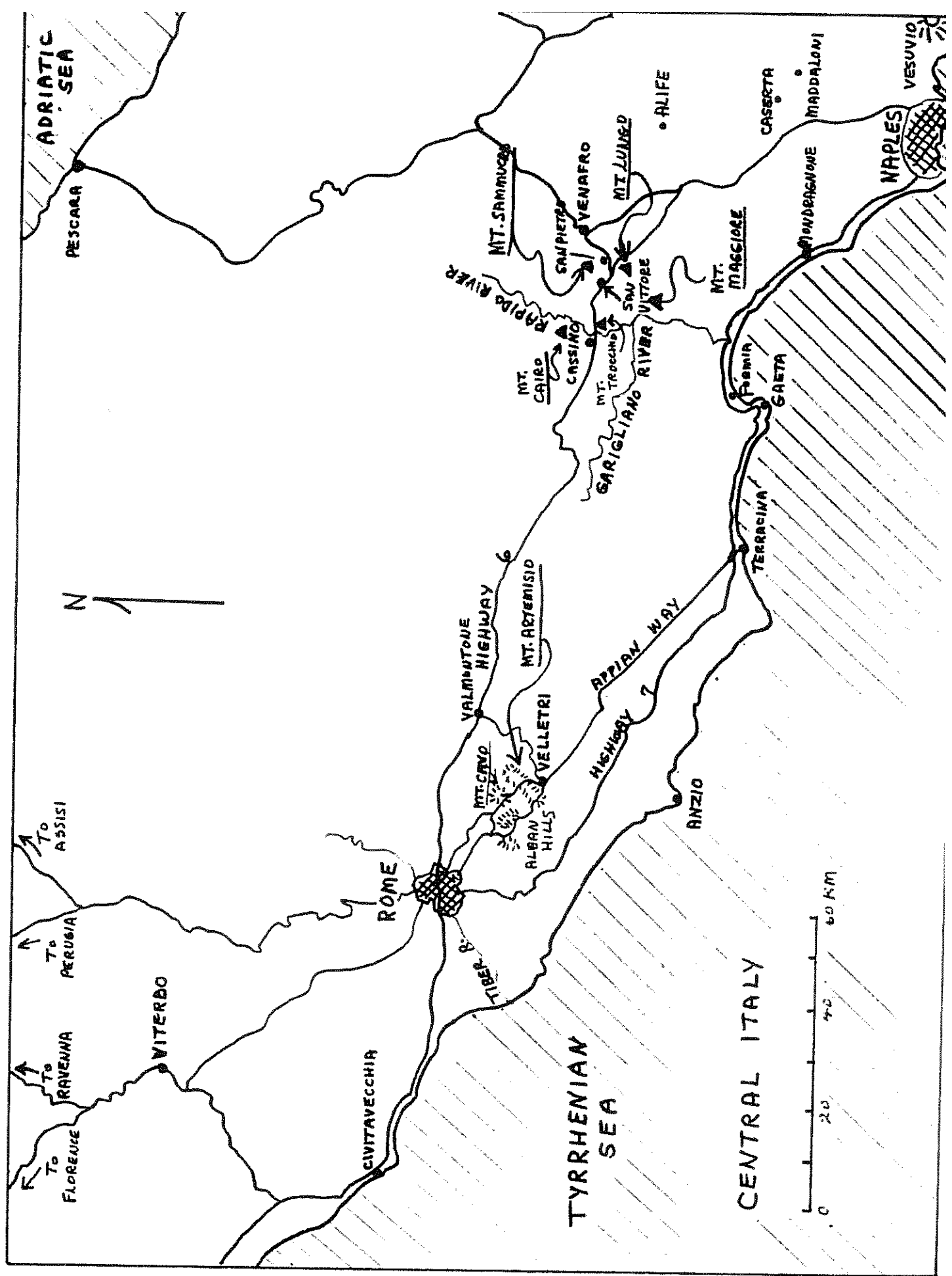
*BATTLE FOR MT. MAGGIORE*

On 2 December, 600 American and British guns put on a huge, synchronized artillery barrage on Mt. Maggiore in preparation for what became a success-

ful attack by the 36th Division's 142nd Regiment. Large caliber German artillery then interdicted supply lines to the 142nd for some time before the mountain was entirely secured. Mt. Maggiore became known as the "million dollar mountain" because of the huge amount of ammunition expended, and artillerymen called the barrage the "Serenade to Mussolini and Hitler". During this action the German multiple rockets or nebelwerfers were encountered for the first time. Men referred to them as "screaming meemies" because of the sound they made as they blasted through the tortured air. Two battalions of the German 71st Nebelwerfer Regiment were identified from prisoners taken. They reported that the American artillery had destroyed four of their weapons.

During the night of 6 December 36th Division artillery began "softening up" the strong German defenses on Mt. Sammucro and around San Pietro. With enemy observation posts on Mt. Lungo (astride the highway and between Mt. Maggiore and Mt. Sammucro) observing American movements, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 143rd Regiment attacked in the rain to avoid close surveillance by the Germans. Several attacks on San Pietro were unsuccessful but the regiment's 1st Battalion made a back-breaking, five hour climb up steep Mt. Sammucro in zero weather and against boulders loosened and rolled down upon them by the German defenders. The mountain was captured and held in spite of seven enemy counterattacks. Thus all the enemy well-organized positions were exposed to American observation as far as San Vittore. Enemy counterattacks continued against Mt. Maggiore and elements of the Herman Goering Division began arriving to bolster the German defenses.

With Mt. Maggiore, south of Highway 6, and Mt. Sammucro, north of the highway, firmly under control, the 36th Division had only to take Mt. Lungo, astride the highway, to effect a breakthrough. The day following the capture of the two mountains, a break in the weather brought renewed enemy air attacks. Platoon C-1 fought off a vicious, strafing and bombing attack on the 131st Field Artillery by shooting down three German planes. The crew manned the guns despite direct strafing and anti-personnel bombing. They continued to fire until a direct bomb hit killed one man and wounded five others, one for the second time that month. All were recommended for the Silver Star. Several hours later Platoon B-2 destroyed one of a flight of eight Me-109s and four Focke-Wulfs attacking the 155th Field artillery just east of Mignano. The following day the same platoon shot down another ME-109.





On 14th December the newly constituted Italian 1st Motorized Brigade attempted to take Mt. Lungo but went into a German trap and lost over 400 men killed or wounded. The Brigade was withdrawn and the 36th Division's 142nd Regiment was ordered to seize Mt. Lungo. In early morning of 15th December, two 142nd battalions were hidden on the lower slopes of Mt. Maggiore. When evening came, the 2nd Battalion moved around Mt. Lungo to strike the Germans from the south while the 1st Battalion crossed the valley to attack from the west. The enemy was completely surprised - many still asleep in their fox-holes. Mopping up continued all night and at daylight, their positions no longer tenable, the Germans withdrew from battle-scarred San Pietro. At 9:30 am Platoons B-1 and B-2 shot down two of 14 FW 190s attacking the 133rd Field Artillery in its new positions, just east of San Pietro.

On 20 December the 2626 AAA Brigade was redesignated the 71st AAA Brigade. And on Christmas Day the 443rd Band played for the 36th Division Commander at his staff at Christmas dinner. Their "Eyes of Texas Are Upon You" and "The Yellow Rose of Texas" brought plaudits and a letter of appreciation to the 443rd Battalion Commander as follows:

*"I desire to express my appreciation, in which I am joined by officers of Division Headquarters, for your thoughtfulness in sending the orchestra of your Battalion to entertain us during Christmas dinner. Please express to members of the orchestra our appreciation for their fine entertainment". - Fred L. Walker, Major General, U.S. Army, Commanding, 36th Infantry Division.*

#### ALIFE REST AREA

The 36th Division was relieved from combat by the 34th Division and on 28 December moved with the 443rd to bivouac in Alife, where  $\frac{1}{2}$  the gun-tracks of each battery established a perimeter defense of the division area. It was at this time that the Adjutant General in the War Department, Washington, D.C., advised the 443rd that 37 men, listed as "missing in action" since 14 February 1943 in Tunisia, were prisoners of war in Germany. And on 1 January 1944 the 36th Division was congratulated by General Keyes, II Corps Commander, for its "feats accomplished under the severest conditions of weather and terrain and against a skillful and stubborn enemy". Men of the 443rd will long remember New Year's Eve at Alife. A vicious, winter storm with snow and cold mountain winds blew down tents and made life miserable for a while. It was here that General Eisenhower's "Farewell Message to All Men and Women Serving With the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean Theater" was received.

- " Soon I leave this Theater to assume other duties assigned to me by the Allied Governments.
- " I take my leave of you with feelings of personal regret that are equalled only by my pride in your brilliant accomplishments of the year just passed. Although tempted to review again the many advantages that have accrued to the Allied cause through your bravery and fortitude, I believe that all these will come home to you if you will merely compare your present position and prospects in this great conflict with your position and outlook in the late fall of 1942. Then the Eighth Army was making its final preparations to attack the enemy who was standing only a short distance west of Cairo. Vast Allied armadas were approaching northwest Africa in complete ignorance as to whether good fortune or complete disaster awaited them. Battered Malta was being defended only by the bravery of her almost entirely isolated garrison. No Allied ship could traverse the length of the Mediterranean. Our fortunes appeared at a low ebb.
- " All this is changed - changed by your will, your determination and your devotion to duty. Enemy action against our convoys in the Mediterranean is limited to harassing and submarine efforts. You have established yourself on the mainland of Europe. You are still advancing.
- " You, along with the other Allied Forces fighting on many fronts, have already achieved the certainty that, provided every soldier, sailor and airman, and every citizen in our homeland continues incessantly to do his full duty, victory will be ours.
- " Altogether you comprise a mighty fighting machine which, under your new commander, will continue, as a completely unified instrument of war, to make further inroads into the enemy's defenses and assist in bringing about his final collapse.
- " Until we meet again in the heart of the enemy's continental stronghold, I send Godspeed and good luck to each of you, along with the assurance of my lasting gratitude and admiration".

- Dwight D. **Eisenhower**

443rd Battalion Headquarters received a 23 December 1943 letter from Headquarters NATOUSA, which Authorized the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) battle honors for the Moroccan, Tunisian and Sicilian Campaigns. And another "thank you" letter came from a medical clearing station for the morale uplift provided by the 443rd's traveling band as it played for patients.

#### *RAPIDO RIVER OPERATION*

Prime Minister Churchill favored the Anzio-Cassino operation. As a result, General Alexander's 15th Army Group ordered General Mark Clark's Fifth Army to make a landing at Anzio and at the same time to make a strong assault across the Rapido River toward Cassino and Frosinone, to

force the enemy to commit its reserve south of Rome, then develop an opening through which to link up quickly with the Anzio Landing.

To secure favorable positions for the attack on Cassino across the Rapido River, the 36th Division, which had been assigned the task, attacked on 14 January and captured Mt. Trocchio. The Division's mission was to establish a bridgehead over the river in order that the 1st Armored Division's CCB could pass through and attack up the Liri River Valley to effect a union with the Anzio forces. Opposing the Division, the Germans had developed the Gustav Line (or Hitler Line) as a series of defenses in depth. Allied commanders recognized that casualties would result from an attack on such defenses but they believed that if the Germans were left free to oppose the Allied landing at Anzio, the casualties there could be much higher with the greater danger that the landing would be repulsed.

Powerful artillery support plus engineers, tanks and tank-destroyers were attached to the Division for the operation. The XII Air Support Command was to bomb bridgehead area strongpoints. As the 36th Division was organizing for the Rapido River crossing the enemy tried to interfere by air. Platoon A-1 destroyed a German-marked Spitfire near San Vittore while Platoon C-2 destroyed an FW-190 in the same vicinity. Platoon A-1, losing three men killed and one wounded by enemy shellfire, was replaced in the planned river crossing force by Platoon D-2.

On 18 January, British forces, on the left flank of the 36th Division and south of the Rapido River's S-bend, had attempted a river crossing and had found the position untenable. As a result, the British refused to sacrifice more men in support of the 36th Division. When the 36th Division attacked across the river on 20 January it was the only offensive action across the entire British and American front. This permitted the Germans to concentrate their forces before the 36th Division.

The 36th Division front extended four miles south from Mt. Trocchio, parallel to the Rapido River which flowed south about 1,000 yards to the west. The river approach from the east was marshy and covered with reeds and brush. The river was a fast, mountain-fed stream, about fifty feet wide and ten to fifteen deep, flowing between vertical banks five feet high. At 7:30 pm on 20 January, artillery began preparation fire and at 8 am the 141st and 143rd Regiments attacked to establish the Rapido bridgehead. Intense, accurate crossfire from the enemy covered every point where a

crossing was attempted. Extremely heavy artillery fire was received on all crossing points and assembly areas. Mines and booby traps had been well placed, and concealed, at all points defiladed from weapons fire. In spite of the strong enemy defense, two companies of infantry crossed the river. But intense enemy fire prevented bridge construction and destroyed communications. The strong, German defensive positions included concrete bunkers, dugouts and barbed wire about 150 yards west of the river. Rubber boats were sunk and the one footbridge, over which Companies A and B had passed, had to be abandoned because of enemy fire. Engineer attempts to install an 8 ton infantry support bridge were unsuccessful.

Probably learning from captured prisoners where the 36th Division Command Post was, the Germans lashed out at their attackers. Both the 36th CP and the 443rd Battalion Forward CP were behind Mt. Rotundo and from 4:30 AM to 7:30 am on 21 January, enemy 170 mm artillery lobbed 310 rounds into the CP areas. The Division Mess Sergeant was killed and Platoon C-3 had a man wounded who later died from gangrene in an amputated leg.

By late morning on 21 January, contact was lost with troops who had crossed the river. At 10 am II Corps Commander, General Keyes, ordered the attack to continue. So at 4 pm the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 143rd Regiment attempted a crossing. Initial resistance was somewhat lighter than during the previous crossings but it increased quickly when it became apparent that Division troops were moving over in force. While rubber boats, hit by fire, capsized and sank, two battalions of the 141st Regiment were able to cross the river by 6:30 pm. The assault broke through enemy barbed wire defenses for about 600 yards before intense fire of all kinds stopped the advance. American-generated smoke to cover the crossings, plus natural fog, blinded the Division's field artillery observers while enemy snipers took advantage of the poor visibility to move into positions where they could harass troops crossing the river. All day long on 22 January, troops that were across the Rapido were subjected to continuous enemy fire. Elements of the 143 Regiment withdrew to the east bank of the river and strong, German counter-attacks were thrown against elements of the 141st Regiment that remained. By nightfall, Americans were running out of ammunition. Ferrying patrols, formed to bring back men who were left on the west bank, failed because of heavy enemy fire. A handful of men were able to swim the Rapido back to the east bank, during the night. The Rapido River crossing had

failed and casualties were heavy - over 2,000 men. The Abbey of Monte Cassino remained in enemy hands-a high observation point dominating the surrounding landscape. And patrols sent out every night after 22 January failed to get back across the river or were forced back by heavy enemy fire shortly after reaching the west bank. In retrospect it is of interest to note that tactically sound General Walker had offered the Fifth Army an alternate plan - to demonstrate with diversionary tactics along the strong Gustav Line defenses before Cassino but simultaneously send troops across a fordable area north of the fortified town. The plan was turned down with consequent results. In just such a maneuver, the 34th Division, at a later date, outflanked the enemy north of Cassino.

Incredibly, a third attack across the river was ordered. It would have included commitment of the 142nd Regiment which was in reserve. The order was cancelled only after a heated protest from General Walker.

Some weeks later, a Corps of New Zealand troops attempted the Rapido crossing and were thrown back. When the British Eighth Army finally crossed the Rapido River in May the entire front line from Cassino to the sea made a full scale attack to support the five British divisions committed to the crossing.

Subsequent to its disaster at Cassino the 36th Division shifted northeastward to the vicinity of Cervaro. Here, on 15 February, 443rd men witnessed eight bombing raids by Flying Fortresses and fighter bombers on the Abbey of Monte Cassino and the slopes surrounding it. Only one portion of the Abbey wall remained intact after the bombing. \*

\* In 1929 the Benedictine Monastery on Monte Cassino marked its 1400th anniversary. During the centuries it has suffered from damage and pillaging by barbaric tribes from north Italy, by Germanic tribes, by invaders from eastern Europe and from Africa. It has been damaged in a number of wars. Each time it was rebuilt by the monks. Its destruction in 1944 resulted from German use of it as an observation point from which to direct artillery fire. The Monastery has since been restored to its original condition.

#### *DIVISION AND AAA (SP) BATTALION RELATIONSHIPS*

General Walker of the 36th Infantry Division requested Lt. Col. Larson to draw up a response to a memorandum he had received from the 71st AAA Brigade regarding, "Advantages of Attaching an AAA (SP) Battalion to a Division", instead of being used by the Brigade in area defense. On 15 February Lt. Col.

Larson sent his report to General Walker. In brief he stated that:

The advantages of attaching an AAA (SP) Battalion to a Division for unit defense instead of being used in area defense by an AAA Brigade are as follows:

1. AAA Advisor and Coordinator. The Division Commander needs an AAA Advisor and Coordinator of all AAA defense of his units and installations. This can only be accomplished by having an AAA (SP) Battalion directly attached to the Division. As part of the Division's Special Staff the AAA (SP) Battalion Commander becomes Division AAA Officer, totally responsible to the Division Commander for control and coordination of all AAA in the Division as well as protection of all Division elements, based upon tactical priorities. In area defense, attached to a Brigade, this is not possible.
2. ADEQUATE AAA PROTECTION.
  - a. Normally, one AAA (SP) Battalion is sufficient to protect a Division.
  - b. An AAA (SP) platoon, attached to a Division unit, keeps in contact with the unit commander, shares in reconnaissance, plans and action and draws support from the unit.
  - c. Infantry in combat, tanks and tank-destroyers do not need AAA protection.
3. TIMELY, CURRENT INFORMATION. Attached to a Division, an AAA (SP) unit receives current, up-to-the-minute information needed in planning and operations. For security reasons, Divisions are reluctant to give certain information to unattached units.
4. REDUCTION OF VEHICULAR TRAFFIC. Relating AAA (SP) platoons to Division units has simplified supply and messing and reduced the number of AAA supply vehicles in forward areas, thus relieving road congestion.
5. MESSING. The advantages of an AAA platoon being able to mess with the unit it is protecting include assurances of balanced and well-prepared meals and proper sanitation and sterilization of equipment.
6. COMMUNICATION. Radio channels are already overloaded and cannot be used for all the administrative functions of a battalion. The current T/O & E does not authorize an AAA (SP) unit any wire for communications. The Battalion (and its units) is dependent upon some unit, such as a Division, to lay wire and permit switchboard hookup. Wire is essential for AAAS as well as administration.
7. ADMINISTRATION. Administration is handled more effectively and efficiently through an operating Division than through AAA channels. It eliminates divided authority and duplication of effort.
8. SUPPLY. The Division is better able to provide supplies to its attached units than is a Brigade. Divisions take care of organic and attached units equally.
9. RECREATION. An AAA (SP) unit, attached to a Division, enjoys all the recreational and special services provided to the organic units.
10. FUNCTION OF AAA (SP) BATTALIONS.
  - a. The mobility and fire power of an AAA (SP) Battalion is ideal for front-line operations in any terrain and in fast-moving situations against low, bombing, strafing and diving planes. Towed AAA wea-

- pons are more adapted to static situations.
- b. AAA (SP) Battalion and Battery commanders exercise all the tactical functions and operational control in coordination with the Division and its units. This would be less efficiently done if complicated by more layering of administration such as would result from AAA Brigade control. The AAA (SP) commanders supervise units by radio and field contact from forward command posts.
  - c. The Division directs priorities of AAA protection for its units and for its operations but AAA (SP) command exercises tactical control over AAA units. Brigade attachment would not support this relationship.
11. COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING. Attachment of an AAA (SP) Battalion over a period of time assures development of mutual understanding of capabilities, function and tactics among commanders of the Division and its units and the AAA (SP) unit. The resulting close contact and cooperation is essential to successful operations. The AAA (SP) unit, to make the most of such relationships, should remain attached to a Division at least through an entire campaign. The AAA (SP) unit will identify itself with the Division and share in its accomplishments, its morale and its esprit de corps.

(Lt. Col. Larson noted that the above memorandum to Division Commander Walker, for transmission to Brigade Headquarters and thence to the AAA Officer Fifth Army, probably jeopardized any chances of promotion in Regular Army Antiaircraft. But he was quite certain of the validity of his analysis).

#### BIVOUAC NEAR MADDALONI

During the nights of 24/25 and 25/26 February, the 36th Division and its attached units were relieved by a British division and moved to the Ravis-canina area to recover from weeks of rough combat, plus the mauling received during the abortive Rapido River crossing. The 443rd bivouaced nearby, close to Maddaloni and near a huge, old, three-tiered Roman aquaduct/viaduct. As weather moderated, 443rd officers and men had time to play volleyball and baseball and take rest leaves to Sorrento and to Caserta. Officers were quartered in the Sorrento Victoria Hotel while enlisted men enjoyed the left wing of the Royal Palace at Caserta, 17 miles northeast of Naples and built by Charles III in 1752. Five days of hot showers, three hot meals a day and fine entertainment were enjoyed. The time was also used to receive and train replacements, repair camouflage netting, repair and replace equipment, guns and vehicles. A small arms firing range was set up and used by all personnel and daily aircraft identification classes were held under supervision of the Battalion S-3 Section.

During the night of 17 March, Mount Vesuvius erupted in its most violent outpouring in seventy-two years and continued to spew ash, rocks and lava for three days before beginning to subside. Sulphurous lava covered part of the town of San Sabatino at the foot of Vesuvius and threatened the nearby coast. Lava ash fell heavily and varied in depth from two inches to two feet in some areas. At one point, rocks of from one to five inches in diameter were blown skyward and many fell on the nearby U.S. New Pompeii Airfield, ripping tents and breaking plexiglass canopies on a number of planes. With memories of the disaster that buried old Pompeii in 79 A.D. still strong, Italian residents near the volcano were panic-stricken and Allied troops and medical supplies were pressed into emergency service. As the eruption began to subside, many 443rd men were able to observe the cooling lava flow first hand as well as to visit the portions of old Pompeii that had been excavated since work began in the 19th Century.

The beauty of the Sorrento Peninsula, with its Amalfi Drive along sheer cliffs dropping into the blue sea, with its orange and lemon groves, with its ancient buildings and the nearby Isle of Capri, as well as fishermen bringing in their catches on the beaches, all reflected an idyllic picture that was shattered during mealtimes back at the 443rd Maddaloni bivouac area. Scores of pitiful, poorly dressed and starving youngsters of all ages, including a few older folk, would surround unit garbage cans to get scraps of food from men and officers who had finished eating. Holding out #10 tin cans, scrounged from the garbage dumps, they begged for every morsel they could get to take home to their families. At first, many 443rd men were unable to eat their food and gave it all to the pitiful crowd. Then, most began to eat only part of their meal in order to share the rest.

One very old and feeble woman in worn out clothing came daily to get food, walking some distance from her upstairs, dilapidated lodgings. One day she failed to appear and Lt. Col. Larson questioned some of the crowd, only to discover that she was ill. He sent the Battalion Medical Officer to provide treatment and take her some needed food. It turned out that her son was a well-to-do businessman who refused to help his aged mother.

On another day the 443rd Commander noticed a group of G.I.s on the first tier of the viaduct and, with several of his staff, investigated only to find that the men were waiting with dollar bills in their hands to give to an old Italian woman when their turn came. She sat at the entrance to a room where a young, blond girl, laying on a G.I. blanket, was taking on



all comers. Concerned over the spread of venereal disease, he had the two women taken to the nearest town and turned the girl over to local authorities. Some months later, as the 443rd and the 36th Division were moving in convoy to the staging area for the Southern France invasion, the girl and her older companion were observed with a horse and buggy, going in the same direction as the convoy.

At about this time, General Mark Clark initiated the issuing of monthly liquor rations to officers, as was done in the British Army. This practice was continued throughout the European campaigns.

#### *FIFTH ARMY FIRING POINT*

On 9 April 443rd Battalion Headquarters issued march orders to a new 36th Division bivouac area near Forino, for mountain training. The mild April climate enabled the Battalion to further regain much of its combat-ready status. Then, to everyone's surprise and consternation, on 5 May a radio-gram from the Fifth Army detached the 443rd from the 36th Division and re-attached it to the 107th AAA Group for seven days training - 7 to 13 May - at the Fifth Army AAA Firing Point at Torre Gaveta, west of Lake Fusaro. This apparently was a means of retaining the experienced and battle-hardened 443rd in II Corps since the 36th Division was then transferred to VI Corps and scheduled to move to the Anzio Beachhead. The separation was regretted by all. However, the 443rd moved as directed and was soon engaged in calisthenics, marching, target firing and weapons maintenance. At week's end the Battalion was inspected by the 45th Brigade's General Rutledge and his staff. General Rutledge concurred in the following commendation released by Lt. Col. Larson.

*"The Commanding Officer desires to commend all ranks for the splendid spirit and rapid improvement manifested during the past week of training. It is a source of great pride for me to be able to tell you that Brigadier General Rutledge and his staff, after close personal observation throughout the week, have declared this Battalion to be in all respects the best yet inspected.*

*"Once more the 443rd Battalion has demonstrated that it is able and ready to rise to any challenge. On the battlefields of four campaigns you have proved in bivouac, on the drill field and at the firing line that you are the best soldiers and the best battalion in your branch of service. This record has been made possible by every man's pride in this Battalion and in himself as a soldier. Your cooperative spirit and your earnestness in pursuit of excellence have been a source of pleasure and of inspiration to those who have observed you. It is a privilege for a soldier, whatever his rank, to be a member of such an organization.*

" We shall not be content, however, with congratulating ourselves on a task well done. At the same time that we have excelled others, we have learned in many respects how far short of perfection we are. We cannot rest on our laurels. We must and will continue to improve ourselves as soldiers and as members of a fighting team. It is recognized that many of the standards we have set during the past week cannot always be maintained under combat conditions. But, in all matters which do carry over into the field of action, we must and will maintain and raise our standards. This should be a matter of pride to every enlisted man and officer. By so doing we shall always be able, in the future as in the past, to proclaim ourselves without apology the best of our kind ".

-(Signed) Peyton W. Williams, Jr., Captain, Adjutant, for Lt. Col. Werner L. Larson, Commanding.

#### ROME - ARNO CAMPAIGN

Its Firing Point experience over, the 443rd moved on 13 May to an assembly area northeast of Mondragnone. A general offensive against the Hitler Line had been under way for four days and II Corps troops had broken through from Minturno to a line beyond Signo and Formia. Leading the II Corps advance were the 85th and 88th Divisions, attacking on a front extending from the Tyrrhenian Sea to east of Spigno. The 443rd was assigned by the 71st Brigade to defend road nets and forward elements of the two lead divisions, north of the Garigliano River between Formia and Spigno. Scenes in some of the smaller towns were reminiscent of Sicily as war devastation rolled around peasants making tomato sauce and spaghetti in semi-primitive surroundings.

On 18 May the Battalion CP received a radio message from Battery B that the "935th, 639th and 910th Field Artillery battalions are moving by us". The message was relayed to the 71st AAA Brigade to which the 443rd was attached. This sharply illustrated the lag in communications resulting from Brigade control of AAA (SP) battalions in fast moving situations. The 71st Brigade had no idea the artillery was moving and had not ordered B Battery to move with it! At once, a meeting between Lt. Col. Larson and 71st AAA Brigade officers resulted in the 443rd being ordered to give unit (rather than area) support to the 85th and 88th Divisions with two Batteries on road defense. The latter was becoming critical as the rapid advance was extending and exposing supply lines. Another battalion of AAA (105th) was assigned to protect Corps Artillery, with one battery on road defense. The 88th Division forged across the foothills east of the Alban Hills, cutting Highway 6 near San Cesaro and then surging northwestward toward Rome, flanked on the left by the 95th Division and with

the 3rd Division on the right. The latter took Valmonte and pushed toward Palestrina. Under all of this Allied pressure and the fall of Cassino to the Polish II Corps under General Anders, the U.S. VI Corps was able to exploit the weakening German defense and broke out of the Anzio beachhead. U.S. air support had helped by strategic bombing which denied the German defenders many essential supplies. During these operations, enemy air tactics forced a change in 443rd operating procedures. Driven from the daytime skies by Allied air strength, the Germans resorted to night bombing and strafing of highways, aiming at supply train convoys between rear and forward supply dumps. For the first time, 443rd Batteries were ordered to concentrate platoons around vital road nets and fire at night on seen targets.

#### *ANZIO - VELLETRI OPERATION*

Even though the 443rd was not attached to the 36th Division during the Anzio-Velletri operation, it took pride in the news that the Division's General Walker, after two tries, had his Velletri flanking attack approved by II Corps and successfully executed it. It was exactly the same tactic that General Walker wanted to use at the Rapido River Crossing and was turned down. The 36th had entered the Anzio Beachhead as VI Corps Reserve. On 23 May it moved to the attack with the 34th and 45th Divisions west of Velletri. Little progress was made for several days until the 36th Division's 143rd Regiment cut the Velletri-Valmonte road and pushed north. On 30 May the 142nd Regiment, in Corps reserve, moved twenty miles to the front and during the night, infiltrated through enemy lines to Mt. Artemisio and then to the top of the mountain's ridge line overlooking Velletri from the north. When dawn broke the enemy became aware of what had happened but underestimated the size of the American force that was behind them, thinking that only one or two companies were involved. Hence the enemy forces sent to counterattack were much too small and, as the 141st and 143rd regiments joined in the attack, the demoralized Germans suffered huge losses in men, equipment and supplies. As a result, the enemy defenses south of Rome collapsed and except for sporadic fighting in the Alban Hills and Mt. Cavo, the road to Rome was open.

Rome fell on 4 June. It had previously been declared an "open city" to avoid fighting in it and so protect its many treasures of historical value from war's destruction. 443rd Commander Larson joined a group of officers around General Mark Clark at the entrance to Rome when a flurry of rifle shots was fired at them. What fighting did occur in Rome was largely in the outskirts. The attack set off a quick search for the source of the shots and turned up three German

boys 12-14 years old, in camouflage uniforms and with high-powered scopes on their rifles.

443rd Batteries A and D moved at mid-day on 4 June to positions defending the highway and adjoining roads from Falconi to Rome. In advances with the field artillery, Battery B and Platoon C-1 had moved through Rome to positions beyond the Tiber River in the northwest sector of the city. An enemy artillery shell exploded beside Platoon C-1's command half-track, killing an officer and two medical aid men and wounding four other men. But by mid-day, General Clark had headed a victory parade into Rome. Pope John X came to the balcony of a Vatican building and blessed the American soldiers. People began coming out of caves and grottos where they had been hiding until the fighting was over. Thousands of Romans lined the streets, cheering their American liberators and handing out bottles of wine, cookies, cakes, garlands of flowers and kisses from girls, men and women -- probably the most enthusiastic welcome that Rome has ever given a conquering army!

For one day, the mobile 443rd Battalion Forward Command Post was set up in a vacant lot in northern Rome, surrounded by three and four story luxury apartments. Italian communists and sympathizers were taking advantage of the temporary breakdown of civil authority to eject people from apartments and even commandeering their cars. Command Post personnel, responded to appeals for help and sent the communists on their way. One grateful doctor, whose wife was American, invited Col. Larson, Capt. Fisher and Lt. Frincke to his apartment for a delicious luncheon.

The 443rd continued, the following day, to support the Allied advance northward through Civitavecchia and Viterbo. On 12 June the Battalion was withdrawn from the line and moved to bivouac in the King's Forest about six miles south of Rome. A training program was begun and efforts made to have all personnel visit Rome - the goal for which they had been fighting for a year and a half.

#### *INVASION PREPARATION FOR SOUTHERN FRANCE*

Lt. Col. Larson and Capt. Fisher (S-3) checked in with the 71st AAA Brigade and were told that the 443rd's new Fifth Army assignment was with the 36th Division. They went to the location they had been given for the 36th and discovered that the 45th Division was there. The 71st AAA Brigade finally said that it had made a code name mistake and that the 443rd's assignment would be

attached to the 45th Division. This attachment cancelled all further visits to Rome by 443rd personnel. On 20 June 443rd gun-tracks were loaded on LSTs at Anzio Port and moved by sea to Salerno and thence to the Battalion assembly area four miles north of Battipaglia. Battalion wheeled vehicles moved on 21/22 June to the same assembly area. Until 2 July the unit engaged in amphibious training with the 45th Division and its units, under control of the Invasion Training Center in Salerno. On 2 July a verbal order from General Truscott, II Corps Commander, detached the 443rd from the 45th Division and re-attached it to the 36th Infantry Division - an attachment that was to continue for the duration of the war. Lt. Col. Larson and Capt. Fisher contacted the 36th Division Commander and determined that the 443rd would remain in position and complete training with the 45th Division while its Batteries maintained liaison with 36th Division Regimental Combat Teams. Upon completing amphibious training the 443rd moved to join the 36th Division north of Paestum. There, a new training program was begun under supervision of the Battalion Operations and Training officer, Capt. Fisher. It included special lectures and demonstrations, a Renshaw Trainer School conducted by naval personnel and special training and drill for Antiaircraft Intelligence Service crews. On 17 July the 443rd moved with the 36th to the Staging Area at Qualiano.

At this same time General Walker left the 36th Division to return to the U.S. and become Commandant of the Infantry Training School at Fort Benning. General Walker was replaced by Major General Dahlquist. The latter, in preparation for the Southern France invasion needed an aide, fluent in French. The 443rd's Lt. Wells Lewis, who had lived in Paris, was selected and transferred to the 36th Division as aide to General Dahlquist.

Also, during this time, two additional commendations were received by the 443rd. Lt. Col. Larson addressed the following to 443rd personnel:

*"I am proud of the fine example and untiring spirit that every officer and enlisted man has displayed during the strenuous combat days that have just passed. When this war of destruction and death is left behind us we will have rich memories of the 443rd, the gruelling experiences, the fast moves by night and by day, the interesting new sights, the different types of peoples, their strange languages and the triumph of knocking planes out of the sky. Until that time arrives, I know you will continue to give of the best that is in you".*

Upon the departure of the 443rd from II Corps in Italy, a commendation was given the Battalion by General Keyes, II Corps Commander. Forwarded through the 7th Army, it did not reach the 443rd until 19 July, as follows:

*" To officers and enlisted men of the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP):*

*" I noted with regret the departure of the 443rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion from the ranks of II Corps.*

*" Your service with this Corps was exemplary. The outstanding success of the Corps during recent operations was due almost entirely to the splendid manner in which you, who composed it, labored and fought as individuals and as a team.*

*" I know that your unit accomplished in full measure the role assigned it.*

*" For myself, as your recent commander and in behalf of the nation we serve, I want to express to each of you a deep and sincere appreciation for your courage, fortitude and sacrifice and a heartfelt wish that success and victory will follow your future engagement and enterprise".*

On 29 July the 443rd Battalion Ordnance Section doubled the firepower of the twenty-four M-3 gun tracks by replacing their twin .50 cal. machine gun mounts with quadruple .50 cal. machine gun mounts. The new guns installed (96 of them) were heavy barreled weapons. All Batteries then test-fired the new weapons. And on 1 August, all battery gun sections, on schedule, began training on a telephone pole-mounted Antiaircraft Trainer, developed by Lt. Col. Larson. Lead variances necessary for hitting planes travelling at different speeds were stressed in using new ring sights.

Except for service echelons of Batteries A and D and part of Headquarters Battery, scheduled to sail for France at a later date, all combat vehicles were loaded on landing craft. By August 10 the Southern France invasion fleet was anchored in the Bay of Naples, ready to sail.

#### SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN

##### *INVASION AT DRAMMONT*

The invasion force for Southern France was the American Seventh Army under Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch. The Army included General Truscott's VI Corps with the combat-experienced 3rd, 45th and 36th Divisions. The 36th Division, with the 443rd Battalion, was assigned four beaches for the landing - Red, Green, Yellow and Blue. Red Beach was the harbor of San Raphael. However, Red Beach was found to be heavily defended by underwater obstacles, pill-boxes and gun emplacements. Green Beach was a small, 250 yard wide, 100 foot deep, rocky beach flanked by quarries and a single, sharply inclined, exit road. Well defended, it appeared to be too small for landing a large

force. Yellow Beach was in front of the town of Agay, protected by a submarine mine netting and covered by extensive, flanking enemy fire. Blue Beach, a few miles from Green Beach, could only accommodate two small boats at a time. The Southern France coastline was a formidable, rocky challenge.

It was toward these beaches in Southern France that at noon on 13 August, the invasion convoy pulled up anchor and sailed northwestward along the Italian coastline. It passed through the Corsican-Sardinian Straits on 14 August and arrived off the Riviera coastline in early morning darkness on 15 August. For the third time the 443rd, sailing in an invasion convoy, had to endure a storm at sea. Before dawn the storm had subsided and naval guns and Allied bombers began blasting the invasion beaches. At H-Hour (8 am) the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 36th Division's 141st Regiment stormed ashore taking the Germans by surprise. Quickly recovering, the enemy bitterly opposed the landing on Green Beach and covered it heavily with artillery fire from commanding heights a short ways inland. But by 10 am the beachhead area was cleared of enemy troops although artillery continued to harass the landing forces. By late morning the 143rd Regiment was able to land and pushed west toward San Raphael while the 141st took Agay and the high ground north of Green Beach, pushing the Germans off their dominating hill positions. Thus with beachheads established at both Green and Blue Beaches, the Americans began moving swiftly. Engineer bulldozers came ashore and began to level the pebbles and rocks covering the steep incline on Green Beach and to doze out a new exit road from the beach to the coastal highway so the landing could be speeded up. In nine hours over 20,000 36th Division(reinforced) troops had landed over Green Beach - one of the most difficult and confined beaches one could imagine. And it was done with relatively few casualties.

The 142nd Regiment had started for Red Beach but was diverted to Green Beach because of the impossible Red Beach defenses. This action, by the Navy Commander Lewis, probably saved many lives. By early morning of 16 August the beachhead had been consolidated and extended and Frejus and San Raphael had been taken.

During the invasion, 443rd units had landed with the assault waves and occupied their assigned, tactical positions. Twelve men were wounded by Navy AA shrapnel on 15 August when two high-flying DO-217 planes, far out of reach of automatic weapons, dropped two radio-controlled bombs. One

hit and blew up the bridge of an LST approaching Green Beach. The other dropped in the sea.

The surprise and force of the invasion caught the enemy completely by surprise. A carload of Germans, with their headlights on full, was captured six miles from Green Beach. In the town of Draguinan, the Commanding General of the 62nd German Corps was completely confused by the speedy attack and was captured along with his entire staff. The 36th Division troops made contact with Allied paratroopers on the day following the landing.

#### *RHONE RIVER ENVELOPMENT*

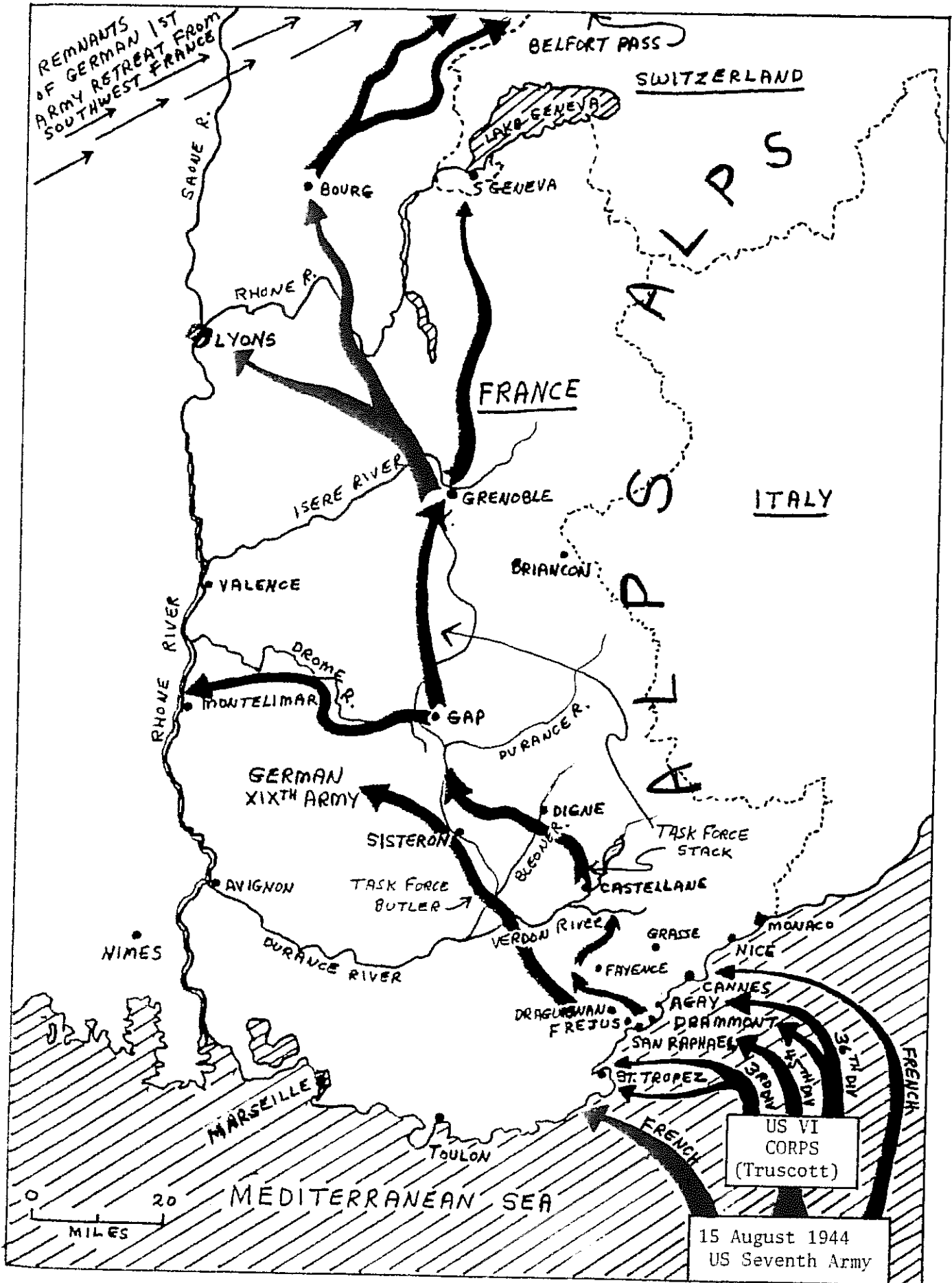
After the invasion, Allied Force Headquarters praised the Southern France landing as, " a model of effective organization, cooperation of all services and vigor of action - one of the best coordinated efforts in all military history ". The beachhead proved to be the largest developed in a three day period during the war.

With the 7th Army front consolidated, General Dahlquist's 36th Division began a fast-moving effort to counteract any German plans for defense or even an organized withdrawal. Brigadier General Butler was given command of a Division Task Force with orders to advance on Route Napoleon into the Alpine area. As the Task Force was assembling, Platoon A-1 had a gun-track blown up by a box mine. The next day, Platoons A-1 and A-2 engaged a single ME-109 with no visible results. On 19 August the 35th AAA Brigade relieved the 443rd from the 68th AAA Group and attached it to the 5th AAA Group. 443rd platoons then joined fast-moving, 36th Div. task forces.

Task Force Butler jumped off from Draguinan and made rapid advance to the north over mountain roads and passes that Napoleon had used on his return from Elba. The T/F reached Sisteron and moved west toward the Rhone Valley. A Task Force under General Stack contacted the Butler T/F and then drove due northward by way of Castellane, Digne and Gap before pressing on to take Grenoble. In one 14 hour period the T/F moved over 90 miles. This northern thrust and envelopment action was intended to cut off German General Johannes Von Blaskowitz's XIX German Army. Time was critical. Every Division vehicle had to be used day and night in moving equipment, men and supplies. The 36th's rapid moves enabled it to outdistance much of the German XIX Army, mainly based in the Marseilles-Toulon area.

Allied strategists counted on the Southern France invasion to draw off





INVASION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE AND PURSUIT OF XIX GERMAN ARMY BY 36th DIVISION

some of the German pressure on the expanding Normandy Beachhead. All 36th Division efforts were placed at destruction of sufficient German forces to necessitate reinforcements being secured from the Normandy area. The Division's rapid advance did alarm the Germans. A week after landing the Division had moved 250 miles to Grenoble while, in the south, French forces had broken into the ports of Marseilles and Toulon, making the German positions untenable. The German Commander chose the Rhone Valley as his escape route to Germany and began a hasty withdrawal, harassed by the Maquis (French Forces of the Interior - FFI) who were well-coordinated, aggressive French resistance fighters.

The rapid advance to Grenoble had blocked any possibility of German help from Italy through the Alpine mountain passes. It also left the 443rd and other units without military maps and for a time, local road maps were used. In spite of this handicap, the Division was able to outdistance the Germans and block the Rhone River Valley in the vicinity of Montelimar, directly astride the German escape route. On 21 August the 36th Division had elements scattered from Montelimar to Grenoble, Gap, Guilestre, Digne and the beachhead. Fortunately, most of its armor, artillery and combat troops, were in a position to block the German retreat.

The trapped German XIX Army was still a powerful fighting force and as it approached the Montelimar area it began to lash out at the 36th Division. Under threat of enemy armor attack by the German advance force the 443rd Battalion Command Post had to be abandoned the evening of 24 August. It moved from a position 1½ miles southwest of Crest to a position 3 miles south of the town. With intensified ferocity the German forces slammed into the 36th Division's blocking line, their only escape route to the Belfort Pass into Germany. Meanwhile the 3rd Division had been advancing northwest toward Montelimar, developing a pincers movement on the enemy forces trapped between the 3rd, the 36th and the Rhone River. Although 36th Division units were taking a vicious pounding from German tanks and artillery as they retreated up the Rhone River Valley, the enemy was also absorbing a relentless fire from American artillery. Fire missions for 36th Division artillery jammed radio networks. And U.S. Air Force P-47 dive bombers had destroyed Rhone River bridges, compelling the Germans to remain on the east side of the river on Highway 7. Road blocks set up by U.S. troops were crushed by the overwhelming concentration of enemy troops, weapons and equipment. But U.S. artillery continued to destroy

escaping vehicles, further blocking the highway escape route. U.S. artillery dispositions enabled accurate fire to be placed continuously on sixteen miles of road, clogged with retreating enemy. In the face of this devastation, enemy armor attempted numerous breakthroughs only to be thrown back. At the height of combat, Platoon C-2 moved to protect the Drome River Bridge in Crest, a key point for the 36th Division. On 28 August it shot down one of two ME-109s attacking the bridge.

The German XIXth Army's huge convoy included about 20 thousand vehicles of all kinds - from heavy cargo trucks to requisitioned French sedans. The U.S. artillery was unmerciful and the carnage at Montelimar was terrible to behold. At least 1000 horses, pulling carts or motor vehicles, had been killed. A few, badly wounded, had to be shot. Some, unharmed, grazed peacefully in the fields after the battle. Smashed, fire-blackened trucks, half-tracks and sedans clogged the highway. Dead enemy soldiers lay among the debris or along the road. Six giant railway guns were captured intact on the railroad paralleling the highway - two were 280 mm and four were 380 mm pieces. Prisoners were taken from seven different divisions as well as many other supporting units. The enemy suffered 11 thousand casualties, 2,100 vehicles destroyed and two artillery divisions completely demolished. In spite of these losses the sheer size of the German XIXth Army in retreat enabled sizeable enemy forces to escape the Montelimar trap, but they were too decimated to be able to set up any kind of a defense until they were behind the Moselle River.

In preparation for renewing the attack to the north, the 36th Division formed small "Task Forces", accompanied by 443rd gun-tracks, to provide ground as well as antiaircraft protection.

#### *LIBERATION OF LYONS*

As August closed the 36th Division had moved swiftly over 80 miles north in three days. It entered Lyons on 2 September. Bridges crossing the Rhone River in Lyons had been destroyed by the retreating enemy, and many roadblocks had been set up north and east of town. In the midst of joyful welcome from the civilian population it appeared that Lyons was about to be blockaded. However, on 3 September, the Germans began to withdraw from their relatively strong defensive positions. The 36th division was again in pursuit. For several days there was no enemy artillery fire and air activity was negligible. Blown bridges and mines caused some delay.

### *PURSUIT TO BELFORT PASS*

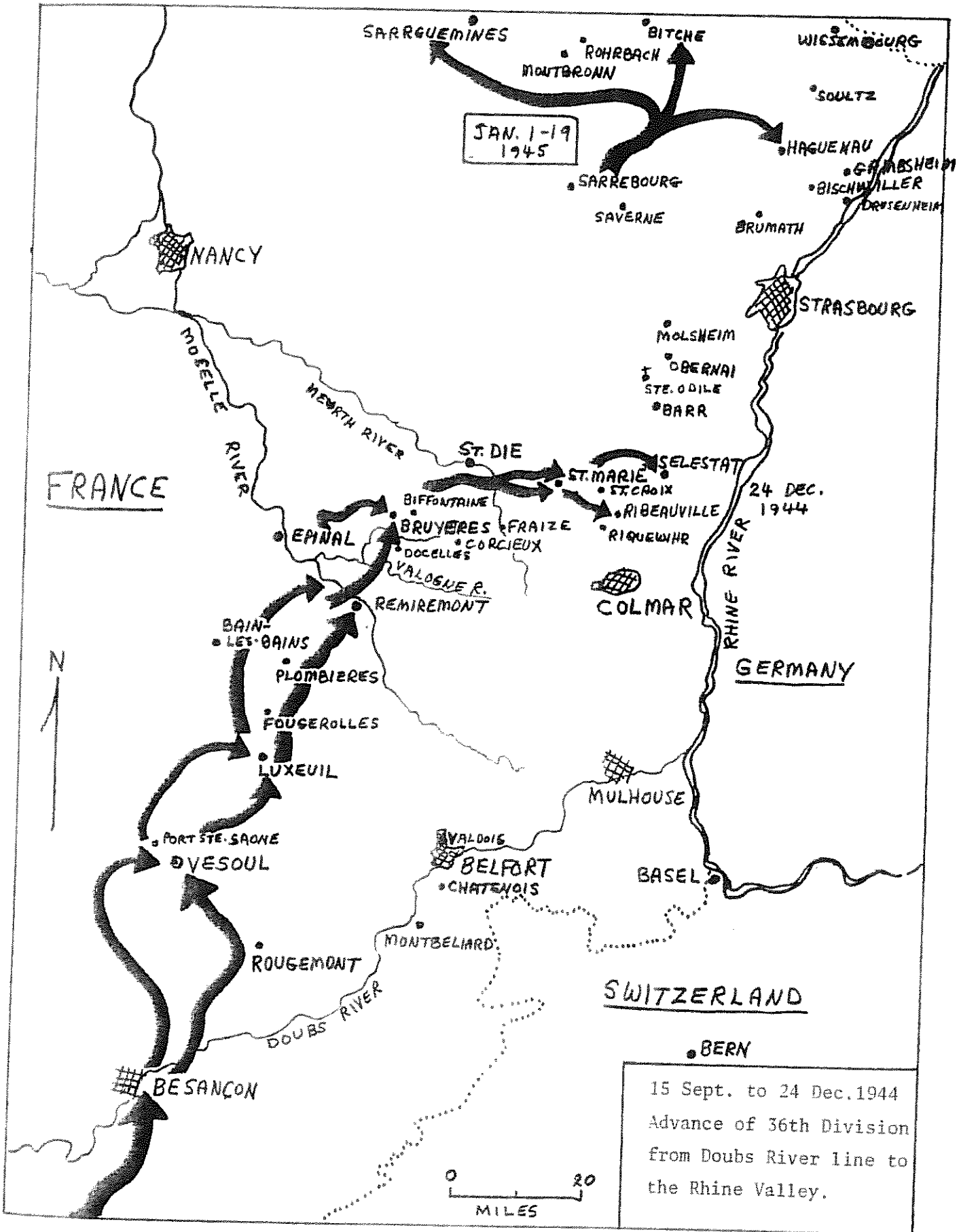
During the pursuit of the enemy, Platoon B-1, while convoying the 977th Field Artillery near Marloz, fired through a screen of roadside trees at two ME-109s, attempting to take off from a nearby road, and destroyed one. The remainder of the German XIXth Army was moving with the utmost speed to reach the Belfort Pass and safety. U.S. units sometimes moved for an entire day without sighting the enemy. Advanced units used short cuts and country roads to bypass ambushes, roadblocks and minefields. Supply problems continued to build up since day and night shuttles were still bringing supplies from the southern beachhead. Every vehicle, including the 443rd's gun-tracks, was loaded with infantry troops so that the pursuit could proceed as rapidly as possible. After several days scattered resistance began to develop and over 1,000 prisoners were taken and a ½ million gallon fuel dump was captured - relieving the supply problem as far as fuel was concerned. A strong German force attempted to hold Vesoul on 10 September but after nine hours of house-to-house fighting, Vesoul was captured two days later. This delay enabled the sad remnants of the XIXth Army to gain in their race to retreat through the Belfort Pass, east of Vesoul. Intelligence from the 36th Division warned units of possible, large scale enemy air attacks and ordered all defensive measures possible to be taken. The 443rd's gun-tracks were manned at all times.

### RHINELAND CAMPAIGN

#### *NOSELLE RIVER OPERATION*

As the advance units of the German XIX Army came into striking distance of Belfort Pass, effective elements of the Army, reinforced by troops from northern France, began to make strong defensive stands. Although the Germans evacuated Luxeuil-les-Bains, intense fighting occurred in wooded areas north and east of town. Meanwhile, the short time they were in the vicinity of Luxeuil afforded many G.I.s opportunity to enjoy luxurious hot sulphur water baths in huge aluminum tubs. They were using baths which had been patronized back in the times of Julius Caesar. Here, too, a French woman who had won gold medals in Paris for her lace work, brought out her cache of work, hidden from the Germans, and in short order sold it all to the Americans.

At this time the 1st French Army was ordered to take over the attack to-



ward Belfort Pass and the VI Corps was directed to cross the Vosges Mountains into the Rhine Valley. It soon became apparent that the reinforced enemy would make a stand at the Moselle River crossing. As the 36th Division moved toward the Moselle at Remiremont, the 443rd Battalion CP displaced forward to Fougerolles and found a barn for overnight shelter. Lt. Col. Larson noticed a number of chickens around and had Capt. Fisher use his high school French to persuade the farmer's wife to bake a chicken for a dollar. Two hours later the baked chicken arrived with head and entrails still in place. No one could summon the courage to eat the chicken so Capt. Fisher had the task of explaining to the farmer's wife that she could keep both the chicken and the dollar.

Arriving in the Remiremont area on 20 September the three 36th Division Regiments attacked the same night. Using a series of feints the 141st was able to cross the Moselle north of town and enlarge its bridgehead by the next afternoon. German determination and resistance was strong but the 142nd, in house-to-house fighting, forced the Germans to flee at daybreak on 23 September, destroying a bridge over the Moselle as they left. That same morning Platoons A-1, B-2 and C-1 engaged two ME-109s and shot one down. By then, large enemy reinforcements had begun to appear on the Division's right flank and the brilliant, rapid advance from the Southern France beachhead slowed considerably.

*AAA AW BN (SP) TACTICS CHANGE*

On 23 September a letter from VI Corps Commander, General Truscott, changed forever the existing concepts of tactical uses of AAA (SP) gun-tracks. Aware of the exploits of the 443rd and recognizing that growing, Allied air power was gradually reducing enemy air power to sporadic, hit-and-run raids, General Truscott advised all division commanders of the capabilities of the AAA (SP) gun-tracks and their possible fuller uses while retaining their effective anti-aircraft role. Entitled, "Employment of AAA (SP) For Ground Missions", the General's letter stated:

*" I have long felt the need for greater exploitation of our fire power in the attack. We have the means for far more effective use of massed fires of our automatic weapons in close support of infantry, particularly in the AAA automatic weapons battalion, mounted on half-tracks- four .50 cal. machine-guns coaxially mounted and one 37 mm with two .50 cal. machine guns co-axially mounted -*

capable of delivering tremendous fire with great accuracy and speed. they have generally been used in rear areas, watching for enemy aircraft. Although the need for antiaircraft protection has not disappeared it has certainly lessened greatly and I am sure that this valuable weapon can be used in many ways without interfering to any great extent with its availability for AA protection.

" The determination as to the use to be made of the AAA battalion at any one time rests with the Division Commander. The Battalions are trained in the technique of ground fires and AAA AW battalion commanders are available to the division and to subordinate commanders at all times for technical advice on the employment of their weapons.

" Within limitation imposed by their characteristics there is a wide range of uses to which the AAA AW half-track may be put. They can be employed effectively in both attack and defense, day or night, and are most effective under circumstances which demand a high and rapid concentration of reinforcing fires at a particular point. The following data and information suggest a few practicable adaptations to ground missions.

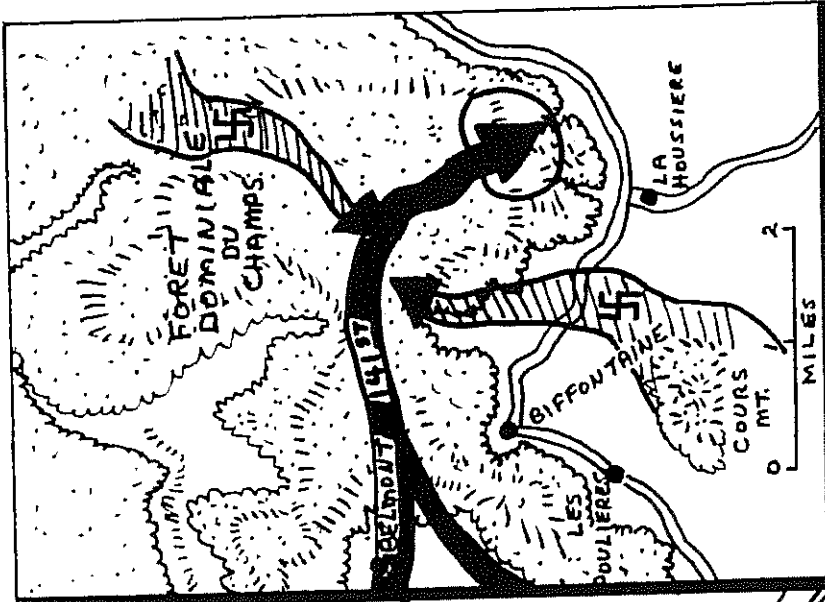
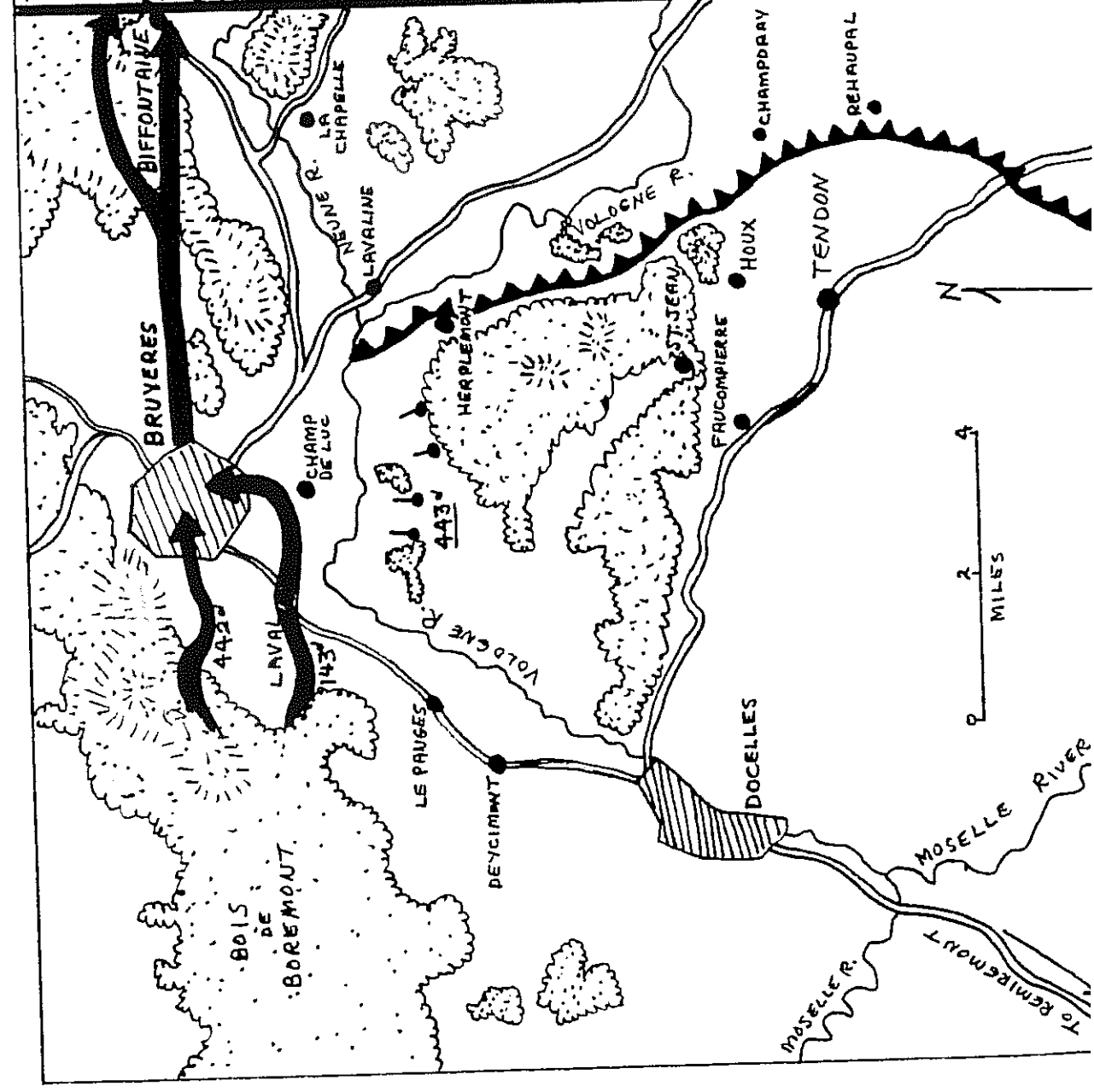
CHARACTERISTICS OF AAA AW MOUNTED ON HALF-TRACKS

M-16 Mount w/armor plying	(1) .50 cal. MGs	8000 ruds per min.	.50 cal. belts are normally loaded: 1 tracer, 2 in- ferniary, 2 AP.
I-22-B1 w/o armor plying	(1) 37 mm gun	240 ruds per min.	210 ruds of HE tracer w/ burnout at 3500 yds. 50 ruds AP.

" It is obvious that because of the half-track's limited, cross-country mobility, the light armor or no armor and its high silhouette, great care must be exercised in using it in the presence of enemy anti-tank weapons. It should not be used to accompany the infantry in attack as is the case with assault cannon but night, however, be moved from one secured cover to another, close behind the assault troops and thus be able to furnish close, supporting fire, particularly for quickly destroying enemy machine gun positions. The M-16 vehicle is better adapted to this type of mission as it possesses some armor and can fire more rapidly and accurately while on the move or at a sudden halt. Moved into position at night, concealed and dug-in, this weapon can greatly increase the weight of infantry fire along the line of departure.

" As the nucleus of a strong point or to cover a road block, bridge or similar position it should be carefully dug-in and concealed and covered by infantry small arms. However, the half-track crews are able to furnish some of the small arms flank protection while still able to operate the piece.

" In support of a night attack the weapon may be used to indicate direction and to furnish diversionary fires. Used extensively by the Germans in Africa and Italy often with excellent results.



First Major Ground Support  
Action by the 443rd (left)  
The Attack on Bruyeres.

The "Lost Battalion" as it  
Attacked Toward La Houssiere.  
(above)



Men of the 442nd used bayonets to dig out the enemy while repulsing numerous German counterattacks. On 30 October, they broke through to the two hundred and eleven remaining men who had held out for seven days without food or water and with little ammunition. The vicious and heroic action of the 442nd had reduced its company strength to 40 to 50 men. The month of October had been a gruelling one as the rapidity of the advance had slowed. Ground support roles for the 443rd's gun-tracks had been frequent and the success of the tactics employed was widely recognized. Infantrymen were loud in their praises of the "flak-wagon" and the enemy had experienced AAA (SP) fire power in a most demoralizing manner.

#### *COMBAT INTERLUDES*

In between convoy movement and battles were many interludes which brought news and interesting experiences. In Docelles a wealthy French woman invited the 443rd CP officers to her home for a superb meal. It was evident that she wanted to get one of the young officers interested in her (too) young daughter. In the same vicinity an often seen activity was observed as two French women were making ersatz coffee by roasting kernels of grain in a metal cylinder resembling a stovepipe with a screen dividing it in half and hot charcoal on the bottom level.

On 14 October members of the 443rd were authorized to wear the 36th Infantry Division's shoulder patch - the well-known T-Patch. This news was warmly welcomed by 443rd men who had developed a close affinity with the 36th Division and its men.

A number of inspections occurred during these operations. Generals came from the Antiaircraft Command in Richmond and from the Army Ground Forces Command. One general saw an enlisted man's cot in a tent with ten blankets on it. Said the general, "Where did you get all these blankets"? Without batting an eye the G.I. answered, "From the infantry, because they threw their blankets away".

On 25 October, the 443rd received commendations from Lt. General Mark Clark, 5th Army Commander, for excellent performance during the Italian Campaign. Capt. Wells Lewis (son of Sinclair Lewis) who had left the 443rd to become aide to General Dahlquist, was killed by a German sniper's bullet as he stood next to the general on 29 October.

T/Sgt. MacArthur, Operations Sergeant, wrote the following after the 443rd's first major ground support mission.

"When the fellows first heard that they would do some ground support shooting in support of an infantry attack they took interest at once. There's something about being able to fight back at the enemy which does something for a man's morale and the days during which 443rd gunners would toss lead at the Luftwaffe a dozen or more times a day had almost become a thing of the past. The one or two ME-109s or FW 190s that buzzed the 36th Division front several times a week didn't provide very many satisfactory targets. Meanwhile, 443rd men had to sweat out enemy artillery barrages without being able to fire back since their guns did not have enough range.

"Their first opportunity came when each of the four line batteries provided a gun section to fire across the Vologne River into German positions in the Bois Boremont while the 143rd Infantry attacked Bruyeres from the south and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team attacked from the forest and hills on the west. The enemy must have been surprised and dismayed when several kilometers of hillside in front of them suddenly belched 37mm and .50 cal. fire at irregular intervals throughout the three days of the attack. Even though the 443rd guns were firing from one flank of the attack the Germans reacted by firing their artillery at the 443rd gun-tracks. In spite of the enemy shells falling around them the 443rd men continued to fire upon call from the Battalion Fire Direction Center, manned by the 443rd Operations Officer and Operations Sergeant. Their fire was of enormous value in supporting the attack. Much enemy artillery fire was diverted from the attacking infantry and enemy observation was greatly hindered by air and tree bursts over German positions. Most of the enemy defenders were so un-nerved by the rain of lead that they were still unable to function effectively when the first 143rd infantrymen reached their positions. Since that initial ground support mission, 443rd gunners have fired again and again in support of the 36th Division Infantry.

"Battery D's first platoon fired into Laveline de Bruyeres early one morning and received mortar fire in return. However, they were rewarded by seeing their shells start a fire which increased in intensity and culminated in an explosion just before dawn. The 443rd men, returning from their mission, were bemoaning their bad luck, believing that they had blown up the only distillery in the valley. They were considerably relieved when they later learned that they had blown up an ammunition dump.

"After firing almost daily at enemy personnel, observation posts and entrenchments, the second platoon of C Battery had its biggest day when one of its sections threw 150 37mm high explosive shells and 3700 rounds of .50 cal. bullets into enemy positions south of Fraise.

"We don't mind the ground support missions - as long as we're helping to win the battles', is the attitude of all 443rd men -- this in spite of the fact that to fire a single round means that men are feeding ammunition and the gunners' seats are five feet above the ground with no protective armor of any kind against enemy artillery, mortar fire and small arms fire -- which was plentiful. Whether it's enemy personnel, dug-in positions, vehicles or attack by ME-109s, FW-190s or the new, German jets, 443rd AAA men are willing and able to make it plenty hot for the Nazis".

The practice of rotating one AAA gun section per battery at a time, for rest and recuperation in the Service Echelon, was continued by the 443rd as long as the tactical situation permitted.

#### *LES ROUGES - EAUX VALLEY OPERATION*

In a final drive up the Les Rouges-Eaux Valley to get to the Vosges mountain passes, Platoon D-1 on 5 November, in support of the 143rd Regiment, blew up an enemy ammunition dump. But the operation began to take on the aspects of the Italian winter campaign, with rain, slush and mud and eventually, cold and snow. Storms limited visibility and enemy mines slowed forward movement up the valley among the heavily forested hills of the Forêt Dominiiale-du-Champs. Platoon D-2 fired harassing fire on enemy positions just northeast of Herplemont as a weather-induced stalemate settled in.

Then on 12 November, 443rd Batteries A, B, C, and D each assigned two gun sections to support a division attack on 14th November. Initial objectives were taken without serious opposition. A mine explosion injured three men of Platoon D-2 but the Germans began retreating toward their strong defensive line along the Meurthe River. They began burning villages as they withdrew forcing hundreds of homeless French civilians to flee. The enemy also razed all buildings on the 56th Division side of the Meurthe River, leaving no concealment or protection for American troops.

#### *LES ROUGES - MEURTHE RIVER OPERATIONS*

Just east of the crest of the Vosges Mountain range was the heavily defended town of St. Marie Aux Mines. The 36th Division, exhausted by no relief in ninety-eight exhausting days in combat since invading Southern France, was given a temporary defensive assignment to protect the Corps and Army right flank, as the northern XV Corps tried to pierce the Severne Gap pass to Strasbourg while the 1st French Army on the south attacked through Belfort Pass - both the traditional invasion pathways into France. Nevertheless, the 36th Division attacked and forced the Meurthe River enemy defenses. By 26 November, the 36th had captured Fraise and pushed well beyond it, knowing that the key to the Vosges was St. Marie Aux Mines.

The 443rd continued its strong support of the 36th Division advance, playing a more important part than ever in the struggle with the enemy. On request of the 143rd Regimental commander, Lt. Col. Larson ordered a

443rd gun-track to "hose down" a low, wooded area full of Germans so his infantry could mop up those remaining. This was done successfully. Platoon C-2 fired support for the 141st Regiment on 22-23 November. In response to an urgent request from 36th Division G-3, Platoon C-1 was assigned and moved at once to protect the mountain road from St. Croix to Wissembach, just cleared by the 142nd. Approaching St. Marie, the 142nd sent one company toward the pass while the rest of the battalion made a tough, four hour climb over extremely rugged terrain to attack St. Marie from the north. Caught completely unawares and unprepared, German defenders attempts to resist soon fizzled out and by evening of 25 November St. Marie was secured with over 170 prisoners and large stores of supplies captured. The speed of the attack had caught some amazed German soldiers riding leisurely around town. By midnight, U.S. traffic was moving into St. Marie. In what was the most hazardous and intelligent maneuver of WW II, one battalion had captured a supposedly impregnable mountain fortress and opened up the Alsatian Plain to Allied troops. St. Marie had been captured for the first time in history! The 443rd immediately disposed gun-tracks to protect the St. Marie Gap as far east as Liepvre.

By morning of 28th November, the 142nd had forced its way through the thickly wooded mountains and captured Chateau Koenigsburg, an old fortress overlooking the Alsatian Plain, the Rhine Valley and the Black Forest of Germany. Platoon C-2 had provided AA fire on the enemy in support of this action by the 142nd. By now the Germans were desperate in their attempts to stop the 36th Division which was operating on an 80 km front. They were apparently trying to get to the German side of the Rhine River with all their weapons, equipment and supplies and to do so were mounting weak delaying actions. As the 36th continued its attacks, it captured Chatenois and Thannenkirch by 1 December, and prepared to attack Ribeauville, since the enemy had been driven from key defensive areas after Battery D's gun-tracks had fired heavily on them. Although, at this time, tank and tank destroyer units had been relieved from supporting the 141st Regiment, the latter's commander was unwilling to release its AAA (SP) unit and it remained with the infantry.

On 9 December, 36th Division troops received a commendation from the VI Corps Commander for "clearing the Vosges, capturing St. Marie Pass and continuing attacks culminating in the denouement into the Alsatian Plain near Ribeauville without feather or fuss".

A TOUCH OF HOME

American G.I.s everywhere are known to pick up pets, especially dogs, and become quite attached to them. Men of the 443rd were no exception. Even when the unit was in Fort Sheridan in the U.S.A. the unit had a huge St. Bernard as a mascot. Men will remember the 25 mile march to Waukegan when ambulances and 2½ ton trucks were used to pick up those whose feet or will to march all the way simply gave out. On the way back to the post the St. Bernard suddenly dropped on the road and refused to go another step. Of course he was picked up and returned to Ft. Sheridan by truck and upon arrival he jumped down - completely recovered. He learned "the ropes" quickly.

One of the favorite memories is that of a chicken! Seldom has one heard of a chicken as a pet during combat but old "Zombie" roughed it out for over two years. One of the men purchased a chick from an Arab in Port Lyautey and when the unit was ordered to head for the Tunisian front, he gave it to Battery D Mess Sergeant, F.L. Bergan, asking him to take good care of Zombie.

The chicken went through battles in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and France. Often riding on the 37mm gun barrel, Zombie survived many an air raid with no more harm than the loss of a few feathers. She really found a home with the D Battery kitchen crew. Throughout her travels she rarely missed laying an egg a day! Zombie was introduced to eligible roosters in several countries but it was in Italy when she laid seven fertile eggs and became a setting hen. In preparing vehicles for the invasion of Southern France, Zombie and her nest of eggs was put into a slatted box with food and water to last for a week. She was stored in Battery D's kitchen truck. Some days later, in France, when it was possible for the kitchen truck to again be operable, Zombie was found loose in the truck with six baby chicks. As might be expected, in due course of time, there was a chicken fry in D Battery.

However, old, battle worn Zombie continued to lay eggs, crouch under the gun-track during air raids and continued to endear herself to the men. During the winter of 1944-45, somewhere in France, a couple of her buddies imbibed too much French wine and shortly afterward poor old Zombie became a chicken dinner. It was reliably reported that tears were shed over the loss of Zombie -- the famous Ack-Ack chicken who had seven battle stars to her credit!

\* \* \*

SSs and no slit trench!



—EWSHAW—

### *COMBAT INTERLUDES*

During battles, horses and cows would occasionally be killed by stray bullets, shrapnel or mines. G.I.s would frequently cut steaks from such cattle but French civilians, desperate for food, would butcher both horses and cattle that had been killed. Remains of such animals were frequently seen along roadsides.

On 5 December the 36th Division and the 443rd were detached from the VI Corps and attached to the 1st French Army. Lt. Col. Larson and Capt. Fisher reported to the French Headquarters many miles behind the lines. They enjoyed a typical, extended, French banquet with many courses of salad, fish, lamb, rice, creme dessert, cheeses, wines, champagne and liquors, in the company of attractive, French women ambulance drivers. Shortly thereafter Lt. Col. Larson invited a French Colonel commanding the French Antiaircraft Group to a dinner at the 443rd Battalion CP. He then wheedled steaks and other foods from the Army Supply Sergeant and with translation help from Capt. Fisher, persuaded a French woman (whose house the CP occupied at Riquewihr) to cook the dinner. T/Sgt. MacArthur reluctantly agreed to be the waiter. Other than the steaks being tough, the waiter nervously spilling chicken soup in the guest's lap and dessert being canned fruit cocktail, the dinner was completed without any French wine and without any attractive women ambulance drivers - a far cry from the sumptuous affair at the French Headquarters!

Early in the Southern France Campaign a daily Ack-Ack News had been started and published by the 443rd Communications Section. It published BBC news, combat tips and items of value and interest to 443rd personnel. Gun crews received it within a few hours of publication and welcomed it warmly. Battalion Commander Larson urged Battery Commanders to encourage their men to submit material for inclusion in what was an important morale and esprit de corps building publication.

And in more than one French town 443rd men had seen girls with their hair shorn - the penalty for having collaborated with the Germans.

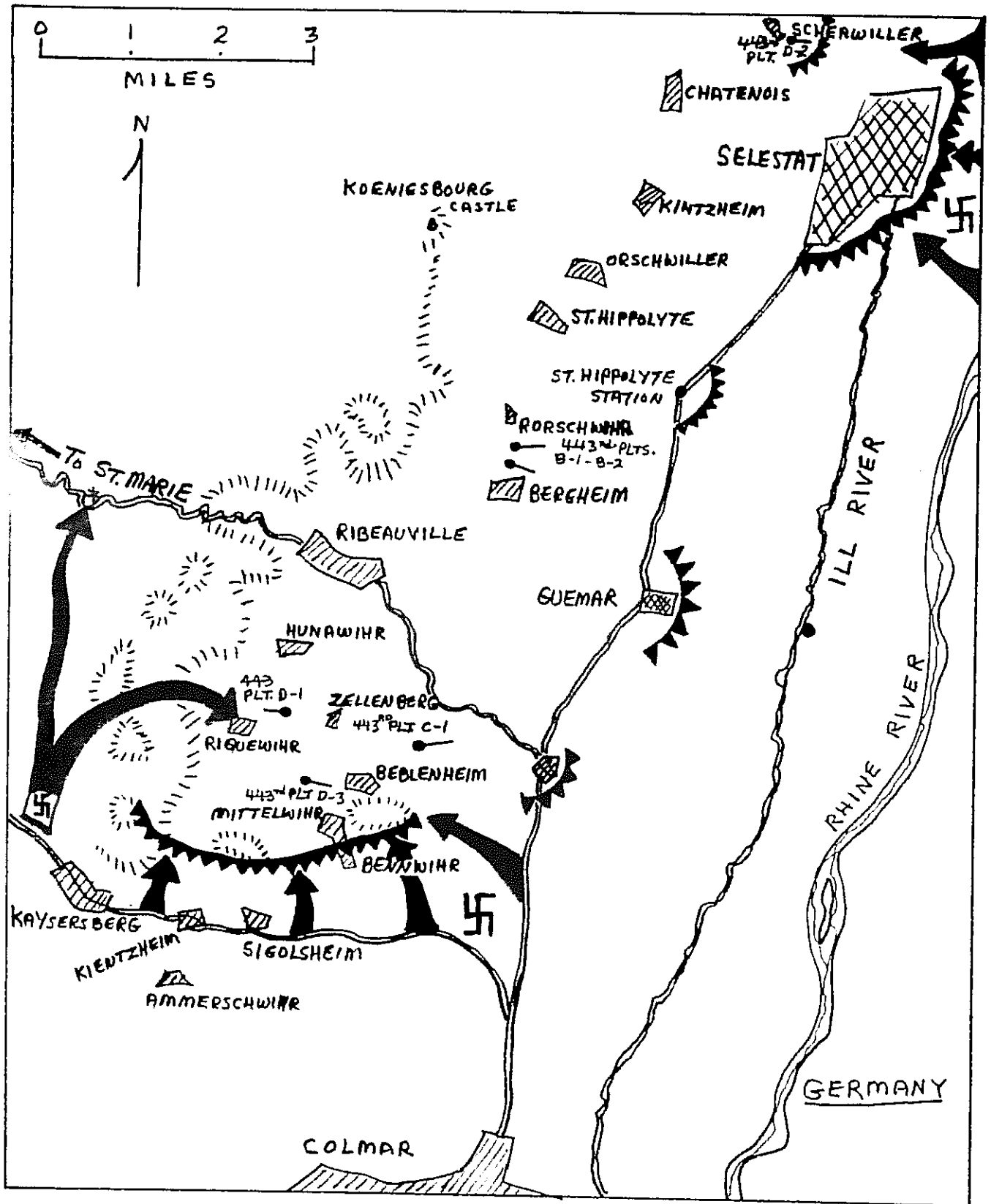
### *COLMAR OPERATION*

The exhausted 36th Division was committed to action to clean up Colmar. The rapid enemy retreat from Ribeauville and the hills dominating Colmar greatly worried the German High Command with the result that large reinforcements were brought in to face the 36th Division. On 12 December a major assault was launched against the 141st Regiment on the Division's

right. The enemy force included an entire German officer candidate school determined to turn the 36th Division's flank and cut the Ribeauville-St. Marie road. The 36th units were initially encircled but, in hand-to-hand combat and using every available man, the 2nd Battalion of the 141st pushed the enemy back. Meanwhile another enemy unit moved around the 2nd Battalion to assault Riquewihr and the Regimental CP. The undermanned two and one half companies of the exhausted 1st Battalion, in reserve, counterattacked and reestablished Division positions.

443rd Batteries were immediately notified to be alert for infiltrating enemy patrols. About noon on 12 December an urgent message from 36th Division G-3 asked for 443rd help in repulsing an expected attack on Scherwiller by 250 German infantrymen reported in the vicinity of Selestat. The Division at this time had absolutely no reserves and infantry companies were down to half or less of their normal strength. The left flank of the Division ended at Scherwiller just west of Selestat. The nearest 443rd unit was Platoon D-2, on road defense at the time and in reserve for such emergencies. But at the time it was out of radio contact since it was moving its positions. Capt. Fisher, S-3, immediately drove to where Platoon D-2 was moving into its new positions, and convoyed the platoon to the eastern edge of Scherwiller, ready to repulse the expected German attack. Arrival of a French armored column from the northwest, several hours later, apparently ended the enemy's attack plans. The 36th Division's left flank was finally secure.

But the situation along the 36th Division's front continued to grow more serious under persistent and ferocious enemy counterattacks. One result was that 443rd gun-tracks were resited to fire on any enemy breakthrough from the east or the southwest. On 12 December the 142nd's 1st Battalion, supported by tanks and tank destroyers, attacked Selestat and pushed the enemy out. With concentrated artillery fire the city was held against a strong evening counterattack. Around 7 pm the same day a strong enemy patrol attacked 141st Regimental CP and 153rd Field Artillery positions at Riquewihr with bazookas, machine guns, automatic pistols and small arms. One gun and its ammunition was blown up and a nearby home set afire by a bazooka hit. Platoon D-1 gun-track driver called for two of his crew to cover him, while he crawled 50 yards over exposed terrain, illuminated by flares and swept by small arms fire, to his gun-track, loaded the four machine guns and repeatedly "hosed" the area from which the German attackers were firing. The enemy ran for cover. Prisoners captured indicated



BATTLE OF SELESTAT and CRISIS AT RIQUEWIHR AND SCHERWILLER - 12 - 15 Dec. 1944



that the patrol's intention was to put the gun-track out of action so they could destroy the artillery guns and cut the road by blowing up a bridge. This action, if it had succeeded, would have put two batteries of artillery out of action and cut off most of the infantry units in the sector. On 13 December Platoon C-1 fired 1600 rounds of .50 cal. in a night mission near Zellenberg, harassing an enemy supply route, bridge and mortar positions. Upon request of the 36th Division G-3 the 443rd's S-3 ordered platoon officers to coordinate the defense of Mittelwihr, as the situation worsened, with the 143rd Regimental Commander. Platoon D-3 had its ammunition trailer blown up by artillery fire. Strong enemy counterattacks continued but were repulsed with heavy loss to the enemy. But German infantry continued to infiltrate Division positions. These powerful enemy attacks along the Division's front narrowly missed succeeding. Even German air was seen and Platoons B-1 and B-2 destroyed an ME-109 near Rorschwihr. But by 15 December the German attack ceased. The enemy intention of breaking through the 36th Division had failed and a terrific casualty toll had been exacted. At least 6,800 infantry were brought across the Rhine for the enemy effort. They included elements of three divisions already protecting the sector plus seven battalions of young and well-trained officer candidates, and SS Non-Com troops under Himmler's personal command. The attackers suffered over 1,300 casualties and 1,360 were taken prisoner. But by 24 December the 36th Division and the 443rd had been in combat for 133 consecutive days. On that day it was relieved from combat by the 3rd Division and enjoyed five brief days patrolling relatively quiet Strasbourg. The average rifle company strength had dropped to 94 and, unable to train replacements, the Division efficiency was rapidly falling. Nevertheless, on Christmas Day, the Americans with the 36th Division gave a Christmas Party for the children of the Strasbourg Orphanage.

By attaching one gun section to each infantry battalion, the 443rd moved to provide maximum ground and air support to the 36th Division along the Rhine River at Strasbourg. Gun section #4 of Platoon B-1, with the 2nd Battalion, 143rd Regiment, fired on enemy positions across the Rhine River. The 443rd CP moved to Eckbolsheim, a northern suburb of Strasbourg. This relief from combat would only last a few days. But on 25 December the 36th moved to the Sarrebourg vicinity for real rest and recuperation. During its 133 days in combat, the Division had

taken 19,751 prisoners and killed or wounded an even greater number of the enemy. Commendation was received from 7th Army Commander General Patch and the Division received Christmas Greetings from its former commander, General Walker. All units were busy training replacements, and rehabilitating weapons and equipment in preparation for the next action. And even with winter's snow covering the ground, all personnel celebrated New Year's Eve with refreshments and song.

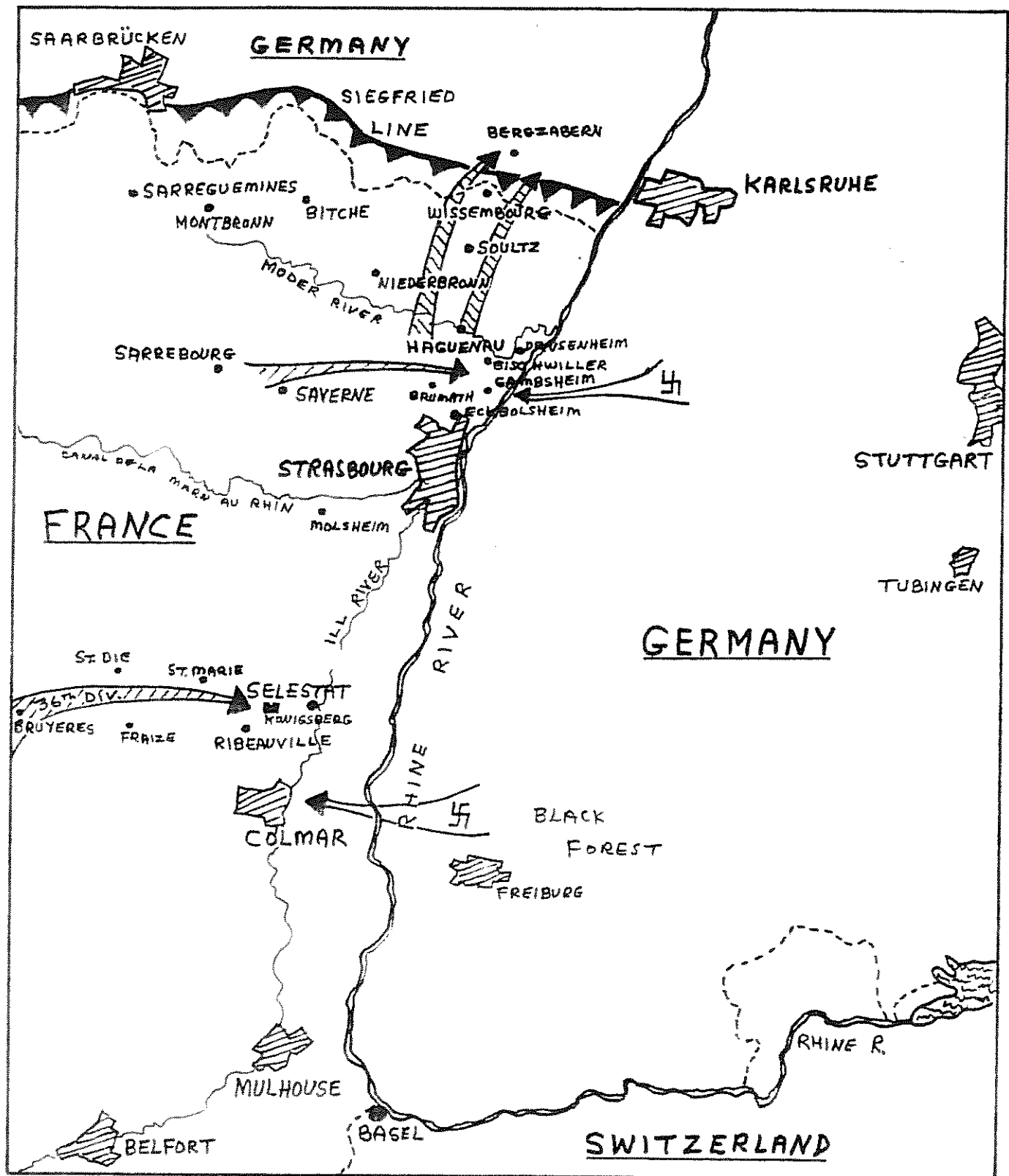
*ARDENNES - ALSACE CAMPAIGN*

At midnight on New Year's Eve, when presumably Allied troops were celebrating, the German High Command launched a major offensive in the Bitche sector with intent to advance to the Severne Gap, take Strasbourg and possibly all of Alsace. The attack was planned because the 7th Army line was very thin and extended as a result of having to move troops to contain the German forces in the Ardennes breakthrough. General Von Runstedt's offensive into Belgium was thus forced to peak on 24 December and the Germans felt that a major offensive in the 7th Army area would reduce the movement of additional troops to Belgium. The 36th Division was alerted to be prepared to move to counter enemy parachute drops expected in the XV or VI Corps sectors.

On New Year's Day the 141st Regiment moved quickly 40 miles from Sarrebourg to fill a gap on the right of the 100th Division through which enemy were filtering on the VI Corps left flank and aiming toward Montbronn. The 142nd was put on immediate alert and the balance of the 36th Division went on a six hour alert as training continued. Division units found the local citizenry in fear with wild gossip about the Germans returning. Since infiltrating Germans sometimes wore Allied uniforms their apprehensions were given more credence.

By 3 January the rest of the Division had moved along the frozen road to Montbronn in snow flurries and cold. The 36th organized a secondary defensive line several miles behind the line being held - something it had never had to do before but which the Germans had been forced to do many times. However, the enemy failed to break through Allied lines at Montbronn.

During a brief respite from enemy attacks, Lt. Col. Larson enjoyed a five day leave at the 36th Division's rest camp at Bains-le-Bains where hotels had been set up for both officers and enlisted men. Major Lazur was in



RHINELAND AND ARDENNES-ALSACE THEATER OF OPERATIONS - 1944-45

command of the Battalion during Larson's absence. Upon his return, Lt. Col. Larson sent the following commendation to officers and men of the 443rd:

*" I wish to express my appreciation for your untiring efforts and devotion to duty during the campaign in France. As a result of your energy and enthusiasm, in carrying out the recent operations, you have added another remarkable performance to the Battalion's brilliant record in the protection and support of the 36th Division. During the landing in Southern France, in the rapid northward drive through the Rhone Valley and in the constant push and drive from Besancon to Bruyeres, you have demonstrated your characteristic, aggressive spirit. Because of your courage and determination, you have been able to carry on the fight in the rain and mud from Bruyeres through Corcieux to Wissembach, in the breakthrough of St. Marie and Ribeauville Pass and in the gruelling, harassing push toward Colmar. Your versatility and stamina have been put to the test in the defensive positions along the Rhine River near Strasbourg and in the relief and attacks in the Haguenau sector with the VI Corps.*

*" Even though you have been confronted with the worst possible conditions of rain, mud, cold and snow, you have always performed your duties in an outstanding manner. Enemy planes have been few but you have maintained a constant vigil, searching the sky for hostile planes diving out of the sun or coming in low over tree tops or hill masses. In addition, particularly when air activity was at a minimum, you have unhesitatingly assisted the 36th Division in its attacks, defensive missions and patrols, by your harassing and diversionary ground firing missions.*

*" In a defensive role you have played a particularly important part in breaking up and routing a large enemy infiltration which threatened to cut off one of the Division's main supply routes in Ribeauville Pass and also in the destruction of a low-flying enemy reconnaissance plane over Rorschwihr as well as in the hasty displacement of your guns to the vicinity of Scherwiller in order to prevent the enemy infantry from cutting the Division's other supply route, where you showed yourself capable of rising to any emergency.*

*" You are now engaged in an intensive training program which includes the reconditioning of your weapons and equipment for the final, smashing drive into the heart of Germany. In this, the final phase of the European War, I am confident that each of you will continue to maintain that splendid 'esprit de corps' that has made the 443rd Antiaircraft Battalion an outstanding organization.*

*- Wermer L. Larson, Lt. Col., Commanding -*

No further enemy air attacks occurred until 13 January when Platoon B-1 engaged the first Jet-propelled plane yet seen - an ME-163. No hit was scored. Other German assaults in the Bitche area were repulsed and the enemy began to withdraw. But then a large enemy force backed by considerable armor crossed the Rhine in the Gamsheim-Herrlisheim area, just north of Strasbourg. It quickly expanded its bridgehead, threatening Strasbourg. During 12-14 January the 12th U.S. Armored Division attacked the

bridgehead but was defeated with heavy casualties. The 79th Division, east and north of Hagenau became exhausted under repeated enemy attacks. To counter the expanding German bridgehead at Gamsheim-Herrlisheim, the 36th Division was ordered on 19 January to move the 80 miles to Hagenau, just north of Gamsheim, to relieve the 12th Armored Division and eliminate the enemy bridgehead. Before the relief could be consummated German armor attacked east of Herrlisheim (with 20 tanks and 500 infantry) and over the Zorn Canal in a major breakthrough. However, the 143rd Regiment and other 36th Division reinforcements just arriving, stopped the enemy breakthrough. The Division's 636th Tank Destroyer gunners carefully demolished six German tanks, the 133rd Field Artillery knocked out another while the 145rd's 2nd Battalion counterattacked, destroying eight tanks and taking 176 prisoners of Germany's best 10th SS Ranger Division. This rallied the 12th Armored Division which was falling back before the enemy onslaught. On 20-21 January VI Corps withdrew to a position hinging on Hagenau-Bischwiller where over twelve inches of snow covered the battlefield and sheets and whitewash were used to camouflage positions and equipment. 443rd gun crews went on special night air raid alert for three nights, since intelligence had indicated the possibility of night air attacks as well as a parachute drop. During the morning of 21 January two enemy attacks were repulsed by the 36th Division. And on 23 January 445rd Platoons B-1, B-2, C-1 and D-1 engaged two ME-262 jet planes bombing and strafing the Division area. No results were evident. Soon thereafter Platoon C-1 fired at a flight of ME-262s and sent one away trailing smoke. Several air raids occurred this same day, one using ME-109Es. Hits on the planes' fuselage were seen but they seemed to bounce off the ME-262 jets. Three 443rd men were wounded by bomb fragments. It was discovered that the ME-262 jet planes had multi-layered skin which made them less vulnerable to AAA fire and their higher speeds exceeded the capabilities of 443rd sighting and aiming systems. The jets flew at a normal speed of 530 mph and dived at 600 mph. Immediate instruction was initiated to familiarize 443rd gun crews with the dimensions of this new challenge - especially demands for greater leads when firing and for early warning. The ME-262 was painted blue underneath and a mottled green on top, leading to a deceptive appearance.

During the night of 25-26 January one gun section each from Batteries A and B fired on enemy troop concentrations in Rohrwiller in support of the 142nd

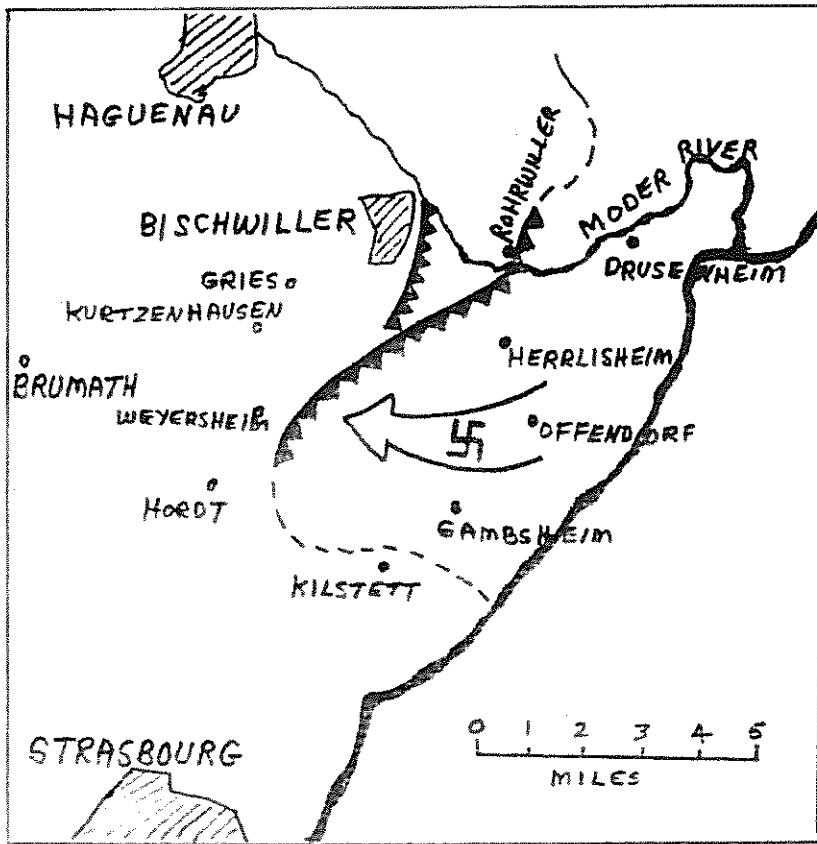
Regiment as it raided nearby Oberhofen.

On 26 January, 36th Division Commander General Dahlquist phoned 443rd S-3 Fisher to request four to six gun-tracks to fire night diversionary fire while the 142nd Regiment attacked at another point. During the night of 28-29 January, an M-15 from Platoon B-2 provided diversionary fire on enemy positions to screen patrol activity by the 142nd. B-2 was then relieved by a gun section from Battery C.

German "Screaming Meemies" were again used during the campaign. They were about 8" in diameter and about 15" long and appeared to be fired electrically from multiple-mounted racks. A dozen exhaust holes at an angle to their bases provided forward propulsion and rotation, generated by an expanding liquid gas. Their slow rate of speed permitted a loud whistling to reach the ear well before the rocket did.

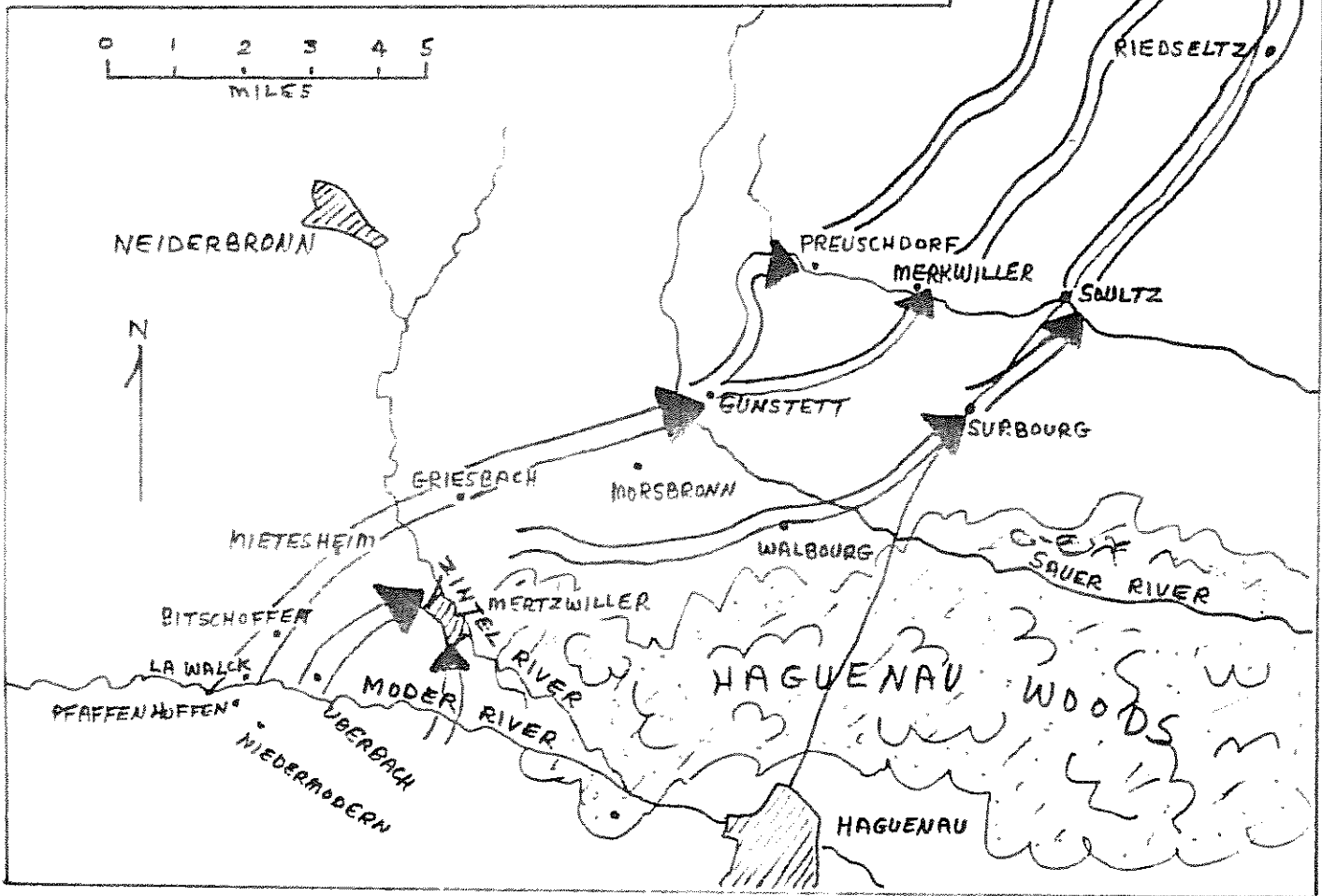
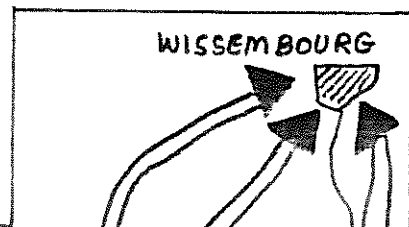
About this time Lt. Col. Larson was designated as 36th Division Security Officer.

The 36th Division began on the night of 31 January to reduce the German bridgehead at Herrlisheim. Oberhoffen, a small village north of Bischwiller, across the Moder River, was captured by the 142nd Regiment but enemy armor and infantry drove the Americans out of the town before they could build a bridge over the Moder and bring up their own armor. A Platoon A-1 gun section fired against dug in enemy troops near Offendorf, just south of Herrlisheim, in the face of heavy mortar and artillery fire. The gun-tracks drew so much counter-battery fire that they had to be withdrawn. The capture, then early loss of Oberhoffen, caused a 24 hour delay in the 36th Division's planned assault on Rohrwiller, just north of the Moder River, and on Herrlishim to the south of the river. Bridging was finally put across the river at Oberhoffen and the 36th retook the town, pushing at once to the north and capturing Rohrwiller, after 12 days of fighting that yielded a large number of German prisoners. Four days of thawing weather had caused streams and canals to overflow and wash footbridges away at Bischwiller. But a treadway bridge, though covered by water, had enabled infantry to cross over 300 yards of soggy ground and through knee-high water to their assembly area to attack Rohrwiller. The enemy was apparently oblivious to impending danger. Their radios were playing and freshly killed ducks and pigs were ready for cooking. Over 120 prisoners were taken with the town and two important bridges southeast of town. On 3 February the 143rd Regiment took Herrlisheim.



GERMAN BRIDGEHEAD  
NEAR GAMBSHEIM

ATTACK OVER THE  
MODER RIVER TO  
WISSENBURG



In the face of steady pressure from the 36th Division, and to avoid encirclement, German forces withdrew east of the Moder and toward the Rhine River.

#### *MODER RIVER DEFENSE*

For the ensuing month the 36th Division set up a static defense along the Moder River. It introduced a combat innovation in the use of AA searchlights when heavy, low clouds covered the night sky. The searchlight beam, reflected from the clouds, provided "artificial moonlight" that could be turned on at irregular intervals to expose enemy night activities, especially when unusual sounds were heard.

During this period of "active" defense some other AAA units in the area reported bombing by U.S. planes, and the 35th AAA Brigade Commander requested Lt. Col. Larson to investigate. He determined that no bombs had been dropped, but that U.S. Engineers were blowing up stores of enemy mines at about the same time that some Allied planes were flying over the area. Platoon C-2 fired on and hit a ME-262 dropping bombs. It disappeared in cloud cover to the east.

During the static defense it was discovered that an artillery gas shell was missing from an ammunition dump. A general alarm was issued since, if the shell had been fired in error, retaliation would have been sure to come. Then everyone became interested in their gas masks. Fortunately, the missing shell was later found.

At this time, higher AAA headquarters ordered one-hole, cabinet finished, box latrines be issued to each 443rd platoon section. This was done but no one would use them. The gun sections placed the one-holers in plain view with a few sheets of toilet paper in each - for the Group inspectors to see. A digestive upset could really mess up such an item and the trailer when a rapid, tactical movement of the guns was required. Some 443rd gun-tracks were seen on the move with the one-holer hanging on the gun barrel like a collar. 443rd gun sections became the butt of jokes in the Division and over a period of time, the sections just forgot to pick up their beautiful latrine boxes when they moved. Higher headquarters said no more about it.

As a sergeant of Platoon B-1 noted, there were two words in the vocabulary of the 443rd that generated tension and suspense. They were "water-proofing" and "infantry mission" (providing close-up support in an infan-



try attack). The former had its obvious, deadly dangers but the latter was even moreso. The 443rd T-28-E1 and M-15 gun-tracks, (and the T-28-E1 with no armor protection), with their high silhouettes, meant that men were five or six feet in the air, readily seen by the enemy, firing at enemy targets in support of nearby infantry troops, usually well dug in and defiladed. The 443rd gun tracks frequently drew intense counter-battery fire from enemy mortars and artillery. But 443rd men continued to provide such support in both day and night missions while at the same time carrying out their AAA mission.

During the defense of the Moder River line some savage battle action occurred. Not unusual was the sight of a U.S. tank unit in formation on the road near Gamsheim. Every tank had been knocked out by German Mark VI "Tiger" tanks, one of which lay disabled in a nearby field. Some U.S. tankers had climbed out of their disabled tanks and were shot by German infantry who had been concealed in concrete spider holes near the road -- an example of an effectively defended road block. The entire scene - tanks and bodies - was covered by a soft, snow blanket.

Not too far from the scene described above, Platoon D-2 on 20 February, moved into a road defense position. Suddenly the lead plane of four U.S. P-51s (Mustangs), returning from a bombing mission over Germany, went into a strafing dive on a nearby U.S. 3/4 ton truck. The 443rd gunner fired one warning round of 37mm and then held his fire because the planes were American. The single shot hit the plane causing it to slow and nose down, its tail hitting the propeller of the plane behind it, causing both planes to crash - one in the 36th Division's area and one in the adjacent French area. One American and two French soldiers in the truck were wounded as the truck was wrecked and the two pilots were identified as of the 8th Tactical Air Force, based in Britain. Lt. Col. Larson reported to AAA Group General Townsend that the 443rd had downed two planes with one shot but was told to say no more about it until the whole incident had been verified.

On 21 February near Bischwiller, an ME-109G and a FW-190 were destroyed by Platoons C-1 and C-2. Another ME-109G near Gamsheim was badly damaged by Platoon D-2 and disappeared in a cloud of smoke with its motor failing.

During this time the 443rd conducted an AA Training School in Wilgottheim. Hour and half-hour classes were scheduled from 8:30 am to 3 pm daily and two sections at a time from each Battery attended this school for five days. This was the most thorough and intensive training personnel had

received in many months, and it afforded a well-deserved break from combat. Meanwhile the 36th Division continued to conduct patrols and raids to seize prisoners, from whom information could be obtained about the German troop dispositions and strengths. And in preparation for the drive into Germany, VI Corps advised all troops of expected standards of military conduct to be followed and ordered that a policy of non-fraternization with German civilians be followed. Dealing with Germans on official business was to be on a firm but fair basis.

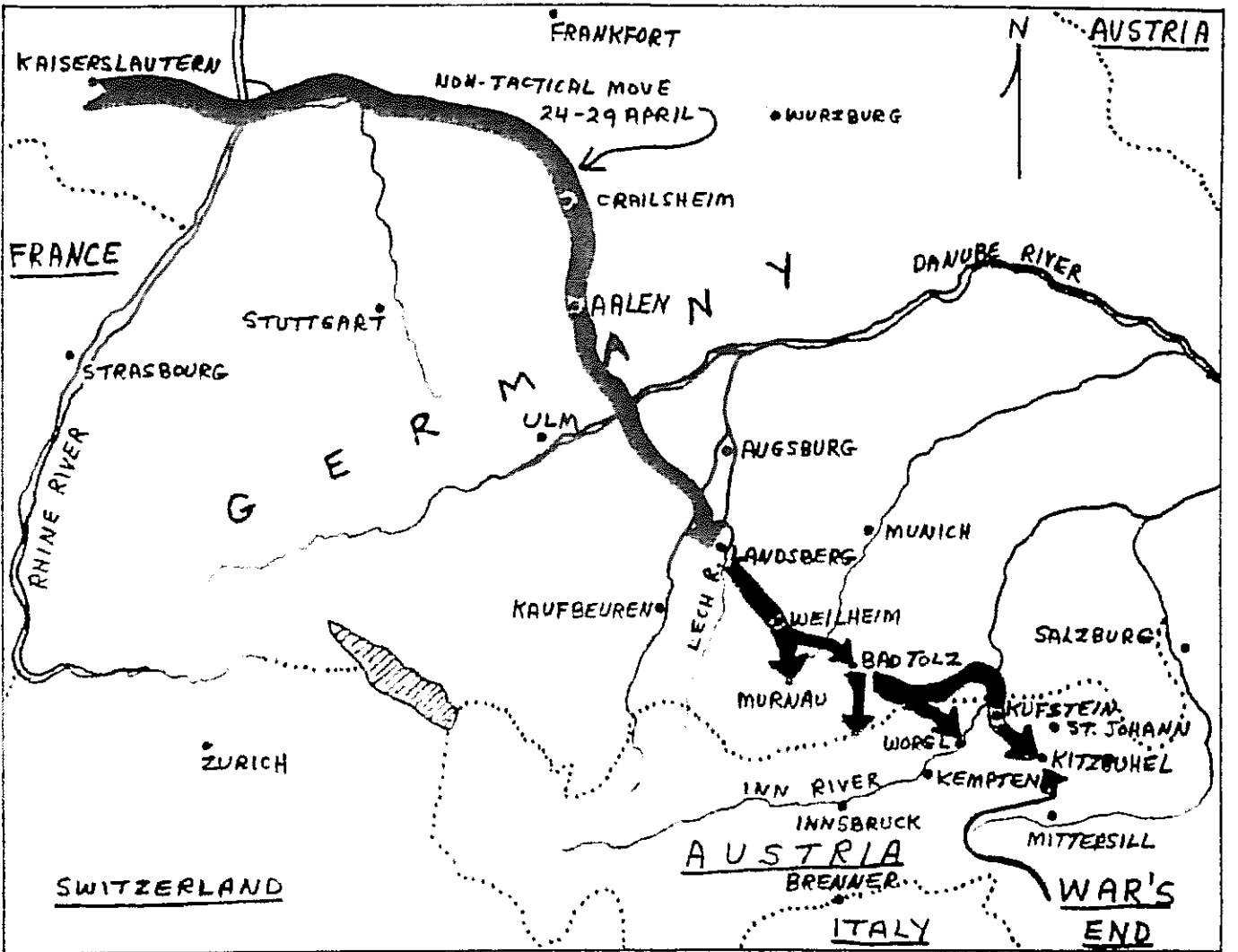
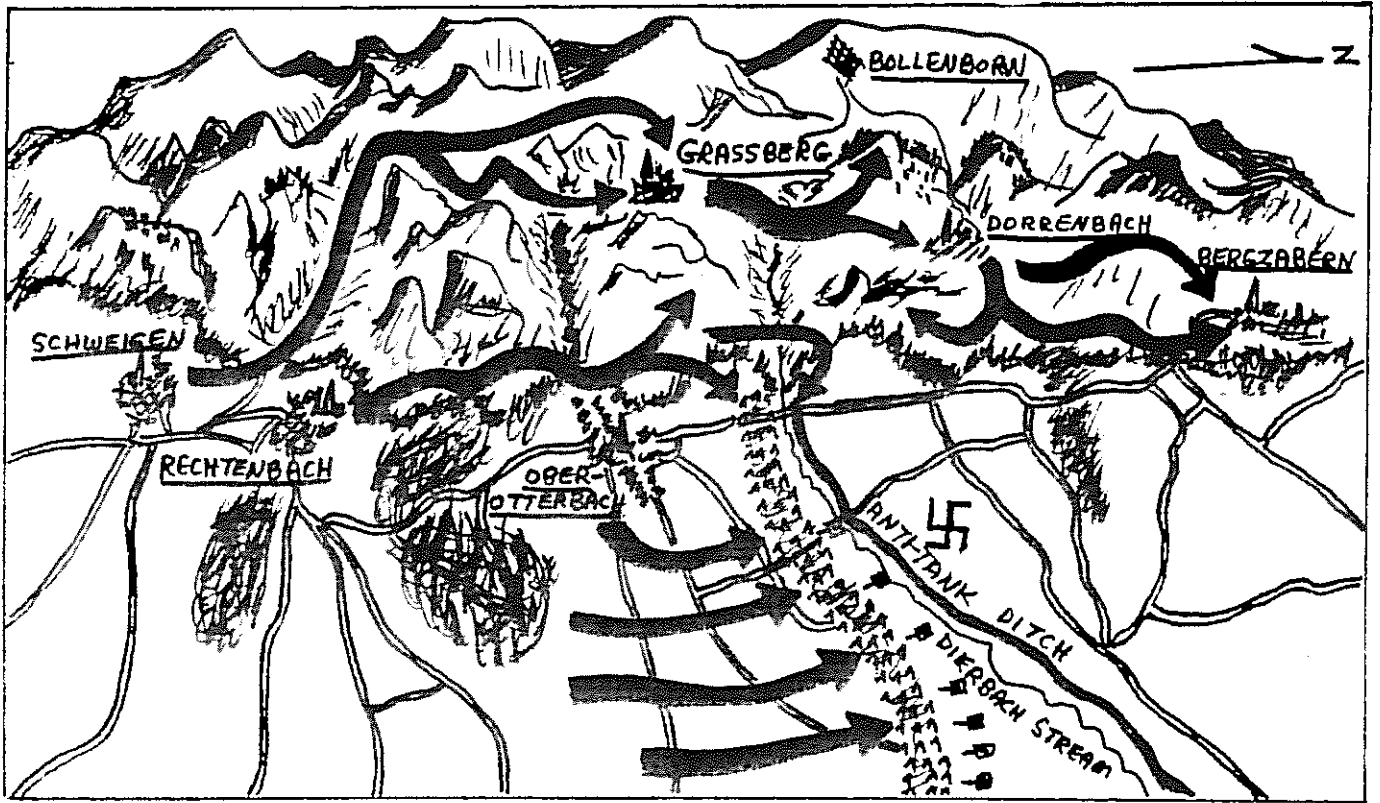
#### *DRIVE TO THE SIEGFRIED LINE*

The first of March saw Allied forces attacking all along the front. The American 1st and 9th Armies reached the Rhine River in the central section, and on 7 March the Remagen Bridge was seized before it could be blown and American troops poured across the Rhine. Patton's 3rd Army reached the Rhine and turned south, hemming in a large German force in the Saar-Palatinat area. The 36th Division began to drive northward through Nietsheim on 15 March. It broke the German Moder River defenses, cleaned out the western part of the Hagenau woods, and bridged the Moder River. As the Division's momentum increased it crossed and bridged the Zintel and the Sauer Rivers. The 142nd was then motorized for a swift thrust to the Siegfried Line. Relieving the 143rd at Gunstett on the Sauer River, the 142nd by noon on 19 March had captured Wissembourg, the last major bastion before the Siegfried Line. And by early afternoon the 36th Division had entered Germany and was before the Siegfried Line.

During the drive from the Moder River Line to Wissembourg the U.S. 36th Division found itself face to face with the German 36th Division and soundly defeated it at Gunstett and the three river crossings.

#### *BREAKTHROUGH INTO GERMANY*

When the 36th Division began its attack on 15 March it was the division farthest from the Siegfried Line and was not expected to attack it. That task was planned as the Army's main effort many miles to the 36th's left. Consequently the 36th was not provided with siege guns to reduce the defenses of the Siegfried Line. It was expected only to make a serious demonstration before the fortifications. The heavy Siegfried fortifications were a formidable obstacle, especially in the 7th Army sector. The familiar pyramidal obstacles (dragon's teeth) stretched across the plain from Ober-Otterbach to Steinfeld before the 36th Division. They were covered by fire



ABOVE: Siegfried Line Breakthrough.

BELOW: War's End in Austria.

from overlooking heights where a complex network of heavy, concrete pill-boxes, set into the ground and well camouflaged, included elaborate systems of trenches and wire obstacles. Three months earlier, other 7th Army troops had spent three weeks trying to force an opening through the Line, without success.

However, when the 36th captured Wissembourg and rolled up to the Siegfried Line it was not to be stopped. The 142nd Regiment's 1st Battalion, weary from the previous day's long pursuit and fighting, was in a lead position and was immediately ordered toward Bergzabern and into the Siegfried Line. Schweigen and Rechtenbach were easily taken but the approach to Ober-Otterbach was met by intense enemy fire. By nightfall, however, the town was taken and other battalions of the Division were moving over the hills, engaging enemy pillbox defenses. The break came on 20 March when the 3rd Battalion of the 142nd, after a twelve hour climb through rugged hills, captured Grassberg Heights - a key enemy defense, whose capture paved the way for collapse of the Siegfried Line, in the Division zone. Bitter fighting continued until on 21 March the 36th broke out of Grassberg to seize Darrenbach and press on into the key town of Bergzabern, over 2½ miles behind the Siegfried Line. Meanwhile the Division was demolishing pillbox after pillbox against stubborn defenders. On 22 March Germans who had not been able to flee began surrendering by the hundreds. Pockets of entrenched resistance continued to resist the American advance both within the depth of the Siegfried Line and beyond it. Before dawn on 24 March the 36th was on the Rhine having captured ferry sites, thousands of prisoners and huge stocks of supplies and equipment. This was the last great battle in which the 36th Infantry Division and its attached units would be engaged.

On 30 March the 7th Army's General Patch issued an Order of the Day, saying,

*" All officers and men are congratulated on the recent operations of 7th Army personnel "*.

The 443rd Battalion S-2 report showed prisoners taken by the Battalion in March as:

Battery A - 15; Battery B - 85; Battery C - 40; Battery D - 18  
Battalion Headquarters - 5

CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN

*MILITARY GOVERNMENT*

With only the 443rd Battalion attached, the 36th Division moved to the Kaiserlautern area to garrison, police and support Military Government in areas west of the Rhine in that sector, prepared to move elsewhere on 24 hours notice. So on 1 April 1945 veterans of the 443rd were in their first rear area assignment, occupation duty. Troops were housed in spotless German houses and buildings. Fraternization was "verboten" and the monotonous drudgery of classes and training caused many to agitate for combat action again.

During the military government duty men were in motorized patrols with checkpoints to reduce German travel to a minimum and to pick up German soldiers in civilian clothing. Great amounts of enemy ammunition and equipment were seized. On 2 April the 443rd Battalion S-3 issued instructions regarding the setting up of check points and conducting patrols as well as a process for "screening" all towns in the area assigned to the Battalion. All male civilians were questioned and anyone not having a Wehrmacht discharge was treated as a prisoner of war. All displaced persons were registered. Travel passes were issued to persons whose work made it necessary for them to travel up to 5 km out of town. One old woman was given a pass so she could follow her occupation of gathering fallen sticks in a nearby forest and selling them. Towns assigned for screening were:

Headquarters - Sembach  
Battery B - Rohrbach  
Battery D - Neuhemsbach

A Battery - Whartenberg  
Battery C - Baalborn

Lt. Col. Larson, during a TDY of five days in Paris, was awakened by a French chambermaid who tearfully broke the news that "President Roosevelt is dead". During this period both officers and men were able to have several days leave for rest and recuperation in Paris, London or the Riviera.

But on 22 April the 36th Division was relieved by the 28th Division and the 36th Commander General Dahlquist sent the following commendation to the officers and men of his command:

*" A month ago the Division was given a new and unfamiliar task - support of Military Government and security of the Army rear area. The task has been well done. Conduct has been exemplary. Personal appearance, military courtesy and discipline has been outstanding. The German population in this area knew, prior to our arrival, of our reputation as hard fighters. They are now impressed with the fact that we are well trained and disciplined."*

*"The Division is returning to a role with which we are familiar-combat. We have had a good rest. We have been able to put our arms and equipment in first class shape. The conditions under which we return to the fight will be the best we have ever had.*

*"I wish to express to every officer and enlisted man, in the Division and attached troops, my appreciation for the excellent work during the period just finished. I know that, in the fighting still to be done, each officer and man will contribute his full share to the success of the 36th Division".*

*- John E. Dahlquist, Major General, U.S. Army*

#### *FINAL VICTORY*

443rd Batteries then moved to the assembly areas of the regiments to protect them in the coming move. The 443rd moved rapidly for several days until the 36th had relieved the 63rd Division on 28 April at Landsberg. At this time it became attached to the XXI Corps. Within this Corps the 443rd was under operational control of the 34th AAA Brigade. For a time the 36th guarded the Landsberg Prison - Adolph Hitler's "Festung Landsberg", where he was interned for 14 months in 1923-24, and where he dictated "Mein Kampf" to Rudolph Hess, in a steam-heated room. At the time the 36th assumed control of the prison, it was filled with both criminal and political prisoners - 14,000 in facilities built for 500. Prisoners were in various stages of starvation in their black and gray striped shirts and pants. They lay side by side in five to six foot high stacks of "beds" on 12' hard pine boards, with 15' of space between one layer and that above it. Some were motionless or dead and others just moaned, crying out for food or drink. Medical personnel went to work doing what they could. Around the fenced-in prison enclosure were bodies of some who had tried to escape when they heard the Americans approaching. In a nearby wood were bodies of three prisoners who had been decapitated. General Dahlquist forced the citizens of Landsberg to line up and go through the prison and see what had occurred. They were also made to dig large, open pit graves and bury the dead prisoners who were little more than skin and bone.

The 36th then began pushing farther into the heart of Germany's "National Redoubt" - a rumored area of cached supplies and weapons meant for a last stand in Bavaria. The Division followed the 12th Armored Division and was responsible for mopping up pockets of by-passed enemy resistance. When Americans and Russian troops made contact to the north at the Elbe River, any more transfer of troops and supplies to the south was cut off. Enemy resistance began crumbling completely. Truckloads and trainloads

of German troops began coming in to surrender but a few, die-hard groups continued to fight and had to be eliminated.

The 443rd noted many German fighter planes hidden among the trees along some of the German main highways (autobahns). Some of these highways had their center divider strip painted mottled green to resemble vegetation. These roads had then been used as landing strips, since Allied bombing had put most of the military and civilian airports out of business. Fuel shortages had helped ground the Luftwaffe and Allied air dominance did the rest.

In the Bavarian Alps the 141st Regiment trapped 66 Germans on top of Hill 1558. They refused to surrender until the 3rd Section of 443rd Platoon C-2 fired into their positions, killing one and wounding another. The rest surrendered at once. As the 36th Division continued its drive to the south and east, picking up German stragglers heading for Alpine hide-outs, it captured a number of Nazi bigwigs. One of the first of these was Field Marshall Gerd Von Runstedt, taken at Bad Tolz. Pressing deeper into Germany, Berchtesgaden was taken and the Division roared into the Inn River Valley. By the time that German Army Group G surrendered at 12:00 noon 6 May 1945, the 36th Division had bagged more Nazi leaders and had freed a number of high ranking French officials who had been imprisoned.

- On 7 May General Von Brauchitsch came to 36th Division Headquarters on behalf of Reichsmarshall Herman Goering. Assistant Division Commander Stack then intercepted Goering on a road near Radstadt, 35 miles south of Salzburg. His wife and daughter and a few military aides were with him.*
- Reichsminister Dr. Hans Frank, Gauleiter of Poland and infamous perpetrator of Jewish extermination pits was trapped in his office by a major of the 36th Division AMG team.*
- Admiral Nicholas Hourthy, Hungarian ruler and associate of Hitler, who set up one of Europe's first dictatorships, was taken into custody in the palatial Schloss Waldbichl near Weilheim.*
- Max Amann, Nazi publicist and third man to enter the National Socialist Party, publisher of Mein Kampf, was captured in his summer home near Tegernsee.*
- Twenty-two additional high Nazi officials were captured by the Division including: Air Marshalls Ritter Von Greim, who succeeded Goering in command of the Luftwaffe, Hugo Sperrle who invented dive-bombing techniques, planned the London Blitz and defended the Normandy coastline in 1944, plus SS General Sepp Dietrich, the defender of Vienna against the Russians and one of Von Runstedt's cruel fledglings in the Ardennes and nineteen lesser generals.*
- French Leaders freed were: General Maurice Gamelin, former French Army Commander, Edouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud, former French*

*Prime Ministers, General Maxime Weyand, Army Commander at the time of the French defeat, and his wife; Mme. Alfred Cailliau, who was sister of General Charles DeGaulle, and her husband; Michel Clemenceau, son of the French statesman; Jean Borotra, internationally known tennis star; Leon Jouhaux, Secretary of the Confederation General Du Travail; and several secretaries.*

The official end of the Central Europe Campaign came on 11 May 1945. At appointed places in towns across the country (usually the town squares) the Germans surrendered their arms, ammunition and motor transportation. The 36th Division patrolled the towns of St. Johann, Kitzbuhl and Mittersill in Austria, enforcing the unconditional surrender.

#### *MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN KEMPTEN*

On 1 June the 443rd was attached to the 36th Division Artillery and assigned the mission of occupying and securing Kempten in the Division Artillery's sector and supporting the Military Government of the town. Limited training was conducted, athletic activities organized along with other recreational opportunities and an Information and Education program was begun.

On 6 June Major General Dahlquist, 36th Infantry Division Commander, presented awards and addressed 443rd officers and men as follows:

- " This is the first opportunity I have had to address the 443rd AAA Battalion. That I have never done so before is not because I didn't want to - I just never had the chance.*
- " Of all the units under my command the 443rd was the only one that I could always be sure of. How all those half-tracks were distributed was something that was beyond me.*
- " There are several things that stand out in my mind about the 443rd and will always stand out. The first is Wells Lewis, my aide, who came from this Battalion and who gave his life in the bitter fight to rescue the 141st. The second thing was at Ribeauville when the chips were down and all of them were on the table. There weren't anymore and still the Germans outnumbered us - Fisher was there with his ideas on where and how to use the half-tracks. This third thing is your quiet, unassuming commander, Lt. Col. Larson. No one has done more to earn the medals which were pinned on his chest this afternoon.*
- " Your Battalion is the oldest one attached to the Division. Most of you already have more than enough points to go home. You are restive and I am aware of the reason. The spirit and discipline with which you have taken over your job from the beginning shows the fine cooperation of your Battalion and all the members of the Division are proud to have you wear the T-Patch".*



On 8 June a phone message came from Capt. Sullivan, 7th Army AAA Supply Officer to the 443rd Battalion S-4, as follows:

*"Two of your Battalion's T-28-E1s are wanted for the Third Army Museum. Officers from Third Army Ordnance will be at your Headquarters on 10 June". (These two original gun-tracks were later placed in General Patton's Armored Museum at Fort Knox, Kentucky).*

On 11 June 1945, Lt. Col. Larson received the following letter from Major General John E. Dahlquist, 36th Infantry Division Commander. It was a real tribute to the men of the 443rd and read as follows:

*"Current instructions from higher headquarters direct that the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SF) will be separated from this Division. The successful culmination of the war in Europe and the redeployment of the United States forces in this Theater tend to indicate that this separation may be a permanent one. It is therefore with real regret that I say goodbye to you and the glorious 443rd AAA AW Bn. My feeling on this occasion is that of every member of the 36th Division who fought side by side with you throughout the campaigns in Italy, France, Germany and Austria. The mutual respect, the comradeship and the esprit de corps, which together we have developed as a result of our victorious campaigns on the many fields of battle and in the face of continued hardships, will be long-valued and forever cherished. Yours is an enviable record and I am proud to have had the 443rd AAA AW Bn as a part of my command.*

*"The 443rd AAA AW Bn joined the 36th Division and became a part of it at Possuoli, Italy, on 25 October 1943. It has been with the Division ever since that time and has never been detached from it. It has been the sole support of the Division against enemy air attacks and often it has served in other important roles. Consequently you wear the "E" Patch with as much pride and proprietorship as any other units in the Division.*

*"In saying goodbye to you all I wish to leave you with the feeling that I have a personal interest in the future of every one of you".*

The 443rd was involved in a number of administrative moves and actions as occupation authorities organized their work. Its assignment changed from 7th Army to 3rd Army on 14th June; from Army to 35th AAA Brigade control, and to attachment to the 91st AAA Group on 15 June. On that date the 443rd relieved elements of the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion near Heiligenstadt and Bamberg, north of Nurnberg. On 17 June the 443rd relieved the 355rd AAA Searchlight Battalion and began a three day period of cleanup and consolidation supporting work of the Military Government. It utilized German prisoners of war to clean the countryside of war debris, abandoned guns and equipment of all kinds - German and American.

Then on 23 June a letter from XII Corps Headquarters ordered the 443rd AAA AW Bn (SP) to move on 1 July to No. 4 Port, Cherbourg, France, as a permanent change of station, not as redeployment. Principal weapons were ordered turned in to the 7th Army Ordnance Collecting Point at Butzbach.

Lt. Col. Larson, who had requested personal assignment to the Pacific Theater of Operations, went to each 443rd Battery and Headquarters Battery at a formation on 29 June and stressed the fact that they had been in two and one half years of continuous combat in the French-Moroccan, Tunisian, Sicilian, Italian, Southern France, Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe Campaigns in hot, burning desert sands, dusty sand storms, hot Sirocco winds, torrents of driving rain, wet shoes and socks in deep, oozing mud, canals, rivers and flooded land, in blinding snow-storms and freezing weather while passing the ammunition and firing their weapons, riding day and night time convoys in mountains, rain and dusty, choking roads, through blasting by artillery shells, harassing by bombing and strafing planes, fire from small arms and machine guns, mortar shells and 'screaming meemies', in open and exposed plains, thickly forested foothills, narrow, winding mountain trails, enemy road blocks and final victory in the beautiful foothills of the Tyrolean Alps of Austria. He addressed them as follows:

*" Most of you will be returning to civilian life, to your schooling, your trades and your professions. All of this combat life will be but a memory when you recall all of your experiences over a cup of coffee or glass of beer in the comradeship of your families and friends.*

*" There is one promise that I will make to you if I am still alive and that is that I will write up the Battalion History of all the nine campaigns in which we fought.*

*" One thing in civilian life, if we meet again, I want you to come up and talk to me, even though I may not at first recognize you, and together we can discuss the old times in the Army, possibly over a cup of coffee or a glass of beer.*

*" Farewell and good luck to you all".*

#### *HOMEWARD BOUND*

Thus the 443rd began its homeward trek two years and eight months after it sailed from Norfolk with the Western Task Force for the invasion of North Africa. It had been in the assault waves of three amphibious invasions and several amphibious flanking operations, fought through nine major campaigns and its personnel had acquitted themselves with distinction. The Battalion had fought with the Divisions that had sustained the heaviest losses of all the eighty-eight U.S. divisions that saw action. The 3rd Division lost 33,547 men, including 6,571 killed; the 36th Division lost 26,718 men including 4,265 killed; and the 1st Armored Division suffered 9,438 casualties.

But except for the few individual transfers of some personnel whose early discharge was expedited for compassionate reasons, most of the 443rd's personnel were destined to be shifted to the 634th AAA Bn and spend several months at Tidworth Barracks near Salisbury, England. Here, they helped process American troops being re-deployed from the European to the Pacific Theater of Operations. As September drew to a close, the remaining 443rd officers and men left England aboard the Aquitania, crossing the Atlantic for a second time. On 9 October 1945 they were discharged from active service at Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

*During their nearly three years in combat, 443rd men had destroyed 122½ enemy planes, and had probably destroyed over 40 more. In addition, they had used their weapons, effectively, in many ways not initially envisioned. In attack, in defense and in support of the units to which they were attached, they had really made "Patton's Idea" work!*

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED

- AAA - Antiaircraft Artillery
- Ammunition Trailer - A one ton, two wheeled trailer, used to transport ammunition and other supplies.
- Amphibious Net (Landing) - A heavy, rope net of hemp, over which men climb down the side of a transport ship into small, landing craft.
- AW - Automatic Weapons.
- Beachhead - The area, beyond the shoreline, seized and under control of an invading force, as it brings troops ashore and stockpiles supplies and equipment.
- Bivouac - The temporary, field location of a military unit, when not in combat.
- CA - Coast Artillery
- Central Tracer Control - A rectangular, metal box, connected to AAA gun sights by a flexible steel cable. Each of two men turns a small wheel that adjusts the gun sights, through the flexible cable. One sets in estimated vertical lead and the other sets in estimated horizontal lead. The gunners then fix their sights on the target and begin firing. (See Lead).
- Grease - A heavy grease, with which manufacturers pack guns prior to shipping. It prevents rust but must be removed before using guns.
- Defilade - A tactical position, in which men and equipment are not under direct enemy observation or line of fire, i.e. Below a ridge, etc.
- Destroyed - Term used to describe results of AAA firing at a plane. The 443rd claimed destruction only when a signed affidavit was secured from someone, not of the unit making the claim, certifying that he saw the plane hit by AAA fire and crash, saw it depart in flames, or saw the pilot bail out.
- Djebel - Arabic term for Mount or Mountain.
- Gun Sight - Aiming device to enable AAA gunners to direct their fire at planes, vehicles, fortifications, dug-in positions, or other targets. The 443rd used telescopic sights, initially, but when they were proven inadequate, converted first to open sights (forward area sights) and eventually to ring sights.
- Gun-Track - Term describing the 443rd's T-28-E1 (as well as the subsequent, modified models), half-tracks, with their multiple gun mounts.
- Half-Track - A military vehicle with wheels at the front and propelled by tank treads at the rear. This contrasts with a tank, which is a full-tracked vehicle with protective armor.
- LCVP - Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel. Small boats designed to carry troops and small vehicles to an amphibious landing. Upon reaching the beach, the front of the LCVP falls forward, creating a ramp to the beach. Not designed for long voyages.
- LST - Landing Ship, Tank. Larger, landing craft, designed to carry heavy vehicles and personnel to amphibious landings over long distances. A front ramp functions as described for the LCVP.
- LCI - Landing Craft, Infantry. Landing craft designed for long trips and for disembarking foot troops quickly, during an amphibious landing. Two foot ramps, on each side of the ship's prow, are dropped to the beach for landing infantry.
- LCT - Landing Craft, Tank. Smaller, landing craft than the LST, designed to carry heavy vehicles and troops over medium distance to a landing.

*Lead* - The distance above or below, and ahead of a plane, an AAA gun should be fired, in order to compensate for the speed and direction of the plane and the speed of the bullet or shell, and ensure that the latter reaches the same point in space at the same time the plane reaches it.

*Posit Fuse* - A timer, built into an artillery shell, that can be set to detonate the shell at a pre-determined point.

*Probably Destroyed* - Term used to describe the results of AAA firing at a plane. The 443rd claimed probable destruction only when a signed affidavit was secured from someone, not of the unit making the claim, certifying that he saw the plane lit, by AAA fire, and disappear emitting heavy black smoke or with the motor missing badly.

*Range* - The distance, in yards, to a target.

*Self-Propelled* - Vehicles and equipment that move by their own power source, rather than being towed by another. Designated by (SP).

*SM* - Semi-mobile. Not completely and quickly mobile (such as a towed gun).

*Spider Hole* - A shoulder-deep, protective, round hole, in which a man could stand and fire his weapon.

*Wadi* - Arabic term for a dry stream bed.

#### MILITARY OPERATIONAL TERMS:

*Headquarters* - The administrative center of a military unit.

*Command Post* - The location of the unit commander and his immediate staff, during combat.  
(CP)

*Forward Command Post* - The advanced location of a unit commander and a small operations staff during combat.  
(FCP)

*Observation Post* - A vantage point of a team of two or more observers, who are reporting enemy movement.  
(OP)

*Task Force* - A grouping of men and equipment, organized to accomplish a specific, military mission.  
(I/F)

*Combat Command* - A reinforced, armored unit, organized to accomplish a specific, military mission.  
(CC)

*Regimental Combat Team* - A reinforced infantry regiment.  
(RCT)

#### MILITARY ORGANIZATION TERMS:

*Army Group* - A tactical and administrative military unit, consisting of a headquarters, two or more armies, and auxiliary units.

*Army* - A tactical and administrative military unit, consisting of a headquarters, two or more Corps, and auxiliary units.

*Corps* - A tactical military unit of ground, combat forces, between an army and a division, and composed of two or more divisions and auxiliaries.

*Division* - A tactical and administrative unit, smaller than a corps, but self-contained and equipped for long combat activity. Usually consists of three regiments, or four combat commands (armored div.), and attached units.

*Regiment* - The major, tactical unit of a division. Divided into three battalions, each with four companies (or) batteries (in artillery battalions). Commanders are usually colonels.

*Battalion* - The major tactical unit of an infantry regiment. (See above). It also may be a separate, tactical unit, not organic to the division, which may be attached to a division during combat. i.e. the 443rd. Commanders are usually lieutenant colonels.

*Company* - One of four, tactical units into which an infantry battalion is divided. Company commanders are usually captains.

*Battery* - One of four, tactical units into which an artillery battalion is divided. Battery commanders are usually captains.

*Platoon* - One of the tactical sections (usually four) into which the company (or battery) is divided. Platoon commanders are usually lieutenants.

*Squad* - The smallest, tactical unit into which a platoon may be divided. Number of men in a squad may vary from eight to twelve. Squad commanders are usually sergeants.



*T-28E1 Gun Track  
Defending Front  
Line in Alsace.  
Winter of 1944/45.*

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Page 5 and following: When the French protectorates in North Africa gained their independence (Morocco in 1956, Algeria in 1962 and Tunisia in 1956), efforts were made to reduce evidences of French influence. In Morocco, for example, currency was changed from the French franc with 100 centimes to the Moroccan dirham with 100 centimes. The name of Port Lyautey was changed to Kenitra and that of Fedal to Mohammedia. In Tunisia, the dinar, rather than the franc, became the unit of currency. The town of Ferryville, on the southern shores of Lake Bizerte, is now known as Menzel Bourgiba (Garden of Bourgiba), named after the country's first and current president.

Page 33: Additional information indicates that when General Patton told Lt. Col. Larson to, "make any changes you want to", General Ward turned at once to Larson and said, "My Ordnance Section is at your disposal". The 1st Armored Division Ordnance Section then took the lead in producing new sights while 443rd men completed the task of adapting and installing them. During later campaigns, on the continent, new sights were developed with three, concentric rings, each painted a different color to correspond with the varying speeds of the three most common Luftwaffe attack planes.

Page 41: The 91,000 German prisoners, captured at Stalingrad, were all that remained of the 300,000 men of General Paulus' Sixth Army. Only about 5,000 of these prisoners ever returned to Germany after the war.