

## GERMANY

Orders to move into Germany were met with enthusiasm. It could not help meaning the start of a new and more important phase in the career of the battalion. It meant more than a chance to come closer to action at the front. It meant that the long slow winter campaigns had been successful, that the enemy was backing across his last natural barrier, and that Company "A", though it had missed the plunge across France, was being called on to play an important roll in the final <sup>push</sup> ~~plunge~~ into Germany. Most of all it meant the war in Europe was soon to end.

The convoy headed north to northeast through Belgium to Leige, striking Germany at Aachen, and on to the twin cities of Rheydt and Munchen Gladbach, leaving A.S.C.Z. markers far behind. The once beautiful Aachen appeared as though the earth beneath had been set to boiling and then frozen in its moment of up-heave. War makers can be proud for having struck such an exacting ultimate of destruction. Trees were like stalks, flailed bare and broken by a very dull weapon. How anything of such ruin could be salvaged is a task for the minds of genius. But, here in the Rhineland west of the river was concentrated the fiercest and most enduring campaign with the Germans. Every city and every village was a bewildering shambles on which total war had inflicted its full meaning. More than ever in Normandy, every mile was fought over, every field was set with obstacles and emplacements, their guns now mute and broken. Battle gear littered the countryside. <sup>P</sup>The company was moving in behind the Armies, and the

section it moved into was taken only  $\beta$  days before. The object of course was to get through. Along every highway were confusion of wreckage; tanks, wagons, horses, trucks and autos of every description pushed against trees and in ditches. Trenches wound their way through fields, fronted with patterns of barbed wire and broken by command posts usually a little more elaborate, perhaps covered with shelter-halves. Twisted machine guns, broken rifles, helmets, clothing, shell casings and all the odd bits of gear a soldier carries into battle littered the areas. Bodies, hastily buried in foxholes and trenches, were marked by crude crosses and helmets. Others had not yet been found by burial parties. Cattle lay dead around farm buildings and other animals still wandered about aimlessly, blowing themselves up with mines. Fields, forests, cities and highways were pock-marked with bomb craters and shell holes; a land stalked with tragedy and death, and its people stood about bewildered and frightened at what might come next. The extent of their propaganda teachings were disclosed in every thought they expressed, and fanatic utterances from Berlin loomed in large letters across buildings and fences.

Travel along the highways was slowed by craters and bridges which had been blown at every strategic point. When engineers had not yet rebuilt them, it was necessary to make detours and on one or two occasions shallow streams were forded. As the convoy drove into Munchen Gladbach the 1st Army completed its mopping up and moved on some 12 kilometers to the attack on Düsseldorf, and Gladbach was in its height of turmoil. People were flooding back into the city

from the surrounding countryside. Those who remained in the city had come out of their bomb shelters and basements, and blinking in the sunlight were trying to get used to seeing a strange army amongst them. Everyone was reorganizing his life, even the Army. There was no Military Government, which left the city in a chaotic state. The every increasing demands of the Army for living quarters added to <sup>the</sup> worries to ~~those~~ the civilian already endured, for in order to locate a company and maintain unity it was necessary to move families out of whole blocks of houses. It was up to civilians to provide for themselves as best they could. There was no electric, <sup>nor</sup> water supply, no stores—nothing except what they had in their possession, and as an added evil there was looting. Civilians robbing civilians, and soldiers raiding them all. There are unheard of evils and crimes committed in the wake of Armies. The Army was still conducting raids occasionally on hideouts of fanatic party members.

It was March 5th when Company "A" moved into the Rheydt area where Lieutenant Heddleston had picked a suitable location. Families were still moving out when the company arrived, some of them having had as much as three hours to find new homes and move their more precious belongings. Others who were not notified at the first estimate of housing needs had only minutes, with troops moving in before they had had time to leave. There were many tear stained faces and streets were crowded with bustling carts and wagons until the curfew at 7:00 P.M.

the job. There was still work to be done but with supplies moving through the object of Company "A" was accomplished and the details yet to be completed <sup>were</sup> left for maintenance crews from other Engineer units.

Leaving Rheydt March 15th, the company, by special orders not to be separated while in Germany, moved as a unit to Geldern behind the 9th Army, facing the Germans across the Rhine at Wesel. Geldern was largely a ghost city, the populace having fled and not yet returned. It was as thoroughly wrecked as its sister cities farther south. Having good luck, the company was able to find buildings enough, enclosing an area large enough to stand its equipment, and to house the men and the Motor Pool. <sup>P</sup> After the men had moved their bags and bedding into their new homes, most of them windowless and shaken by the weight of bombing attacks on the city, Captain Simmons called his company together in the grassy parking area to acquaint them with their new objectives, and warn them of the dangers. Company "A" had an important part to play in the preparations for, and the crossing of the Rhine at Wesel. For the present and until the invasion was launched, the railroad bridge, which was the climaxing objective of the job, would have to wait, for the German Armies were occupying Wesel and the east banks of the river. However, it was extremely important to put rail transportation through to the west bank or as nearly so as possible. In the six miles of track approaching the site of the new bridge to be built, three minor

bridges had been blown out. Besides these the rail itself had been split by fixed charges at 20 foot intervals, and switches had to be replaced. The men were warned to be ever alert; for, for the most part, it was necessary to work in front of their own artillery and within sure range of German guns. Besides this gloomy aspect were the dangers from mines and possible strafing by the Luftwaffe.

The company obtained 60 Russians, who were only recently released from German slave labor camps, ready and anxious to help; and as soon as reconnaissance was made and the section was checked for mines and traps, the company was assigned work details and went out on the job. Those of the Russians who were in good enough physical condition faced the dangers and went with them. There were none unwilling but a few of the older and undernourished remained in the area relieving the men of all petty details and allowing the job to be attacked in full strength. Work progressed rapidly, the men often working in the dense smoke screens that veiled the entire front by day. The single span bridges were completed in surprisingly short order. The men working in two shifts made use of every hour of daylight, and occasionally of moonlight. Night work was a precarious task for the Germans were sending over scouting parties, besides, the flare from cutting torches was easily seen from the east bank of the Rhine and secrecy of operation was of utmost importance. However carefully, and rapidly done, the job was not void of dangers. The volleys

of the British and American artillery were deafening and constant. In reply the Germans sent in spasms of 88's and their never to be forgotten whistling sent men to the ground clutching for safety. Some of the shells landed very near—much too near. When the attacks became too violent it was necessary to leave the job for awhile. Late in the evening and at night German Stukas made weak attempts to strafe artillery positions adding anxiety to the situation but were soon driven off, if not shot down by anti-aircraft batteries. The night sky with its flares, flashes and ribbons of tracer fire was an interesting sight but unholy by its meaning and the roaring din that accompanied them.

Even with precautions there was the lurking danger of mines. Clark again had, with others from the company, risked his life at the job of searching out mines, dragging them from hiding, and detonating them in fields where they could do no harm. But, even with such attention there were always others which somehow escaped notice. A jeep bearing an officer had only the day before struck a mine which tore it to bits. <sup>P</sup> One of the Company's air compressor's met similar fate. Roland Whitman and Vern Husted, operators of the vehicle, ~~reporting to duty~~ drove onto the shoulders of the railroad, and, as Whitman jumped from the cab to direct Husted, who was driving, the truck struck the mine with one of its front wheels. To the good fortune of the men themselves and by some unexplainable miracle they were not maimed or ~~instantly~~ killed. They were of course hurt and unconscious and taken immediately to

a field hospital along with two other<sup>3</sup>, John Sykora and Francis Vernon, not so severely hurt, but bleeding from embedded debris thrown by the blast.

As typical of all the Rhineland the Geldern area lay in wreckage but nearer the river, ~~if it is possible to imagine~~, the fields, farms, and communities were even more crowded with horrors and destruction. Rich fields were rendered unproductive for years to come by systems of defenses and blasted shell holes. Again animals and even men lay here and there in the forsaken valley. Farm buildings rendered the stench of dead animals. Burial parties were busy and crude graves constantly appear in odd places and at odd angles, sticks or cross or only a helmet marking them. Before the company could finish its work it had the unpleasant job of burying four German soldiers, evidently a patrol that had been knocked out with rifles and grenades. They lay sprawled on the station platform and across the tracks at Buderick. Sergeant "Joe" Mason and six men went on the burial party with shovels and a line of rope on their shoulders. They buried the four men in a garden behind the railroad station while other "Heinies" across the river lobbed shells into the area.

As the railroad neared completion, (a half mile of approach to the rivers banks which had not yet been attempted), the shelling and air activity increased. On March 23, it had reached a hideous climax, and in the late afternoon hundreds of bombers sailed over the area in wave after wave to unloose wrath on Wesel and the

surrounding area. The city if not already in ruin was now being pulverized. Those who ~~washed~~<sup>watched</sup> from the salt mine near Buderick describe the billowing city as a sea of eruptions. How could there be a living person to combat after such an attack. <sup>RT</sup> The crossings were effected with little opposition in the early hours of March 24<sup>th</sup> while the pounding continued behind the bridgehead. Prisoners immediately began flooding from barges and later over ponton bridges which combat Engineers had drudgingly put across that fateful day. The prisoners were a pitiful bunch, dirty, tired from sleepless days, and in a dizzy stupor from the pounding they had taken. It was no wonder for the roar of gun fire and bombs even heard from the west bank was almost unbearable.

The morning of the 24th found the sky still amass with bombers and troop carrying transports pulling gliders of supplies and equipment. Another crossing was made at 10:00 A.M. and until well afternoon the huge ships were returning from cross-river flying low almost tree top high—a thousand or more. Some ~~were~~ crippled, a few were doomed and struggled only hoping to reach the friendly side of the Rhine and upon doing so, men unhurt and able jumped from their flaming planes. Parachutes opened often within a few feet of the ground or didn't open at all. Six or eight of the big C-47's fell in the vicinity of the job. One circled the tracks twice trailing smoke from its tail and threatened to fall where the men were working.

It was a cheering sight to see, and comforting to know the crossings were snocessfully made. Wesel was taken in minutes and the bridge-head had driven on miles beyond by the end of the day,



leaving the city in burning ruin. The flames were moving from building to building a week later. The Navy, the Army and the Air Force had coordinated their branches of service without flaw. The Navy had been maneuvering its landing barges into the area on special trailers for days; a dry land fleet.

The Company had its assignment well under control. The men had worked the night of the invasion under heavy barrage in order to open the route for supplies immediately needed on the beach for the start of the bridge. Sidings and switches were still needed, but trains moved through on the main line. On the 28th of March supplies and equipment had been unloaded on the beach at the river in sufficient quantity to begin the actual bridge construction. In order to be nearer the bridge site the company moved to the vicinity of Menzelin, only two kilometers from the river. Buildings were hard to find intact. Some of the men slept in rooms with portions of outside walls blown out and very often with only partial roofs. The company was, in this new location, so widely dispersed that John Altenbaugh was forced to ride about in a jeep to blow his painful harangues on the bugle. <sup>PP</sup> With sidings and switches in good condition and the main line through to the new half mile long bridge approach which "C" Company was building, Company "A" was ready to help rig the barges and prepare to drive piling. On April 1, well after the actual work on the bridge had started the job was declared officially underway. Company "A's" portion of the work was to assist the 1056 Port Construction and Repair Group in driving piling in the river bed. It was a day

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and night job, the men working in three eight hour shifts disrupting the usual routine completely. It was cold out in the river at night and hours passed slowly, but it was equally hard on the cooks who had seven meals to prepare daily.

The boys who worked on the Rhine river job can be thankful the Germans had at this point in the war been so weakened and so deprived of fuel that they could not muster air power capable of striking a single effective blow at them. If such attacks had been launched casualties would undoubtedly have been extremely heavy. Five huge rafts rigged with pile driving machinery floated at anchor in mid-stream manned by twenty men each, their only contact with shore being by river boats which were always busy, <sup>men were</sup> ~~besides the~~ hundreds of others climbing about on scaffolding or working on the beach. As it was the few German planes that appeared kept their distance and were hardly a threat considering the elaborate patterns of barrage balloons and anti-aircraft defense, besides the aspect of the British and American Air Forces always over head. Occasionally the guns opened fire and filled the sky with ribbons of tracers.

The bridge seemed <sup>clumsy</sup> ~~clumsy~~ in getting started, but soon began to move along smoothly. It was a huge job employing about 2000 troops directly, driving 14 bent of 24 piling each in the water alone, and covering the spans with 2300 feet of track. The job took eight days, "officially," of hard work to complete, but actually the troops had had four days start on the official

time. Company "A", by nature of its work finished its portion of the job first, and, while the 355th Engineer Regt. assigned to framing the bents and completeing the spans finished their work on the bridge itself. Company "A" went to the assistance of its battalion brother, Company "<sup>B</sup>B," which was hard at work laying 4,400 feet of rail over fills they had already made for a new approach, connecting the Army's bridge to the main line heading to the old one. They helped finish the ~~the~~ section and were present to see a train cross the river while men hurried to tighten the last bolts and tamp the last ties only a few yards ahead of the engine.

It was a job masterfully planned beforehand. For the individual, it could not be premeditated, but, because of the masterful planning on the parts of others months before, and, because of the simplicity of design, which made the mechanics of the job easy for the layman to grasp, the work progressed with utmost speed and smoothness. <sup>P</sup>The company lost two men badly hurt in accidents aboard the pile drivers, Alexander Stachlowak and Grover Maggard, but both men were promised recovery. Two officers from other associated Engineer groups were drowned when the a boat in which they rode capsized and another unit lost a man who was crushed between heavy beams. The casualties were remarkably low.

The Rhine river bridge, in the wake of the General Simpson's 9th Army crossing, was the pride and climax to the career of the

Advance Section troops in the area. It was not a signal to relax however for in the meantime the Armies had driven deep into the heart of Germany and supply lines had to be moved on. On the 11th of April, the Company packed its caravan with even more loot, and moved on following the main routes to Berlin, and stopped at in a suburb at the outskirts of Hamm to make further reconnaissance of main rail routes between Hamm and Soest. Wesel, just across the Rhine was still smoldering and appeared a hollow shell as they left. Hamm was also a ruin, but along the road there was a definite relief from the total destruction west of the river. The pocket in which Essen and Dortmund were wreathing was the nearest enemy activity and the sky in that direction flared and thundered. Except in such small encircled areas the advance had had been very rapid, hence, except for minor repairs the track was quickly rehabilitated. Bridges were, however, blown up everywhere, highway and railway alike, but Company "A" built no bridge in the Hamm area since none obstructed the rail section they were interested in.

Life at Hamm was as much a problem of settling civilian quarrels and keeping peace as it was opening a supply route. The hordes of Russian, Polish, Czechoslovakians, French and Italian slaves so long beaten into submission by the Nazi party, were now free and roving the countryside hungry, ragged and revengeful. Besides the Army had its own loot. Crazy individuals who found excuse to commit all manner of petty thievery upon a conquered

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people they could blame and hate for their misleadership. The gatherings of frightened, robbed, and raped appeared at headquarters every morning to plead for protection, and it was a tiring thankless ordeal for interpreters. The company was the only Army unit in the vicinity and on it fell the task of keeping peace between the Russians, who were the most revengeful, <sup>and</sup> against the German families. There was a murder most every day. Farmers also complained their cattle were being butchered. Horses and wagons, bicycles and watches were being stolen. The roads were streaming with hungry people daily searching for food, Germans and foreign laborers alike. Food stores and supplies of necessities no matter where they were found in warehouse or private homes were at the mercy of the mass even in the face of death. Farmers held a precarious position. Here was the picture of lawlessness in the wake of an Army.

On the 13th of April the Company left its billets in the Ost Wennemer school house and neighboring houses, <sup>and</sup> loading into convoy headed on east to Stetterburg. The civilians crowding <sup>ed</sup> anxiously into the houses behind them both to protect their property, and appraise their losses to the Army.

Stetterburg, the home of the Hermann Goering factories ~~and~~ not far from Braunschweig, was fought over only 4 or 5 days before the company's arrival and again there was the confusion of a war ruined community. The site of such a factory naturally attracted most brutal and total war. Being the first troops to settle in the particular community the flood of complaints and problems were <sup>again</sup> immediate upon the company. The Captain, and particularly 1st

Sergeant Harshman had their headaches. There were German soldiers who had changed into civilian clothes and wanted to surrender themselves, and an accused Gestapo agent was taken into custody by ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> men. Sick and wounded civilians needed attention and had to be taken to a hospital.

There had been an ever growing desire for German guns and knives. Those who had not already picked up weapons in trenches or in raids on homes, had an opportunity to satisfy their desire at Stetterburg. There were a number of rifles found at the school house where the company was billeted, and, through the boys in the neighborhood who were now more interested in candy and cigarettes than knives or pistols, trades were made. One German boy led several men to a fox-hole where fifteen or more knives had been buried.

The stay was not long. Before the company had been put to work in the area it was sent back west to Nordstemmen, a village not far from Hannover. A magnificent castle built by British royalty stood high on a forest covered hill overlooking the company's billets in civilian homes at the edge of the village. The village was in good condition, having few battle scars and a small business district still operating, and with a surprising amount of supplies on display. The people, too, seemed more friendly and cooperative. The castle not only furnished the men with sight-seeing trips, but ample supplies of wine from its cellars. <sup>P</sup> The Company went directly to work on the construction

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of a railroad bridge crossing a small stream between Nordstemmen and Elze, besides minor repairs to the railroad in the section. There were civilians to help on the job as usual where they could be found. The company had also collected a crew of Russians and Poles to work as K.P.'s and do odd cleaning jobs around headquarters, thus relieving the men of such unpleasant details and at the same time furnishing employment, good food, and a place to sleep for them while they waited out the war.

The complaints of civilians in the vicinity were buffered by a squad of Military Police stationed in Nordstemmen. Still the company was called on quite often to assist in keeping peace, and, occasionally joined them in searching parties and arrests of fanatic party members. *clix*

The weather while at Nordstemmen was for the most part warm and clear and the men had not found their stay unpleasant. On April 28th, with orders to return to the Rhine to take part in the building of a second railway bridge at Duisburg, the ~~Company~~<sup>Company</sup> packed up and continued its withdrawal westward. The battalion was collected in the vicinity of Wedau a comparatively modern suburb of factory and railroad employees, located about 3 kilometers southeast of Duisburg. *P* Company "A" had a choice section of billets in apartment buildings, previously evacuated for the use of an anti-tank outfit which had played a part in the final phase of the encirclement of the Ruhr industrial empire. The billets centered around the communities foremost Gasthof "Unten den Erchen" which served as a kitchen, mess hall and recreation room which was apart

from the mess hall, being on the second floor and furnished with a piano, games, and a bar dubbed "Worsham's Wonder Bar" in honor of its tender, a Texas long-horn rustler. Many good drinks were rustled over its tables in an effort to sustain the non-fraternizing policies. Many hours of good fellowship were enjoyed, and the ~~ordinarily peaceful~~ neighborhood rang with laughter and song.

The company, upon arrival, set to work preparing the site and rigs for the beginning of the bridge construction. Material and equipment arrived and by May 1st the actual construction of the bridge by A.S.C.Z. Engineer Group "A", of which Company "A" was a ~~part~~ <sup>part</sup>, began. Though May 1st was the official beginning and the official record for time under construction is six days, the men on the job felt the credit for having obtained such a record undue, for they had, again made a three day start on the official gun. Nevertheless the job was a remarkable piece of work, following the same general procedure as the crossing at Wesel. The bridge was completed May 8th, the day Victory for the Allies in Europe was officially announced. <sup>P</sup> With the completion of the "Victory Bridge," as it was named because of the coincidence ~~of its being finished on that day~~, there followed a general relaxing in the company though there was little boisterous celebrating of the wars' end. It was a day so long awaited, so long dreamed of, that when the weight of war was lifted it was hard to ~~except~~ <sup>accept</sup> as being real. There were smiles of certain relief and satisfaction, but the daily routine, though relaxed, continued much the same—Japan was still to be beaten. The German civilians went soberly about their business, many of them genuinely glad to have the crisis of their political miseries



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past, but disparing the economic destitution certain to come. It was already hard upon them.

For the next several days following the record breaking construction job the bridge area was policed, a reviewing stand was erected and appropriately decorated for the dedication of the bridge and the decoration of certain persons, who had distinguished themselves in some manner in recent operations, by the commander of the 12th Army Group. The men were issued new blouses, ribbons, battle stars, chevrons and hash marks so far as was possible in order to add color to the show. <sup>They</sup> and turned them in immediately afterward. There were eight Generals of various rank including General Plank of ADSEC at the dedication. It was hot and dusty and men and officers suffered mutually for what each considered the other mans pleasure.

With the completion of the bridge at Duisburg the 371st had accomplished its purpose in the E.T.O. There were perhaps supervisal jobs to be done, something to occupy time, but, for the present there was no work ahead and the men relaxed, played soft ball, and went for <sup>to</sup> leisurely walks around the huge forest fringed lake just across the road from their billets. They bathed in the sun, went swimming, and kept their eye on the Frauleins whose impelling beauty was a constant challenge to the fraternization ban.

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Curiosity about the people their Army had battered into submission, and the restlessness that drives a soldier out anywhere to relieve the pangs of a monastic life and regimentation, which together starve the soul for the opposite attractions of civilian society, is incentive enough to inspire fraternization against any established policy. Whether wise or unwise, by natural law the fraternization problem solved itself. Tempered by the desires of higher authority and perhaps by the fines imposed, which inspired a parody on the <sup>\*</sup>Pepsi-cola lyric, fraternizing with the Germans got off to a slow start, finding its beginning anywhere but in the open, but with the passing of a few weeks gained embarrassing proportions. Embarrassing perhaps to the command, but <sup>wholly</sup> ~~wholly~~ satisfactory to the individual.

Retiring from the pressure of the demands of conflict was indeed a relief. The program drifted to organized athletics and a minimum of harassing routine. Recreation gained an almost equal footing with serious work. <sup>P</sup> On May 18th the company was ordered to Kitzingen, near Wurtzberg, Germany, for the purpose of organizing the clearance of wreckage from the Main river, left, as most streams, in a totally impassable state by the blowing of every bridge along its course. Civilian labor, slowed somewhat by the disruptions of their personal lives and almost to a stand-still by their lack of equipment, were ready and anxious to start work. One of their greatest hopes for the transportation of their needs for existence lay in clearing the waterways, but the task seemed hopeless. The company furnished trucks and equipment where absolutely necessary and otherwise helped to locate

*\* Fraternizing with the enemy. Seventy five dollars, that's a lot. I will be much if you can get with this. Fraternizing is the thing for you.*

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materials needed to begin the work. The stay at Kitzingen was not long. The men were impressed with the exceedingly large families, which, under the Nazi order, proved an asset in premiums but, with prospects of a hungry winter to come, a decided burden. Prisoners captured in the last mass surrender were being hurriedly screened and discharged. Trucks stopped along the highway often to release a shabby husband into the arms of his home community ending for him the ~~torments~~ <sup>tortures</sup> of a soldiers life, but beginning its parallel as a civilian with, however, its love and the prospect of a brighter future within reach.

After the brief reconnaissance of river clearance on the upper reaches of the Main, responsibility was left with Military Government, and the company moved farther down the Main to Florsheim, again to begin the same work in a new section. Giving some assistance in gathering materials, cutting steel beams and performing other jobs, where the lack of equipment had stumped civilians, kept the men fairly busy, but not in large numbers. Their quarters were in the village grade school and in houses surrounding the school grounds. Life settled to a restful routine of waiting for what might come next. <sup>P</sup> The men played softball, became good at it, and developed a team which had little trouble beating its challengers. There were sight seeing trips to Heidelberg, swimming parties to Weisbaden, golf on the golf course there for those who had golf balls, and passes to Brussels, Namur, and Paris; even furloughs to England. People were friendly, regardless of the fact many of them were moved from their homes to make room for the company, but, as usual as fearful of their neighbors criticism of their friendliness with

Americans as the soldier of his Commanding Officer. Children stayed around the area asking for washing, offering to sell "Mama's" wine, and picking up cigarettes butts for "Papa." Candy and chewing gum was as popular as in any other country. A new bar was set up in the school house. Barrels of beer, wine, and occasionally bottles of Champagne flowed in and flowed out. Squeeze boxes made music, and many evenings were sung away in songs adjusted to the general soberness of the singers.

The German was, to many, a strange person in defeat. A complex of embarrassment and self-pity surrounded him <sup>and</sup> with an utter disregard of the suffering of the rest of Europe. He was anxious for friendship, and asking of sympathy. His method of waiting around to pick up your cigarette butt almost as it hit the ground or squabbling over kitchen left-overs aroused suspicion of his trying to shame you. Actually the people dressed well and seemed to have more than their share <sup>of</sup> the luxuries remaining in Europe. The fact that <sup>his</sup> ~~home~~ as well as ~~their~~ <sup>his</sup> person was clean and tidy, which are an attribute to German methods, went <sup>far</sup> ~~far~~ in making him <sup>acceptable</sup> ~~acceptable~~ person, though his ideas were as of one fenced from the world by a modern dark age. <sup>P</sup> The future, haunted with questions, began gradually to unfurl. The battalion was sure not to be designated for occupation in Germany and the stay could not last much longer. Clothing and equipment inspections <sup>did</sup> ~~could~~ not ease the hopes of remaining <sup>dominant</sup> ~~dominant~~ for long. High point men were being shipped out, replacements came in. The battalion was alerted.

With the new status came a flourish of rumors, and at last a conviction that ~~was~~ <sup>the battalion was</sup> heading directly for the Pacific. Time withered in suspense, and the day finally came for the company to move to a redeployment area. Trucks marked in chalk spoke the feeble hopes in every heart.

The men said good-bye forever to Florsheim the morning of July 6th. They pitched shelter-halves at Trier, Germany, late in the afternoon in the first leg of their retreat, and moved on to Montmedy for the second night, entering France for the first time in four months.

On July 8th the battalion met in Camp Chicago to begin its redeployment process, disappointed by the ~~misleading~~ <sup>misleading</sup> reports of the camps many features, and not yet resigned to its fate.

Camp Chicago was only one of many in the marshalling area near Rheims. Thousands of troops were concentrated there, and waiting out orders to move to the next phase of their processing in a staging area from ~~where~~ <sup>which</sup> they would move against Japan either directly or through the States. The 371st seemed daily to seal the fate of its moving direct to the Pacific, <sup>more completely</sup>. Boxes were made, equipment waterproofed and packed, and marked with shipping numbers. Clothing was rechecked, and more high point men left with the awarding officially of the battalion's fourth battle star. Replacements came in. The men who had remained in the company since its birth in Ellis were beginning to feel the loss of comrades severely, for it was almost as though they ~~had~~ themselves had been transferred.

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The waiting was monotonous. The uselessness of life weighed on weary hearts. Home seemed forever beyond their grasp. The program of the camp proposed a half days schedule dealing in such basic subjects as close order drill, gas mask drill, rifle inspections, and empty, half-hearted lectures on varied subjects. The camp was plagued with dust, and, being unfinished provided no mess hall or kitchen. The washroom was small, crowded and cursed by a drain that, <sup>flowed</sup> ~~flowing~~ the wrong way, ~~left it flooded~~. In an area where so many thousands of men were concentrated ( a condition the Army seems to delight in,) all places of recreation were a nucleus in a sea of men. There was no escape from long lines and crowds of soldiers.

P The camp lay north of Rheims some 25 miles, in an area isolated by its distance from even the smallest villages. The men depended first on their company motor pool for transportation to any of the towns, and later, when their motor pool was turned over to Ordnance, the camp buses were the only substitute. Such nearby villages as were made available to the men in the evenings were hopelessly crowded with Army personnel, a condition annoying to civilians and soldiers alike. However, three day passes and furloughs were issued in greater numbers than ever before, and, ~~in turn~~, though a man had little choice in where he might take his vacation, the men had their chance to escape.

Time passed anxiously ~~on~~ with the soft ball games, which the company was soon scheduling regularly, the main attraction through the day, and a trip to the Red Cross doughnut line an excuse to get out for a walk before hitting the "sack."

News of the Atomic bombs and Russia's entry into the war was greeted with as much fervor as the end of the war itself. Its element of surprise ~~counting~~ <sup>counted</sup> for much, but the importance of such revolutionary force could not be mistaken. The burden of a trip east was surely lifted. Some men were willing to bet the surrender of Japan would come within hours and were surprised to find how nearly right they were. The Potsdam Conference and the Japanese surrender offer were subjects passionately discussed; as fully explored as the splitting of the Atom a few days before, but perhaps more wisely. Such excitement ~~staid~~ <sup>stayed</sup> old boredom, and days swept by unnoticed. What every man prayed for was realized officially when the "Stars and Stripes" announced no more shipping of units to the Pacific. The company could look forward with a new certainty. Perhaps they would be home by Christmas, maybe by Thanksgiving. In any event they were going home. The war was over. It couldn't be long now.