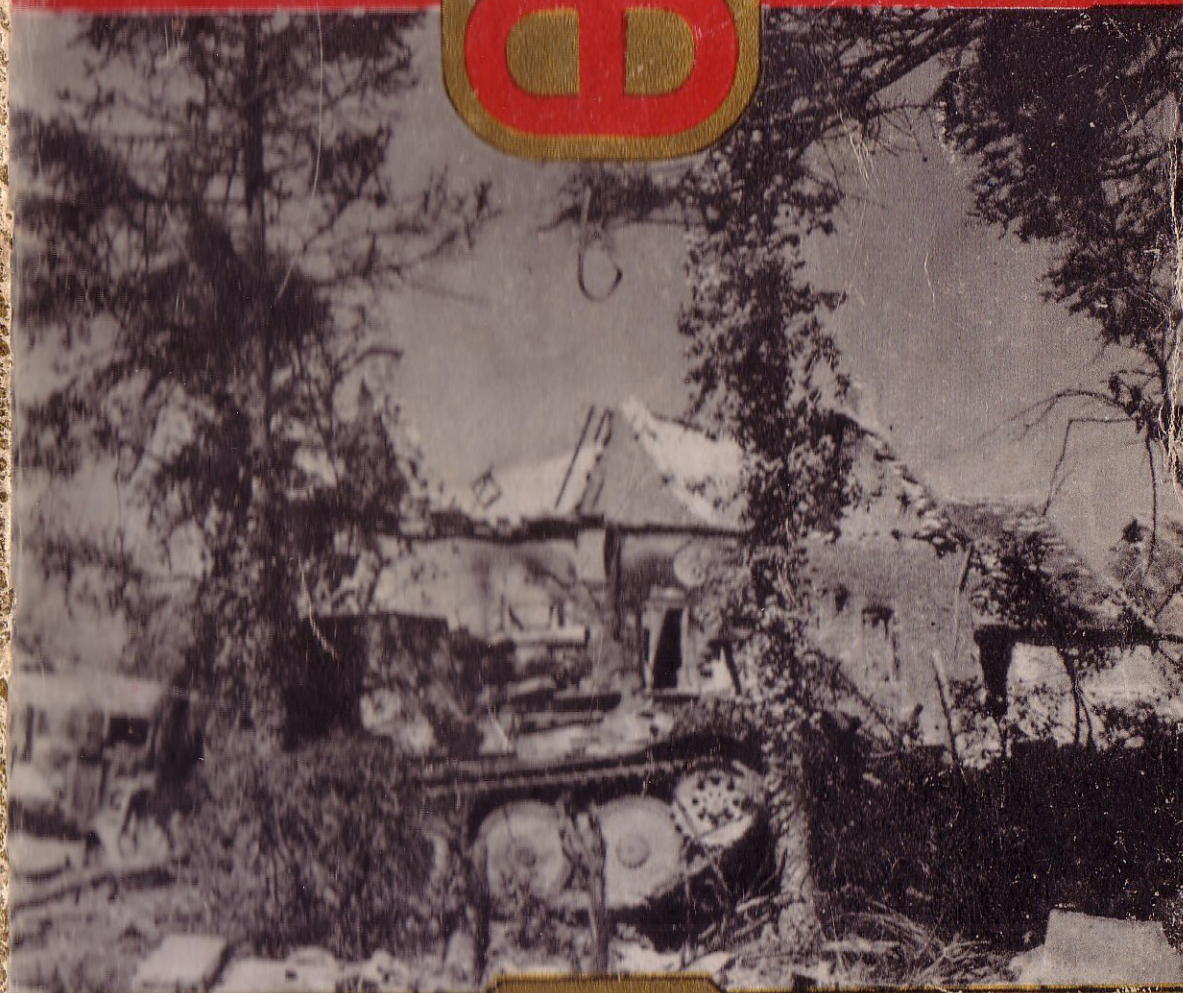


Just a few of  
the 12,335 Ger-  
man 'Supermen'  
whom the 90th  
Inf. Div. picked  
up at Chambois

Typical road in  
"Death Valley"  
near Chambois,  
after the trap-  
ped Huns were  
all liquidated



# TOUGH ÔMBRES!



## The Story of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division



This is one of a series of G.I. Stories of the Ground, Air and Service Forces in the European Theater of Operations, to be issued by the Stars and Stripes, a publication of the Information and Education Division, Special and Information Services, ETOUSA... Maj. Gen. J. A. Van Fleet lent his cooperation to the preparation of the pamphlet, and basic material was supplied to the editors by his personnel.

Name .....

Date Enlisted .....

Attached to 90th .....

Training .....

Battle Actions .....

Citations .....



**T**HIS is only the beginning of the heroic story of the 90th Infantry Division in World War II. I wish that we could tell you all of it—thousands of words more of the details of the triumphs and the trials, but that will have to wait until after victory. Even in this short account, there is so much for the Tough 'Ombres of the 90th to be proud of, and I am proud with them. I am new to the division, having assumed command on 17 October 1944, after the events related here, but I know well the 90th's record. Let's carry it on and build it higher and higher until everyone of us can say proudly at the end: "That's the way it was. I was there with the 90th."

*J. A. Van Fleet*  
Major General, Commanding

## The Story Of The 90th Infantry Division

"BLOOD-RED FOR TOUGH 'OMBRES"

**W**HEN the 90th Infantry Division landed on D-Day, the blood-red T-O insignia meant Texas and Oklahoma. Today the T-O stands for "Tough 'Ombres." The men who wear that patch fought for fifty-three consecutive days. They landed among the first, took the staggering blows of the prepared German might and came back with even more decisive blows of their own to sweep across France and onto Hitler's front porch.



D-Day and D-plus-1 were the beginning. When the troopship *Susan B. Anthony* struck a mine and sank, the 2nd Bn, 359th Inf and Co C, 315th Engr Bn, waded ashore without a loss—except for their weapons. When the 4th Inf Div needed reserves, the 1st and 3rd Bns, 359th Inf, plunged through water and artillery to back them up. When a German patrol spied on the assembly area near St Martin de Varreville, Pfc Samuel C. Maples of Stella, Mo, Co A, 359th, killed the division's first two Krauts.

The 'Ombres were tough and stayed tough. They had to be tough to plough through the hedgerow defenses of Normandy in the famous dash to the important rail junction of Le Mans, and to form part of the Falaise pocket at Chambois that brought terrible disaster to a frantically fleeing Nazi.

They had a sense of humor, too. When B Btry, 915th FA Bn, hurled its 50,000th round at the enemy from the same gun that had fired the first, stencilled on the shell was "To Adolf with love from T-O."



## T-O FOR TEXAS AND OKLAHOMA

THE letters T-O of the insignia actually stand for Texas and Oklahoma, being a carryover from World War 1, when the 90th, made up of men from these states, fought at St Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne. The Tough 'Ombres of this war hail from everywhere in America.

The division was reactivated at Camp Barkeley, Tex, Mar 25, 1942 and after training there went to the Louisiana and California-Arizona Maneuver Areas before sailing for England on Mar 23, 1944.

With the division assembled near Turqueville, and its first CP in France at Loutres, Brig. Gen. Jay W. MacKelvie, Battle Creek, Mich, (then CG) received warning orders. The division would attack across the Merderet River, through the 82nd Airborne Div.

Early morning June 10, the 'Ombres moved to attack and to deepen the VII Corps bridgehead established earlier by the 82nd Airborne Div, aided by a devastating barrage laid by the 90th's own 345th FA Bn.

The 357th Inf struck out on one flank for Gourbesville while the 358th Inf steered for Pont l'Abbe (Etienville). The bulk of the 359th and B Btry, 915th FA Bn, was still with the 4th Div.

The 358th crossed the Merderet River and brushed aside heavy enemy resistance before Pont l'Abbe. A strong German counterattack repelled them from



the town but they clung to the edges. The 357th crossed the river causeway at La Fiere through a murderous artillery and mortar barrage.



The first day of fighting netted one and a half miles. Odds had heavily favored the Krauts. Hedgerows were hardpacked, root-filled walls of earth four or five feet high, overgrown with thick hedges and trees. Ditches lined the earthen walls, and the enemy was entrenched in well-prepared positions. The terrain was well known to the occupying Germans.

Automatic weapons and small arms were in the first row. Mortars held the second. Eighty-eights backed them up. Flanking hedgerows concealed more automatic weapons and mortars dug in under brush and covered with logs and dirt.

When our troops ventured into a field, machine guns opened deadly crossfire, followed by mortars peppering the area. Those lucky enough to get back to the hedgerows' protection were harassed by 88's zeroed in on the trees above them.

Our own artillery's forward observers often were unable to see beyond the next hedgerow and had to fire blind. Observers in trees were targets not only

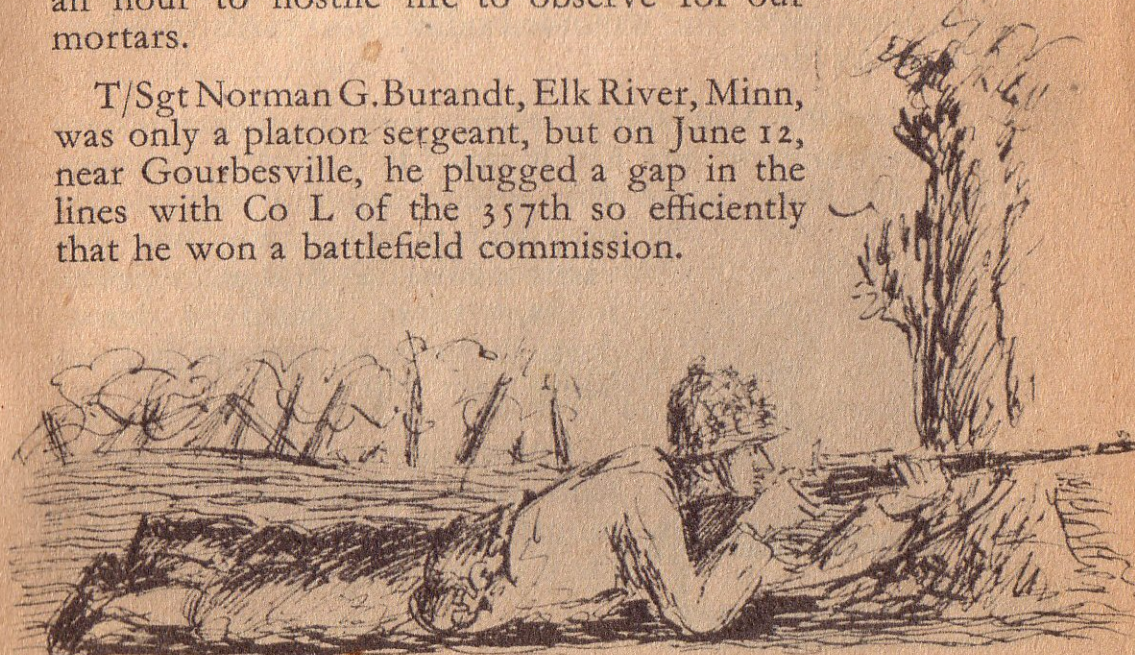
for the enemy but for our own troops wary of snipers. Once, Capt Donald B. Hutchens of Oregon, then commanding Co B, 359th, climbed a tree to direct fire only to fall when enemy shrapnel snapped the limb. Undaunted, he shinnied up the tree again and resumed his fire direction.

### COURAGE CREATES HEROES

It was this determination to win that produced heroes by the score.

S/Sgt Warren N. Snider, Gainesville, Tex, squad leader in Co H, 358th, whose squad was supporting the advance on Pont l'Abbé June 12, exposed himself for an hour to hostile fire to observe for our mortars.

T/Sgt Norman G. Burandt, Elk River, Minn, was only a platoon sergeant, but on June 12, near Gourbesville, he plugged a gap in the lines with Co L of the 357th so efficiently that he won a battlefield commission.



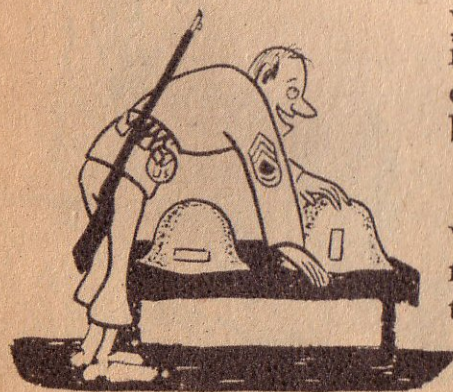


S/Sgt Jarral M. Moore of Perrin, Tex, Co I, 357th, in an attack on an enemy strongpoint defending Gourbesville June 14, calmly hurled such well-directed hand grenades in a storm of enemy fire that he inspired his men to reduce three emplacements.

### HELP WANTED—CO GETS IT

THERE was gallantry, too, in the rescue of the wounded. Pfc Victor Boxberger, Fort Collins, Colo, light machinegunner in the 358th, administered first aid under devastating fire to his wounded CO near Picauville, June 12. Then in sight of the enemy, he dragged the officer to a ditch in which they huddled for five hours until rescued by volunteers. With Pfc Boxberger's help, they pulled the wounded officer 500 yards to safety, still under fire.

During the Merderet crossing, June 10, linemen kept open communications. Cpl Richard R. L. Slobig, Palermo, Calif, Hq Btry, 343rd FA, under constant eighty-eight fire, laid a telephone line 600 yards across a bridge, repaired it four times, relaid it waist-deep in water to prevent it from being shot out.



Annals of the 90th are crowded with such stories but these demonstrate the spirit that routed the Germans out of their burrows.

Two battalions of the 359th at-

tached to the 4th Div reverted to the 90th on June 10. The 359th went into the 90th's line June 11 near Picauville, flanked by the 358th and 357th but confronted by the same type of harrowing hedgerow warfare.



The 358th continued to strike at Pont l'Abbé June 11. Action next day started 400 yards east of the town. Command of the regiment fell to Lt. Col. (now Col.) Christian H. Clarke, Jr., Atlanta, Ga, 2nd Bn commander. P-47 fighters dive-bombed the town at 1700. Then after a smashing artillery barrage the troops attacked. By 2130, Pont l'Abbé, now little more than a rubble pile, was mopped up.

Meanwhile, to the north, the battle for Gourbesville raged. Since the 3rd Bn, 357th, was badly spent, Co A of the 315th Engr Bn was sent as infantry to capture Gourbesville, June 13. Fierce opposition a quarter mile north of Amfreville forced them to withdraw. The 359th continued its slow attack northwestward.

On this day, Maj. Gen. Eugene M. Landrum, Columbia, SC, assumed command of the division.

The 358th secured a crossroad 1000 yards northwest of Pont l'Abbé, June 14. The 359th advanced 700 yards in more bitter fighting. The 3rd Bn, 357th, with Co A of the 315th Engr squeezed into Gourbesville, but was smashed back.



# The 90th Broke an Iron Door

## GOURBESVILLE GOBBLED UP

CAPTURE of Gourbesville was accomplished late on June 15 by a wide flanking sweep to the north.

Two days later, in a reshuffle of sectors, the division wheeled northwest into a defensive position around Ste Colombe while the 9th Inf Div pressed west to cut the Cherbourg peninsula.

The defensive position maintained through June 18, Combat Team 357 was motorized and sent to take up a line extending from St Sauveur le Vicomte west to Portbail. Its job was to prevent southward escape of Germans trapped in the peninsula, thus freeing the 9th to join the 4th and the newly arrived 79th Inf Div in the drive on Cherbourg.

The 90th shifted from VII Corps to VIII Corps on June 19. Ste Colombe remained fairly quiet. But the 357th had a lively time with enemy troops and tanks around Portbail. Sixty-six German prisoners trying to escape the trap were taken June 19, and 99 on June 20.

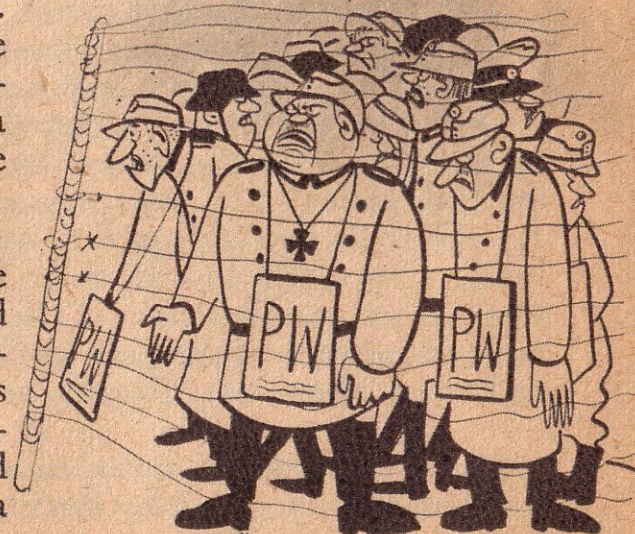
On June 23, the 358th and 359th moved to a defensive sector south of the Douve River near Beuzeville la Bastille, remained there until June 29. The 357th returned the next day.

## STAGE SET FOR FORET FIGHT

THE stage now was set for the battle of the Forêt de Mont Castre which began July 3 south of the Douve. It was like the slow forcing of a massive iron door with hinges rusted solid by the Beau Coudray marshlands. To the northwest, at the other end of the 90th's sector, the door was locked fast by the formidable forêt and Hill 122.

Hill 122 was the eyes of the enemy. This 400 foot rise was a bastion from which Caesar's legions 2000 years ago repelled an enemy horde in the Gallic Wars. From a bald crest on the north, the forêt stretched to the south in a trackless and jungle-like growth.

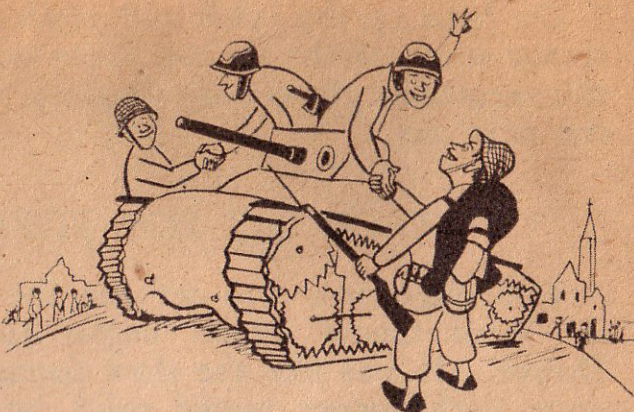
For three years the Germans had fortified the forêt and had learned every inch of its terrain during maneuvers. The hill dominated the Cherbourg peninsula





and keyed the entire southward drive to break out of the hedgerow country.

The 90th found itself smashing against fresh, fanatical paratroopers and SS men. The jumpoff, July 3, was a line from Baupte, northeast past Pont Aunoy to the east edge of Pretot. The division faced southwest.



The first day, the 359th, on the west, advanced through Pretot for roughly 2000 yards despite savage machine gun, artillery, mortar fire and mines.

The 358th, in the east sector, chalked up 2000 yards to St Jores. By 1410, one platoon of the 1st Bn battered its way into the town. Enemy tanks smashed them back. The 3rd Bn maneuvered wide past the east flank to present such a threat that by 1930 the 1st Bn, having crashed through St Jores, pressed on to Les Belles Croix. Enemy self-propelled guns delayed the advance, but Les Belles Croix fell to the tanks of the 712th Tank Bn, fresh from the beaches. (The attached 712th became a blood-brother of the 90th in the Mont Castre campaign and since then has fought as part of the division.)

The 358th fought off a counter-attack as the battle continued, July 4, and by the end of the day had pushed

on to La Butte. The 359th in the meantime had swung down to the St Jores—Le Fry road. Then it gained Ste Suzanne, was driven out in the morning, plunged in again that afternoon.

Back in the east the 357th had entered the battle on July 5 to relieve part of the 358th. The outfit was stopped cold outside of Beau Coudray in a day-long battle but continued to trade blows there for six bitter days. Constant battering only loosened the hinges but diverted German attention to the east so that the lock on the west was picked and the portal was forced open slowly in a southeastern swing pivoted on Beau Coudray.

#### “J” CO PUT TO BATTLE TEST

THIS sector was comparatively quiet, but on July 10 boiled up again. A provisional “J” Co of 120 cooks, mechanics and headquarters specialists had been organized and put up front to prevent enemy infiltration. But the enemy still kept Beau Coudray. The 357th’s 2nd Bn finally flanked the town from the west on July 11 and the Germans withdrew that night. The 2nd Bn snatched Le Plessis without opposition the following day and the 1st and 3rd Bns moved through Beau Coudray.

The door finally had swung wide and the hinges now had torn loose.

While the 357th was tied up at Beau Coudray, the rest of the division had moved around to the north of the



forêt. But 1st Bn, 359th, hit the west nose of the hill on July 6 and the punch caught the Germans off balance because they had expected the main effort from the east. Bypassed by the 1st, however, the retreating Nazis greeted the 3rd Bn, 359th, driving up on the left, with enough artillery to halt them and surround both battalions. Ten counterattacks were repulsed in twenty-four hours. At one time the situation was eased only by artillery directed on the enemy by the 1st Bn CO, Lt. Col. (then Capt.) Leroy R. Pond, Fayetteville, Ark.

Ammunition was low. The men were surrounded for thirty hours. Each round fired had to spell death for a Hun. Relief finally arrived when the 2nd Bn, 358th, plus eight tanks, knifed through the enemy wedge at 1830, July 7.

The 2nd Bn, 359th, and 1st Bn, 358th, had moved



into the eastern edge of the forest July 6 while the 3rd Bn of the 358th, having moved south from Lithaire to the crest, occupied Hill 122, July 8. Thus a line across the entire heights was established.

One result of the battle was a two-day haul of 430 PWs.

Meanwhile, the division's right flank was open. The enemy, driven out of La Haye du Puits by the advancing 79th Div, was infiltrating eastward. Another "J" Co was activated from 359th cooks and mechanics to protect the right flank.

The 315th Engr Bn again was brought into play as infantry assuming a defensive position July 7-8 atop the hill, where for three grim days it held fast under heavy enemy pressure.

## MENACED BY NATURE AND NAZIS

THE 90th continued its mission July 10. If Hill 122 had been bad, the fight down the south side through the forest was just as bad, perhaps worse. German paratroopers, almost invisible in camouflage clothing, were young, strong, fanatically determined and skilled in individual combat. Direction and contact were difficult to maintain. Undergrowth and murky weather limited visibility to twenty-five yards, more often to only five.

The 3rd Bn, 358th, took the center sector, flanked on

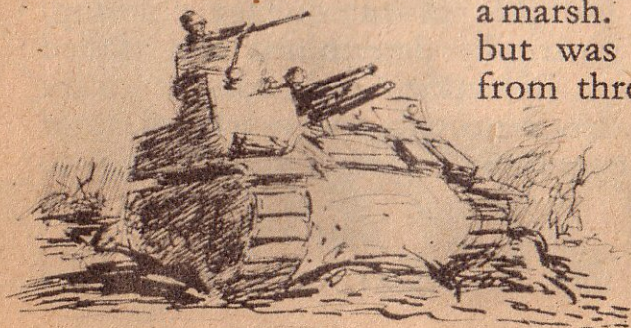


the left by the 2nd Bn and on the right by the 3rd Bn of the 359th.

The advance hit fierce resistance. When Co I was pinned down by a Nazi nest behind a twenty-five foot hill, Pfc William L. Smiley of Centertown, Ky, scaled the obstacle and fired point blank into the enemy. Pfc Theodore Wagner of San Antonio, Tex, followed his example and lobbed several grenades. Pfc Wagner then urged the Germans to surrender. Eight did, the other nine were found dead.

Lt. Col. Jacob W. Bealke of Sullivan, Mo, and his command group of eight followed Co L. While Co I was occupied, the group was attacked by a squad of Germans that had emerged from the west and behind Co L's assault platoon. Beaten off by small arms fire, the enemy hit again from the west and the rear but this time was routed by another platoon of Co L.

Four tanks thrashed through the thickets and hacked out the trail by which wounded were evacuated. Later in the battle two tanks were knocked out by the enemy, and a third immobilized by a marsh. Co K thrust forward but was thrown back by fire from three sides.



On July 11 rifle companies of the 358th's 3rd Bn shifted to the right

and with the aid of the flanking 359th drove the Germans out of the forest.

The division halted on July 14 along the Sèves River facing south toward the enemy's strong position on the Island of Sèves.

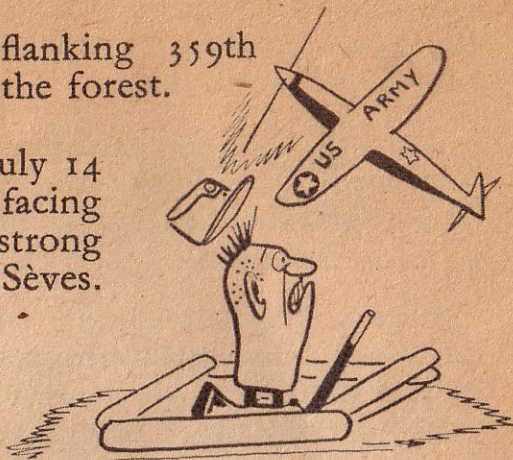
To the 90th fell the task of eliminating this obstacle. The 1st and 2nd Bns, 358th, punched across the hip-deep river in bitter fighting, but were so hard hit by superior German forces that retreat was the only practical move. Most were able to scramble back but four officers and 200 men were captured. The island was lost and the 358th resumed its old defensive position north of the river.

Chaplains Joseph Esser of Cleveland, Minn, and Edgar Stohler, of Ipava, Ill, accompanied by 12 litter bearers, later retrieved 16 wounded.

## T-O JOINS FIRST ARMY DRIVE

The First U S Army began its great drive to eliminate the enemy from the lower stretches of the peninsula, July 26.

The day before, the American Air Force had blasted the enemy at St Lo. The 90th, sitting morosely on





the Sèves licking its wounds, perked up as clouds of bombers roared over.

On July 26, the division, attacking with VIII Corps, bypassed Sèves Island by sending the 357th to the left. The 359th attacked due south, while the 358th continued to face the island.

Heavy resistance was encountered during the first day, and only small progress was made. The advance of the VII Corps on the left was so rapid that the enemy realized the danger of entrapment and hastily withdrew. The division's units raced ahead to overtake the enemy rear guard south of the town of Perriers, overrun by the 90th during the day.

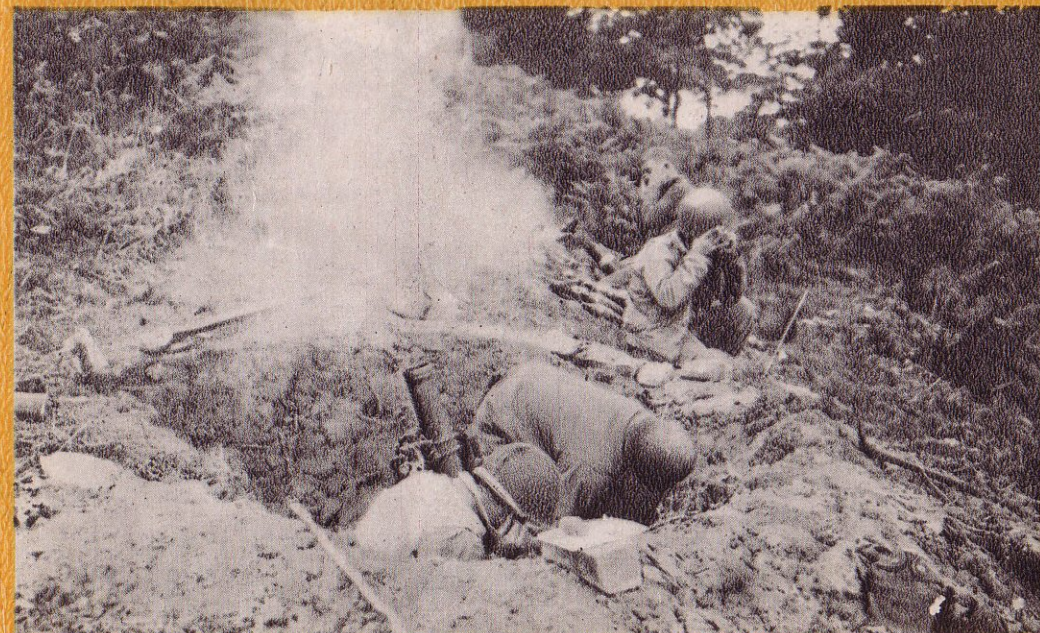
Small isolated groups of Germans were quickly eliminated by July 28, and the town of St Sauveur de Lendelin, 10 miles south of the Sèves, was occupied. By nightfall, the 90th had reached its objective—the newly captured sector of the 1st Inf Div of VII Corps, which lay across the front of the 90th's path south. In the preceding three days the 90th had covered 10 miles. Compared to the deadly slow fighting experienced previously, this was blitzkrieg movement, and it was indicative of better things to come.

From July 28 to Aug 1, the division remained in the vicinity of St Sauveur and for the first time in the 53 days since D-Day was completely out of contact with the enemy.

The rest period was utilized for reorganization and training. Here on July 30, Brig. Gen. (now Maj. Gen.)



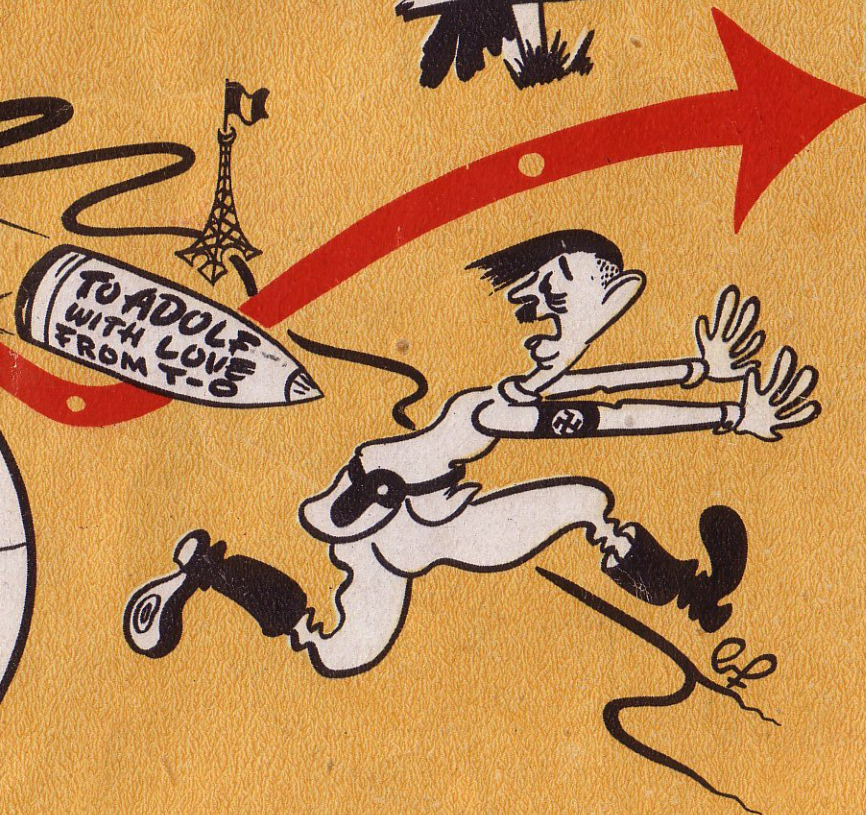
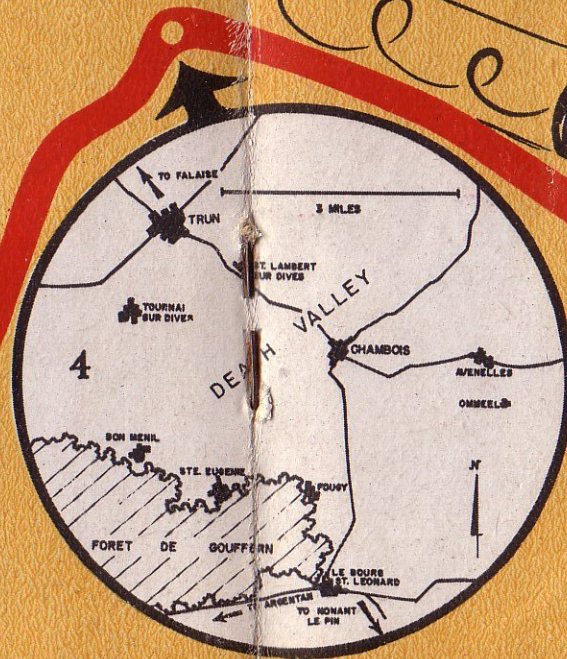
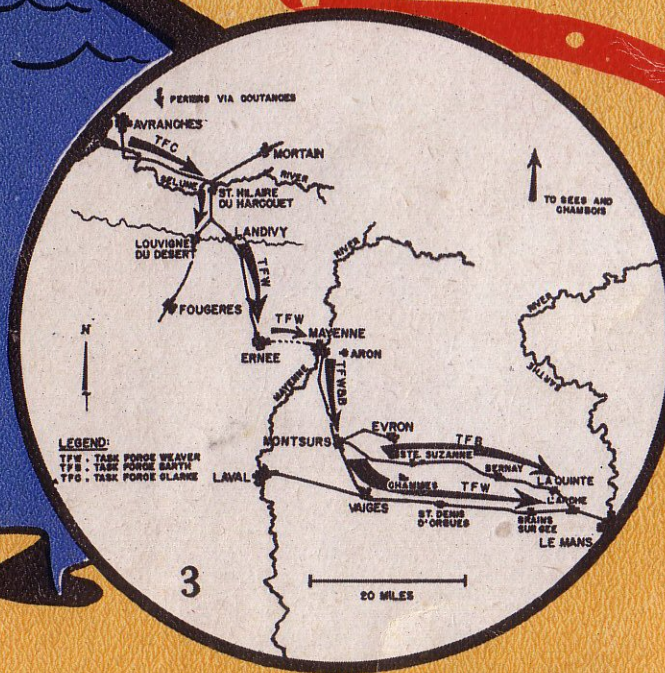
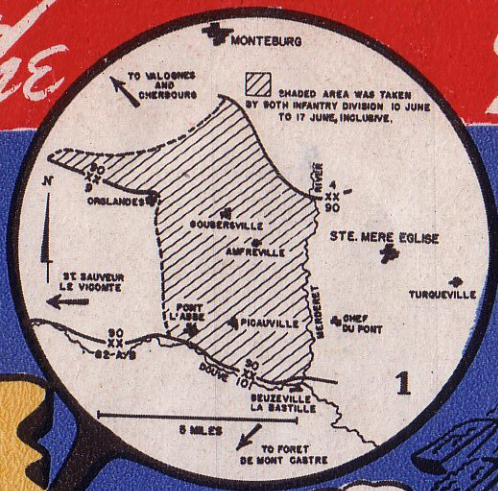
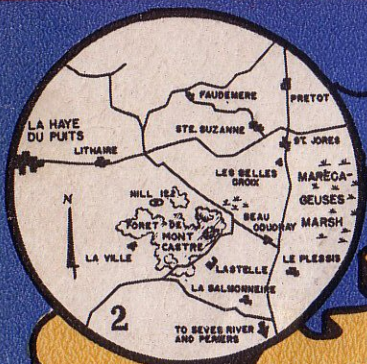
**Maj. Gen. E. M. Landrum directs the battle from a cellar CP**



**A captured German mortar defends Hill 122, July 7—10**



# Route of the 90<sup>th</sup> Division through France







The 315th Engineer Bn built this bridge over the Selune



Company CP inside a typical Normandy hedgerow jungle

Raymond S. McLain, Oklahoma City, Okla, a veteran of the Sicilian and Italian campaigns took command. Brig. Gen. William G. Weaver, Louisville, Ky, became assistant division commander the same day.

## HITTING THE ROAD AGAIN

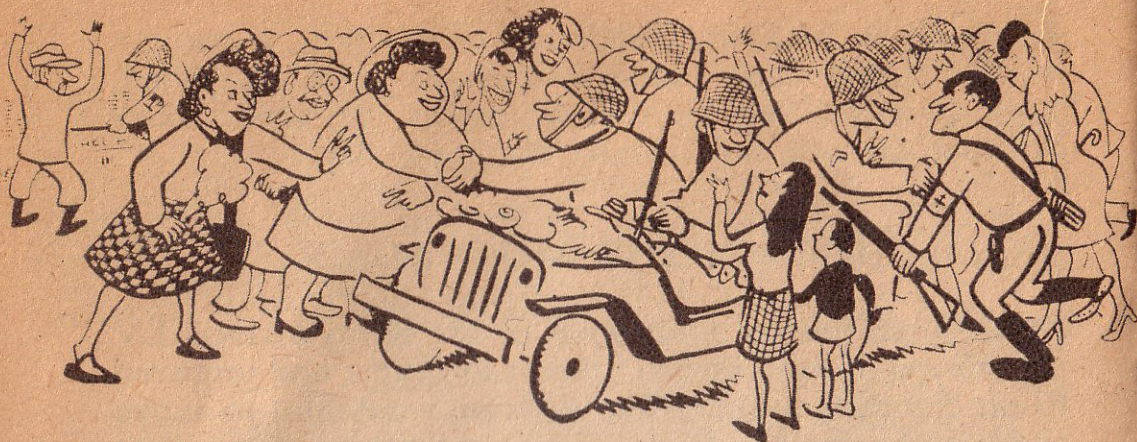
THE 90th passed to control of the newly arrived XV Corps of the Third U S Army on Aug 1 and prepared to hit the road again. The division's mission, to move south and seize the bridges over the Selune River near St Hilaire du Harcouet, resulted in the organization of two special task forces, one under Lt. Col. George B. Randolph, Birmingham, Ala, (commanding the 712th Tank Bn), the other under Lt. Col. Clarke (commanding the 358th).

Task Force Randolph moved Aug 2 on the Perriers-Coutances-Avranches road, screening Task Force Clarke in the manner of advance cavalry and sweeping aside negligible resistance. Task Force Clarke followed immediately.

At the end of the 50-mile motor march to St Hilaire, Col. Clarke, finding the main highway bridge across the Selune west of the city intact, seized the high ground overlooking it. Racing across the bridge, two platoons of Co K met enemy small arms and machinegun fire but fought their way into town, followed by the rest of Task Force Clarke and other division elements.

Task Force Clarke pursued the enemy south to Lou-





vigne du Desert, taking it Aug 3. Patrols streamed into the town of Landivy.

XV Corps was ordered Aug 4 to move on Le Mans, an important railroad center 73 airline miles southeast. The 90th was ordered to seize the bridge and city of Mayenne 45 miles away. Relieved there by the 1st Div, it was then to swing southeast to the Laval-Le Mans highway and advance to Le Mans. The 79th Div was to capture Laval and push forward on the 90th's right, entering Le Mans from the southwest.

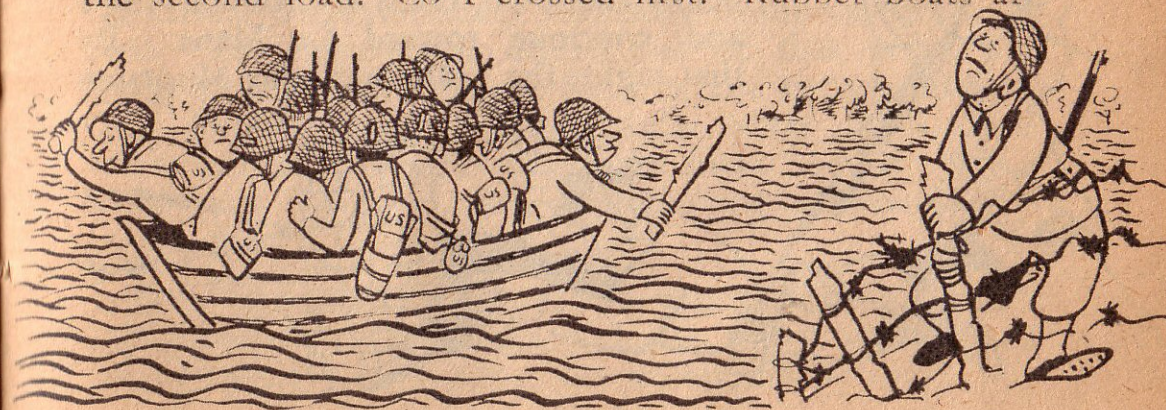
### ARMOR SPEARHEADS THE ADVANCE

FOR its part in this bold stroke, the 90th organized another task force—strong in armor—under the command of Gen. Weaver to spearhead the advance. From this force was made up Sub-Task Force Randolph, which started Aug 5, followed by the remainder of Task Force Weaver. The force poured through Landivy

and Ernee. It seemed strange to be rolling along at 20 miles an hour in enemy territory where before every yard had been contested. The men's spirits rose, especially when the French, recovering from their surprise, lined the streets to pelt them with flowers and hand out cider during pauses of the 12-mile column.

By noon the head of the column hit the first appreciable resistance two miles east of Mayenne. While the 90th Rcn Trp scouted, a hard hitting force of the 357th's Co B, plus ten medium tanks, punched ahead. Learning that Mayenne was held in force, it was decided to envelop the town to the south with the 357th's 2nd and 3rd Bns while the advance 1st Bn moved straight ahead to seize the only undestroyed bridge across the Mayenne River.

Col. G. B. Barth, Washington, DC, commanding the 357th, soon located a likely crossing south of the town. A skiff and a larger but leaky old boat were found. A torn-down fence provided oars. Col. Barth took the first boat over, then with an engineer rowed back for the second load. Co I crossed first. Rubber boats ar-





rived and the crossing of the two battalions was completed by 2030 hours.

Meantime, the 1st Bn under Maj. Edward S. Hamilton, Washington, DC, pushed forward so rapidly that it was able to storm the bridge and prevent its destruction by the Germans, who had mined it with eight 500-pound airplane bombs. Our artillery hit a caisson of ammunition on the German side. A terrific explosion resulted, and a pall of smoke blanketed the bridge. Maj. Hamilton called off the artillery and B Co rushed the bridge. The battalion had the town mopped up by 2030, while the other two battalions took positions for all around defense.

A hundred prisoners were taken, including some bewildered Germans who came into the town, not knowing it had changed hands.

Both the 358th and 359th marched southeastward to the Mayenne River below the town, ready to cross on Aug 6 and continue toward Le Mans. By that night, the 358th was near Montsurs



and the 359th near Vaiges, paralleling Task Force Weaver's route.

Gen. McLain now split Task Force Weaver into two columns, one under Gen. Weaver and one under Col. Barth, to set a trap for the Krauts. He sent them on toward Le Mans Aug 6. The two forces were to rejoin at L'Arche to form a pocket to catch the Germans swept before them.

At Aron, five miles out of Mayenne, early Aug 6, Task Force Weaver hit a strong enemy force attacking to recapture Mayenne. A fierce engagement continued the rest of the day. Leaving the enemy to the 1st Div, Gen. Weaver withdrew under cover of darkness to seek a more satisfactory route. He reversed his column, heading south to Vaiges to hit the main Laval-Le Mans highway.

At Vaiges he found the 359th Inf, commanded by Col. Robert L. Bacon, Columbia, SC, grappling with the enemy east of the town. With speed paramount, Gen. Weaver hurried around the 359th's left flank. At Chemmes, however, sharp resistance again was encountered. The enemy was driven out of that town, but clung to a position on the flank of the route eastward. Gen. Weaver again reversed under cover of darkness and returned to Vaiges where the main highway to Le Mans now lay open, the 359th having eliminated the enemy there.

Task Force Weaver sped on, quickly reducing successive points of resistance with the aid of artillery and highly effective air support put on targets by radio.



Just before dark, Aug 8; Task Force Weaver joined Col. Barth who had arrived at L'Arche after a brilliant dash through the enemy. Col. Barth left Mayenne at 1500, Aug 6. Ripping two minor pockets of resistance, he advanced swiftly through Montsurs and stopped for the night at Ste Suzanne. Maj. Hamilton, his 1st Bn and the tanks dashed on to Viviers. At 2200, Col. Barth was notified that the enemy had reoccupied Montsurs and cut off the remainder of his column. Soon after, the Germans began preparing an attack on Ste Suzanne. Maj. Hamilton was recalled from Viviers just in time for his tanks to scatter the German's formation.

Much of the opposition was knocked out by air support and artillery fire prior to the approach of the task force. An infantry attack was required just east of Joue en Charnie, and the Tough 'Ombres carried it through successfully. The accompanying artillery was continually firing with one or two batteries, while the others dashed forward to set up new positions.

The air support was highly effective, constant cover being maintained by four to twelve P-47 fighter-bombers, which were kept on the target by radio. All along the road were evidences of the air accuracy -- bombed out tanks and wrecked vehicles. So rapid was the advance that enemy vehicles were found pulled up alongside the road with their motors still running.

The Kraut drivers had dashed off the road to avoid the murderous hail of artillery and came back to their vehicles just in time to meet the rapidly advancing infantry.

## Tough 'Ombres Fight On To Metz

### ARTILLERY SOCKS TANKS

At 0900 came word that the remainder of the column had cleared the enemy from Montsurs, and at 1000 the delayed battalion arrived at Ste Suzanne. About 1300, as the advance was ready to continue, 15 German tanks lumbered out of a wooded hilltop and thundered towards Ste Suzanne into the fire of the 345th FA, which drove them back.

Assured by Lt. Col. Frank W. Norris, Austin, Tex, commanding the 345th, that his artillery would keep the tanks at bay, Col. Barth decided to push on. The column stopped for a night at La Quinto, six miles short of Le Mans, after brushing aside small delaying groups.

The advance continued Aug 8. At L'Arche, the column met a German anti-aircraft battery trying to escape. First Lt. Charles H. Lombardi, Ozone Park, NY, firing the lead tank's 75, destroyed 15 tanks in about two minutes. Tankriding infantrymen killed more than half of the 60 Germans. Progress into the city was slowed by four German gun emplacements and the need to coordinate with the 79th Div approaching



on the right. But our troops entered the city at 0030, Aug 9, to find the 79th in control of half of it, having entered from the southwest.

Back at L'Arche, the 358th locked with the rear of Col. Barth's column, forming a solid barrier to trap the Germans fleeing northeast from Weaver.

Gen. McLain now directed Col. Clarke to cross the Sarthe River to the north of Le Mans and sever the main highways. The enemy, trying to flee, was killed or captured. The rest of the combat units took up positions, Aug 9, north and east of Le Mans, ready for the next phase—the "Chambois Shambles."

The McLain Machine in its seven-day dash from St Sauveur de Lendelin had marched a total of 146 miles, fought three hard engagements and numerous skirmishes and taken 2054 prisoners. Many Germans were killed. Large numbers of tanks, armored and other vehicles were either captured or destroyed. The 90th's casualties were light.

The division moved north from Le Mans Aug 11, following the 2nd French Arm'd Div. In the first three days it consolidated the French gains,



mopped up the Forêt d'Ecouvres between Alençon and Sees without major incident, bagged 1329 prisoners.



On Aug 15 the 359th took over a system of road blocks, from Le Bourg St Leonard on the west to Le Merlerault on the east. The 358th held the Nonant Le Pin road north of Sees, while the 357th remained behind to maintain the Alençon bridgehead.

The great Falaise pocket, sewed up on the south and east by the capture of Le Mans and the subsequent swing north, was closed only by fire. No firm line of troops sealed the mouth of the trap in northwest France. Until the shooting was over, there remained an escape gap through the valley where the little village of Chambois is located. So much fire was poured into the bottleneck that a large part of the proud German Seventh Army was annihilated in its struggle to withdraw.

The 90th Div alone took 12,335 prisoners and killed an estimated 8000 from Aug 16 to 22. In addition, 308 German tanks, 248 self-propelled guns, 164 artillery pieces, 3270 motor vehicles, 649 horse-drawn vehicles, and 13 motorcycles were destroyed.

The big fight started Aug 16 in the Le Bourg St Leonard sector, which the 90th had taken the day before. Co A, 359th, holding Le Bourg, was hit by a vastly



superior force of German infantry which drove the company partly from the town. It later developed that 1100 remaining Nazis of the proud SS Panzer Division Das Reich were beginning the enemy's desperate efforts to keep open their escape route.



Co A regained its ground by 1513. A platoon of tanks of the 712th arrived to reinforce the garrison. At 1700 German tanks and infantry lashed out again.

### "WILD BILL" WHOOPS IT UP

This see-saw continued until the next day when Gen. Weaver arrived. He was everywhere, rallying the men and the tanks and living up to his nickname of "Wild Bill." The town was secured at 2300, Aug 17, after having changed hands twice completely and having been partially lost twice.

The 2nd Bn, 359th, relieved the 1st in the town after midnight and sat tight all day Aug 18 while our artillery ground up the Germans trying to slip through the Falaise gap.

Meanwhile, Aug 17, the 90th had passed to control of V Corps of the First U S Army. V Corps planned

to take a line northeast from Argentan to the high ground northeast of Chambois while the British closed in from Falaise.

The 358th Inf was brought up to attack through the Forêt de Gouffern to the west of the 359th, heading for Chambois. The 357th was in reserve.

This attack began Aug 18 with the 2nd Bn, 359th, driving for Chambois and the 359th's 1st and 3rd Bns heading for Fougy to block roads west of Chambois.

The 1st and 2nd Bns of the 358th pierced the Forêt de Gouffern to seize Ste Eugenie and Bon Menil on the north edge of the woods. The 3rd Bn of the 358th, supported by the 3rd Bn of the 357th, moved to the east of Chambois toward the high ground, northeast of the town.

Dense smoke from burning trees set afire either by the enemy or our own white phosphorous shells complicated the attack through the forêt.





After a sharp skirmish at the edge of the forest the 1st Bn got underway again at 1500, Aug 18, accompanied by two platoons of the 712th's tanks. There was little opposition until the column reached a point three quarters of the way through the forest. Here anti-tank guns opened fire and knocked out the leading tank, halting the entire column.

The enemy laid down an artillery concentration at this point, and the remaining tanks were ordered to back out of the deadly fire. The 1st Bn withdrew with the tanks, and until the next morning the Krauts held possession of this small part of the forest.

On Aug 19 Ste Eugenie was taken over by the 2nd Bn after the 1st Bn swung over to Bon Menil. There, early on Aug 20, "The Balcony of Death" was completed.

The 2nd Bn, 357th Inf, patrolled the woods to the west and made contact with the 80th Inf Div in the vicinity of Argentan.

There was a sharp tussle at the southern edge of Chambois Aug 19, but the 2nd Bn, 359th wrested control before midnight, nabbing 1000 prisoners. Chambois' ruin was indescribable, the result



of our constant artillery pounding.

The night was full of suspense, with our occupying force outnumbered by the 1000 prisoners, frequent outbursts of small arms fire, and two

German tanks careening wildly through the town chased by our bazooka men. One tank was destroyed by a bazooka fired at a range of 15 feet by S/Sgt John J. Czekovsky of Westfield, Mass. The other tank escaped.



## "BALCONY OF DEATH"

During Aug 20, the 90th sat on a "Balcony of Death" extending from Bon Menil through Chambois, pouring death into the Germans running the murderous gauntlet. The frantic enemy was initiated by the guns of the 358th at Ste Eugenie-Bon Menil, pummeled by the 359th at Chambois, mauled by the 3rd Bn of the 358th northeast of the town.

The Tough 'Ombres first made contact with another of their Allies, the Poles, when Co L, 359th Inf, which had reached a position west of Chambois and was



blocking the road from Trun, was passed through by reconnaissance elements of a Polish armored brigade. This brigade had been cut off by the Germans, and for several days was supplied by the 90th and by the air forces.

If the infantry is Queen of Battle, then artillery is King. And Chambois, which afforded perfect observation, was a dish fit for any king. Our artillery chewed up and swallowed the three-mile valley. Frequently, during the afternoon of Aug 20, firing ceased to permit wholesale surrender of Germans.

First Lt. William R. Matthews of Lawton, Okla, one of the air liaison pilots for the 344th F A Bn, was credited with starting a new motto for the division artillery. When he had spotted one target and fire was a trifle slow in coming, Matthews howled into his radio microphone, "Quit computin' and start shootin!"

The 344th's story was duplicated by the division's other artillery battalions—343rd, 345th, and 915th. Five battalions of corps artillery also added to the cacophony of death, as did the temporarily attached 773rd TD Bn, towed guns of the 607th TD Bn, and tanks of the 712th. (Like the 712th, the 607th is considered a blood-brother of the 90th through long association.) Another relative is the 537th AA Bn, which has enjoyed a comparatively quiet time with the division owing to the Luftwaffe's reticence.

On Aug 21 after an unsuccessful attempt by the Luftwaffe to drop supplies, the operation simmered down to a mop-up. On that day and the following, the 90th enjoyed a rest in the ruins. The following day it was relieved by a British division.

### GALLANT JOB DONE BY MEDICS

THE story of Chambois wouldn't be complete without mention of the gallant job done by the 315th Med Bn—not only in caring for our own wounded but for record-breaking numbers of enemy wounded as well. On Aug 21 alone, the battalion evacuated 698 injured German "Supermen."

Behind the lines other division units — 90th MP Platoon, 90th Sig Co, 790th Ord Co, and 90th QM Co—all played their parts well.

The success at Chambois, coupled with the striking Le Mans campaign, won for Gen. McLain the command of a corps. He was succeeded as commander of the 90th by Brig. Gen. J. A. Van Fleet of Bartow, Fla, on Oct 17, who was promoted to Maj. Gen. in December 1944.

After Chambois, the division rested near Nonant le Pin until Aug 26 when it passed to control of XX Corps and began a long drive eastward, arriving outside Reims Aug 30. It occupied the Reims bridgehead



until Sept 6 when it thrust east to participate in the siege of Metz.

Here, preparing to advance on Metz, the 90th found that it had caught up with its own history. In World War I the division had fought through St Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne and at war's end was furthestmost of the Allied forces—at the gates of Metz.

*Now, in late October 1944, the Tough 'Ombres, confident, battle-tested successors of the Texas-Oklahoma, found themselves at these same gates. But this time they weren't stopping. This time Metz was not to be the finish line. Metz would be the starting post for the 90th's race to Berlin.*



# The Team - Autographs

