

**History of the
Yankee Division
26th Infantry Division
in
WWII**

The Prelude to Combat

The German General looked on stiffly as his men marched along the road that led to the Prisoner of War Cage. Once these men had fought in Russia and in France. Once they had been nicknamed the “Ghost Division” because of their manner of appearing unexpectedly anywhere along the western front. Once they had earned the respect of men of war everywhere. Now on 7 May, 1945, the tattered remnants--5,000 men of the 11th Panzer Division--were surrendering to the Yankee Division.

It was a strange and ironical coincidence. In its first engagement seven months ago, the 26th Infantry Division killed and captured soldiers of the 11th Panzer Division. Now almost 1,000 miles east of the battlefield in Lorraine, the same enemy division was surrendering en masse to its now victorious opponents.

“I am honored to surrender to a division famous throughout Germany,” said the commander, Lieutenant General Edgar Freiherr Treusch Von Buttlar-Brandenfeld.

The “Division famous throughout Germany” in the Second World War has been a famous division for almost two centuries of American burgeoning and growth. The lineage of the YD extends back to the beginning of the American citizen soldier--the fighting colonial troops of the early Plymouth and Massachusetts colonies. The 102nd Field Artillery Battalion traces its origin to one of the oldest military organizations in America, the Gloucester Militia. Ancestors of the 101st Engineers unfurled the first American flag on Prospect Hill during the Revolutionary War. Battery A of the 101st Field Artillery was one of the original artillery units in the Army and won fame as “Battery Jones” during the Civil War in fighting through the Wilderness, Petersburg, Cold Harbor, and Richmond.

The oldest of the YD's three infantry regiments--the 104th, stems back to the Springfield Train Band in Hampshire County regiments, whose troops served through the French and Indian Wars. Their descendants took part in the siege of Boston in 1776 as “Minute Men”. Later, generations of these New Englanders took part in the War of 1812 and every Great American conflict since.

The 101st Infantry Regiment was originally designated the Massachusetts 9th Infantry and was first organized from a nucleus of Boston fighting Irishmen in 1861 during the Civil War. They played their pipes at Manassas, sounded the charge at Antietam and Chancellorsville, and sang “Garryowen in Glory” at Mechanicsville as, heavily outnumbered, they held off Stonewall Jackson’s men. During the Spanish American War, they again took to the field at Santiago.

Such was the background of part of the troops that made up the New England National Guards on the eve of the First World War. Most of these units were on the Mexican border, during the trouble with Mexico, in 1916. On August 13th, 1917, after the United States declared war on Germany, their ranks were augmented, and together they formed the 26th Infantry Division.

At a press conference held shortly after Major General Clarence Edwards arrived in Boston to assume command of the new Division, a reporter suggested that the division be officially nicknamed “Yankee Division” since so many of its men were New Englanders. And so, despite the fact that men from every state in the union soon joined, the name has stuck. Later, during the

Meuse-Argonne Campaign in September 1918, the official Division insignia was adopted - the blue YD on a yellow ochre diamond shaped field. These have been proud symbols ever since.

The 26th Division was the first complete American Division to be committed in France in 1918. Taking part in six major campaigns: Ile de France, Lorraine, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne, Champagne-Marne. The YD Division was cited thirteen times by France and three times by American Army Headquarters. This Division spearheaded at Chateau Thierry in St. Mihiel and fought the longest of all American Infantry Divisions--210 days. The 104th Infantry became the first military organization in American history to receive a declaration from a foreign government when it was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palms by the French on April 28, 1918, for bravery in the Battle of Apremont.

After the Armistice when President Wilson visited AEF headquarters in Chaumont, troops of the Yankee Division were chosen for his Guard of Honor, in recognition of their gallantry and outstanding combat record. Later, the President was the guest of the Division for dinner on Christmas Day.

After returning to the States, the Division reverted to National Guard status. On January 16, 1941, the Yankee Division was once more called into the service of the country on the occasion of the Second World War.

During training, inductees were received at the ratio of one for every member of the National Guard, and at various times over a period of more than three years, the Division was stationed at eight different camps: Camp Edwards, Massachusetts; Fort Dupont, Delaware; Camp AP Hill, Virginia; Fort George Meade, Maryland; Fort Jackson, South Carolina; Camp Gordon, Georgia, and Camp Campbell, Kentucky. It took part in three maneuvers: the VI Corps maneuvers during the summer of 1941 in the Fort Devens, Massachusetts area; the First Army Carolina maneuvers in the Fall of 1941; and the Second Army Tennessee maneuvers in the Winter of 1943.

Beginning in February, 1942, while the nation was transforming its citizens into large armies of soldiers, the Yankee Division sent out combat teams to patrol the Atlantic Coast from Maine to Florida against the threat of invasion. In addition, thousands of YD trained officers and men, transferred to other units, were sent to the fighting fronts. When the Division was trimmed to the size of a triangular Division, the 181st Infantry Regiment was released to the American Division. These ex-YDs were among the first troops to relieve the marines at Guadalcanal. A battalion of the 101st Combat Engineers landed on New Guinea, fought over the Owen Stanley Mountains, and later received a mass citation from General MacArthur. The 101st Medical Detachment served in New Caledonia. Another detachment, popularly known as the "Little YD," was among the first Rangers that stormed the beaches of Normandy.

When the Division was streamlined to its present strength of three regiments, a new regiment joined the 101st and 104th Regiments. In March, 1943, the 328th Infantry Regiment was activated at Jack Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Although the youngest of the regiments, the 328th already had a tradition of which to be proud. Originally a part of the 82nd Infantry Division, it had fought

in the fateful Argonne Forest during World War I. Sgt. Alvin York, a doughboy of the 328th Infantry of that day, added a colorful picture page to the history of the American Army by his almost legendary exploits. During the period of peace, before joining the Yankee Division, the 328th Infantry served as the Florida Guard Reserve.

In August, 1943, Major General Willard S. Paul assumed command of the Yankee Division from Major General Roger W. Eckfeldt at Camp Gordon, and within a year the Division was on its way overseas.

The Yankee Division left Camp Shanks on August 26th, landed at Cherbourg and Utah Beach on September 7th. Arriving with the first convoy to land in France directly from the United States, the Division moved to the Valognes Staging Area and established a Headquarters at Bourg De Lestre. The various units set up in the nearby towns and fields and initiated intensive training. During those first weeks in France, the troops maintained their hard fighting edge with daily hikes and bayonet practice and further perfected their combat skills. Classes in mine removal, first aid, and radio were conducted.

Six days after landing, the Division was given its first combat missions.

Weeks before, American aircraft, tanks, artillery, and infantry had joined to deal a crushing blow to the Wehrmacht. Operation Cobra, as it was called, punched a gaping hole in the German lines between Saint Lo and Periers: Armored columns then plunged deep into Western France past Granville, Avranches, St. Malo, Rennes, down to the river Loire. While the main force slashed to the east through Laval, Le Mans, Chartres, Paris, on to the historic battlegrounds of the last war, another armored spearhead spurted westward down the full length of the Brest Peninsula. Now the infantry had taken over from the armor, and a climactic battle was taking place to wipe out the German garrison in the city of Brest and its surrounding fortifications. On 13 September, 1944, the 26th Reconnaissance Troop was ordered by III Corps Headquarters to establish patrols along the coast from Carteret to Sieuville on the lookout for any possible nuisance raids from bypassed German forces on the Isle of Jersey in the English Channel. No action with the enemy occurred. On 29 September, the Troop was relieved by the 94th Reconnaissance Troop and rejoined the Division.

On 20 September, the 101st Engineer Combat Battalion was ordered to remove extensive minefields from Carteret. The engineers remained at Carteret until the middle of October and cleared approximately 7,000 mines.

As the American Armies advanced farther and farther across France toward the German border, supply became one of the most difficult problems the high command had to face. To meet this developing crisis, a series of "Red Ball" express highways were established, reaching from the beaches of Normandy and the quays of Cherbourg to the fighting fronts hundreds of miles away. Over these main roads, truck convoys were roaring day and night bringing up vital rations, ammunition, and fuel. During September, 3,000 men of the 26th Division were taken to form

nineteen provisional truck companies for the “Red Ball” run. When the Division was alerted for combat, they rejoined to resume their former duties. For the role of strategic reserve, the Division was awarded the first battle star of this war---Campaign of Northern France.

The Lorraine Campaign

During the first week in October, the 26th Infantry Division was ordered from Normandy to the Third Army front in Lorraine.

The 26th Division went into the line on the right flank of XII Corps, Third Army, and Twelfth Army Group, relieving the 4th Armored Division, which had spearheaded General Patton’s drive across France. There, in the hills and forests of Lorraine between Nancy and the German border, the Division took up the fight just east of the Toulon sector where it had fought in 1918.

The front extended about 13 miles south from the high ground near the town of Salonnnes, south of Vic Sur Seille, east to a point south of Moyenvic, through Moncourt and the Moncourt Woods, to the Canal du Rhine au Marne.

The relief of the 4th Armored Division was begun on the night of 7 October, when the 104th Infantry Regiment moved up its 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The 101st Infantry followed. By 8 October, five battalions were committed. On 12 October, the command of the sector passed to the 26th Infantry Division.

Initially the Division did not go into combat as a complete unit. The 328th Infantry attached to the 80th Infantry Division had relieved a regiment of the 80th Division at Pont-a-Mousson on 5 October. It was at Pont-a-Mousson in 1918 that the 328th went to the relief of a regiment of Marines and joined in an attack on Nancy, then held by the Germans.

On 15 October, the 328th Regiment rejoined the 26th Division and moved to the Division sector in XII Corps the following day. The 1st Battalion of the 101st Infantry arrived at the front on 16 October after completing a mission in the Communication Zone. The 101st Engineer Combat Battalion entered combat on October 22nd. On October 23rd, the 26th Division Artillery began the relief of the 4th Armored Division Artillery. Battery B, 102nd Field Artillery Battalion fired the first shell at 13 minutes past noon on 23 October. The same day, the 114th Medical Battalion joined in the action.

During the month of October, 1944, when the 26th Infantry Division underwent its baptism of fire, the western front had become stabilized. North in Holland, British, Canadian, and American troops were striving to widen and make secure the 50-mile deep salient that had been sliced in toward the landing grounds of the 1st Airborne Army near Nijmegen and Amheim. Others were grinding north to Antwerp. Farther south, Aachen had been taken after a long and bitter struggle. Here was the first major foothold on German soil. On the right, the line ran south through the Vosges Mountains to the Swiss border. The Third Army front extended approximately 75 miles

from the French-Luxembourg-German border to a region southeast of Nancy. The northern flank was held by the 90th Division, north of German-held Thionville, ready to push across the Moselle River into Germany, just thirteen miles away. In the Mazieres-les-Metz sector north of Metz stood the 95th Division. South of Metz, the 5th the Division was preparing to swing south of Metz and join with the 95th east of the city. The immediate objective was Louvigny. In the area of Pont-a-Mousson was the 80th Division. To the south on its right, the 35th Division and forming the right flank of the Third Army, the 26th Division.

Execution of the plan to envelop Metz, breach the Siegfried Line at its most formidable point, seize Saarbrucken, and slash deep into the vitals of Germany could not be accomplished immediately. Millions of gallons of gasoline, millions of rounds of ammunition of all kinds had to be accumulated in the Army dumps in the rear before the great attack could be unleashed. In the meantime, troops were holding, preparing, and jockeying for position. Wherever the enemy held dominating ground, it had to be wrested from him. Enemy air activity during this period of defensive operation was limited to small number of sorties for strafing or reconnaissance purposes. On 15 October, two ME-109's strafed the command posts of the 101st and 104th Regiments. Both enemy planes were destroyed by the 390th AAA Battalion.

Thus, while holding a defensive sector under fire, the 26th Infantry Division launched its first attack, with the limited objective of strengthening the front line. Enemy positions at the Moncourt Woods, a hill to the northwest, and the town of Bezange la Petite were to be attacked and seized by the 104th Infantry.

Opposing the 26th Infantry Division were troops tough enough to give any "green" division an acid test--the 11th Panzer Division. Although this Division had been hammered all the way across France and now numbered 4,000 men, it still fought with spirit. In a short space of time, it was rejuvenated by some 12,000 reserve troops and 30 big guns and tanks.

In preparation for the drive through Moncourt and Bezange, the doughboys of the 104th were given an opportunity to observe air support in action. On 21 October, American planes flew over German positions in Moncourt and over the woods. The men saw the planes dive to the attack, bombing and strafing.

On October 22, the men of the 104th attacked. Companies A, B, and F crossed the line of departure. The terrain designated as the objective had been occupied by the Germans long enough for it to be strongly fortified, and stiff opposition was encountered from 14 pillboxes hidden in the woods and along the edge of the town. Mines and booby traps had been placed profusely. The Germans had dug in shelters, some of which were 12 feet deep. Bezange la Petite was seized and the 104th held the high ground before it. The Germans withdrew to the high terrain behind it. Three weeks later, when a general attack was launched by the Division, the Moncourt Woods were cleared completely, and Moncourt and Bezange la Petite taken by the 328th Infantry.

On November 1, 1944, the Allied Armies still continued to maintain defensive positions, with limited attacks along the front. Early in November, however, regroupings and plans pointed to a continuation of the advance toward Germany and the Siegfried Line. General Patton, issuing instructions to his commanders, spoke to the officers of the 26th Infantry Division in an open field in the vicinity of Hoeville, France, on 3 November, 1944. The Army Commander spoke of the coming offense and ordered all units to be in state of readiness to strike fiercely at the German positions, penetrate the German lines, and continue the attack.

The Division made final preparations. The 761st Tank Battalion, the 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 602nd Tank Destroyer Battalion were in positions to advance with the infantry elements. Division Artillery and supporting Corps Artillery units were ready to lay a preparation on the German positions. The 4th Armored Division was poised to exploit, with a rapid advance, any breakthrough by the infantry.

D-day in the Third Army Offensive was November 8, 1944. On this day, doughboys of the Yankee Division participated in their first large-scale attack.

For more than a week there had been constant rainfall, and many of the German positions were flooded. American aircraft had raked a gap in the dam at Dieuze, releasing thousands of gallons of water into the Seille River to further inundate the enemy defenses. These flooded areas, plus the heavily mined Foret De Bride et de Koecking, led the enemy to anticipate an American advance toward Dieuze, an important communications center.

At 0500 hours on November 4th, 1944, 26th Division Artillery and XII Corps Artillery began the one-hour barrage that subsequent reports showed destroyed all wire communication between enemy command posts and forward elements. At 0600, the infantry began the advance, not to the east toward Dieuze, but northeast, toward the towns of Moyenvic and Vic Sur Seille. The 104th Infantry Regiment was on the left, the 101st Infantry Regiment in the center, and the 328th Infantry Regiment on the right. The 26th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop screened and maintained contact on the left flank of the Division, and the 2nd Cavalry Group performed the same mission on the south.

On the first day, the 104th Infantry and the 101st Infantry moved across the fields and up the high ground overlooking Chateau Salins. Both Vic Sur Seille and Moyenvic were taken in the first hour and a quarter. The bridge at Moyenvic was captured intact. On the right, the 328th Infantry moved into Bezange la Petite, then drew back at night to cross the bridge, turning its sector over to the 2nd Cavalry Group.

After taking Chateau Salins on the 10th, the 104th Infantry veered and drove east toward Chateau Voue and Rodalbe, north of the Foret de Bride et de Koecking. Blocking the way on the main road was the town of Morville, strongly held by the Germans. On November 9, a task force (TF 'A') consisting of infantry, tank destroyers, tanks, and engineers, driving northeast from Moyenvic, cleared Morville after a sharp clash. On 10 November, high ground behind Hampont

was seized further northeast. With the right screened for the 104th, the Regiment pushed eastward, taking in its stride two violent counter-attacks on November 11 and November 13 at Obreck and Chateau Voue, about three miles east of Hampont. The Regiment cleared the Houbange Woods, Obreck and the ground east of Hampont, and thrust deep into German lines north of the Foret der Bide et de Koecking. On November 13, Companies I, K, and L of the 3d Battalion outposted Rodalbe just two and a half miles west of the Division's objective at Benestroff, a town on one of the main railroads to Metz. Here, a numerically superior German force counter-attacked savagely on the night of the 13th. After fighting violently for some hours, the 3rd Battalion withdrew and reorganized its position slightly to the west. The Regiment then waited for the other units of the Division to come up and cover its flank.

To the 328th Regiment fell the task of mopping up the Foret de Bride et de Koecking, a bristling wedge in the path of the Division's advance. On November 11, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions led off in a dawn attack through the woods. At first, they moved quickly, but as they approached Berrance Farm, they were held up by a stubborn enemy battling from pillbox emplacements, employing a heavy concentration of artillery. For four days, the 328th Infantry blasted the pillboxes, cleared mines, struggled up against machine guns. As the battle neared its climax, the 761st Tank Battalion, attached to the Division, entered the fight. By November 15, the Regiment had reached its objective at Wuisse. Meanwhile, the 101st, after seizing Moyenvic on the first day of the offensive, fought stubbornly to clear the ridges to the east. The fighting for Hill 310, in particular, was so violent that the men who took part in it have named it "Purple Heart Hill". Nowhere along the front was there more bitter fighting than that faced by the 1st Battalion as it advanced toward St. Medard, and by the 2nd Battalion as it advanced toward and fought through to Harracourt, two towns south of the Foret de Bride et de Koecking. On 15 November, after an intensive shelling, the Regiment took Marsal and Harracourt and assembled in the Foret de Bride et de Koecking to establish a defense along the Lindequin-Dieuze Road.

In driving for the towns immediately east of the Foret de Bride et de Koecking to cut off railroad arteries that fed Metz, the Division ran up against a strong defensive position. The 3rd Battalion of the 101st, in an attempt to encircle a muddy little town called Guebling, ran into enemy strong fronts along a railroad embankment. The Germans, to get grazing fire, had removed the ties and dug in their machine guns.

Taking advantage of the streams winding through the terrain, the enemy had set up gun positions in culverts and fortified a large stone quarry at the edge of the Bois de Marimont. It was not until these woods had been cleared by the 104th that the 2nd Battalion of the 101st could assault the high ground and capture the quarry. The 104th, advancing on the left flank of the division, took Benestroff 10 November, seized Montclichier 21 November, an enemy stronghold on high terrain from which the Germans had poured down artillery fire on everything passing in the south. The high ground around Albestroff was seized and the town captured after heavy fighting on 24 November.

Meanwhile, the right flank of the 26th Division and of the Third Army had been screened only by the 2nd Cavalry Group. The crossroads town of Dieuze, south of the Foret de Bride et de Koecking, represented, at least potentially, a lateral threat. On November 20, the Division in its forward momentum had already bypassed Dieuze, and the position of the Germans became untenable. On November 20, after a blistering two-day artillery barrage, elements of the 328th Infantry entered Dieuze and found that the Germans had already withdrawn. The right flank of the Division, resting in a valley which the daily rains and the breached dams of the reservoir above Dieuze had turned into an impassable lake, was now secure.

The Germans, combining their panzer and infantry units, machine festung troops, and elements of the 43rd and 117th, 51st and 815th, and super-heavy machine gun battalions were using every expedient to block the Division's advance. They felled trees for road blocks. They set extensive mines and booby traps. At Guinzeling, anti-aircraft gunners were captured who had been employed as ground artillery men. Large areas were flooded. In addition to all these obstacles, the roads which had stood up so well at the beginning of the offensive now threatened to break down on a large scale. At Guinzeling, due to the unsafe condition of the main bridge and the flooded roads, the 328th Infantry was in danger of being cut off for 12 hours. Replacement of the unsafe bridge avoided this catastrophe. The 101st Engineer Combat Battalion and the 166th Engineer Battalion constructed this and other bridges of various types across the floods, under the pounding of heavy artillery fire from as far as 15 miles.

The enemy, without adequate troops to attempt a decisive counter-attack, was entangling the YD forces in continuous local actions to slow down the impetus of the drive and make the Division pay in men, material, and equipment for its gains. Driven from commanding ground around Montdidier, the enemy fell back, fighting a series of delaying actions to the Saar Canal. The 101st and 104th Regiments advanced abreast. They were assigned the mission of seizing outposts along the canal. The Germans had organized a defense line from Vibersbourg on the north to Altwiller on the south. The base of these defenses was Honskirch, a town nestling in the hills and teeming with German armor. The Division cracked the defenses in a series of moves. On November 25, the 101st Infantry struck out to the right, out-flanking the defenses and seizing portions of the Foret de Bonnefontaine. It established outposts along the Canal from Chateau, south of Honskirch. The 328th Infantry, driving to the north, captured Vittersbourg, the northern gateway to Honskirch. The 101st occupied Altwiller, supply base for Honskirch and lying directly to the southeast. By this time the Germans, finding their position at Honskirch untenable, withdrew the bulk of their forces, and the 101st with Company Q spearheading, entered the town, fighting an action with rear guards only.

With the Honskirch-Altwiller line overrun, the Germans, on November 28, began a general evacuation of their forces east of the canal and fell back to a line extending from Halving on the north through Schopperten directly west of Saar Union on the bank of the Saar River. The enemy was now defending to the south and west, as the Third and Seventh Armies wheeled to face him.

The 26th Division continued the advance to Saar Union—a milestone on the road to the Saar Basins. At noon on 29 November, the 101st Infantry occupied Bissert, a half mile to the south of Schopperten. The Regiment then moved due east by motor, crossing the Saar River without opposition, and moved under the cover of a ridge into Wolfskirchen, five miles directly south of Saar Union. From here, it was prepared to advance north and launch an attack directly on Saar Union itself.

Fierce fighting ensued to capture Saar Union. On December 1, the attack was launched from the south, spearheaded by the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 101st Infantry, with elements of the 4th Armored Division. The attack began at 0800. Fifty-one minutes later, Companies B and C had reached their first phase line. By 1014, Company I had patrols in Saarwerden, and Company K had moved toward the woods southeast of Saarwerden.

The enemy was well-entrenched on the high ground east of Saar Union. From here, he delivered effective blows with small arms and artillery and by 1400, the attack of the 101st Infantry had been slowed down. That afternoon the infantry fought stubbornly to advance, while fighter planes strafed the main supply roads leading north from Saar Union to Oermingen. By 1635, Company I had reached the outskirts of Saar Union, but Company K, which had been moved up in support, was held up by heavy fire in the woods 500 yards southeast of the town and withdrew to consolidate its position. When darkness set in, Company K was reorganized and consolidated with Company L into a single company. Plans were formed for the resumption of the attack on the following day.

Company A, 101st Engineer Combat Battalion, meanwhile, constructed a bridge in Saarwerden, swept adjacent roads of mines, and neutralized various enemy booby traps. Potatomasher grenades with trip wires were found, as well as German artillery shells with firing devices attached, which were buried in the road beds.

In the attack, the 101st Infantry had attached to it Company A, 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion; Company A, 114th Medical Battalion; the 101st Field Artillery Battalion; and was supported by Company A, 101st Engineer Combat Battalion.

On 2 December at 0900, the attack was resumed. The 104th Infantry which, during the previous day had crossed the Saar Canal from the west, along the routes used by the 101st Infantry previously, had moved up to the left flank of the 101st, and now both regiments struck out abreast.

Fifteen minutes after the jump off, Company I, 101st Infantry was in Saar Union. By 1035 Companies I and L were engaged in heavy street fighting. The Germans had based their defense north and east of the town, and they were launching constant attacks of infantry supported by tanks, usually in groups of six.

The 1st Battalion, trying to advance on schedule through the woods east of Saar Union, was meeting ferocious resistance. By noon, the 761st Tank Battalion had moved elements to support the 1st Battalion in the struggle. Company C had been held up by heavy fire in the woods. Companies A and B bypassed the position on the right. The Germans were surrounded. Company E, therefore, received orders to move and attack the wood from the east, along with a task force from Combat Command B. As a result, by 1630, Company C was able to resume its advance through the woods. When darkness set in, the company consolidated its position.

During the afternoon, the 3rd Battalion of the 104th Infantry had joined the 3rd Battalion of the 101st fighting in Saar Union. The town was cleared only after very bitter fighting. Artillery hammered the town and then the infantry moved in, fighting for almost every doorway and cellar.

As darkness fell on this second day of fighting, the Division had gained all of its objectives. The 1st Battalion of the 101st Infantry was astride the high ground on the Saar Union-Domfessel Road, threatening enemy positions to the east of the town. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 104th had secured Saarwerden and Rimsdorf, respectively, to the south.

Germans moved into town, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting ensued, plus tanks, artillery, and sniper fire. At 1310, tanks in support to the infantry were instructed to move against the enemy armor on the eastern edge of the town. Reports were received that the division artillery fire was very effective in reducing the attack.

At 1600, one tank company from the 37th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division was sent into Saar union to assist in cleaning up whatever enemy armor was still there. After two hours of violent fighting, the brunt of the counter-attack was broken, and thereafter enemy resistance was sporadic. By 2215 in the evening, all fighting ceased. After 62 hours of battle, Saar Union was in friendly hands.

The fight for Saar Union was costly. During the enemy counter-attack, the Command Post of Company I had been captured, and five anti-tank guns and four prime movers destroyed.

With Saar Union cleared and the 3rd Battalion of the 104th Infantry remaining behind to mop up, the attack to the north was continued. The 101st Infantry on the right flank sent the 1st Battalion north through the woods and then northwest to block enemy forces on the road north, leading out of Saar Union.

Meanwhile, the 328th Infantry, which during the fight for Saar Union had remained in reserve west of the town, now entered the drive on the left flank of the Division, advancing north to seize Schopperten and Le Hanau Woods. On 5 December, the 3rd Battalion cleared the Vienwald Woods, which the Germans had strongly held onto the Division left flank. The 2nd Battalion entered Keskastel, meeting little resistance, and Co E continued north to Saarlbe.

The 26th Division, now having advanced to the extremity of Lorraine, entered a new phase of operations. After fighting through forests, across numerous streams, and stubbornly contested towns, the Division now encountered a series of Maginot Line fortifications that stood in the way of the advance.

These forts in the Division zone consisted of a wedge-shaped belt of concrete pillboxes linked to four towns. The French had constructed pillboxes in an ingenious pattern, placing them in positions suitable to the peculiarities of the terrain, protecting one another by interlacing fields of fire.

From 6 December to 9 December, Division units regrouped into positions for the assault, occupying strategic ground in the face of enemy artillery and direct fire from the pillboxes. Kalhausen, the point of the wedge, was seized, along with the high ground southwest of Etting on the right. The 104th Infantry mopped up the southern half of Le Grand Bois, which lay between Kalhausen and Wittring.

Then on 9 December at 1000, while corps and division artillery laid down a barrage and the 405th and 362nd Fighter Bomber Groups bombed and strafed the forts and the roads and towns, the YD Infantry launched the attack on Achen and the other Maginot forts. The 12th Armored Division, having relieved the 4th Armored Division on the right flank, also attacked. Elements of the 104th Infantry Seized Achen. The Germans resisted savagely in Le Grand Bois and Le Haut Poirier and between Wittring and Achen, but the Division's objectives were reached.

Driving through Achen, the 1st Battalion of the 104th Infantry, against hostile artillery and automatic weapons, seized Fort Achen and other Maginot fortifications in its zone. The 328th Infantry cleared Le Grand Bois and destroyed fort Wittring. On 9 December, the 102nd Field Artillery Battalion, supporting the 104th Infantry, fired the first mission of the 26th Division Artillery into Germany.

As the Yankee Division cracked through the Maginot Line this second day in December, allied troops all along the front were meeting grim opposition. Between 50 and 55 German divisions, most of which were under strength, supported by 15 or 20 divisions in reserve, were putting up fanatical resistance. The maximum penetration into Germany was not over 25 miles. The First Army was struggling through the Hurtgen Forest immediately beyond Aachen, The Ninth Army was battling bitterly for Julich and Duren, key points on the Roer River. The fighting along the Roer River was, in the words of a high officer, "the Meuse, the Marne, and the Somme all rolled into one." To the south of the Third Army, troops of the Seventh Army had taken Strasbourg in a dash to the Rhine, but the Germans had so far been able to prevent a crossing of the river.

Metz had fallen (November 17), and troops all along the Third Army front were pushing to the edge of the Saar Basin. The 90th Division, pressing through the Siegfried Line beyond its bridgehead and Konigsmacher, had broken into bomb-wracked Saarlautern at the German border and had seized Dillingen, two miles to the north where the Germans were fiercely counter-

attacking. The Sixth Armored Division had wiped out an enemy salient three miles deep and two miles wide southeast of Saarbrücken. On the north flank of the 35th Division, elements had crossed into Germany at Saareguemines, pushed on to the town of Neunkirsch, which was less than one half mile from the Saar Basin. And when the 26th Division broke through the Maginot Line defenses, both the 26th and 35th Divisions were ready to make a concerted drive on the Saar Basin from the south.

On 9 December, the Yankee Division's mission in Lorraine was coming to an end. After two months of bitter combat, the weary YD Infantry had earned a respite from the fight. On 9 December, news reached the foxhole soldiers of an impending relief, and that night the 87th Division began moving into the area of the 26th. The 101st Regiment was the first unit to be relieved (10 December), departing immediately from the XII Corps sector, proceeding to Metz. On 11 December, the 104th Infantry followed. With the relief of the 101st and 104th Regiments by the 87th (Golden Acorn) Infantry Division, the only Yankee Division doughboys remaining in battle were those of the 328th Infantry. The 346th Infantry of the 87th Infantry Division was now on the right of the 328th Infantry, and on the left was the 320th Infantry of the 35th Division. Perhaps because of the sacred soil of the Fatherland only a few miles away was being seriously threatened, the Germans began a counter-attack on the afternoon of 9 December in the zone of the 328th Infantry's 2nd Battalion. This repulsed, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions began to advance again the following morning. Again, enemy armor delivered heavy fire on our troops. The attacking battalions were forced into a slight withdrawal because of the massed enemy tanks in the Bliesbrücken Woods. XIX Tactical Air command was called upon for air support, and in the afternoon, a squadron of fighter bombers bombed and strafed the enemy concentrations in the woods. Direct hits were scored on three tanks; others were damaged. The 602nd and 610th Tank Destroyer Battalions were both engaging any armor that came under observation. Approximately ten tanks were eliminated by Tank Destroyer operations in the Bliesbrücken Woods action.

On the night on 11 December, the 328th Infantry established defensive positions in the vicinity of Obergailbach, alerted for any further thrusts by enemy armor. During the night, 11 infantrymen patrolling from Company I became the first YD doughboys to invade German soil.

On December 12, the three infantry battalions attacked toward the German border, the 3rd Battalion plus Tank Destroyers to engage enemy tanks in the vicinity of Obergailbach. By 1530 in the afternoon, meeting stubborn resistance, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, Company A leading, had advanced into the Obergailbach Woods, 600 meters inside the German border. Companies E and F secured objectives on German soil, and the 3rd Battalion, Company I, leading, captured Hill 360, a strategic terrain feature in the Corps sector.

Thus, on December 12, ended the first campaign of the 26th Division, beginning on November 8 just east of Nancy, continuing for 66 days of hard combat through the province of Lorraine, ending on the 67th day inside fortress Germany. In figures, which can never measure the suffering and hardship of the fighting infantrymen, the division advanced approximately 45

miles against stubborn German resistance, wrested from the enemy 132 French towns, over an area of 450 square miles. During this period, the Division captured 2,573 prisoners and inflicted an estimated 2,307 casualties.

Speaking to the 26th Division, in a letter of commendation to General Paul, the Commanding General, XII Corps, Major General Manton S. Eddy, said, “When I tell you that some of the bitterest fighting of our entire front during the last three weeks has taken place in your own zone, I do not tell you something that you and the 26th Infantry Division do not know.

Some of you may not know, however, that your skill and gallantry in your first major engagement have won the respect and admiration of the whole XII Corps—even, I feel sure, of the German troops facing you.

Some of Germany’s finest fighting troops are on your front, including the tough and tested 11th Panzer Division. I can give you no higher compliment to your division than to assure you that, if these battle-ried German troops expected to deal easily with a new and unried American Division, they have received one of the great surprises of their careers. The remarkable speed with which your fighting troops have acquired the spirit of veterans deserves commendation second only to the high courage and constant aggressiveness with which you have battled across Lorraine.”

Metz

On December 10, 1944, the 101st Infantry Regiment arrived by motor convoy in the French citadel of Metz, which had fallen in November to the 5th and 95th Infantry Divisions. It was planned to send all of the Division, except the 101st Infantry Regiment, into immediate rest. The 101st had been given a mission to perform before going into reserve.

By December 10, 1944, all forts that had formed a ring of defenses around Metz had surrendered, with the exception of one—Fort Jeanne D’Arc. This fort was still holding out, and it was the mission of the 101st Infantry Regiment to take over from the 345th Infantry Regiment, of the 87th Infantry Division, the job of conducting the siege until the fort surrendered.

The Regimental Command Post was established in the Schlier Kaserne, which had been the barracks of the German Officers’ Candidate School before the capture of the city. Under cover of darkness on 11 December, 1944, the 2nd Battalion took over the siege from the elements of the 345th Infantry. Troops from Company L of the 3rd Battalion relieved men of the 345th Infantry, guarding Fort Driant, and took over the occupation of Fort Dame. The rest of the 3rd Battalion assumed command of Fort Plapperville and Fort Quentin, other forts of the chain.

Prior to the relief of the 87th Infantry Division by the 26th Infantry Division, eight enemy patrols had attempted to escape from Fort Jeanne D’Arc and to reach German lines. It was decided on

December 11, 1944, to send the 1st Battalion of the 101st Infantry to reinforce the 2nd Battalion, to take over the southern sector while the 2nd Battalion regrouped and occupied the northern sector.

Resistance from the fort was sporadic. Orders had been given to the 101st Infantry not to attempt to attack the fort other than by fire, and the fort in its turn answered with a periodic activity of burp guns, automatic weapons, and the exchange of signals with German elements somewhere in the vicinity.

On December 13, 1944, at nine o'clock in the morning, Major Gramm, commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, gave the first report to headquarters that the fort was on the verge of surrender. He reported that a German officer had left the fort with a white flag and had come over to Company A, expressing a desire to discuss terms for capitulation. Major Gramm was instructed to tell the German officer that he return from the fort with the Commandant, that the party would be met by a similar American party at a road junction southwest of the fort, and here, discussion would commence.

At 0915, an order was given to the 101st Infantry to cease fire, and a party was organized. The party consisted of Brigadier General Hartness, Assistant Commander of the Division, the Commanding Officer of the 101st Infantry Regiment, the Regimental Operations Officer with a Regimental Stenographer, the Commanding Officers of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, an IPW team, a Corps Signal team, a mine-sweeping detail, and an anti-tank detachment.

The parties met at the prescribed spot at 1100 hours in the morning. It was agreed that the Americans return with the Germans to CP inside the fort to complete negotiation. The terms of surrender were delivered to the Fort Commander, Major Hans Voss, who accepted after a short discussion with his officers.

During the surrender negotiations, the remainder of the division, now under command of III Corps, had arrived at Metz for a period of rest, recreation, and training. For the first time in several months, the men were living under approximate garrison conditions. Passes were given daily to visit places of interest in the city. The men had showers, ate well, and saw movies regularly. A training program was instituted to iron out the errors most commonly noted during the Lorraine Campaign. A battalion was organized under the supervision of Brigadier General Hartness with a cadre of veteran officers and enlisted personnel to train the 2,585 replacements that were coming into the division.

The schedule, an intensive one, included practice in basic subjects, small arms, bazooka and mortar fire, scouting and patrolling, combat in cities, personal and field sanitation with emphasis on the avoidance of trench foot. The program was interrupted by an unexpected turn of events. Many of the replacements were destined to perform their duty in combat before they had a full opportunity to take advantage of the training.

On Sunday, December 17, 1944, the 26th Infantry Division, assembled for the first time in many weeks, gathered to hold religious exercises in the historic church of Metz. Mass was celebrated in the world-famous Gothic Cathedral, and all the regiments and other units held memorial services for the men who had given their lives in the drive from the Moncourt Woods to the German border.

On this day, the Commanding General of the Division, the Assistant Division Commander, and the Chief of Staff were guests at a luncheon given in the division's honor by the mayor of Metz. The mayor, speaking on behalf of the citizens of Metz, expressed his extreme gratitude of the Yankee Division's part in the liberation of the city.

The prospect of a division rest period in the City of Metz was anticipated with some pleasure by the men who had just finished 67 days of cold, muddy battlefields. The morning of 18 December, however, began a series of events which shocked the entire world, and shortly, terminated the rest period at Metz.

The Battle of the Bulge

In the early dawn of 16 December, a German counter-attack in strength lunged westward out of the Slegfried Line, spearheaded by top-notch armored columns, covered by hundreds of new and hitherto hidden aircraft. Not since Avranches had the enemy endeavored to mount a counter offensive of the proportion of that which now rolled across the frozen hills of Luxembourg and Belgium. Von Runstedt's offensive in the Ardennes hit the American First Army in a thinly held sector, extending roughly from the Belgium town of Malmedy, south to Echternach, Luxembourg. In three days, enemy spearheads, overrunning American lines, had penetrated into the area between Bastogne and Houffalize. Some elements swept further west to bypass Marche and reach the Meuse River. By 19 December, the "shoulders" of the Bulge were becoming more stabilized, and enemy thrusts were being contained without further loss in the Stavelot-Malmedy area on the north shoulder and in the Echternack area on the south. The 101st Airborne Division, with portions of the 9th and 10th Armored Divisions, were making their historic stand at Bastogne against constant enemy pressure which had surrounded the town. This was briefly the situation into which General Patton's Third Army was soon to play a leading and spectacular role, and in which the 26th Division was to meet its heaviest engagements with the enemy

As plans hurriedly formulated in Supreme Headquarters, the part Third Army would play in reducing the German penetration in the First Army sector became known. General Patton's offensive along the German border approaching the Siegfried Line was to be suspended, the present line held with a minimum of troops, and the main effort of the Third Army to be directed in a smashing blow against Von Runstedt's south flank. The units most immediately available to the Army Commander were III Corps Headquarters in Metz, the 4th Armored Division, and the 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions, none of which were, at this time, actively engaged.

On 19 December, III Corps was ordered to employ these divisions in launching an attack on 22 December against the enemy's south flank. On 20 December, III Corps moved its headquarters from Metz to Arlon, Belgium, and the 4th Armored Division and the 26th Infantry Division began assembling in the area in preparation for the attack. With road priority directed to the armor, elements of the 4th Armored Division became the first Third Army combat units to arrive on the new scene of battle, but only a few hours behind, elements of the 26th Infantry Division closed in the concentration area.

Although the 25th Division had followed closely the developments of the Ardennes offensive, the order directing the entire division to move to Luxembourg was received with a suddenness, which allowed only ten hours until elements must begin movement to the north. Orders were received by the Division Chief of Staff on the night of 19 December to start moving the following morning.

By midnight on 20 December, the entire division had moved from Metz, France to assembly areas in the vicinity of Eischen, Luxembourg. On 21 December, the 4th Armored Division had completely assembled in its area near Arlon, and the 80th Infantry Division had assembled NE of Luxembourg City. III Corps then directed these 3 divisions to attack at 0600 on the 22nd. The 4th Armored Division was to advance up the Arlon-Bastogne Highway with the 26th Division in the center of the Corps zone and the 80th Division on the right.

At no time prior to the attack was the Division able to secure any substantial amount of information concerning the location of the enemy or other details related to the situation. The infantrymen who remained concealed in the Luxembourg forests during the day and night of 21 December, making last minute preparations, were, of necessity, to begin the attack the following morning in which they must seek out and find the enemy. They were to move north aggressively, engage the flank of the German salient pushing west. Ahead, in their path, stretched the hills, woods, streams, cold and frozen ground, covered now with a raw mist, shortly to be covered by snow. And somewhere, the enemy.

At 0600 on the morning of 22 December, with the countryside still wrapped in a chilling mist, the 26th Division began the attack with two regiments abreast, the 328th Infantry on the left, the 104th Infantry on the right. In columns of battalions on foot because the possible point of meeting the enemy was unknown, the infantrymen of the two attacking regiments walked approximately 16 miles before contacting the German columns moving west.

First contact with the enemy on 22 December was met by the 26th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, which had been sent out in advance of the infantry to screen and probe across the division front. The 1st Platoon of the troop had advanced north to Ell and then to Rambrouch without sighting the enemy. Just outside of Rambrouch, the platoon, now approximately 16 miles north of Arlon and Eischen, went into concealment along the side of the road. From this position the cavalrymen, firing from their armored cars, were able to ambush two enemy vehicles carrying personnel and one motorcycle bearing a German colonel.

Soon enemy infantry began to arrive in larger numbers, followed by tanks and anti-tank guns. The reconnaissance platoon, heavily outnumbered, fought a stubborn delaying action and withdrew to the town of Rambrouch, in which they resisted for two hours the savage attacks of the enemy. Other elements of the troop had contacted the enemy at Rodt-Les-Ell.

The 328th Infantry struck the flank of the enemy when the 1st Battalion encountered self-propelled guns on a hill in the vicinity of Rindschleiden. The Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon of the 104th Infantry found enemy in the vicinity of Grosbous. During the afternoon of 22 December, the enemy became aware of the threat that was pushing into his left flank. In the zone of the 4th Armored Division, Combat Command A advanced up the Arlon-Bastogne Highway as far as Martelange. On the right of the Corps zone, the 80th Division encountered stiff resistance from the 352nd Volksgrenadier Division at Merzig and Ettelbruck. Later in the day, the enemy sufficiently recovered from the surprise of this flank attack to launch a counter-attack south of Grosbous, forcing our troops to withdraw one mile.

On the second day of the attack, terrain became an increasing obstacle to operations. In the area north of Grosbous, toward Eschdorf and the Sure River, the ground was broken into a series of deep gorges and high, wooded ridges. During the day, in which the enemy resisted vigorously, the 104th Infantry captured Grosbous and pushed on to Dellen and Buschrodt. Company K, 328th Infantry, occupied Grosbous and pushed on to Dellen and Buschrodt. Company K, 328th Infantry, occupied Wahl on the morning of the 23rd, and the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment became part of a combat team known as Task Force Hamilton. Task Force Hamilton was organized to fill the need for a quick, powerful, mobile armor-infantry team, consisting of the 328th Infantry's second Battalion motorized, Company C (less one platoon) 735th Tank Battalion, one Platoon Company A, 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, one Section Battery C, 390th AAA Battalion, one Section Company A, 101st Engineer Combat Battalion.

Late in the day on December 23rd, the 2nd Battalion, 101st Infantry, was taken from reserve with the mission of securing Rambrouch on the Division left flank which had been in German hands since the withdrawal of the 26th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop on December 22, 1944. This was accomplished on the following day, with Rambrouch and Koetschette both wrested from the enemy.

During the second day of the Third Army attack, the 101st Airborne Division and other units at Bastogne were supplied by our aircraft with much needed medical supplies and equipment. The 4th Armored Division continued to fight up the highway towards Bastogne, Combat Command B reaching Chaumont and Combat Command A still held up on the main road by a blown bridge in Martelange. The German defense against this flank attack was conducted with increasing ferocity, with paratroopers landing within the American lines and small groups of enemy infiltrating by use of captured United States uniforms and vehicles. Having seized the offensive, the enemy sought desperately to continue on the offensive. The Third Army attack and the heroic resistance of Bastogne constituted a thorn in the side of the German effort that threatened to

cause the failure of the whole campaign in which Von Runstedt had hoped to sweep the Allied Armies from the continent.

Through the 24th and 25th of December, the progress of the III Corp Divisions was retarded by the recurrent counter-attacks and stubborn resistance of the enemy. The 6th Cavalry Group (Task Force Fickett) arrived in the Corps zone and was assigned a zone between the 4th Armored Division and the 26th Infantry Division. In the 26th Infantry Division zone, the 1st Battalion of the 328th Infantry fought bitterly to capture Arsdorf, with B and C Companies fighting from house to house to overcome Germans fighting with primitive fury. The battle in Arsdorf continued all night and on Christmas morning, the 2nd Battalion of the 101st Infantry joined and succeeded in clearing the town.

Task Force Hamilton, meanwhile, was assigned the mission of seizing the heavily defended town of Eschdorf, which dominated the approaches to the Sure River. Advancing up the road to Eschdorf, Companies E and F of the 328th Infantry encountered strong enemy resistance at the tiny village of Hierheck. The enemy pinned our infantry down with intense rifle and automatic weapons fire. Tanks of the 735th Tank Battalion entered the battle, endeavoring to engage the enemy while the infantry infiltrated forward. The bloody fighting on the road to Eschdorf continued, and the battle for the town itself did not begin until 0100 on Christmas morning. In the struggle which began on Christmas Day, Eschdorf was to become one of the most bitterly contested points in the campaign, and the town to be reduced to little more than smoldering rubble. For two days and nights, Eschdorf was shattered and blasted by the battle. E and F Companies of the 328th Infantry stumbled through the burning village, under artillery and mortar fire, killing the enemy where they found him, losing contact with their own troops and commanders. By Christmas night, most of Task Force Hamilton was forced from Eschdorf by the violent German attacks, but the Task Force re-entered the town on the following morning to recapture it with the 1st Battalion of the 104th Infantry.

With the strategic villages of Arsdorf and Eschdorf cleared of the enemy, all units of the Division were facing the Sure River, winding through its deep channel in the hills and the lofty snow-covered ridges beyond. The 80th Division, on the right of the 26th Division, having now passed to the control of XII Corps, was still held up by the enemy, leaving the 104th Infantry facing an exposed flank. All during Christmas Day, the 4th Armored continued thrusting at the enemy's frantic defenses to block the road to Bastogne. Finally, on 26 December, the 4th Armored made contact with the defenders of Bastogne and medical supplies, ammunition, and food began to move into the besieged Americans.

The attack was resumed by the 26th Division on the morning of December 26, with the 101st Infantry and the 104th Infantry prepared to cross the Sure River. The enemy was very active on the opposite bank, and the efforts of the infantry and the 101st Engineers to secure crossing sites were met by heavy small arms and mortar fire, particularly in the vicinity of Bonnal and Esch Sur la Sure. By the end of the day, using assault boats and foot bridges initially, the greater part

of the 101st Infantry and the 104th Infantry had crossed the Sure. Enemy aircraft were active over the bridging sites, and the 390th AAA Battalion destroyed 15 enemy planes and damaged three.

On the morning of December 27, the 35th Infantry Division, having arrived from Metz on the 26th, attacked through the 6th Cavalry Division Squadron and seized objectives north and west of the Sure River on the left of the 26th Division. In the bridgehead of the 101st Infantry the advance was continued, capturing Mecher-Dunkrodt, Kaundorf, and the high ground vicinity, Bavigne.

Two bridges were now established across the Sure, a Treadway at Esch Sur la Sure, and a Bailey Bridge at Bonnal. The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 104th Infantry had crossed the river at Esch Sur la Sure and seized the high ground east of Kaundorf, assisting the 101st Infantry in clearing Kaundorf.

Through 28 and 29 December, the enemy utilized the high ground to fight a delaying action in the area between the Sure and Wiltz Rivers. The 4th Armored Division strengthened and widened the corridor into Bastogne; the 35th Division made slight gains. In the zone of the 26th Division, small gains were made by the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 101st Infantry and Nothum was cleared by the 104th Infantry against considerable resistance. The advance infantry elements were now approaching the key communication and supply center of Wiltz. The enemy indicated a stubborn reluctance to surrender the Wiltz area, which was vital to carrying on the offensive, which he still hoped to resume.

During the next two days, there were numerous indications that the enemy was preparing a counter-blow to arrest the advance along the III Corps front. On the morning of 30 December, the 35th Division reported a small counter-attack in the vicinity of Lutrebois, which, during the day, developed into a major offensive with at least one regiment of infantry reinforced with tanks. Bitter fighting continued all day, costly to both sides, but with no substantial change in front lines.

In the 26th Division zone, the brunt of the attack fell full upon the 3rd Battalion, 101st Infantry. Company A, 101st Engineers was alerted to go into battle, as infantry, to support the 3rd Battalion, and the 2nd Battalion sent G Company around to the left of the 3rd Battalion to relieve the pressure. Company A, 735th Tank Battalion was unable to assist because of the icy roads. The Division Commander then ordered the 3rd Battalion of the 328th Regiment to position in depth behind the 3rd Battalion, 101st Infantry. After containing the counter-attack, the Division reorganized and established defensive positions during the night December 31 - January 1.

During the first week of January, 1945, infantrymen of the Yankee Division engaged in a series of attacks towards the Wiltz River, with little success in breaking up the deadlock that now characterized the entire Corps front. III Corps was endeavoring to reduce the German pocket in the general area Tarchamps, Bras, Doncols, Berle, but every effort of the 35th and 26th Infantry Divisions secured little or no advantage. The 6th Armored Division was meeting heavy resistance in the vicinity of Wardin and Margaret. It was during this period that our troops experienced an

attack by the new rocket artillery known as the Nebelwerfer. This weapon delivered on our troops a barrage of 30 to 40 rockets, simultaneously detonating, with a powerful concussion. Many YD infantrymen will long remember the cold night of January 3-4, when Germans sent large concentrations of this Nebelwerfer fire into the Division zone. Further discomfort was contributed by the near zero and sub-zero temperatures, the snow-covered frozen ground, and waist high snow drifts.

In the period 1-4 January, a succession of bitter attacks and counter-attacks took place approximately one kilometer north of the village of Nothum at a crossroads called Mon Schuman, at which point the main road from Bastogne to Wiltz was threatened. On 2 January, the 101st Infantry, with 3rd Battalion, 328th Infantry attached, jumped off in an attack to secure Mon Schumann and Hill 490 beyond. The 2nd Battalion and C Company of the 1st Battalion were halted early in the attack by heavy enemy fire from enemy tanks and automatic weapons. The 3rd Battalion, 328th Infantry was employed to strengthen the attack, but stalemate was never eliminated. Although our troops reached Hill 490 several times, counter-thrusts by the enemy forced our withdrawal. Other elements of the Division, endeavoring to push forward, were forced back to original positions.

During the period 5-8 January, elements in the division maintained defensive positions and regrouped in preparation for continuation of the attack on Corps order. The 90th Infantry Division was assembling in the Corps zone, prepared to attack on the left of the 26th Division, making the Corps main effort to eliminate the enemy pocket. Task Force Scott was formed on 7 January, consisting of the 101st Infantry, 101st Field Artillery Battalion, Battery A, 390th AAA Battalion, 26th Reconnaissance Troop (less 3rd Platoon), one platoon Company A, 101st Engineer Combat Battalion, Company A (less one Platoon), 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion, two Platoons 735th Tank Battalion, Company A, 114th Medical Battalion. The 2nd Battalion, 101st Infantry remained on the left flank of the Division zone, and the remainder of Task Force Scott moved by motor to the vicinity of Baschleiden to relieve elements of the 35th Infantry Division on line around Harlange. Through this area, the 90th Infantry Division was to launch its attack, with the main body of the 26th Infantry Division on its right and Task Force Scott on its left.

At 1000 on 9 January, the attack jumped off along the Corps front with only minor gains in the 26th Division zone due to the well-defended enemy positions. Task Force Scott attacked with the 1st and 3rd Battalions abreast, but the German 5th Parachute Division resisted fiercely. The 3rd Battalion was able to reach the high ground east of Tarchamps, in conjunction with Task Force Fickett (6th Cavalry Group). While Task Force Fickett was battling to collapse enemy resistance in the base of the pocket, the 90th Infantry Division had captured Berle and was advancing on Doncols. The 6th Armored Division had gained 1200 yards to the southeast.

The attack was continued on 10 and 11 of January, with the 90th Infantry Division seizing Doncols and Sonlez after these towns were pounded by air and artillery. On 12 January, 1945, as a result of being hammered by the coordinated attack from all sides, the enemy's defenses began to crumble. The 6th Armored Division had captured Wardin and advanced to a few hundred yards

west of Bras, pinching off the pocket between it and the 90th Infantry Division. Task Force Scott mopped up the enemy in the area around Harlange and then, with its mission completed, reverted to normal functions in the Division zone. The 101st Infantry Regiment moved by motor into assembly area vicinity Hierheck on 12 January, 1945, for reorganization and rehabilitation. The 104th Infantry and the 328th Infantry Regiments continued to maintain defensive positions overlooking Wiltz and Winseler, patrolling along the Wiltz River.

During the week 13-20 January, 1945, the situation in the 26th Infantry Division zone remained stable with periodic relieves of front-line battalions. Some limited attacks were made to eliminate enemy forces south of the Wiltz River, and patrol activity was constant. In the remainder of the III Corps sector, the 90th Infantry Division and the 6th Armored Division continued to make small gains, which still were resisted vigorously by the enemy. By 20 January, 1945, however, the overall picture of Von Runstedt's offensive showed the "Bulge" to be no longer such. First Army Troops had pushed down from the north and joined Third Army forces in a squeeze that completely destroyed the German penetration, enabling both armies to wheel to the east and drive enemy back into the Siegfried Line.

In this final stage of the campaign, the mission of the 26th Infantry Division was to cross the Wiltz River, secure Wiltz, and continue to drive the enemy eastward. In preparation for the attack, the 101st Infantry relieved elements of the 328th Infantry in the right portion of the zone. During the night of 20 January, 1945, the 3rd Battalion, 328th Infantry crossed the Wiltz River and secured the bridgehead, while engineers constructed a bridge northwest of Grumelscheid.

On 21 January, 1945, at 0800 hours, the Corps attack jumped off. In the 26th Infantry Division zone, two regiments attacked abreast, the 328th Infantry on the left and the 101st Infantry on the right. The 2nd Battalion led the infantry advance across the river, followed by the 3rd Battalion. The 2nd Battalion cleared Bruhl and Noertrange, organizing the high ground vicinity Noertrange. The 1st Battalion crossed the Wiltz River, entered Wiltz from then north and northwest, clearing that portion of the city north of the river by nightfall. In the attack of the 328th Infantry, the 2nd Battalion secured Grumelscheid, while the 1st Battalion advanced rapidly to the high ground vicinity Brachtenbach. The regiment thus gained approximately seven kilometers over steep, snow-covered hills and roads that were blocked and mined. The 101st Infantry also reported encountering numerous booby traps and mines in its attack on Wiltz.

The Division continued the attack to the east towards the Clerf River on 22 January, 1945, with the 3rd Battalion, 101st Infantry capturing Eschweiler, in conjunction with the 6th Cavalry Group. By the following day, with little resistance, the enemy was cleared from the Division zone up to the Clerf River.

On 24 January, 1945, the 101st Infantry launched the attack to cross the Clerf River. Considerable enemy fire was received by the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 328th Infantry as they attempted to find crossing sites along the Clerf River. The 1st Battalion cleared Urspelt by 1200 hours on the 25th of January, 1945. The first elements of the Division to reach the east bank of

the Clerf River were from the 3rd Battalion, 101st Infantry. The 1st Battalion, 101st Infantry, attacking with elements of the 6th Cavalry Group succeeded in clearing Clervaux.

By 25 January, 1945, the “Battle of the Bulge” was rapidly drawing to a close, with enemy withdrawing his forces to the east bank of the Our River into Germany and the Siegfried line. Throughout the Ardennes Campaign, various enemy units were encountered, including the 5th Paratroop Division, the 276th, 9th, 340th, and 167th Volksgrenadier Divisions, and the 1st SS Panzer Division.

On 25 January, 1945, III Corps was notified that the 26th Infantry Division was to pass to command of XX Corps in France.

The 17th Airborne Division was directed to effect the relief of the 26th Infantry Division, and elements of that division began to arrive on 26 January, 1945. The 104th Infantry Regiment, which had remained in successive reserve areas from 19 January, 1945, departed from the vicinity of Niederwiltz, Luxembourg on 27 January, 1945 and moved by motor to XX Corps area, 95th Infantry Division Zone.

During the afternoon and night of 27 January, 1945, the relief of the 328th Infantry Regiment and the 101st Infantry Regiment was executed by elements of the 17th Airborne Division and the 6th Armored Division. On 28 January, 1945, the main body of the Division began movement to the vicinity of Boulay, France.

Thus, the Ardennes Campaign closed for the Yankee Division 36 days from the cold morning in December, when the fighting infantry had headed north to do battle with fanatic German forces, who had delivered defeat and cruel death to many in their path. The 26th Infantry Division played a leading part in the campaign, engaging in more costly, bloody, violent battles that had yet been met in fighting with Germans. Places like Eschdorf and the woods at Mon Schuman will always be remembered with a grim sadness by those who know how dearly we paid to wrest our victory from the enemy.

On 20 January, 1945, General Patton wrote a letter of commendation to all officers and men of the III Corps. “The speed with which the III Corps assembled, and the energy, skill, and persistency with which it pressed its attack for the relief of Bastogne,” he declared, “constitute a very noteworthy feat of arms.”

And to the letter of commendation, General Paul added these words for the men of the 26th Infantry Division: “When you initially attacked for seven days and nights without halting for rest, you met and defeated more than twice your own number. Your advance required the enemy to turn fresh divisions against you, and you, in turn, hacked them to pieces as you ruthlessly cut your way deep into the flank of the ‘Bulge’. Your feats of daring and endurance in the sub-freezing weather and snow-clad mountains and gorges of Luxembourg are legion, your contribution to the relief of Bastogne was immeasurable. It was particularly fitting that the

elimination of the ‘Bulge’ should find the Yankee Division seizing and holding firmly on the same line held by our own forces prior to the breakthrough.

I am proud of this feat by you as well as those you performed earlier. We shall advance on Berlin together.”

From the Saar to the Rhine

When the 26th Division moved from the bloody battlefields of the Ardennes at the end of January, 1945, the Division faced an immediate return to the front lines farther south in the Third Army sector. During the bitter fighting of January and December in the Ardennes, the Third Army’s main effort diverted to the north. The remainder of General Patton’s divisions facing east into Germany were engaged in a holding operation. It was to this mission that the YD returned, in the sector of XX Corps.

XX Corps had now become the right flank Corps of the Third Army and, once again, the 26th Division became the extreme right flank unit of the Army. XX Corps sector consisted principally of an aggressive defense of the west bank of the Saar River. Within the Corps sector, however, was one bridgehead, east of the Saar at Saarlautern. Here the 26th Division was ordered to relieve the 95th Infantry Division, facing for the first time the German Siegfried Line defenses.

From 29 January to 6 March, in carrying out this mission, the 26th Infantry Division maintained an aggressive defense in the Saarlautern Area and in the bridgehead area on the east bank of the river. The 104th Infantry, being the first regiment of the division to arrive from the Ardennes campaign in the XX Corps sector, was first to take control of the bridgehead. The relief of the elements of the 95th Infantry Division was conducted on 28 and 29 January. During the subsequent weeks in which the Division commanded this sector, the three regiments alternately occupied the defensive positions in the bridgehead and along the Saar River.

The type of fighting encountered in Fraulautern and Saarlouis-Roden was new to many Yankee Division Infantrymen. In parts of these two villages, enemy troops frequently occupied houses or blocks of buildings directly across the street from elements of the 26th Division. During the hours of darkness, any noise or movement would draw immediate fire from enemy automatic weapons and mortars. Numerous limited objective attacks were launched, in which the progress of the Division was measured in pillboxes and houses. Elements of the German 347th and 719th Infantry Divisions likewise launched numerous counter-attacks in order to force the withdrawal of our troops or to regain blocks of buildings which had changed hands.

During the operations in the Saarlautern bridgehead, the 26th Division utilized searchlights for the first time under battle conditions. By penetrating the over-hanging mist on dark nights by this artificial moonlight, infantry weapon crews were assisted in the adjustment of their fire.

By 21 February, Third United States Army instructed XX Corps to begin a phase of operations in which, later, the 26th Division resumed the offensive. The 94th Infantry Division, which had been on the left flank of the 26th Infantry Division, was ordered to attack in conjunction with the 10th Armored Division into the Saar-Moselle triangle. This attack progressed favorably with Saarburg being captured on the first day, and the attack was continued on subsequent days to effect the reduction of the German garrison which was believed to be defending Trier in considerable strength. By the end of the month, the 10th Armored Division had driven its columns to within three miles of Trier. Trier was captured on 1 March. On 5 March, relief of the 26th Infantry Division by the 65th Infantry Division was initiated in order to allow the 26th Division to assemble for an attack from the bridgehead across the Saar River, now held by the 94th Infantry Division.

By 8 March, all elements of the 26th Infantry Division had completely assembled in areas in the vicinity of Saarburg. By at his time, the 4th Armored Division was well advanced in its drive to the Rhine River. The 10th Armored Division had continued its advances beyond Trier, and now the Army Commander directed an attack southeast from the Saarburg bridgehead, which began on 13 March. This attack from the Saarburg area to the southeast generally paralleled the Saar River on the right and caused the 26th Infantry Division to be attacking laterally through the Siegfried Line. Thus, during the entirety of this operation, the combat echelons encountered not only unfavorable terrain, but intense fire from pillboxes, mortars, artillery, and Nebelwerfers. On the first day of this difficult operation, the 2nd Battalion, 104th Infantry gained two miles and repulsed six strong enemy counter-attacks which violently endeavored to halt our advances through the Siegfried fortifications. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 328th Infantry attacked and succeeded in making some gains and destroying some of the concrete fortifications in their zone.

Enemy resistance continued to be strong and effective throughout the first five days of the offensive, but on 17 March, the important town of Merzig fell to the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 328th Infantry. The 26th Division attack now swerved to the east, as further south along the Saar River, the 65th Infantry Division was beginning to break out of the Saarlautern bridgehead.

On 18 and 19 March, the progress of the advance accelerated as the 104th Infantry Regiment and the 101st Infantry Regiment, meeting scattered enemy resistance, advanced rapidly and captured numerous towns, with the 2nd Battalion 104th Infantry reaching Ottweiler on the Bleis River. During the rapid advances in the period 17 to 19 March, the 328th Infantry organized defenses and blocked the exposed south flank of the Division.

During the period 13 to 21 March, the 26th Division made rapid advances from the bank of the Saar River to the banks of the Rhine River. Communication and supply lines in the Division were maintained only by the utmost efforts of the personnel concerned in order to maintain progress of the drive. It was continually necessary to shuttle troops on the limited amount of vehicular transportation available. On 21 March, the advance was continued against very slight resistance with elements pushing beyond Landstuhl toward Kaiserslautern. During this time, contact had been established with the 6th Armored Division of the Seventh United States Army,

and other Seventh and Third Army units had linked up, enclosing numerous pockets of trapped Germans on the west bank of the Rhine River. Thousands of PW's flowed through the Division PW cage in this phase of operations. Hundreds of German units were represented, including the 2nd Mountain Division, 17th SS Grenadier Division, and the 19th, 256th, and 212th Volksgrenadier Divisions.

All Third Army divisions were now poised on the west bank of the Rhine River, alerted to launch an attack to force the crossing of the river.

The Race Across Germany

On March 23, 1945, the 26th Infantry Division passed to the command of XII Corps as part of the regrouping taking place in Third Army, in preparation for the crossing of the Rhine. On the nights of 22 and 23 March, the 5th Infantry Division made an assault crossing of the Rhine and secured a bridgehead, which was rapidly expanded. Elements of the 90th Infantry Division and the 4th Armored Division followed immediately into the bridgehead, and on 24 March, the 104th Infantry Regiment crossed the Rhine at Oppenheim and was attached temporarily to the 4th Armored Division in the bridgehead. The 104th Regiment gave infantry support to the 4th Armored Division on the flank, once again the Army flank. The 101st Infantry Regiment crossed the Rhine River on 25 March and assembled in an area east of Leeheim, prepared to attack on the following morning. The 328th Infantry Regiment crossed the Rhine River on 26 March and was immediately attached to the 4th Armored Division to replace the 104th Infantry Regiment, which had been detached. The 328th Infantry Regiment then advanced rapidly northeast with the 4th Armored Division meeting only light opposition and secured a bridgehead over the Main River. The 101st Infantry attacked to the northeast on 26 March, and on 27 March reached the Main River, and on 28 March secured a bridgehead across the Main River. In accomplishing this, the 10th Infantry reached Babenhausen five miles from the Main River on March 26, and on the following day relieved elements of the 4th Armored Division in Schweinheim on the east bank of the Main River. The 328th Infantry engaged in house-to-house fighting against persistent enemy resistance in the city of Hanau, which was finally reduced on 28 March.

One again east of the Rhine as in the battle for the Saar Palatinate, German opposition became fluid and disorganized. The 26th Division continued its rapid advance and, with the 4th and 11th Armored Divisions and the 90th Infantry Division, broke out of the Main River bridgeheads, reaching Fulda on 1 April where the 101st Infantry engaged in house-to-house fighting to clear the city. The 1st Battalion of the 101st Infantry reached Meiningen on 5 April and assaulted the town, meeting stubborn resistance.

Elements of the 11th Armored Division entered Meiningen from the south and southeast.

The enemy garrison defending the town surrendered on 5 April at 1830 hours, but mopping up continued through the night. The enemy was active in the Meiningen area through 6 and 11 April, with numerous enemy patrols engaging in skirmishes south of the town. On 8 April, the

Division again resumed the attack to the southeast, with gains of approximately five miles reported at the end of the day. Road blocks, blown bridges, and scattered fire fights with enemy infantry constituted the opposition to the Division attack.

From 10 to 15 April, the advance was continued, with the 101st Infantry and the 328th Infantry attacking abreast. The 104th Infantry, in Division reserve, was performing flank security and mopping up operations.

Sonneburg, Eisfeld, and numerous other places were captured as the Infantry advanced over unfavorable terrain with heavily wooded steep hills.

By 15 April, with three regiments abreast, the Division held objectives approximately 10 miles from the Czechoslovakian border, and further advance was halted by order from XII Corps. During this advance, elements of the 101st Infantry cut the important German autobahn linking Berlin with Munich and Nuremberg. This succeeded in reducing the possibility of the escape of important Nazis from northern Germany into the Bavarian-Austrian Redoubt area.

Having thus sliced through the heart of Germany, Third Army turned the main effort of its attack to the south and southeast, generally paralleling the Czechoslovakian border on the left, heading for the Danube River and Austrian border. During the month of April, enemy opposition to our advances continued to collapse. The main effort in the XII Corps attack toward the Austrian border was again led by the 11th and 4th Armored Divisions, followed by the Infantry of the 90th and 26th Divisions.

By the end of April, the 26th Division had captured numerous towns and villages, reaching the Danube River. On 30 April, elements of the 104th Infantry were five miles from the Austrian border, the 328th Infantry was fighting toward the city of Passau, and the 101st Infantry was protecting the Division south flank along the Danube River. In the first week of May, the advance of the Division was continued into Austria, and the 328th Infantry was attached to the 11th Armored Division to continue the drive towards Linz. Combat Command A of the 11th Armored Division with the 328th Infantry captured the important city of Linz on 4 May. As directed by XII Corps, the 26th Division advanced in a new direction on 6 May, moving northeast into Czechoslovakia, crossing the Vltava River and securing a strong defensive position north of the river.

At this point, further operations were halted by order of XII Corps. Positions were consolidated, and active patrolling carried on. On 10 May, 1945, patrols sent out from the 104th Infantry made contact with the 1st Battalion, 263rd Regiment, 86th Russian Infantry Division, X Corps, 46th Russian Army, at Ceske-Budejovice, Czechoslovakia.

On 7 May, 1945, a message had been received at Third Army Headquarters and relayed to 26th Infantry Division Headquarters from General Dwight D. Eisenhower, which terminated the

European war. It stated in part:

“A Representative of the German High Command signed the unconditional surrender of all German Land, Sea, and Air Forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Forces and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command at 0141 hours Central European Time, 7 May, under which all forces will cease active operations at 0001 hours 9 May. Effective immediately all offensive operations by Allied Expeditionary Forces will cease and troops will remain in present positions.”