TERRIFIC ARTILLERY BARRAGE SOFTENED RHINE

SMOKE AND DUST MAKE SCENE UNREAL

By HOLBROOK BRADLEY

Sunspapers War Correspondent

With U. S. 30th Infantry Division, March 24 (By Radio—Delayed)— All over the flat stretch of land running back of the high ground east of the Rhine was evidence of the terrific artillery bombardment our gunners had thrown into the area in preparation for our crossing.

Over the whole area hung a mixture of smoke and dust rising from dirt roads, for, although the recent dry weather has made the ground excellent for the operation of armor and other vehicles, at the same time it has turned the countryside of the battle area into a semblance of those dust-ridden Carolina maneuvers.

At a farmhouse captured only a few hours before, the task force "Hunt", named for its commander, Lieut. Col. Richard J. Hunt, of Bethesda, was in the process of forming up for a further push toward interior objectives within the Reich.

White Flags in Evidence

The force, composed of an infantry battalion commanded by Lieut. Col. James W. Cooper, of Greenville, S. C., a light tank battalion commanded by Colonel Hunt, and other elements, was to take off shortly to pursue the initial success in driving the Germans back and chopping up elements encountered in front of it.

Along the dust-laden road stretching toward the high ground a mile or so away, doughboys of the 120th Infantry already were mounting their tanks for a rapid operation.

There still were a few civilians, mostly women, children and old men, grouped in the doorway of the farmhouse, over which flew the white flag which all German families now throw out to meet the advancing Americans.

The afternoon was almost hot, for the spring weather of the last few weeks has dried up the ground, which in places is already baked hard.

Dogs Run Beside Tanks

Through the small towns in their path, groups of German civilians stood, apathetic to the show of American strength, but at the same time evidencing friendliness, and apparently wondering how the conquerors would treat them. A couple of German dogs ran excitedly beside the tanks for a few moments, then turned away, not quite sure of what was happening.

Some fifteen minutes later, as the lead tanks reached the first stretch of an uphill grade, the column stopped in its tracks. Up ahead we could hear the sounds of the rapid exchange of small-arms fire.

A hot March sun still blazed in the sky above as we sat and waited for the next move. Somehow, that moment, the war seemed far away, as cattle grazed quietly in fields on both sides of us, a few civilians wandered about the usual task of spring planting, and the only sounds of battle were distant ones.

They Sweat It Out

Then the scene changed. There was the quick, high-velocity shriek of an incoming shell and almost immediately an explosion a hundred yards to our right. Then came a series of rounds in rapid succession, slamming into the fields on both sides of the road.

An enemy battery evidently was near by. For we could hear the sound of a shell leaving the gun and then the almost instantaneous explosion.

Our forces had been held up for the better part of a half hour when the order came to move again, just as Thunderbolts went low, section a mile or so ahead to strafe and bomb Jerry positions. As the silver P-47's screamed down the valley and in a power dive, we were glad they bore the blue star, not the black swastika, and even from a distance the ground under us shook as the bombs exploded.

Guns Moved Recently

From evidence gathered from the later trend of the battle, it was apparent that guns had been moved in shortly before we arrived, for even as the first tanks were on their way up the hill, for there was none of the usual camouflage, no sign of prepared positions. In a ditch on one side lay the bloody body of a German gunner, felled as he attempted to man his gun.

At a T-shaped intersection 500 or 600 yards ahead a Heine half-tracked vehicle that had attempted to stop the push was burning fiercely. Even from a distance there was an acrid smell of burning bodies, and as we drew up to it we could see a driver and gunner still at it, a direct hit by one of our tanks.

In the semi-darkness, infantry already was deploying out right and left to cover the flanks and prepare to moving on through the woods or setting up a perimeter defense for the night.

Krauts Caught By Surprise

Suddenly there was the sharp chatter of a German "burp gun" down the road to the right. Although it may have been 50 yards away, it sounded near to us as the spray of lead sent twigs and branches flying overhead and we flattened to the ground. For a few minutes a fire fight blazed as the doughboys tangled with the Krauts.

Up at the main intersection, north of the left-hand road, Lieutenant Colonel Hunt and the tankers were attempting to break through the last strip of forest to open ground beyond. As we came up there was the sound of heavy guns going into action, then the sharp rattle of machine guns and small arms.

Things were getting stiffer, but it was evident the Krauts had been taken by surprise, for at the intersection were three mobile 150-mm. guns left behind by the enemy, who had retreated so fast he was unable to salvage these highly valuable pieces of equipment.

Arrogant Captain Captured

A few moments later, one of the more valuable prizes of war came down the road—two of our doughboys—a captain in command of a battalion of the 116th Panzer division. Apparently out on reconnaissance preparatory to moving his unit into a position against us, the Nazi was the arrogant type who would speak only after he saw the amount of supporting men and material we were employing.

A crowd of German prisoners was moving off down the road through the column of our tanks when the screaming, high-pitched whine of German rocket guns broke over the other sounds of battle. It sent us diving to the ground, with a big sigh of relief as the explosive tore through the skies to explode well behind us. Then the column began to move forward slowly again.

Near 7 o'clock a few more prisoners straggled in, this time a mixture of both the division against us, survivors of supporting men and sturm troops to arrogant Nazi armored corpsmen. They were a general cross-section of what we seem to be up against in this bridgehead across the Rhine.

Nazi Vehicle Explodes

Half an hour later, the tanks were ordered buttoned up for the night and the infantry commanders instructed company and platoon leaders to deploy men throughout the area for a perimeter defense against counterattacks. As we laid back through the still-blazing forest, there was a terrific explosion back at the corner, where a German tracked vehicle had been seen. As we turned to see a shower of sparks, metal, ammunition and pieces of Krauts showering through the air as the vehicle exploded.

By noon, the companies moving forward to drive the enemy from the woods had all reached their objectives and reported the enemy falling back to positions in the open ground beyond. As we left, the armor again was on the move up, and several more had reached the edge of the wooded area.

Seen about the area were:

CAPT. CHARLES H. BROWN, 311 East Thirty-first street.

LIEUT. JOHN V. RICKLE, 2920 Riggs Street.

TECH. 5/g EARL BROOKS, 3801½ Woodbine avenue.

LIEUT. COL. JOSEPH E. REYNOLDS, Hopkinsville, Ky.

MAJOR EZEKIEL CLAZIER, Palm Beach, Fla.

PFC. STEVEN CRONISE, Hagerstown.

LIEUT. GEORGE W. TERRY, Elmhurst, L. I.

LIEUT. RAY E. ELVAN, Clifton, N. J.

LIEUT. JOE SULTAN, Youngstown, Ohio.

Civilians At Magdeburg Nervy Lot

By JOHN MacCORMAC

N. Y. Times

WITH 30TH INFANTRY DIVISION—When this correspondent entered Magdeburg this afternoon the city had already been cleared of active resisters though prisoners were still being brought in and shells from the German artillery on the other side of the Elbe were coming in.

The Reichsbank, a square brown stucco building of modernistic architecture, was being guarded by men of the 117th Regiment and so was a warehouse stocked with German champagne. This was not only to protect champagne from the enemy, better say, the men from the champagne but the champagne from the Germans who have shown themselves ready looters of such property on occasion.

Of Magdeburg's 319,000 inhabitants 300,000 still remain. They have stayed through bombings and artillery fire which has destroyed one third of the city flat and seriously damaged at least another third.

CIVILIANS CALLOUS

It must be admitted that these German civilians have strong nerves. According to unconfirmed reports, 25,000 of the city's inhabitants are dead or missing since yesterday's 5½ hour bombing.

A German medical officer complained today that the American troops were not rescuing thousands whom he said were suffocating under piles of new rubble created by that attack. Yet Lt.-Col. Ben T. Simmons of Jackson, Tenn., commander of the Second Battalion of the 117th said that the citizens had to be shooed off the streets today while the fighting was in progress so curious were they to see it.

According to Lt.-Col. Robert E. Frankland of Jackson, Tenn., commander of the 120th, it had been a strange sort of fighting in which Hitler youth would rush at Americans from behind roadblocks, firing wildly until they were mowed down. —

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HOLIDAY ATMOSPHERE MARKS DASH OF INFANTRY THROUGH RHINELAND

By JAMES WELLARD

Times Staff Correspondent Copyright, 1945, by The Chicago Times, Inc.

With Ninth Army Across Rhine, March 26 (By Wireless). The field commander of this forward unit several miles east of the Rhine told his men today he believed there was scarcely anything left between the Ninth Army advance troops and Berlin.

All last night and again today the 30th American infantry division, which made the initial crossing of the river in this sector, has surged forward against resistance which has changed hourly from moderate to light.

More than 1,500 prisoners have been taken in 24 hours by this division.

Prisoners were still coming in while I was at this outpost—so fast there were not enough guards to watch them. One group of 200 was left to fend for itself until it could be transported toward the rear.

I wandered around among these Germans, who were the lowest type of Wehrmacht soldier I yet have seen.

Odds and ends from "ear and stomach" battalions, punishment companies consisting of men who previously had been withdrawn from the line for disciplinary action, replacements who have never fought before, engineers and stragglers make up these thrown-together battle units. Given rifles from the last war, they were told to "hold to the last."

SMOTHERED BY YANKS

These defense units have been smothered by fresh American troops and now we are through the crust of them and almost out into the clear.

A typical prisoner was a German who'd celebrated his 50th birthday yesterday. He had fought in the last war and was called back into service a year and a half ago. He had served in the west as a headquarters sergeant, and then two days ago was given a rifle from the last war and put in command of a squard.

When you see prisoners like this and listen to reports coming in from patrols, and ride across this east bank of the Rhine without seeing a German shell, the war begins to take on a fantastic and unreal aspect.

You have the impression you can step into a jeep, cross the Rhine, and drive all the way towards Berlin—and perhaps be welcomed with flowers and kisses.

Today I took part of this ride which hourly will become longer.

LIKE A CARNIVAL

You race down to the Rhine along a fine concrete road with a traffic spinning along at a 30 MPH clip.

As you near the river things take on a carnival atmosphere. Over the river fly little silver balloons once familiar around British ports. These are balloon barrages manned by the RAF.

You top the dike which runs along the west bank of the Rhine and look down onto a wide river.

Today it was sparkling in the sun and across it runs a heavy pontoon bridge beautifully firm and sinuous.

Under clouds of smoke you roll across at the end of a convoy with nothing to impede the advance—no shelling, no air bombardments. Overhead, glimpsed through rifts in billowing white smoke, fly our fighters.

Even infantrymen tramping towards the front along dust-hidden roads have a holiday aspect. They are carrying a few personal possessions like portable radios, little suitcases, and one had a string shopping bag over his back with an orange parachute and a book in it.

Civilians already are emerging and going about their daily routine. Women in farm clothes sort out belongings from the rubble of their homes.

War has passed over this area with a comparatively light hand. Even the Germans did not have time to complete their defenses.

At a farm house a few kilometers behind the front line I sat down with outposts to eat lunch with a group of American officers. They were tired but happys. The impression they gave me was their job was almost ended. They are clearing some woods and high ground ahead and then they said "the way was open to anywhere the armor wanted to go."

On a fine mahogany table we ate fresh potatoes, beet root hash and fresh oranges.

I learned from officers how successful the 30th division's operation had been. The Germans said they knew we were coming Friday, Saturday or Sunday. But they did not know where.

They did not expect the 30th division to cross where it did, in fact they did not know the 30th was in the vicinity.

Opposite the 30th was a part of the German 180th infantry division. It had been badly mauled in the first day.

The American bridgehead was miles deep in the first 16 hours.

EXPECT COUNTER STABS

So far the Yanks had not received one counter attack. They expect counter attacks tonight but only small and ineffectual ones.

We had overrun their guns because they had no infantry to protect them. Now the Germans were using flak batteries as ground infantry artillery.

I was unable to take a look at prisoners just brought in from fields and holes in the ground.

One tall, thin man with thick lenses had his spectacles stuck to the side of his face with tape.

The Italians and Belgians were thin, shivering, undernourished and broken in spirit. But one Russian, who was 20 years old, had been reduced to the lowest form of humility I have ever seen.

As I stood talking with these slaves, a German lieutenant in an immaculate uniform, stood by grinning arrogantly and 900 cold, decrepit soldiers waited like sheep for orders.

823rd TDs 1st Over Roer River

Stars and Stripes

WITH XIX CORPS—Men of the 823rd TD Bn., claiming to be the first tank destroyers across the Roer, reported comparatively light resistance the first day. But on the second, discovering the 30th Inf. Div. had moved too fast to clean out everything, the 823rd found 'em passed strongpoints, machine gun nests and roaming tanks.

The TDs knocked out a pillbox, two machine gun nests and two 20mm guns. Next day the battalion got a Tiger, two certain Mark IVs and one probable and an anti-tank gun.

Meanwhile, the 29th Inf. Div. attacking on the left flank, had pushed back a large number of enemy. They were retreating across the plain to the north when the 823rd thrust out from among the trees. Driving them into buildings, the TD's buried 125 rounds into the structures, demolishing them. Thus gaining entrance to the plain, the 823rd drove north.

30TH RUNS JERRY SEPARATION CENTER

By ERNIE LEISER

Stars and Stripes Staff Correspondent

PLAUEN, Germany, June 6—They were handing out discharges so quick and so slick at this German PW "separation center" that you felt like sneaking into line yourself.

No points were necessary. They didn't care whether you had one or umpteen battle stars, if you'd been overseas or if you had quintuplets. All they required was that you were a German. That you weren't a general or a member of the German Supreme Staff, that you weren't an SS-er, a bigwig in the Nazi Party, or a war criminal and that the CIC didn't find any other flies on you. If you passed those tests you were out like a Kraut.

In its first day's business today, the Plauen camp group processed prisoners, handed them their discharges from the Wehrmacht, and loaded them on trucks headed for a distribution point near their homes where they were to be turned loose.

Maj. Reynold Erickson, of Moline, Iowa, and the 120th Inf. Regt., who runs the place, says that when the whole thing is in casual observer's see are worked out, a thousand walking papers will be issued daily.

The discharge station is under the control of Lt. Errol Sharpe, of Durham, N. C., and the 120th, aided by Pfc Mortimer Satter, lawyer from New York City, who set up a filing system which speeds up the process, but who keeps the help on the ball and a general red tape eliminator. All the "helps" in the place are German soldiers.

The station is set up like a big American induction station. Batteries of clerks fill out a long series of papers.

The prisoners undergo a physical, given a German army doctors, and about as thorough as the familiar "He's warm, he's in" test of U. S. draft days. Then they're paid off—the equivalent of 16 bucks for EMs and more for officers—their papers are signed, stamped, and delivered, and they're ready to be sent home to till the land and make little Germans.

It's quick and painless, taking maybe a half day. In fact, it's so good that a 30th Div. Joe on guard here muttered a little bitterly: "Ya know, for the first time I wish I was in the German army. They lose the war, they get out. We win, we stay in."

'Pop' Gets To Go Home, Sooths Assault Nerves

Stars and Stripes

WITH NINTH U.S. ARMY.—Pop was going home.

Less than five hours before Easy Company 119th Inf. was scheduled to jump across the Rhine, battalion telephoned that Pop was leaving the next morning. That meant he wouldn't be in on the crossing. Pop was a relative newcomer to the company—hooked on to it in January—but he wasn't a newcomer to combat. He'd been overseas for 31 months, was on four D-Day operations: Africa, Sicily, Italy and Normandy. No one was begrudging him 30-day furlough to the States. He had earned it.

But, down in the cellar where the Third Platoon was holed up and waiting to take off, Pop was the riding Pop . . . said he was walking out on the company just when they needed him . . . called him a deserter.

Pop—his name is Pfc Delbert Tompkins, of Eureka, Cal.—isn't really old. Only 35. But, he has fallen heir to a fatherly way about him, so everybody just naturally called him Pop.

He just sat there and grinned as they kidded him.

"Hey, Pop," called S/Sgt. Chester Biggs, of Washington. "You're gonna miss all them German cigars on the other side of the Rhine."

Pop simply smiled.

Pvt. Maurice Swanson, of Sidney, Mont., asked. "How about seeing the girls in Los Angeles when you get home Pop?"

Someone else yelled across in the room, and S/Sgt. Garland Hall, of Hillside, N. J., Pop's squad leader, came in and said, "He's quitting me, that's what he's doing. I bet you're gonna get drunk every night when you get home."

Pop didn't answer.

Sgt. Jack Ward, of Pensacola, Fla., and one of the medics, passed around some aspirin, like you would candy . . . just two. And if it's going to even offer some, Pop." Ward said, "You haven't got the right to have a headache."

And then, someone asked Pop how he felt about going home. He looked up, and his face was serious.

"Hell, Doc, how would you feel?" Everybody was silent. Nobody moved. You could almost read the thoughts of every man in the cellar . . . "How would you feel about going home?"

They stopped riding Pop after that. A couple of them went outside to watch them artillery across the Rhine. Some curled up on the floor, trying to get some sleep. The rest just sat there . . . thinking.

Try This When Password Slips

Stars and Stripes

WITH THE 30th INF. Div.—What to do when you can't remember the password is a question that has upset many GI's. But the safest and most efficient seems to have been provided by Lt. Col. Ben Cooper, of Cobales, Colo., and Co. H, 119th Regt.

Gomez was seeking his outpost one night, but, realizing he had passed it, he turned around and headed back toward his own lines.

"Halt, who is there?" came the challenge of an alert sentry.

Gomez, who is still in process of learning the English language and who couldn't remember the night's password, was very much interested in not being shot. He thought fast and came up with the right answer. "Kamerad! Kamerad!" he shouted.

As he expected he was allowed to advance by the wary sentinel, was taken to the battalion CP, finally identified and sent back to his own unit.

SPEARHEAD TROOPS ON RHINE TENSE

By ERNEST LEISER

Stars and Stripes Staff Writer

WITH NINTH U.S. ARMY, Mar. 24—Easy Company, 119th infantry spilled out of the cellars and shadows and scuffled down the road in single file toward the Rhine. They were going to cross in the first wave of storm boats.

A dough up front said, "All I hope is that those guys on the other side know they're supposed to be losing."

As he spoke, 1,250 field and self-propelled artillery and mortars cut loose in a cyclone of sound. And nobody bothered to tell him more.

Over the shoulders of Capt. Warne Parker's men you could see the bursting of shells painting the smoke with fire, silhouetting the doughs in their life jackets.

Slowly, they moved up and reached the boats, 300 yards from the river. The engineers, who manned the small craft, were waiting.

Seven men to a storm boat, 15 to an assault boat. In a long row, they dragged the craft 300 yards that seemed like 3,000. When they rested, they could see the far bank pounded to powder.

At 0155 the boats in the first wave were in the water and ready. Five minutes to wait and they crouched, panting, sweating, tense.

H-Hour . . . and the crash of artillery along the opposite shore lifted, leaving a sudden silence.

At the tiller of our boat, Pvt. Chester Dabrowski, of Minneapolis, Minn., fiddled with the outboard motor. Next to him, Pfc Frank Ward, of Attleboro, Mass., Pfc Earl Barefoot, of Erwin, N.C., Pfc James C. Winters, of Sarasota, Fla., Pfc George Yokell, of Anniston, Ala., Pfc Noah Kelly, of Clarksburg, W. Va., and INS correspondent Frank Conniff hugged the bottom and ducked the spray.

Machine Gun Tracers

The boat headed in, the motor was cut, and we scrapped over the bank. Tracers from two machine guns outlined the crossing boundaries, and the ripping noise of a burp gun entered their staccato.

The doughs hopped out and headed toward the dike 100 yards from the bank with Sorber yelling after them: "Take it easy, guys." But no one turned to answer. They kept on going, over the dike, past the cringing German, who popped out of a weather-beaten pillbox. Awaited a seemingly deserted American anti-tank gun.

Then it was reaching over the desolate scene. Sgt. William A. Crabtree, Huntsville, Ala., was on guard in an OP just below the gun. Pfc Lloyd Chambers was temporarily on the defensive and Sgt. Crabtree's 57 mm. gun was guarding this approach to the battalion's assembly.

Two shells came in, driving the sergeant from his OP, but suspecting trouble, he crawled back up the stairs and saw three German Mark IV tanks approaching.

Summoning one of his men he dashed to the gun. A German shell came in, knocking one wheel off the gun and slightly wounding the sergeant, but the two men slammed three shells into the first tank, destroying it and causing the other two to stop, reconsider and retreat.

When the threat of the tank attack had lifted, Sgt. Crabtree went forward with an infantry platoon leader to have a better look at the terrain. Four or five yards away eight Germans were leaving a pillbox, and the lieutenant and the sergeant opened up with their M-1 rifles and killed or wounded the entire group.

ANTI-TANKERS REPEL THREE MARK IVs

WITH THE 30TH INFANTRY DIVISION, GERMANY—The streets were empty and the threat of German artillery and mortar fire kept them that way. Near Rire kept squatted a self-propelled gun. Awaited a seemingly deserted American anti-tank gun.

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30th HONORED FOR LIBERATING CITY

Stars and Stripes

MAASTRICHT, Mar. 11—Citizens of this Dutch town today thanked doughfeet, tankers and TD men of the 30th Inf. Div. for liberation of Maastricht on Sept. 12 at formal ceremonies here.

About 600 men of the 30th were present, heard addresses by Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson, Ninth Army commander, Maj. Gen. L. S. Hobbs, division commander, and Maastricht's burgomeister. "Less formal thanks were given the 30th at a dance tonight.