
Section IV

THE BATTLE OF BRUYERES - "LOST BATTALION"
"THE CHAMPAGNE CAMPAIGN"

Following the trip across from Naples, and a losing battle with wind, rain, and an alien sort of mud that seemed to be largely glue at the staging area near Marseille, the 442d Combat Team moved toward the Seventh Army front not far from Epinal. All elements except the 3d Battalion made the trip by motor. The 3d rattled up the Rhone Valley in a weird assortment of "40 and 8" boxcars, some with and some without roofs to keep out the constant drizzle. After a three-day breathing spell during which the Combat Team was attached to the 36th Division and commanders reconnoitered the sector, the 100th and 2d Battalions began the attack on the key road and rail center of Bruyeres. The 3d then closed in in reserve behind the 100th. The 522d Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support, and the 232d Combat Engineer Company played its usual role, lifting mines and reducing blocks so supplies could move.

The attack launched on the 15th progressed slowly all that day and the next, consisting of a yard by yard advance in the face of a determined enemy. Heavy mortar and artillery shells burst in the trees overhead, raining steel on the doughboys below who could find few ways to protect themselves from the vicious tree bursts. Illustrative of the caliber of resistance is the following. On the morning of the 16th, the 100th Battalion, attacking on the left, had presumably cleared a roadblock. After the battalion had passed on, a few enemy diehards cut loose a blast of small arms fire on the engineer party that came forward to remove it causing five casualties. The engineers withdrew to cover, reorganized, and promptly launched an attack on the defenders, driving them out. They then proceeded with the day's work of blasting out the tangle of logs, wire, and mines that made the road impassable. This was indeed, a new and more devastating war than any our troops had previously experienced.

By noon of the 17th, the 100th Battalion had advanced

as far as the first of four conical hills that towered over Bruyeres. The 2d Battalion on the right kept pace, driving back two determined counterattacks and launching an attack on Hill "B," second of the four hills. Meanwhile, the 3d Battalion swung quietly into position on the right of the 2d Battalion on the night of the 17th. The following morning, all three battalions mounted a battering-ram attack behind a screen of fire from the 522d and other elements of division artillery. Hill "A" fell to the 100th at 1400 hours that day, yielding more than 30 prisoners, and by the end of the day, Hill "B" had fallen to the combined efforts of the 2d and 3d Battalions. L Company of the 3d Battalion had also pushed into the north end of Bruyeres and was proceeding to a linkup with the 143d Infantry, which had attacked the town from the south. Hill "D" fell to the 3d on the 19th, and Hill "C," now somewhat in rear of the advancing troops, fell to the 100th on the 20th. The rear areas of both the 2d and 3d Battalions had now developed into a bedlam, with large pockets of enemy troops (left on Hill "D" and by-passed in the attack) opening fire on the reserve companies and command posts. Consequently, when the leading elements were held along the railroad line two kilometers east of Bruyeres, the reserve companies slowly reduced the resistance in the rear.

Resistance along the railroad embankment had developed somewhat slowly, but when the battalions were in complete contact with the enemy position, the battle mounted in fury. The Germans, aided by extensive minefields sown in the wooded ground before the embankment, thrust back every attempt of the assaulting troops to drive them out. It now became evident that, having lost Bruyeres, the enemy was determined to hold this last high ground before the valley running south from St. Die. After repeated failures on the part of our troops to secure a foothold across the embankment, it was decided that a direct frontal assault would be too costly.

In line with this decision, the regimental commander formed a task force comprised of Companies F and L, reserve companies of the leading battalions. He then placed Major Emmet L. O'Connor, 3d Battalion executive officer, in command, and formed the staff and command group from personnel of regimental and 3d Battalion headquarters. This

task force moved without detection during the night of 20 October to a position in the enemy's left rear. At dawn of the 21st, the commander launched his attack after a preparation of prearranged fires controlled by a forward observer with the task force. Three hours after this surprise assault, the 2d and 3d Battalions attacked the enemy's main line of resistance. Caught in this deadly pincers, those enemy troops not killed by small arms or caught in the devastating artillery fire, fled. The task force sustained only two casualties, so great was the surprise they enjoyed. For this action, Companies F and L, with the task force command group, were awarded a Presidential Citation by the War Department.

As the attack continued in force, the 2d and 3d Battalions advanced and cleared the hill mass southeast of Belmont. The 100th crossed the ridge preparatory to launching an attack on Biffontaine on the other side. Meanwhile, an armored task force had occupied Belmont. Resistance continued heavy on the 22d, even though the enemy was slowly forced to withdraw. By-passed groups of enemy made supply difficult; in the case of the 100th, it was almost impossible. It was only through a determined effort by a carrying party, protected by a platoon of light tanks, that this battalion was supplied at all. The following day, the 100th launched an attack on Biffontaine, while the other two battalions continued to mop up the recently reduced hill mass. Biffontaine fell late on the 23d. Twenty-four October, all elements of the Combat Team were relieved by other units of the Texas Division, and withdrawn to the vicinity of Belmont for a rest. Though the area was still under shell fire from the enemy's heavy guns, some relaxation was achieved.

On the 26th of October, Colonel Pence was directed to relieve the 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry, with one battalion, 442d Infantry, and elected to send the 2d into the line. The relief was effected at 0300 hours on 26 October on the extreme left of the division sector. The following day, however, the entire Combat Team was ordered into the line in an effort to relieve pressure on the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry. In a push down the long heavily-wooded ridge that extended southeast and dominated the valley from Biffontaine to La Houssiere, the 1st had overextended itself

and had been cut off by strong enemy forces.

Moving quickly, the 3d and 100th Battalions pushed off from Belmont in pitch darkness at 270400 October. By 1000 hours they had passed through the remainder of the 141st, which had been trying to break through to its besieged troops. The 442d launched its attack, battalions abreast, with the 100th on the right.

Progress was slow on the 27th. The terrain was next to impossible, heavily forested and carpeted with a dense growth of underbrush. Fighting went back to the days of America's Indian wars; every tree and every bush were carefully investigated before the troops passed on. Then, abruptly, the enemy drove the friendly troops off the high ground to the left flank of the 3d Battalion, opening that battalion to two major counterattacks, supported by a Mark IV tank and an armored car. Only after three hours of



105 mm Howitzer of the REGIMENTAL CANNON COMPANY firing a mission in support of attack to relieve the "LOST BATTALION."

violent action were the troops able to beat off the threat and disable the tank.

The following day, both battalions continued the drive forward in the teeth of stubborn resistance and heavy artillery and mortar fire. Casualties went up and up, caused largely by tree bursts, from which there was no escape. Our own artillery was active, and the Cannon Company and 4.2 mortars performed yeoman service, but the Germans were below ground, while our troops were up and moving forward. At the end of the day, the regiment was 1,500 yards nearer to the "lost battalion," but only at terrible cost in men and materiel. During the night, biting cold and rain kept the men from resting.

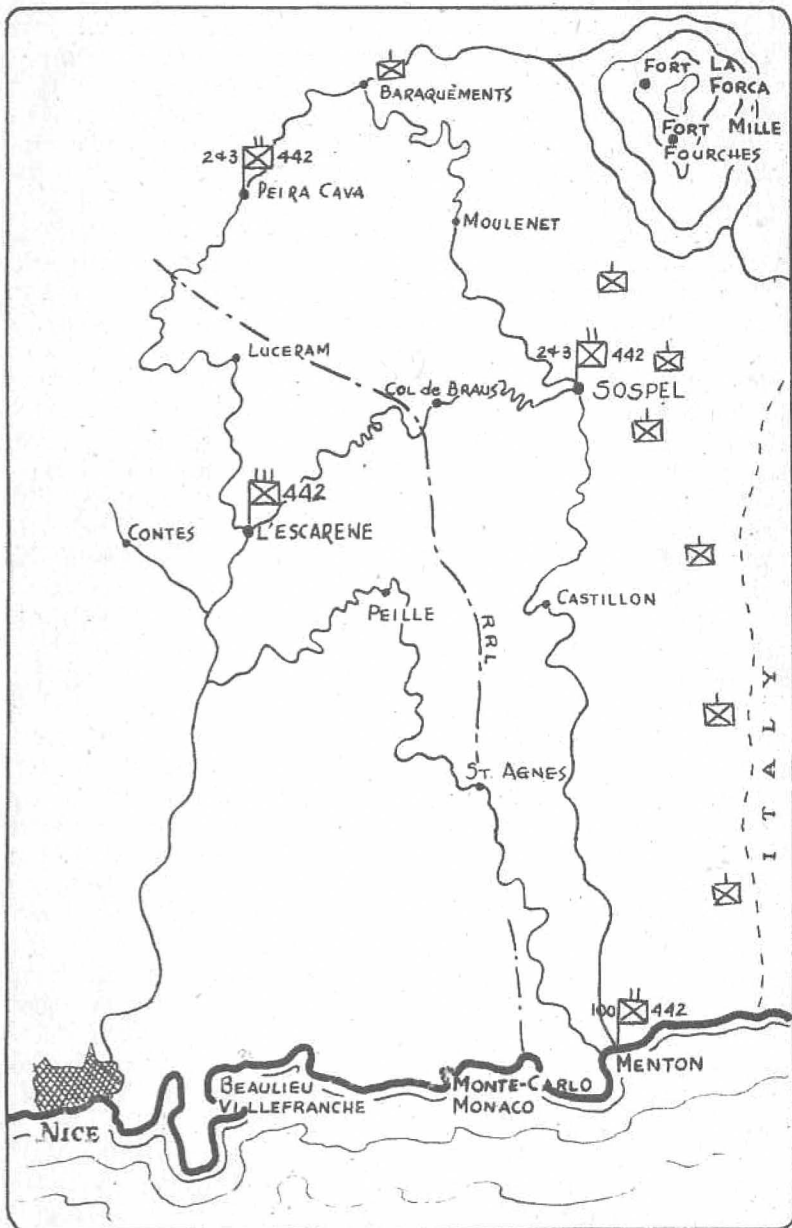
On the 29th, the regiment jumped off again, cleared one knoll, and ran into the enemy's main defensive position thrown astride the ridge where it was so narrow that maneuver was impossible. Any attack was hopelessly canalized into a direct frontal assault. In the meantime, word had come to the battalion command posts that the situation of the "lost battalion" was becoming desperate. Relief must be effected immediately. Consequently, a position that would normally have taken two days to reduce had to be reduced at once. At the time of the attack, the 3d Battalion was directly under the enemy positions. The 100th had dropped back to the right rear of the 3d and was not in a position to attack, due to the narrow conformation of the ridge. The commanding officer of the 3d Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Alfred A. Pursall, therefore, elected first to turn the enemy's right flank, but the bluff there was so steep that the men could not maneuver or move quickly. The enemy easily turned back the thrust. While the men regrouped, a platoon of tanks came up; supported by direct fire from the 75s, the troops were able to advance some distance in an attempt at infiltration before they were pinned down by the enemy's relentless small arms and mortar fire. There they remained, unable to advance, unable to turn back; they could look for no other support than that which they already had. Here was a situation in which battle craft and the weight of supporting fires were worse than useless. All the weapons of modern warfare were available but could not be effectively employed. There was one chance left. The battalion took it. As the word to fix bayonets came

down the line, I and K Companies moved forward in the assault, firing from the hip. Men fell; others took their places. The dead lay where they had fallen, inches from enemy holes, over enemy gun barrels, inside enemy dugouts. The remnants of the enemy force that had so confidently held the positions a short 30 minutes before threw down its arms and fled. For once, there was no counterattack, only the interminable artillery.

In a surprise move three thousand yards to the left rear, the 2d Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel James M. Hanley, had taken an important hill which the enemy had neglected to secure in sufficient strength. The 2d reached the top of the hill and stormed down on the unwary Germans. The hill fell and the battalion left a hundred enemy dead behind them, taking 55 prisoners. This was a fitting climax to a struggle equally as long and hard as that which had occupied the other two battalions.

On the 30th, although the back of the German resistance had been broken and infantry action was sporadic, the artillery kept pouring in. Finally, at 1500 hours that day, with the 3d and 100th Battalions moving as much abreast as possible, a patrol from I Company, led by Technical Sergeant Takeo Senzaki, made contact with the "Lost Battalion." Shortly thereafter, the main bodies linked up. The impossible had been accomplished.

The next day the 100th deployed south to protect the right flank and regimental supply route. This move enabled the 3d Battalion to advance to the division objective, the end of the long ridge, poking like a giant finger into enemy territory. On 1 November, the 3rd consolidated its gains and dug in against artillery fire which came in day and night, at times adding up to hundreds of rounds pouring in from the front and both flanks in a single barrage. On the 3d and 4th, the 2d Battalion returned to control of the regiment and took up positions to the left rear of the 3d, protecting this flank. The regiment now assumed the shape of an arrow, still pointing at the enemy's heart. Meanwhile, the 522d zeroed in protective fires, and the 232d Engineers labored day and night to keep the one supply route open, working under fire to lay logs and planks for miles through the sea of mud that had once been a trail.



The 3d Battalion tried until the 8th to clear the hill to the valley below, finally succeeding in clearing part of it with the aid of the 2d Battalion's G and E Companies, but the effort was too great. Average company strength in the regiment was 35 men. Company I had a total of five riflemen, plus a few men from the weapons platoon. Company K was commanded by S/Sgt. Tsutomu Yoshida, a squad leader (later lieutenant).

The regiment was relieved on the 8th and moved to the Lepanges area, out of artillery range, on the 8th and 9th. Here the men washed, drew new clothes and gradually assumed the semblance of human beings again. On the 10th, the 100th was detached, sent to another rest area, and subsequently ordered south to the Maritime Alps sector under Seventh Army control. The morning of the 13th, the regiment took over holding positions on the division left flank, with the 2d Battalion on line and the 3d Battalion in reserve. There they remained until the 17th. For these few days, weather was the worst enemy. Then the Combat Team pulled back to Docelles, leaving there the following day for Nice. They carried with them a commendation from the Commanding General, 36th Division, and more important to the men, the respect and admiration of the division's doughboys.

The month the Combat Team spent with the 36th Division had been a month of great heroism and great tragedy. At the time they went into the lines, these had been the only fresh troops the Seventh Army possessed. They were committed against an enemy whose orders were to hold to the last man. In destroying this enemy, the Combat Team was so badly battered that it was impossible to go on without reinforcements, and these were not forthcoming. Perhaps if it had not been for the urgency of the mission to reach the "lost battalion" casualties would have been lower, but even this is doubtful. Suffice it to say that the 442d Combat Team contributed mightily to the drive of the Seventh Army when its contribution was needed most. That, after all, is the highest accolade of any regiment of infantry.

After a three-day run down the flooded Rhone Valley by truck, the Combat Team closed into an assembly area near Nice the night of 21 November, expecting several

days' rest before being committed to action. Instead, it was found that the 100th was already holding a sector high in the mountains to the north of Nice, near St. Martin Vesubie. Two days later, on the 23d, the remainder of the Combat Team was sent into line, occupying a line between the coast resort of Menton and the little town of Piera Cava, ski mecca 20 miles to the north. The 100th held the coastal area, having been relieved in the north; the 3d held the center sector around the Franco-Italian border town of Sospel, and the 2d Battalion held the Piera Cava region. Although battalions rotated, the regiment held the same sector throughout the winter on the Riviera.

Although this was in many ways a forgotten front, it was vitally important. A determined German push here could conceivably have carried down the coast, disrupting Allied installations as far west as Marseille. The Combat Team, attached for operations to the 44th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Brigade, was assigned the mission of defending the area against such an eventuality, and of patrolling aggressively to keep the German 34th Division, posted across the border in Italy, worried and off balance. This was accomplished by the use of frequent patrols and raiding parties, as well as occasional "shoots" by the 522d Field Artillery, the regimental Cannon Company and supporting 75's and medium artillery.

Here the regiment stayed for four months. There was little action, but men were killed and wounded. The medics still performed their heroic service, and the supply teams, operating with borrowed pack mules, kept the food and equipment going up to the men on their lonely mountain outposts. Still, there was time for play. Rest centers opened in Nice and Cannes, and, while the weather and quantities of mines were not conducive to lolling on the beach, there were girls and dancing, lights and music, and a chance to forget the war for a few days in hotels once inhabited by the world's idle rich.

As all good things must, this also came to an end. In March, word got around that the outfit was moving out. Rumors flew, for the destination was a closely kept secret. CBI? Italy? The States? After much speculation, a French division took over the Combat Team's sector, relief being completed 16 March 1945. The 522d Field Artillery

Battalion was separated from the Combat Team and sent north to help support the Seventh Army's jump across the Rhine. The men regretted the loss as they had learned to respect the shooting abilities of their mates and the ability and gallantry of the forward observer parties. Shortly before the relief was effected, Colonel Charles W. Pence, still suffering from an injury received in the fighting in the Vosges, had also been ordered to other duties, to be replaced by his executive, Colonel Virgil R. Miller. Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Singles, commanding the 100th Battalion, was also transferred to a new command. Lieutenant Colonel (then Major) Jack E. Conley, took command of the battalion. Lieutenant Colonel James M. Hanley was named regimental executive officer, and Major Robert A. Gopel took command of the 2d Battalion. So, under new management, the unit moved to an assembly area at Antibes, left there March 17th, 18th, and 19th, arriving in Marseille staging area the same days. Finally, on March 20th, 21st, and 22d, the outfit boarded LST's. Destination: Italy!



Preparing mule train for the trail to supply outpost on the Maritime Alps.