

the French washerwomen by washing their clothes in the <sup>main</sup> rivers fresh waters, spanking them on slabs and drying them on the grass in the sun. The men stripped themselves, too, and washed and swam in the river. Even the truck drivers drove their trucks into the shallow water and scrubbed off layers of mud. <sup>R</sup> These were days of rest, leisurely days away from the whirl of travel, days when map pointing was popular. The men were haunted a little by the mysteries that shrouded the future. Stories of lost German patrols in the neighborhood spiced many bull-sessions around camp fires, and the men were secretly proud of the precariousness of a situation that demanded the carrying of rifles at all times.

Villages were "off limits" except to the few who would willingly venture having to dig garbage pits and slit trenches for the ~~the~~ pleasure of satisfying their curiosity and perhaps cornering a bottle of French champagne. However, in the evening the townsfolk came out from their villages to walk on the roads, gape at the soldiers, and barter their wines and fresh vegetables for whatever a soldier might have to offer. It was the evenings pastime. A beer cart could usually be found on the road or under a tree and the men drank many bottles of the salty, watery brew.

It was evident the companies were awaiting job assignments. They finally came and here ~~and~~ here also was the last instance in which the battalion was together as a unit in France. As jobs were assigned, companies packed up and moved out. On September 16th Company "A" was sent to an old camp of the French army. The stay near Vitry le François had been pleasant. <sup>It</sup> There was no false fact that we were approaching the front for the roar of the battle raging near Nancy could be easily heard. Here, too, the men saw their

German prisoners close-up. They were being guarded by another Engineer outfit. It was surprising to note the freedom they could be allowed.

The other companies having gone their separate ways, Headquarters company and Company "A" moved to spacious Camp de Sissonne. Hundreds of German troops had been quartered in its old stone barracks and Hospital. There could have been several thousand and likely were. The buildings, showed signs of having been heavily strafed and shaken by air attacks. Inside the bleak buildings rooms were placarded with pictures of German sentiment, and strewn with odds and ends of equipment and personal possessions of the former occupants. Owls glided out windows as men slipped through doors of vacant buildings surrounding the company area to snoop beds or mattresses. Others <sup>found</sup> knives, bayonets, guns, lanterns or any of a hundred items they might find some use for. <sup>P</sup> Soon Prisoners of War began to arrive with a Military Police escort. They were moved into buildings down the street and crowded into as little space as possible for the time being, to make the job of guarding them less complicated, though guarding them was hardly necessary. Little desire showed in their bewildered face to get back again to their lines. For the most part, theirs had been a ragged retreat with weeks of little food and rest. The smell of their dirty bodies and <sup>perspired</sup> ~~perspired~~ slept in clothing was stifling, a shabby representation of super-men. Until facilities could be arranged they remained as dirty as ever, and went to work cleaning up the camp. <sup>P</sup> Weary as they were they worked willingly. They ate the best food they had <sup>had</sup> in months in the

company's mess hall, seated ironically beneath a huge wall inscription painted in another day by an over boastful comrade: \* "Wo steht den Deutsche Soldat, Kommt kein andre dahin."

While at Camp Sissonne the company had its first unprohibited chance to meet the Frenchman in his village and drink his wine and champagne. It attacked the opportunity feverishly. Curious and thirsty, and fresh in O.D.'s the men saw no time wasted in getting to Sissonne, (the village from which the camp takes its name) with pockets full of francs <sup>which had so long burned</sup> ~~so long burning~~ their pockets. The money so hot in their pockets vaporizes as quickly as droplets on a cook stove, cooling their fervor for a moment until soap and cigarettes were found quite as negotiable. Some men only by miracle found their way home, <sup>HP</sup> nor getting there knew just how the last kilometer was accomplished. Mark Andrews was the "good man Friday" one Saturday night, having spent several late hours collecting casualties and seeing them snugly or otherwise safely to bed, and collecting such lost items as upper-plates and helmets.

\* Where the German soldier takes his stand no others come.

After three days at Sissonne more becoming work was assigned the Company, and, as preparations for beginning the new jobs were started the platoons were appointed and sent out. The new assignment was repairs on a section of railroad including two bridges which had been damaged by bombings, and lay in the vicinity of Charmes and La Pere. On the 19th of September the 1st platoon moved into a spacious home about 3 kilometers from the two towns, and was later joined by the 2nd and 3rd platoons on the 20th and 23rd of September. On the 26th headquarters joined the platoons in the "Chateau", bringing the company together on the job.

The "Chateau", as the men liked to call any large home with a dozen rooms, was spacious, but, though every available amount of space, including the attic, was made use of, there was still nearly half the company left to pitch shelter-halves in the gardens around the building. The weather was changing now, but, though not severe, the rains made sleeping in the open quite chilly. However, the self reliant found straw, and, otherwise employed weather proofing and improvisation on their shelter-halves making them fairly comfortable. Without the benefit of a dining room the men were again messing in the open. Fenders of trucks made good lunch counters.

The section of railroad <sup>the</sup> company had been given to put in order was already being worked on by civilians when the company arrived. One of the two bridges in the section had been partially destroyed, one span having been blown out. It was here the company directed its main efforts. The other bridge, which had not been damaged so

severely, and about half a mile of track and switches took the attention of the minor portion of the company who assisted the French civilians. <sup>P</sup>With the Army's ability to get material and with a well equipped company of Engineers on hand the work was brought to a speedy end. As the most difficult parts of the work which demanded equipment, (the Frenchmen had none) were completed, the civilians, anxious not to see the work, which was their sole means of livelihood vanish, stepped in to take over again while the Company pulled out slowly for other more important work. ~~for~~ <sup>It</sup> the <sup>Army's</sup> ~~Army's~~ main interest to accomplish only that which is absolutely necessary to communications.

On September 30th, Sgt. "Pop" Hinmans' boys of the 2nd Platoon moved by convoy to Etain where they immediately began the task of clearing a railroad yard and main line of about Forty blown up railroad cars and a locomotive. The yards themselves were to become a huge ammunition dump. Besides having to prepare the area the main rail line was badly damaged. The platoon put in some switches. The work went smoothly, headquarters having furnished the heavy equipment needed to lift and drag the heavy tangles of <sup>steel</sup> iron.

At Etain, the platoon found its quarters in a barn under which was a pottery works. Some of the men had to pitch tents, for the barn was not large enough for all.

Headquarters left La Fere with the 3rd platoon for Stenay, October 2nd, leaving the 1st platoon to put the finishing touches on the job in La Fere and join them on October 4th.

In moving on to Stenay the company gained a little in easterly

~~56~~ direction, approached the Belgium border, <sup>was</sup> but, not quite ready to cross it. Stenay was to occupy quite a bit of the company's time even calling men back from Belgium at later dates. For the present the work showed no such evidence. The camp itself was only a home on this first visit while the 1st and 3rd platoons built a highway bridge, made some road repairs and road reconnaissance. <sup>P</sup> It was turning noticeably <sup>ly</sup> colder. Warm enough in mid-afternoon but nights and mornings were very chilly. The undersize fireplaces in the barracks were kept aglow most of the day, and it was a sizeable job to keep them supplied with wood. Here <sup>as in Sicone</sup> again was a spacious camp, and, though housing two other companies, it still bore a haunting emptiness. <sup>P</sup> About the time the 80 foot bridge was complete and the men were taking their self-washed laundry down from over fireplaces, dry or not, in preparations for moving, German Prisoners began rolling in in truckloads for <sup>i</sup>nternment. Here too came the reason for Company A's many weeks of work in Stenay, but, it was agreeable enough to the men. They liked the town, a fact above all others in importance.

1057  
BELGIUM

An instinct so strong as self-preservation need little training to become an art. It had reached a point now, when, upon moving, trucks <sup>were</sup> <sup>so</sup> piled high with self-providings that the providings were displacing the individuals. The Army issued no beds to the Engineers. Each man had his 3 blankets which was the extent of his issue, and, except for his ability to find beds, cots, mattresses, extra blankets and pillows in houses, barns or barracks wherever he might be living, he did without. In addition to bedding some men were even loading on chairs, small tables, boxes, stoves and occasionally a rug or some similar luxury. The boxes were catching the over flow from duffle-bags caused by accumulated souvenirs, perhaps extra clothing and personal stores of "C" rations. So it was, each time the company moved more difficult to solve space problems. However the climax was not reached as yet for there was Germany still to come and an accumulation of <sup>radios</sup> ~~radios~~, motorcycles and battle field souvenirs. There were even such extreme modern conveniences as bath-tubs carried on one occasion.

If, on the morning of October 12 when the Captain got his orders to move the portion of his company in Stenay to Ciney, Belgium, the whole company had instead been with him, the move would have to have been made in two hauls. Looking more than ever like big city scavengers <sup>than</sup> ~~though~~ part of an Army, the outfit squeezed into its trucks and headed <sup>north-east</sup> ~~north-east~~. The country had been fought over somewhat more than that through which recent moves had been made. There were scores of burned out German tanks (some American), perhaps

pushed back to the steep borders of Belgium and caught there. The low rounded mountains of Southern Belgium were scenic and abundantly covered with forest. The change from France to Belgium was extreme in the sense that the people seemed not quite so poverty stricken by the effects of war. The cities were, for the most part, damaged little, and upon reaching Ciney, the city was found to have not only an orderly business district, but the shops were comparatively well supplied with merchandise. The wooden shoes, revived because of lack of leather in rural France, were still to be seen through the working day. Push-carts were still dominant on the street but there were fewer evacuees along the roads. Homes were not so disrupted.

In Ciney the company divided its platoons between four locations. The 3rd platoon moved into rooms in a monastery. The berobed brother offered sharp contrast to the swearing helmeted Engineers. The experiment was interesting. The 1st platoon slept in an old theater behind a tavern, using the balcony, auditorium and stage, its dressing rooms, and some men found sanctuary beneath the stage itself. Headquarters had a chateau in the heart of the small city, and another chateau at the far end of Ciney was claimed and ready for the 2nd platoon which was finishing the job of clearing the rail yards and adding a few more switches at Etain and Eix Abaucourt, and did not leave France to join the rest of the outfit until four days later.

Sergeant Wayne's men had a good home in the monastery, but the 1st platoon, besides having to sleep amongst <sup>theater</sup> seats, stacks of boxes and other stored items, found the roof to be a hopeless sieve, and when



the long days of rain, which seemed the course of Belgium's fall weather, came, came also roaring complaints. With buckets crowding the floor, mopping a continual necessity, and their own initiative the only resort they covered the roof with tarpaulins. <sup>PP</sup> However, the aged theater had her blessings as well as hardships and rewarded the men with 83 bottles of fine cognac. Dan Burkee stumbled on to the horde packed beneath the steps leading to the balcony back stage. No one stopped for the moment to consider who the rightful owner might be until later when it was popular to suppose the Germans had hidden it there, but, even if the tavern keeper who had his abode in the theater's front was the owner, he deserved the loss for his prices were much too high.

The company's job in Ciney was to make additions and alterations to the 130th General Hospital which had been newly built by the Germans and abandoned before it had been fully occupied. It was a huge, well built building, but still the Army <sup>needed</sup> ~~need~~ more space, and had Captain Simmons' men build a tent annex, weather-proofed, and complete with quarters, storage rooms, and wards, and large enough to care for the hospital's convalescents as well as medical personnel. <sup>PP</sup> Concrete foundations, over which the ward tents were pitched, and sidewalks were laid. Rows of tents were walled with plywood sidings and doors, and equipped with stoves, electricity, and running water and plumbing where necessary. The convalescent unit even had its own P.X. and the completion of the exteriors required a good deal of carpentry. The electrical and plumbing alterations in the main building were, in themselves, big jobs.

One wall was knocked out on two floors and lavatories were added on the outside requiring experienced carpentry and brick work.

*P* The company had only been together a short while when the need for its full strength at the hospital diminished and <sup>other</sup> ~~the~~ projects became immediate. <sup>by more important</sup> On the 24th of November, the 3rd platoon left Belgium to return to Eix Abaucourt where the men put in two rail spurs ranging from 1000 to 1800 feet in length, and built hardstands between them for a supply dump. On the 24th, Lieutenant Weinstein ~~and~~ <sup>had the way</sup> his 2nd platoon to Poix St. Hubert to begin the construction of a saw mill which would supply the 7th Army. Sergeant Victory's men continued at the Hospital preparing a stockade for prisoners of War ~~who~~ <sup>who</sup> were to be imported to serve on details around the hospital.

*P* These were the days of cigarette famine and buzz bombs, England was still catching the fiendish weapon in her southern cities. It was only more apparent to the Company because of Cincy's geographical position placing her in the route between launching ramps and target. The stay in Cincy was, however, pleasant and taking advantage of the city's comparative <sup>a</sup> wealth of merchandise the men had their spree of buying, <sup>perfume</sup> <sup>perfume</sup>, which was plentiful; <sup>headed</sup> ~~leading~~ the list. Prices began to skyrocket. Cigarettes and soap became as much a medium of exchange as money. The blackmarket had long been regular practice, but here was the company's first good chance to experience its evils. The people regardless of their harsh prices, <sup>which of course were</sup> ~~was~~ suffered by themselves as well) ~~were friendly and patronizing.~~ Anxious to have men in their homes, they often stopped at the

61

billets to invite one or two of the men to their homes for meals which they made as attractive as possible, though they could very often ill afford it. The guards who stood at headquarters will remember the little girl who, never failing, brought a warm bowl of tasty soup to them at noon. It warmed their hearts as well as stomachs. Many of the men have good friends in Ciney, friends they may never see again but will always remember. Thanksgiving came while the company was there, and ~~the people of~~ the civilians made an effort again to show their gratitude by decorating the tables with bottles of wine. There was a show at the hospital that day headlined by Marlene Dietrich.

The work soon terminated at the hospital. The weather had been cold as a result of the late fall rains, and now as it was growing steadily colder the business of moving and working in the out-of-doors took on new discomforts. <sup>TP</sup> The men recently sent to Eix Abancourt had been bivouaced in the rainy cold. Sickness occurred and the threat of trench foot, growing among all troops, found no exception in the Engineers. On the 26th of November the stockade <sup>at the hospital</sup> was completed and Lieutenant Schuster took his men back to Stenay, France where the flood of war prisoners, already arriving in small numbers when the company was recently there, now demanded a more substantial enclosure. Headquarters ~~was~~ held out in Ciney alone, completing final details on the hospital by November 30th, and moving to Poix St. Hubert, then, to help build the saw mill.

Headquarters made its home in an old chateau near the village

62

than the quarters taken by the 2nd platoon. The surrounding forest covered hills were beautiful, a part of that huge stretch of forest known as the Ardennes. A swift mountain stream cut its way through the cheateaus grounds, lending its spark of beauty. But, the rains and cold gray skys contributed their share <sup>to make</sup> making the sawmill site a dismal, muddy place to work. The village was very small but had a good supply of cognac which offset most of its disadvantages.

Lieutenant Euren joined headquarters, returning from Eix Abancourt with his 3rd platoon to help the 2nd platoon, but, remaining only two days departed for Stenay. Foundations were soon poured, roads were made passable, and machinery was placed. The company was relaxing while finishing carpentry work and electrical installations, and even found time to do a little hunting. Christmas was coming and everything shaped accordingly for a pleasant holiday, as much so as could be expected. <sup>H</sup> The hunting proved fruitful and all in keeping with the holiday spirit. Deer had been seen by the men on occasion, slipping out for water. A sight to thrill the heart of any hunter. The men had been getting days off occasionally. "Ed" Breault on one of those lucky days stole into the hills with three other men, and <sup>they</sup> took likely positions among foliage, rifles ready, and waited. By midmorning two young bucks appeared in Breault's sights and fell, leaving the echoes of the shots to ring through the hills. A Belgian game warden in his tyrolian shorts, jacket and feathered cap, having heard the shots not far away, in-

63  
investigated, and arrested the men. After reporting the incident to the orderly room a truck drove out to pick up Breault and his two deer. A fine of \$100., which the men were all willing to share, was at first <sup>in</sup> suppressed but later dropped, strained relations having been patched between the Belgians and the Army. The deer were dressed in the kitchen of the Chateau by Mess Sergeant Brown that night. Men crowded around to help, and offer suggestions of how the dark wild meat would look best on a mess gear.

Christmas was less than a week away. The spirit was mounting higher, now, as a few packages began to arrive. Christmas decorations were being planned, a party was talked of. A <sup>German</sup> plan upset it all.

The Germans had broken through in Belgium and there was growing alarm among troops in the sector but civilians not waiting for more than first evidences of <sup>the</sup> ~~a drive by the Germans~~ began lining the streets evacuating their homes for the open highways leading west. Some, more hesitant, stood by ~~unseen~~ watching other civilians listening to every rumor, but, most important, watched the Army's move. The 101st Airborne at Bastogne, badly in need of ammunition, scouted neighboring A.S.C.Z. troops requisitioning all available munitions, and even "borrowed" Company ~~G~~ "A" bazookas. <sup>P</sup> The German attacks developed in intensity and scope causing nervous trips between Company and Battalion C.P.'s. It finally became advisable to leave, since the unit was in no way prepared to help in making a stand. The portion of Company "A" at Poix St. Hubert, (the 3rd and 1st platoons being still at Stenay) left December 20th with rumors of

64  
German troops driving toward St. Hubert itself. Stories of wildest proportions were coming from civilians, and with the departure of the Company, the village at Poix, already desolate was empty except for a handful of those <sup>few</sup> who evidently had no fear for the Nazi ~~but stayed in off the streets~~. The roar of guns, which could often be heard in the distance, now had come close indeed. A part of Headquarters Platoon had left the previous afternoon to make arrangements for the entire company in Sedan, and with rumors now coming in of paratroopers and tanks spearheading in their direction, the men who remained until the 20th had an uneasy wait. Any man who has stood guard duty on such a cold pitch dark night can assure his buddies it is no effort to stay awake. Even when the next day came it was necessary to call for volunteers to remain behind a little longer to destroy equipment and supplies, and remove machinery from the saw mill. <sup>P</sup> At Sedan there was the same excitement St. Hubert had experienced two days before. Army units were moving in. Civilians were moving out. Vicious convoys lined the streets, troops were at work preparing elaborate defenses both inside and outside the city, ~~itself~~ and before two days passed the Sedan was a bristling fortress ready to be fought over again and further destroyed. The advanced party Company "A" sent down from Poix St. Hubert found Company "B" still in the quarters it had supposedly evacuated. It was late and the advanced party wearily threw blankets and mattresses on the basement floor, crowding around the furnace, for it had snowed and become very cold outside. They waited for morning to find housing for the company. Some of the men had Christmas packages which they had hurriedly received before

65  
leaving Poix. They blacked out windows, rigged up a light, played poker, ate K rations, enjoyed the delicacies from their packages, and finally went to sleep in the whole crowded mess, a bit disgusted with the apparent lack of coordination of their move.

Early the next morning Lieutenant Heddleston went out into the troubled city and meeting with fair success reported back soon that he had quarters, perhaps crowded, but <sup>su</sup> efficient ~~enough~~ until better conclusion could be reached. The company moved in late that day only to move on to a moat surrounded Chatcau at Rubicourt, 5 kilometers from Sedan, the following day. A miserably cold experience, moving, and to make it worse there was no relief after arriving at the destination. The big chateau, large enough to easily house the Company's 210 men if necessary, was without heat or lights.

# The Company Headquarters, the 2nd platoon and now the 3rd platoon, ~~which had~~ <sup>which</sup> just returned from Stenay was immediately assigned the job of putting a highway bridge across the Meuse River in the heart of Sedan. The original bridge had long since been bombed out, and while there was one in its place built by the Combat Engineers, its hurried flimsy structure was becoming incapable of the heavy traffic it bore. The Company had instructions to sink piling and build a companion bridge capable of supporting 100 tons. The other then was to assist in handling two way traffic except in cases of extreme loads. ~~Before~~

# The work was hardly started <sup>when</sup> Company "B" moved out of its quarters in Sedan and "A" Company moved <sup>in</sup> ~~into their quarters~~ to the relief of the men, for they could be closer to their job, comfortable and

66  
fairly sure of not having to move for a while. However, the short interlude at Ribicourt was not without interest. The Germans were sending through spies, a treacherous bunch dressed in American uniforms, bearing apparently correct identification, regulation equipment including Army vehicles, and <sup>speaking</sup> ~~spoke~~ fluent English. Such bands were difficult to deal with. Highways and cross roads were heavily patrolled, and guards were a bit jumpy and over suspicious, making travel by night particularly dangerous. Men kept their distance from one another on the street and questioned every false move. Doubting M.P.'s and guards examined every vehicle, <sup>justifiably</sup> ~~righteously~~ for there had been several instances of ambush reported.

So it was on the night of December 23rd when the company courier, Tom Cremins, and his driver, Jean Etzel were reporting back to the Company with their jeep loaded with bags of Christmas mail. Cremins was sitting high on the mail bags trying to be as comfortable as possible in the cold night wind, (the top having been taken off the jeep to accomodate the load,) when he and Etzel noticed another jeep stopped in the road ahead. Suspicious themselves they slowed only a little, and attempted <sup>to</sup> get by. They sideswiped the vehicle and spun to a stop in the road just beyond. The occupants of the suspicious jeep threw a hand-grenade without saying a word. The two company "A" men heard the fuse, thanked their stars the top was off their jeep, and <sup>plunged</sup> ~~jumped~~ for a ditch. The grenade exploded harmlessly at a distance, but the strangers immediately opened fire with carbines and only after firing a dozen rounds did they call for a



surrender. Perhaps they had heard the frantic shouting by the mail man, "Were Americans," above the noise. <sup>The two men</sup> ~~They~~ were asked the pass word and not knowing it were fired on again, but further pleading won them a chance to come forward to be recognized. Skeptical, but, in view of the fact another vehicle was arriving on the scene, they advanced as instructed, hands over head and found their assailants Americans; men from a non-combatant outfit placed on special patrol duty, nervous and hasty in their judgement. Officers in the third jeep to enter the scene aided in the identification. (Another approaching vehicle, its driver hearing shots and seeing the disturbance ahead, turned in his tracks and went the way <sup>it</sup> ~~he~~ had come). Military Police were notified and towed Company "A's" battered jeep and carrier to the company area. The men were pale with fright, but whole. Their jeep, however, had a dozen bullet holes through its windshield and <sup>engine</sup> ~~engine~~. The mail was saved. ¶ The orderly room had had its dramatic moments too, while awaiting answer to the couriers whereabouts. He was three hours late, a fact which caused concern considering the dangers. Dramatic, not entirely because of the waiting but because the Company had to call for volunteers to move in the direction of the enemy's advance and prepare bridges for demolition. ¶ The German power drive continued to move forward but somewhat slowed. The fight was stubborn, and German planes continually tried to break through flak and anti-aircraft fire to reach the bridge the company was building and other bridges linking the city and highways leading out.

218

were out policing up cigarettes butts and paper from the previous days carelessness. Turkey and hard candy on the mess gear at noon encouraged a humorous Merry Christmas now and then, but bursts. They dropped poorly aimed bombs occasionally and made otherwise the meal was very routine. Of the original decorations strafing attempts with no real damage. The visits had become for the festivities planned back in Poix St. Hubert, the one item quite regular, demanding a reason other than military. Many surviving was a life size female Santa Clause whose uniform consisted of only one piece, a red stocking cap. "Christmas Eve" was suggested as her name and she disappeared one day with a

platoon moving out. <sup>P</sup> The "break through" was felt by many troops, some much more severely than Company "A". Still, though the company suffered no casualties, it is not because no opportunity presented itself. The men considered their unit lucky, particularly the platoons caught in Stenay, for there the attacks were concentrated on their project. The prison camp was as yet unfinished. It had been fenced in three compounds, each encaging some 2000 Germans; some in tents, some in permanent structures, a part <sup>in</sup> ~~of~~ the old French garrison. The Stockade, during the holiday season, was constantly the object of German night raids, for reasons only the Germans themselves can explain. At the beginning of the attacks the site was lighted by huge flood lights as is usual around prison fencings. <sup>H</sup> However, it was found and with near disaster, as Julius Ross can well relate, that the lighting made too perfect a target, and warnings gave little time to throw switches and take cover. The first attacks proved virtually harmless but <sup>to</sup> persisted, and finally took their toll among men and prisoners even though the lighting was eventually ordered completely shut off. <sup>P</sup> The gravest attack came New Years eve when the Germans came out of the inky night to shower the Stockade with personnel bombs, and stayed to straff the area. Their brethern of the Wehrmacht suffered 20 casualties, 4 of them dead. Among the Army personnel in the area 14 were wounded, one mortally, but Company "A" escaped unscathed. The billets in the village itself were never fired on directly but the men spent many tense hours through the week often scuttling for cover. <sup>P</sup> The work on the Stockade at Stenay had progressed well. Sergeant Dearsmit's men

were acting now in a supervisory capacity, the prisoners themselves doing the actual labor. The 3rd platoon had served its usefulness by the 23rd of December and moved from Stenay, joining the 2nd platoon at Sedan, reporting the social life as well balanced as ever in Stenay. Panama Hatty's still gay and flourishing, cognac available in trade for cigarettes, and an occasional movie at the local cinema. With the turn of the New Year the German power drive became powerless, and with the dwindling salient came an appreciated peace. Civilians began daily returning to their homes after what must have been a refuge to cold, misery and hunger for many. But, for most people in Sedan such discomforts were constant companions, well understood and much more acceptable than the Germans. The men made many friends during their stay. They shared the discomforts with them, in their homes of an evening, gay evenings in spite of a poverty that could have made anyone but a Frenchman a boring fatalist. Through the help of two teachers Ms. Jean Sigonneau and Daniel Paradis, at the only college holding classes in Sedan, and the persistent Sergeant Moore, two dances were given for the company in the Headquarter's Chateau. Special Service furnished an excellent orchestra, and the teachers produced the dancing partners. Their Mother's, following French custom, came along as chaperons. The girls brought tea cups, the men had their mess cups, and the cooks served coffee and cake. The two dances were bright spots, diversion for the moment to the brighter life for which men endure the miseries of a soldier.

71

The bridge was completed in time to serve the last convoy crossing the Meuse to join the counter attacks in the south of Rundstedt's halted drive. In the wake of its completion the 3rd platoon packed up and left for Brillon en Barrois to make repairs on a bridge at Sandrupt. They quickly finished at Brillon and continued their reputation as the company's most restless platoon moving onto Verdun, January 21, where they worked on lighting installations for a Quartermaster Depot. January 23rd, headquarters moved from Sedan to Fresnes en Wovre farther south in the old <sup>2</sup>imbattled fields near Verdun. Partially because of lack of sufficient transportation and because it is customary to leave a guard, a number of men remained behind at Sedan to wait for trucks to return for them a day or two later. In the meantime they said good-bye to the people in Sedan for buddies who had left with the main body. <sup>P</sup> After much getting lost and piecing together bits of conversation to support the drivers' meager knowledge of the new destination, the bulk of headquarters drove into Fresnes in the midst of a wet, heavy snow, found a make shift chow in a hurriedly installed kitchen, shivered while they choked down a bite of food in the old theater, ~~where the kitchen had been temporarily thrown~~ together and then went in search of billets. It turned out to be a new experience, for in Fresnes, the company lived with private families. Billets were scattered throughout the village. Good comfortable beds, in some cases blessed with clean white sheets and the pains of civilian care, made late morning sleep tempting, and, fortified with excuses such as not hearing the bugle or having

so far to walk, the crime was committed, frowning the Captain's brow, causing the sergeant a certain pain and vexing the bugler who was compelled to walk the icy streets at an early hour, stopping often to fumble a variation on first call. Morning exercises varied from the usual, by becoming a sporting event. First marched to the corner, mess gear in hand, the men were halted, and after an about face, dismissed. The resulting stampede, inspired by hunger and a dread of being last in the chow line, made exercise the only alternative. The few, who never felt quite so hungry or ~~inspired~~<sup>delighted</sup> by Army food, walked the distance, taking their exercise less violently and peaving over their plight. <sup>P</sup> The business of headquarters while at Fresnes consisted of mainly supporting the platoons and details, detached in isolated places. The motor-pool spent its time making check-ups and repairing vehicles, records were brought up <sup>2</sup>to-date in the orderly room. Four men were sent to Gedinne in the Ardennes to operate a saw mill. Thirteen others went to Graide Station to haul piling. On February 3rd, Lieutenant Wienstein's 2nd platoon moved to Verdun and was attached to Company "C" then working at the 193rd General Hospital. They poured concrete flooring and did general repairs to the old <sup>so</sup>Napoleon Garrison there which the Army was converting for its use. It was a rather unpleasant experience being attached to a rival company in their own battalion. The snows and cold wet thaws that followed made the out door life unpleasant and a promised early spring could come none too soon. The P.O.W.'s assigned the

battalion were being gradually put to work on more of the Company's jobs, relieving a weary bunch of men of the winters' burden. <sup>JP</sup> The Company's headquarters moved farther north again, February 6th, to Dun sur Meuse, leaving some of the oldest battle grounds of France behind. Fields wasted even now by the scourge of 1918. Pock-marked by shell craters so close together no cultivation is possible, and cut by endless systems of trenches and brestworks of the fierce concentrated warfare of those years. Thousands of acres stand in scrub and underbrush, in their slow process, seeking to hide the scars and perhaps give some commendable life to the land. In these valleys were played games of blood and vengeance, and the cemeteries tally the score in neat rows of crosses extending almost out of sight. When the remnants of the platoon were collected on return trips to Fresnes, where those left behind existed on 10 in 1 rations and enjoyed a short freedom among the villagers, headquarters settled in what was evidently a school, and by the sweat of their P.W.'s enjoyed a clean and somewhat restful existence. <sup>JP</sup> The platoons continued their work in Stenay and Verdun. Younger men continued to leave for reinforcement depots and a few replacements were being received in exchange. Records continued to be checked; the Motor Pool continued its work of putting its equipment in the best condition, and all together the process bore signs of a new future. <sup>P</sup> The comforts of Dun soon exchanged themselves for the not so modern but still comfortable St. Joseph College of Engineering near Virton. The company found itself restricted on arrival at Virton through the follies of two of its members, and set about

immediately to find ways of escape. Laundry seemed the best vehicle for violation. At the college near Virton the company came together as a complete unit for the first time in months, the 2nd and 3rd platoons having preceeded headquarters, which arrived February 13th, by one and two days respectfully and the 1st platoon following later on the 17th. The company brought its prisoners with it, keeping them under guard in an attic room by night and working them by day. The buildings seemed to swallow the numbers of men with ease, allowing comfortable quarters for all besides those reserved by the black robed professors who remained, though no classes were in session. <sup>PP</sup> The company was put leisurely to work repairing a network of roads in south Belgium and a portion of France in the vicinity of Sedan. The work was a step down from the importance of other projects, entailing no disgrace but rather a period of marking time, for it was now evident the battalion was preparing to enter Germany. The turn of weather, bringing <sup>very</sup> clear warm afternoons, was opening the way for an important drive into the Rhineland and perhaps the final plunge. There was an impressive increase in air activity. Daily endless formations of bombers flew over which set the prisoners gaping skyward and curled broad smiles on the faces of G.I.'s and civilians. The day finally came when the company was alerted to move into Germany. The finishing touches were put on all equipment and all departments prepared to move. Prisoners were returned to the Stockade at Stenay for the company was moving too close to action to allow them in their possession. <sup>PP</sup> Lieutenant Heddleston and his interpreters left, as an advance party, <sup>March</sup> 4th for Munchen Gladbach to find living quarters for the company following the



#75

next day.

France, friends, and pleasant associations vanished for a while into the past, but memories were revived occasionally by refreshing letters.