

EXTRACT FROM

FIVE STARS TO VICTORY

THE STORY OF THE

107TH EVACUATION HOSPITAL (SM)

**SOURCE: National Archives and Records Administration,
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OF THE

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EVACUATION HOSPITAL (SM)

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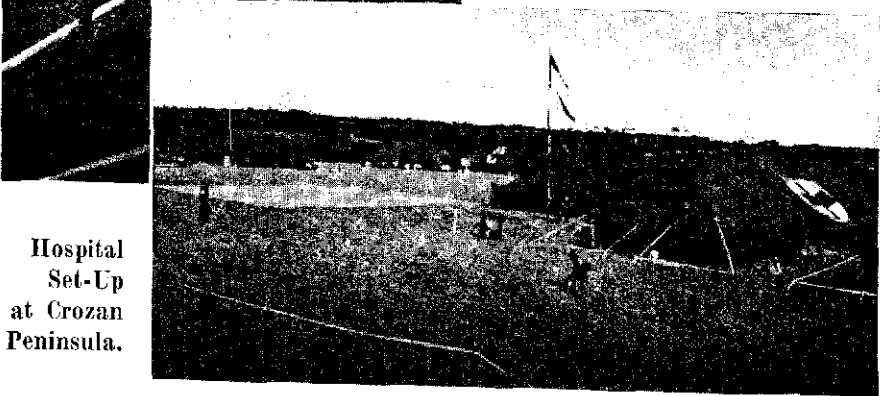
The Editors wish to express their deep gratitude to all Officers, Nurses and Enlisted Men who have assisted in the preparation of the manuscript and collection of pictures for this unit history



Hospital Facilities swamped with arrival of 1000 wounded PWs.



The Americans treat all wounded alike.



Hospital Set-Up at Crozan Peninsula.

In the months to come the 107th supported many bigger campaigns but only during the early days of Rundstedt's counter-offensive did it feel the same complete responsibility for medical support.

The time had now come for the hospital to take up its combat station in the great battle for Germany.

A TOUR OF THREE COUNTRIES VIA THE 'RED BALL EXPRESS'

Towards the end of September the 107th departed from Brittany. The convoy, consisting of 69 vehicles, began its 700 miles voyage across the center of France. After a 150 mile drive there was a bivouac near Rennes and after another 12 hour drive, a stop-over at Chartres.



Beginning 700 mile trek from Brittany to Luxemburg.

The great moment had arrived which all had so fervently looked forward to: a glimpse of Paris. But dreams and reality are not always the same. It was night time. All one could see were the big somber blacked-out buildings and a few couples walking arm in arm. A short stop on the outskirts of the city, then the command, "Back to the trucks", and Paris was behind us.

During this hop, the biggest in its history, the 107th traveled from 1600 hours until 0200 hours or later so as to free the highway in day time for the "Red Ball Express". Our armies were eating up millions of gallons of gasoline daily. Great stores of material piled up at French and Belgian



Nurses breaking camp
Suippes, France.

ports. Large masses of infantry headed for the Siegfried Line had to be brought up mainly in trucks. Thus the unit moved along mostly at night, bivouacking and sleeping during the mornings.

At the last bivouac, near Suippes, a formation was called. The CO addressed his men and women. "Your job as liberators is now over. Pretty soon you will be coming as conquerors, surrounded by a hostile population. From now on I want you to watch your step; to be especially careful. May I again express my hope that none of you will be separated from your dog tags."

The convoy started on its last lap. It was the fourth night on the road. It had rained steadily for the previous few nights. Draped as they were in blankets over ODs and fatigues, the men shivered as the cold wind

whipped through the canvas of the trucks and the never ending drizzle "ate" into their very bones. "We come as conquerors". Somehow this phrase kept cropping up in all conversations as the men and women conjured up the most frightful pictures of desperate snipers in every tree top and fanatical Nazis all around them. The poor medics have nothing but their Red Cross brassard with which to meet these furies.

Such jitters were by no means allayed as the convoy began driving past the Compagnic battlefields, the final resting place for so many thousands of Americans who took part in the last war. For endless miles not a single farm house was to be seen in this military zone. All too frequently there was row upon row of little white crosses on either side of the road. Only the cratered, shell pocked earth, the trenches and underground tunnels where millions of men fought and died so that the First World War might be the last.

Soon the blacked-out convoy, driving in the rain, began passing the freshly liberated Belgian and Luxemburg towns and villages. While the greetings were not as hysterical as in Brittany there were plenty of people on hand to shout, "*Vive Nos Liberators-Thank you Americans. Long Live*

Liberty." In the Luxemburg towns the most common slogans were, "*Mir wolle bleibe wat mir sin*" (we want to remain what we are) and "*Lebe Roosevelt und Grossherzogin Charlotte.*"

In the early morning hours of October 1st the convoy at last reached its destination: a wind-swept hill, 12 miles northeast of Bastogne. The 50,000 vehicle miles were completed without an accident of any kind, which was a feather in the cap of the "Greasy 27".

WINTERIZING IN THE LUXEMBURG MUD

The hospital had to be set up and ready for patients by 1800 hours, the day of arrival. So the groggy, bleary-eyed crew, drawing upon its last bit of energy, plunged into the job with a real determination. At scheduled time the tent city was up. It was set on a high hill near a planted pine forest and overlooked the wide expanses of the lovely Luxemburg countryside. The enlisted men pitched their pup tents inside the forest. The rains came down, day in and day out. Within a week the mud became so deep and the roads so impassable that the engineers had to be called upon to build a gravel road.

"*What's going to happen to us now? Are we going to remain in this God-forsaken mud-hole?*" There was a fierce debate on this question. Some said we'll keep right on going. Others thought that we would winterize and start up again in the Spring. One silly question which no one bothered asking was how about the German divisions facing us a stone's throw across the border? Will they winterize too?

Having failed to outflank the Siegfried Line with the air-borne operation launched at Arnheim, Holland on September 17th the nature of the fighting now changed to one of applying steady pressure all along the fortified Roer and in the Hurtgen Forests, known to the doughboys as the 'death factory'. The Nazis were selling space for time and were determined to exact the greatest possible price. A steady stream of battle casualties kept coming in, but a large portion of the patients were sick with respiratory diseases and there was a growing number of trench foot casualties.

Many of these admissions were from the hospital personnel. The ceaseless drop of rain through the tall black pines; the life in the cold and damp pup tents; the mud, ankle deep and then knee deep. Mud on ones clothes, in the food, on the blankets. All this proved a bit more rugged than many a constitution could endure. Again the engineers came to the rescue and began erecting a building from prefabricated German barracks. By the middle of November Receiving, Registrar, X-ray, Surgery and

EVERYDAY LIFE IN LUXEMBURG MUD

A Midnight Snack.



Keeping Clean.

A Little game of Blackjack.



The railsplitter.

part of the Ward section moved into these barracks. The personnel remained in their tents or lived in one of the many log cabins that sprang up in the pine woods.

These were hard and hateful days. More and more of the unit personnel were being admitted into the hospital. The days moved by so slowly. Another Thanksgiving arrived. "Now what's there to be thankful for?" the men asked. "When a guy gets up in the morning with enough ambition to wash and shave in the icy water only to find the lister bag frozen and then have to build a fire to thaw it out. Or when a fellow tries to find his pup tent in the woods in total black-out and slips into a water filled foxhole and has to go to sleep dripping with mud." "What's there to be thankful for," complained a ward boy, "when the only time your feet are dry is when you stand up on the stove." Thus the boys continued to gripe and beef as they ate their turkey and trimmings.



Lt. Col. Reid-Mission Completed.

And yet the morale of the unit remained surprisingly high. The men knew all too well how much they had to be thankful for; namely, not being among the doughboys who came into the hospital, their bodies mutilated by the terrible treeburst, the screaming meemies and 88s. They were mighty thankful for not being in the shoes of the men who came in with feet swollen like balloons after standing knee deep in water in their fox-holes and not removing their shoes for 2 and 3 weeks at a stretch. Yes, there was plenty to be thankful for; above all for the life still in us (while so many GIs lay buried in the mud), and the hope that some day all this would be a distant memory, to be repeated every Thanksgiving day as the family gathers around the fire place.

Towards the end of November "Bed-check Charlie" became a frequent visitor. But this time something new had been added. With him came the buzz bombs. One could sit in his pup tent and see these rockets rise and sputter through the sky. On certain days they kept coming over every 20 or 30 minutes. And at such times in everyones heart there was a prayer that they shouldn't stop sputtering. Many did come down only a few miles away.

The never-to-be
forgotten
Luxemburg mud.



1st Sgt. Southard and Daisy Mae.



Lt. Mateljan.



"THEY CAN'T COME THROUGH THOSE MOUNTAINS"

About this time all the patients were evacuated. The personnel moved into the German barracks and life became a bit more comfortable, too comfortable to last long. An advance party was dispatched to Caserne, near Aachen, to find a new hospital site. When they came back with a negative report it was decided on December 16 to unload all supplies and equipment, and return the trucks borrowed for this anticipated move. Were we settling down for a long stay?

The Special Service Officer reassembled his chorus of Officers, Nurses and Enlisted Men and resumed practice of Christmas carols.

"*Guess we'll be stuck in this mud-hole till the spring*", all disputants admitted resignedly. "*And its only December 16 now.*" To which people in the know added that we could afford to do so quite safely even though there were very few American troops in this sector. The Nazis couldn't possibly attack through the impassible Ardennes that lay between us. Medical and Surgical teams were organized and placed on detached service with the 44th and 67th Evacuation Hospitals at Malmedy, Belgium. Thus the little tent city, amidst the rolling hills and ghostly grandeur of the Ardennes forest, prepared to hibernate for the winter.

At 2230 warning orders were received for movement. The transportation officer was sent to draw 30 trucks from First Army (to which the hospital was assigned October 22nd). Things began to happen fast.

THE BATTLE OF THE ARDENNES IS ON!

Throughout the day of December 16th one could hear the distant crump of shell fire, seemingly getting louder by the hour. "Sheer imagination", some said, but before long the lethargic atmosphere became charged with electric tension. Early the next morning the personnel was awakened by the 1st Sgt. Instead of his usual calm, gentle, gravel-like voice, he said very excitedly: "Get the hell out of bed, throw your cots on the trucks, grab some chow and be ready to move at a moment's notice." The shelling had become very intense. The sky was lit up with the flash of artillery, search lights and Ack-Ack fire.

Soon reports started coming in about street fighting in Clervaux, 3 1/2 miles away. Stragglers were now streaming in with the most horrible tales. Some had just escaped across the Our river after Jerry paratroopers in US uniform swooped down on their batteries. "*The Kraut is*

taking no prisoners", they replied to a question as to what happened to the rest of the battery.

Now came the most unbearable hours of all; hours of waiting for transportation to arrive; waiting while the shells were crashing all around, while the unit faced the imminent danger of being engulfed by the Nazi tide. At last, after 5 hours of waiting, the trucks arrived and the 107th departed at noon. Staying behind was a detail to take care of part of the equipment. Their stay was cut short when a lone tank rolled up and the tankman shouted from his turret, "This is positively the last GI vehicle. The Jerries are right on my tail. You fellows better clear out."

The convoy headed for Chateau Roumont, 2 miles southeast of Libin, Belgium. "At least we're moving somewhere," commented one of the jokers, "even if it took the Jerries to pry us loose from the Luxembourg mud."

The battle for the Ardennes was on. The 107th was to undergo its severest test. Never before or since was the going so tough. Somehow the 107th always seemed to be in the very thick of things. That the leadership and each and every man and woman faced this supreme test and came through with flying colors is now history.

CHATEAU ROUMONT

Late that afternoon the 107th arrived at the palatial hunting lodge of the Chateau with its elaborate grounds, mirrored walls, gilded chandeliers and magnificent marble stairways. The poor litterbearers (and practically every able-bodied man gave a hand) who hauled the wounded up those 4 flights would gladly have traded all this splendor for a second hand elevator. Day and night these men labored hauling the wounded to the wards and to the operating theatre set up in the rose and pearl gray banquet hall.

The hospital began receiving patients at midnight. The building's capacity was 250. Before long 450 wounded were crowded in and more kept coming all the time.

Wounded were pouring in from all armies and all sectors of the front. The confusion was great. Commanding Officers came to the hospital looking for members of their units and enlisted men came looking for their COs. "What divisions is your hospital supporting", a stray Major asked the Registrar. (Normally the hospital supported between two and four divisions) "Christ, looks like you're supporting all the divisions of all the Armies of the United Nations," he exclaimed as he looked over that day's records of admissions.

One platoon of the 42nd Field Hospital arrived at the hospital minus all their equipment. The other platoon had been surrounded at Wiltz.

As ever more units were being overrun more stragglers were appearing in the 107th chow line. Reports kept coming of rampant Nazis appearing in groups on the highways surrounding the hospital, — ravaging and killing whoever came along.

But the 107th personnel, working 24 hours a day without let up, was too busy to worry about all these reports. True all contact with army was severed and it was rumored that for ten days the hospital was listed as missing. Right now the 107th wasn't concerned about these reports or about Army connections. Being the only Evacuation Hospital so far forward in the fighting zone, the sole concern of these dog-tired medics was to face their additional responsibilities in as calm and courageous a manner as did the doughboys on the line.

The Commanding Officer seemed to be at all places at all times, but he particularly worked with the operating theatre where 388 operations were performed in an 80 hour period.

Although the number of operations does not seem spectacular, a review of the statistics reveals a much greater volume of very serious operations were performed than at any other period. There especially was a large number of abdominal, chest, maxillo-facial, brain and serious extremity cases. This is understandable when it is realized most of the casualties came directly from the Battalion Aid Stations, since the chain of medical evacuation was greatly disrupted.

At times it almost seemed as if the unit would crack under the terrific strain but the enormous pressure, fear and tension only welded the personnel together even more firmly, single in purpose and spirit.

Men worked 12 hours at their usual assignment and then continued to work as litter-bearers for hours more. Officers carried litters. No one slept if they could help in some way. The mess personnel fed more than 1500 people at each meal. The spirit was magnificent.

News arrived that the 101st Airborne had been surrounded and that Bastogne had fallen. On December 21st, just when it appeared as if the hospital was beginning to emerge from this chaos, a message arrived that Nazi patrols were observed a few miles down the road heading for the hospital. It was no longer possible to ignore the fact that at any moment a bunch of Nazi paratroopers might walk in the front door.

"Clear out in ten minutes," came the order. "Everything, yes everything but what you can carry on your back must be left behind." All patients that could be moved were speedily loaded on ambulances and trucks. Volunteers were needed to care for those that could not be moved. On all sides hands went up. "Do you realize what it means?" they were cautioned. Yes, they

did and all hands went up again. No one was thinking of being a hero. Just doing ones duty. Of the 400 patients in the hospital 300 were evacuated further to the rear and the rest were carried in ambulances to the hospital's next location.

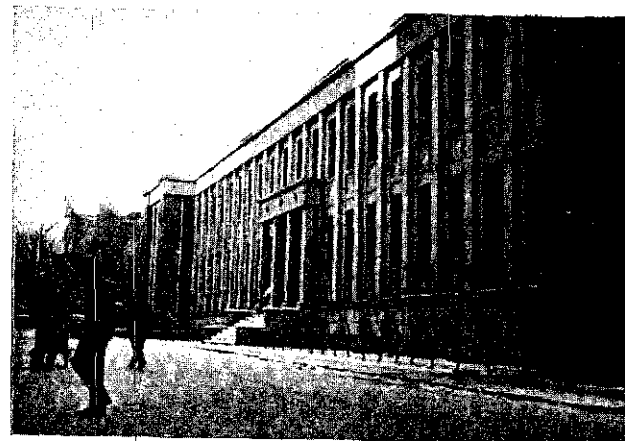
THE ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL AT CARLSBURG

The caravan of assorted vehicles jolted to a halt at the St. Joseph's School in Carlsburg, Belgium at noon of Dec 21. The hospital was at once opened to the patients awaiting admission from the clearing station as well as the hundred patients carried along in our convoy. The men were hungry and thirsty, but no one could drink his precious water; all canteens went to the patients.

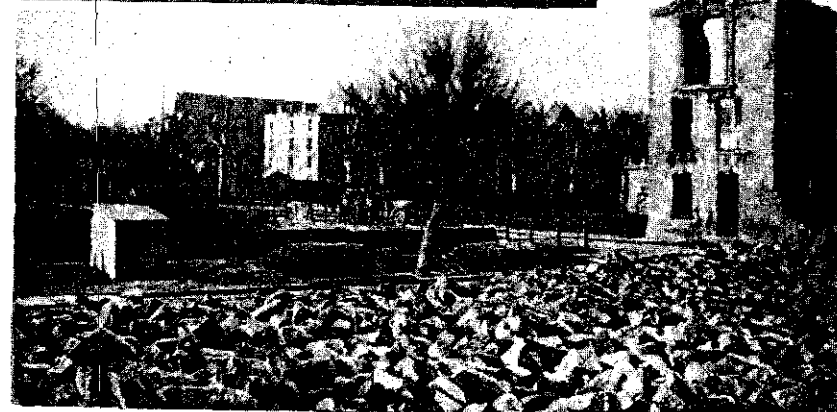


Escaping from Von Rundstedt's Clutches. Unloading Patients at Carlsburg, Belgium, after hasty withdrawal from Chateau Roumont.

There was one consoling thought: at least they were away from mortal danger. Then came the cry for volunteers to go back into the lion's den to salvage the rest of the equipment. Before long 50 men had boarded trucks and were heading back to the Chateau amid the flash of guns and the roar of the revitalized Luftwaffe. "Hell, that's one subject they never taught us in basic", the men kidded as their trucks dashed down the Nazi infested roads. Upon arrival at the Chateau the men witnessed the grim testimony of the timely get-away of the hospital. A German bomb had caved in part of the roof.



L'Ecole De Textile,
Hospital Site Sedan,
France.



Important target of Luftwaffe.
Bridge across Meuse River, Sedan, France.

AT SEDAN-THE GATEWAY TO FRANCE

No sooner had all the patients been unloaded at Carlsburg and most of the equipment assembled when the frightening news arrived that savage Nazi paratroopers had broken through in this area and were killing and looting as they went along. This was the time of the Malmedy massacre. At noon of the 22nd of Dec. orders arrived to proceed at once to Sedan, that ancient fortress city of France. Arriving towards evening the men were greeted with the news that the Germans were 20 miles away and

advancing towards Sedan as the gateway to France and one of the most important communications centers. The men and women were too exhausted to worry any longer.

The personnel was quartered at the College Turenne and the hospital was set up at the Textile School then occupied by the FFI. Before long patients started rolling in a steady stream. A block or so from the hospital was an important bridge spanning the Meuse River, and about 200 yards to the left of this bridge was the College Turenne. The Luftwaffe had orders to 'get that bridge', and came over nightly to bomb and strafe it and everything else along the way. A heavy concentration of Ack Ack would answer. As this grim nightly duel commenced our battlewise patients would dive under their beds. This situation was particularly hard on the men suffering from combat exhaustion, and there were many such among the 1200 patients that were brought into the hospital after the siege of Bastogne was lifted.

Christmas came and went, hardly noticed by the men absorbed in the great drama of the Bulge. The only things that might be associated with Christmas were the jeep shows being put on in each ward, a fine turkey dinner and a brief session of Christmas carols. It was also the occasion of the transfer of the 107th back to the Third Army, with which it finished out the war.

Christmas presents? There was one which thrilled everyone as nothing else could have done. Clear skies for our air force! Those big clumsy C-47s flying supplies to the besieged men at Bastogne, those fleets of mighty bombers roaring over the Sedan skies to settle accounts for Malmedy; to us they seemed like avenging angels on an overdue mission of retribution.

Even New Years Day might have slipped by unnoticed had it not been for the intervention of the Luftwaffe. On New Years night all off-duty personnel had crowded into the mess hall to see a Frankie Sinatra movie. It was bitterly cold outside and everyone tried to generate as much heat as possible.

While the audience was watching a news-reel of the bombing of Helsinki, the bombing suddenly seemed too realistic. The projection machine crashed to the floor. Glass and shrapnel scattered all over the place. After a deafening crash came a series of smaller explosions. A Jerry bomber had dropped some 50 anti-personnel bombs. Everyone threw dignity to the winds and dove under the tables. Before anyone dared to rise 'Bed-check Charlie' was back. This time one could hear the sputtering of his machine guns as they cut a path across the mess hall windows and poured a hail of bullets into the crowded hall. Despite the fear in the hearts of those men and women,

outwardly everyone was calm and collected. In the operating theater the surgeons, technicians and nurses remained at their stations and continued to work. It was truly a miracle that so few casualties resulted, since only one man was seriously wounded and five slightly wounded.

THE 107TH'S TOUGHEST MONTH

That Von Rundstedt's all or nothing gamble was lost became quite clear toward the middle of January. The Bulge had now been compressed to a small area and was fast disappearing. The days of the "Road Back" were over. Once again the doughboys were swinging into the offensive. And this time they had many a score to settle.

But defensive or offensive, a heavy stream of casualties continued to pour in. And when on the 15th of January the hospital closed its doors at Sedan, it had completed the busiest month in its history. It had cared for 2700 patients.

It was also the 107th's most exciting and exacting month of operation. A month of great hardships gallantly endured; of heroic deeds performed in a modest and unassuming manner. The conduct of this group of American men and women was not only a tribute to them as individuals and as an organization but reflected great credit on the Medical Service of the U. S. Army.

At this time speculation was rife among officers and enlisted men about the possibilities of a unit citation for the excellent work it had performed during the trying days just ended. Especially so since the 107th was among the few medical units that even when the danger of being over-run by the enemy was imminent, was able to move patients, personnel and equipment without outside assistance and continue to function. But here fate was to play one of its nasty tricks.

WE RESUME THE OFFENSIVE

The Battle of the Bulge, despite the temporary advance of the enemy, resulted in the destruction of two of their panzer armies, the best they had. Much of the armor which survived our aerial blows was rushed eastward to meet the most devastating of all Russian offensives. Our armies now resumed their advance and it was time for the 107th to move up with the advance. The first forward move in 3 months was completed Jan 21st when the hospital arrived at Hachy, Belgium and set up in St. Joseph's College, formerly used by the Nazis as a headquarters.

The building was in a deplorable condition. Much work and time was put in cleaning it up. But polishing rusty iron won't make it shine

like stainless steel, nor will mopping the floor straighten out the warped boards. Thus the unsuitable housing as well as a certain let-down after a ten weeks period of intense strain made the afternoon of Feb 22nd an ideal time for an Army inspection. An inspection did take place and by no less a person than the Third Army Surgeon. The informal greeting of a ward-man didn't help matters, "*Hi ya Colonel, What can I do for you?*" As a result, the unit did not receive what it considered was due credit for its previous outstanding accomplishments.

Compared to the previous phase, the stay at Hachy might be considered a breathing spell. During this period the organization took stock of the



First Presentation of Bronze Star Medals, Hachy, Belgium.

past. It noted those individuals whose performance was outstanding during those crucial days. Bronze Stars were awarded to a number of officers and enlisted men.

Nevertheless the influx of patients was considerable. So much so that a number of ward tents had to be pitched in the court yard to accommodate the overflow. There was a particularly large number of patients suffering from trench foot and frost-bite. This was one of the after-effects of the rugged life of the doughboys, fighting in mud and sleet and snow to halt and then reverse Von Rundstedt's steam roller. Thus 2300 patients passed through the hospital at Hachy.

Busy days were nothing new to the 107th and while accommodating the considerable flow of sick and wounded the organization was able to resume some of the luxuries of military service, such as passes. Many went to the large nearby town of Arlon in search of souvenirs, champagne and other things... A feeling of great optimism now developed as the radio

continued booming news of smashing victories on the eastern and western fronts. Yes, the allied armies were again on the march and Jerry didn't seem to have enough left to stop them.

ON GERMANY'S DOORSTEP — DIEKIRCH

The entire front from Holland to Swizerland was now moving forward and the 1st of March found the 107th also joining the advance. The hospital moved into the once charming city of Diekirch and set up in the Luxemburg State School, the only building in town to escape serious damage. The unit was now supporting the XIII Corps which was blasting its way through the Siegfried Line and pushing on towards the Mossele Triangle.



The Last Stop Before Germany. Luxemburg State School, Diekirch, Luxemburg.

It was at Diekirch that Major Rex Trusler, MAC joined the organization, soon to be appointed its Executive Officer and destined to play a principle part in directing the unit's affairs.

It was here that "lucky" Noah Gome's name was pulled out of a hat. He was to go home on a 30 day furlough. No greater joy could be given to any GI than to set his feet on U.S. soil.

And finally it was at Diekirch that EVAC EVENTS, the very popular unit weekly publication was launched by the officers and enlisted men, which so truly reflected the trials and tribulation, the joys and sorrows of the 107th family.

In its very first issue, Professor Thibeau of the Luxemburg State School, who was of such great help in readying the building for the hospital, gave genuine expression to the gratitude felt by the liberated people towards the Americans. He wrote: "*The town is bleeding from a thousand wounds but with the help of God and our friends we shall construct a new and peaceful Diekirch. It's good to breathe and to work in a free house, battered and broken though it may be.*"

After ministering to 1500 doughboys at this station the hospital received orders to move into "Fortress Germany."

ON GERMAN SOIL — AT LAST

The middle of march was the period of lightning advances. Within four days Third Army units advanced 55 miles to where the Rhine and Mossele Rivers meet at Coblenz. Numerous large pockets of Germans were left behind. As the 107th convoy left Diekirch and at long last moved



Passing the Siegfried Line with its dragon teeth and numerous strongpoints.

on to German soil it was met by a staggering scene of devastation. Vianden was the first town after crossing the border. It was still smouldering with a smell of death. A few gutted walls and heaps of rubble was all that remained of a once thriving town. It was the same story in Bittburg, Kyllburg and other towns passed along the way. White flags in the form of towels, table cloths and negligees fluttered from the few remaining Gasthouses, farms and church towers.

After driving past this havoc and the Siegfried Line with its dragon teeth and numerous strong points, it felt good to be again out in the countryside green with early spring. "*This country reminds me of the Berkshires in Connecticut*", said Jake, "*These people have a nice country, then why in God's name don't they stay there.*" The convoy passed a railroad station. Just one wall remained standing. On it were splashed in big red letters such slogans as "Wheels must roll for victory." "Victory or Siberia." The sign that brought the biggest laugh was, "We shall never surrender", because just at that time a convoy of trucks rolled by packed with a few hundred PWs. These were just a small droplet of the millions of Krauts who were paying no heed to the "Never Surrender" signs.

MAYEN — FIRST COMBAT STATION IN GERMANY

On the 16th of March the convoy halted in front of an orphanage outside of Mayen, 15 miles west of Coblenz on the Rhine. Upon arrival the hospital was faced with a serious dilemma. According to the non-frat rules GIs and civilians were not to occupy the same building. As our convoy pulled up in front of the orphanage the whole group of pathetic looking kids faced the convoy. They looked like any other motherless kids. How can we throw them out? They were finally moved to nearby temporary quarters but were allowed to retain the use of their chapel, bakery and other essential rooms.

Pockets of Germans were still holding out a short distance to the northwest and south of the hospital site. The crack of rifle and machine gun fire, the wham of sniper bullets kept up for some time. Every morning exactly 9AM bombers would come over and drop their loads at the foot of the mountain where a large pocket was holding out. The earth quivered for miles around and the area would be blackened with geysers of smoke. The pocket to the southwest was 15 square miles in size and it took the 89th Div about a week to clean it up.

At first the casualties were gratifyingly low. Great masses of Germans had been pinned against the Rhine and cut to pieces. Little effective resistance was encountered. But how high a price will we have to pay for