

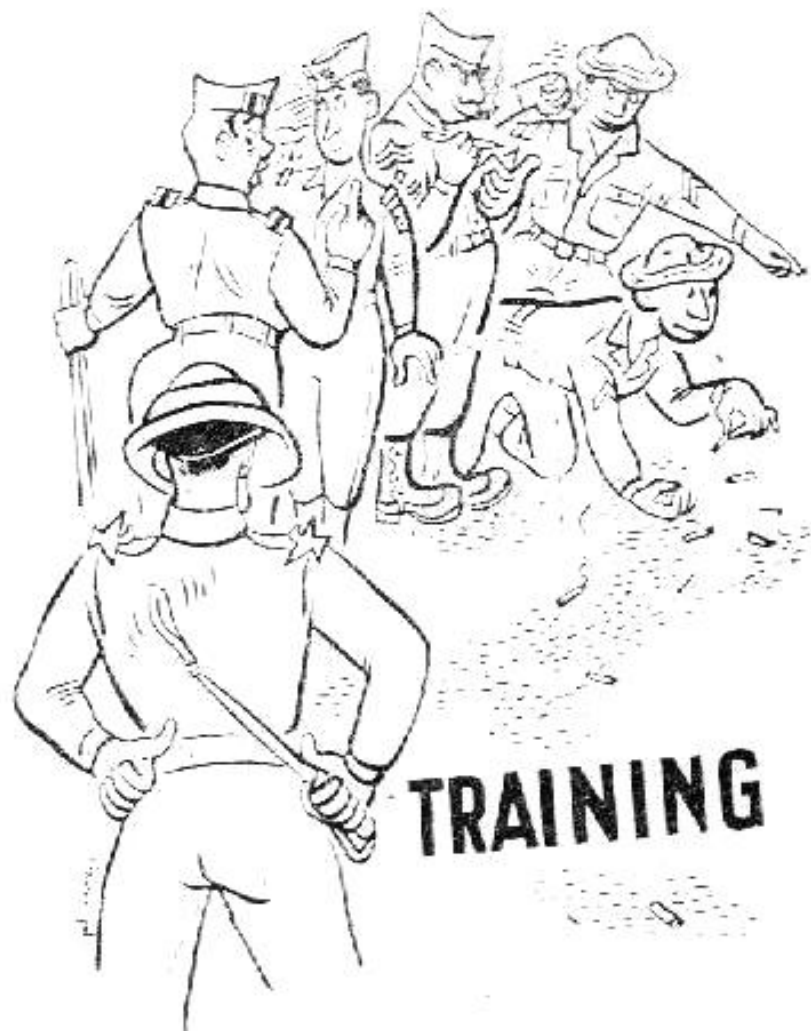
PERAGIMUS

A Brief History of
the 358th Infantry Regiment

90th Infantry Division



We Accomplish



TRAINING

Camp Barkeley

The story begins in Camp Barkeley, near Abilene, Texas. There, in the famous mesquite range country of west Texas, the 358th Infantry was reactivated with the 90th Infantry Division on the 25th of March 1942. New recruits from all parts of the country joined the original 20th Infantry cadre at Camp Barkeley and a vigorous training program was instituted for these soldiers, fresh from civilian life. In basic training at Camp Barkeley, they learned how to live as a soldier, how to shoot. There were daylight maneuvers and night problems on barren, rugged Hankins ranch. A high state of discipline was maintained throughout all phases of training and great emphasis was given to close order drill. On the parade ground they gained a reputation for their appearance and their precise execution. Their endurance was tested on many grueling twenty-five mile hikes along Burma Road and over the familiar ranch area. Finally, after eleven months, well trained and disciplined soldiers emerged from these west Texas proving grounds.

Louisiana

January 26, 1943, the Regiment, now completely motorized, was rolling down the highways for a crack at Louisiana maneuvers. Here it engaged in a series of three, two week free maneuvers, make-believe battles, against the 77th Division. Eleven months of rigorous training was now put to a successful test. On completion of these maneuvers the unit returned to Camp Barkeley, cleaned up, and polished up on drill and marksmanship.

Desert Heat

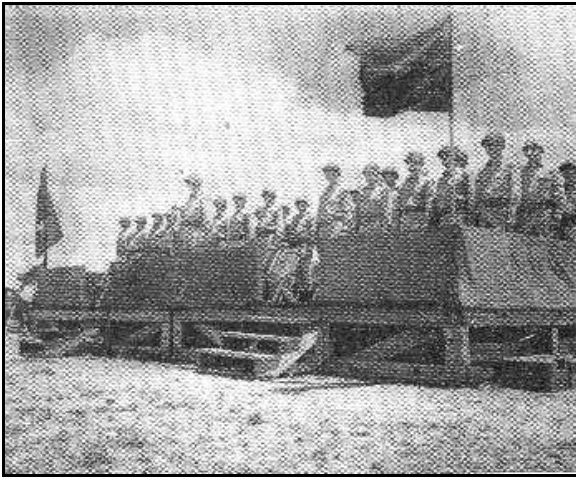
The 358th Infantry struck out for the west on August 4th, 1943, moving by rail to the wide open spaces of the California desert, temporarily stopping at Camp Pilot Knob near Yuma, Arizona; later moving to Camp Granite under the shadow of the towering Granite Mountains, and to the vast maneuver area in the Harquahala Mountains of the Arizona desert. In the final weeks the outfit participated in a large scale mock-battle that raged up and down the California desert from Needles, California to Yuma, Arizona. It was during this latter phase of the maneuvers that the division distinguished itself – attacking through Palen Pass, a treacherous mountainous passageway, in record time. Three months of rough exercises in this hot, desolate wasteland of the west under “Ol’ King Salt Tablet” found the Regiment physically hardened and skilled in maneuver; found it tougher – wiser.

From Coast to Coast

A coast to coast railroad trip took the Regiment from the Pacific to the Atlantic, where, on New Year’s Day it moved into comfortable quarters at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and occupied regular barracks for the first time since activation. Many for the first time became acquainted with New York City and America’s Eastern Seaboard. Garrison life for the 358th Infantry was short lived however, for early in March the 90th Division was alerted for overseas movement, and on March 14th quietly loaded up bag and baggage, and slipped out of Fort Dix to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

“P.O.M.”

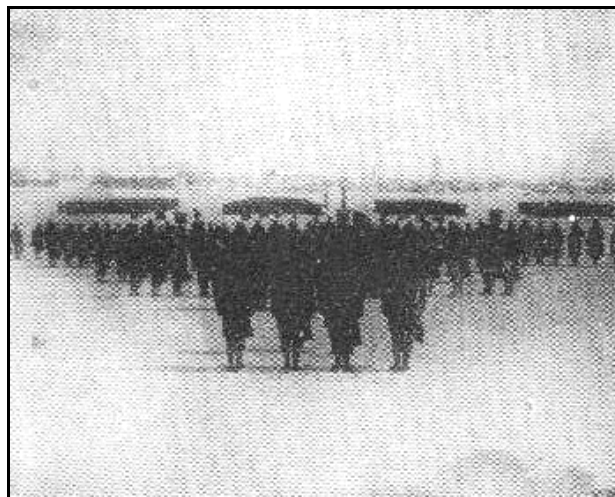
At camp Kilmer the outfit was immediately plunged into a whirl of furious activity – equipping and preparing for overseas movement – “POM”. For several days the Regiment was but a shipping number, “precious and high priority cargo”, marked for a secret destination somewhere in the ETO.



General Terrel Reviews Regiment at Camp Berkeley.



Company Street at Camp Granite, California



The Regimental Review for the Secretary of War

ENGLAND



The Skyline Fades

On March 22 troops of the Regiment rode the rails to New York harbor, where under the cover of darkness they boarded the M.S. John Erickson, sister ship to the famous Gripsholm. In the early morning haze of the following day she sailed majestically toward the open sea as a famous skyline faded out of sight on the distant horizon. Soon she joined a convoy of the other ships and a naval escort that stood by like big brothers. On the second night out to sea the liner was forced to put back into port for engine repairs, but after three days in New York Harbor, she again put out to sea and proceeded across the Atlantic without further incident. So it was a welcome sight indeed on Easter Sunday, the eighth of April, when troops of the Regiment looked out on Liverpool harbor.

Life in England

At Liverpool the Regiment was hustled aboard English trains and transported across the neatly patterned English countryside to two camps just south of Birmingham. The Second and Third Battalions, and the Special Units were billeted at Camp Sturt Common near the town of Bewdley, while the First Battalion was at Camp Coton Hall. Training began immediately with special emphasis on physical conditioning exercises and marches over the picturesque English countryside. Daily the men were required to carry full combat equipment on fast road marches. Another hike was added to the busy schedule for some when they set out for the nearby villages of Kidderminster and Bewdley, where local atmosphere as well as ale was absorbed.

To The Last Shoe String

On May 12 the units moved again – this time to settle as a Regiment at Llanmartin, near Newport, Wales. The stay at Camp Llanmartin, however, was to be short lived with most of the time devoted to checking of equipment down to the last shoe string. The hardening and toughening training in the nature of fast road marches with full combat equipment continued and soon brought the men to the peak of physical condition. Meanwhile, the outfit was “sealed” in the camp. The mysterious, heavily guarded building with its boarded up windows took on added significance as high commanders entered to study impending operations.

Invasion

On June 4th the Regiment packed up and moved in closest secrecy to dockside at Newport, Wales – the personnel of the Third Battalion loading into the Bienville and the rest of the Regiment into the Excelsior. The vehicles and heavier equipment were loaded into Liberty ships. When loading was completed, the ominous gray ships slipped into Newport harbor and proceeded to rendezvous off Cardiff, Wales with several other ships. On board, it was soon obvious the big event which had been in the wind for so long was about to happen and on the second day the Convoy sailed from Cardiff, remaining within sight of the English coast for some time.

Then it was no longer a secret. The ship’s radio announced that this was D-Day. Paratroopers were fighting in France – Allied troops had already landed on the Normandy coast. Intermittent radio reports throughout the day added a tenseness to the expected atmosphere as the roll of the 358th Infantry was unveiled. Maps and detailed plans appeared from everywhere, and last minute preparations were made for debarkation and movement to the first assembly area in France. Prior to debarking, the Regiment’s chaplains held well-attended church services in the mess halls and compartments of the troop ships.



Utah Beach

At eleven o'clock on the morning of June 8th, in the midst of a great display of naval power, the convoy dropped anchor off "Utah" beach on the Cherbourg Peninsula. As far as one could see, the channel was dotted with ships and landing craft of all types and description. All the larger ships had barrage balloons moored to the masts and everywhere one looked there was a panorama of floating "sausages." Overhead, hawk-eyed Allied aircraft hovered and maintained a constant patrol of the skies on the lookout for enemy aircraft.

Debarkation

Landing craft pulled up to the sides of the ships and the troops began clambering down the landing nets and into the smaller boats. Debarkation started at 11:58, and as the crafts rammed up on the beach, the men unloaded and waded through the waist-deep water to the dry sands, and made their way inland. The area near Azeville which the Regiment had planned to occupy was still in enemy hands, so instead the columns moved along a dirt road south of St. Martin de Varreville, and thence north and east towards Turqueville. As the men marched along, a hot midday sun beat down on them with their heavy loads of new equipment, accentuating the unpleasantness of those first impressions of Normandy. Roads were lined with discarded invasion equipment – at frequent intervals, there were signs with skull and crossbones and the letters "MINEN". Carcasses of dead horses were sprawled on the roadside, and occasionally a dead German in a strange grey uniform and black boots stared grotesquely from a ditch. Now and then, the way would be cleared to allow a jeep with wounded soldiers to proceed in the opposite direction toward the beaches.

First Day Ashore

The 358th Infantry was now in the war, and it was not to be long before those heavy unsavory impressions would become actual daily experiences. The day following the landing was spent reorganizing and getting the vehicles and heavy equipment into the hands of the companies and battalions. All the while big long-toms in the area sent artillery shells whistling into the enemy lines. That first night, "Bed Check Charlie", the nightly, low flying reconnaissance plane of the Germans with its recognizable drone, introduced himself to the outfit and received a hot reception. In the distance, over the beach, the sky was aglow with a streak of tracer bullets and anti-aircraft fire.

Into the attack

Less than twenty-four hours after the first troops landed on the beach, the Regiment was ordered to attack. The 1st Battalion jumped off and secured the bridge at Chef du Pont, rescuing a battalion of paratroopers, and then moved on to take the town of Picauville by midmorning. Pushing on toward Pont L'Abbe they met fierce resistance and murderous mortar fire. Later in the afternoon the Third Battalion moved up on the right flank of the First and together they attacked toward the town, but so determined was the resistance, they were forced to dig in just short of the town that night. Meanwhile the Second Battalion remained in Division Reserve.

Hedgerows

The three-quarters of a mile from Picauville to Pont L'Abbe was stubbornly defended from hedge to hedge. The famous hedgerow country of Normandy reared itself as the ugly, bitter battle field on which the 358th Infantry was to fight some of its bloodiest battles. Each hedge was another line of defense for the Jerry. Prominent also were the sunken roads where the unforgettable odor of the dank Normandy soil was most noticeable. Also came the hated German "88" and the "Burp Gun", each a nemesis to be reckoned with in Normandy. This, indeed, was a new type of fighting, and for a time the hedgerow proved a difficult obstacle. Soon, however, the Infantry learned to overcome this obstacle and drive the German from his hedgerow home. Normandy exacted its bloody toll and plodding Infantry moved on, day after day, from hedgerow to hedgerow.

Pont L'Abbe

On the 12th of June the Regiment made its final attack to capture Pont L'Abbe. Roaring P47's dove on the town and mass artillery battered it to bits in preparation for the four o'clock "jump off". When they moved in the First Battalion on the left and the Second Battalion on the right they mopped up a completely destroyed village. On the day following, the Second and Third Battalions attacked to secure an important crossroad on the west of town.

Le Calais

On the 14th of June the 82nd Airborne Division passed through the Regiment and drove on to the west. That night the outfit was moved to the vicinity of Amfreville where it attacked the next day toward Le Calais. There were stories of numerous acts of gallantry as the Third Battalion was first to cross an open swampland which Jerry had well covered with machine gun crossfire. They were followed by the Second which had a difficult time too; but their nemesis was an open field on the other side of the swamp. As darkness approached the First Battalion crossed and the three held firm on the other side for the night. Next day all three battalions pushed forward about 3 kilometers to hold a line near La Ham. Through these lines the 79th Division passed to continue on to Cherbourg while reports came that the peninsula was almost cut. The Regiment then moved to a defensive position extending from Coigny to Bauppte, France.

Patrols and "Guts"

While in this location, meager comforts were made available to the fighting men. Some were able to use a blanket in their foxholes, the first bit of cover since the landing on the Normandy beach; and some received hot "chow" for the first time. However the gallant and courageous actions did not cease, for many patrols were dispatched to penetrate deep into enemy lines. The patrols that came back were frequently badly mauled, but vital information was obtained, and the great courage of the officers and men who fearlessly entered enemy lines is beyond description. At night there was the familiar drone of "Bed Check Charlie", and frequently – almost always, the chronic harassment of enemy artillery came screeching and screaming overhead and detonated with a loud, terrifying explosion that shook the very earth.

The Rains Came

The preceding battles in the Normandy Hedgerow country had been rough but the ensuing battles were to be equal tests of the mettle of the fighting men of the 358th Infantry. On the July 3rd, a memorable day in the battle of France, the Division launched an attack southwest against a strong enemy line defended by determined, fanatical paratroopers and SS men. On the first day of the attack, the rains came and the damp dismal weather of the succeeding days made the battle one of the most unforgettable in history. Casualties were heavy and communications and supply were hampered by heavy enemy shelling. The 2nd Battalion charged through to Les Sablons, bypassed it, and continued south, while the First Battalion fought for St. Jores. The Third Battalion, initially in reserve, moved up to Les Sablons to clean out the town and tie in with the Second Battalion. These were days that put a man's courage and strength to the most severe test – days that did not end with nightfall, but dragged on incessantly through daylight and darkness, with rain and mist that apparently would never cease. Hard fighting continued until the Division faced a great hill covered with deep woods that rose from the land like a powerful giant and engulfed all who were so bold to enter.

Foret De Mont Castre

This was the formidable Foret de Mont Castre the famous Hill 122 that looked out on the English Channel and the very beach in which the Regiment first set foot. Here was to be the supreme test. For the great courage and tenacity displayed here in routing enemy from his mighty wooded fortress, the Third Battalion was to be cited by the President of the United States.

The First Battalion was committed in the Division sector between the 357th Infantry and the 359th Infantry Regiments and launched a successful attack against the eastern nose of the Hill 122. Success was short lived, however, for on the first night the Battalion was pushed off the hill by a furious counterattack, and Division Engineers were hurriedly moved up to help bolster the line. The rest of the Regiment was committed on the following day. The Second Battalion was moved to the extreme right flank of the Regiment and temporarily went to the control of the 359th infantry while the Third Battalion went into action on the left of the Second Battalion. Meanwhile, the enemy increased his desperate efforts to retain control of the important hill. He plastered the reverse side of the hill incessantly with mortars and artillery. He sent small groups of paratroopers infiltrating into the lines to attack from the rear.

Hand To Hand fighting

On the 11th of July the Third Battalion executed a bold, hazardous flanking maneuver cutting in rear of the hill, hitting an enemy nerve – his main supply line. Instantly the battalion was hit from all sides by frenzied enemy paratroopers. The most bitter hand to hand fighting the outfit was ever to see took place as the battalion fought against vastly superior numbers of the enemy's best troops. In the thick brush of the mighty forest a man could see only to the next bush. Casualties were extremely heavy as the battle became a fight to the finish. Meanwhile, the First Battalion had finally seized and regained control of the eastern nose of the hill and the Second Battalion thrashed on through the thick brush along with the 359th Infantry Regiment. On the 12th of July, the entire Regimental front moved as the enemy withdrew leaving his dead in the once impregnable forest. This was the day they finally emerged from the jungle-like woods after cracking the Mahlman Line – one of the enemy's greatest defensive positions.

Battle Of Gorges

Continuing the advance the First Battalion hit another strong enemy line in the vicinity of the town of Gorges. The battle of Gorges was hard fought, but the enemy was forced to relent and withdraw to still another line along the Seves River. The Third Battalion moved up to the river to a defensive position while the rest of the Regiment was allowed a few days rest in Gorges – rest that was disturbed by extremely heavy enemy artillery.

Island of the White Witches

On the 22nd of July, the 358th Infantry was ordered to attack and seize the Island of Seves – the Island of the White Witches, by an age old superstition, located in the Seves River little more than a mile northeast of Periers. As the entire invasion front remained momentarily static, the First and Second Battalions attacked against overwhelming odds, gaining a foothold on the island, only to be severely counterattacked, with the enemy throwing in everything he had in an all out effort to retain control of his main line of resistance. Eventually, after butting against impregnable enemy defenses and being subjected to unusually large concentrations of enemy artillery and tank fire, the attack was repulsed amid heavy losses. However, the stage had been set for the historical Third Army breakthrough. In the following days, the 358th Infantry was to reap the benefits of a bloody past in the many victories that were to come. The battle of the Island of Seves proved to be the last major encounter of the 358th Infantry in the Normandy hedgerow country.



Normandy Hedgerows



The Race To Le Mans

The Normandy defense had been cracked, Jerry was broken and running, and the sky was filled with friendly air power as the tanks of the Third Army rolled toward Avranches. The prison-like hedgerows of Normandy were left behind and before them lay the open, rolling terrain of interior France. The ensuing days brought lightning fast maneuvers, and the 358th Infantry became a leading element in the 90th Division's race across France.

On the 2nd of August, the Third Battalion, led by "K" Company, raced to St. Hilaire du Harcouet, captured the town and secured a vital bridge. The First Battalion followed to seize the high ground east of St. Hilaire, while the second battalion occupied the town. In the days following, the race continued to the banks of the Mayenne River, where the doughboys stripped for a dip in the cool waters while engineers repaired a bridge. Then came a long, grueling three day march to the east, to St. Suzanne.

Le Mans Captured

On the 8th of August, the outfit loaded on trucks and hit the road toward Le Mans. Detrucking and moving under the cover of darkness the First and Second Battalions circled northeast of the city. Shortly after daylight on the next day, the Second Battalion utilizing rowboats gathered together by the civilians crossed the Sarthe River northeast of Le Mans. The remainder of the Regiment following closely behind completed the encirclement of the city, and the resulting capture of Le Mans by other elements of the Division put the 90th farther into France than any other Allied Force. "A" Company alone at one roadblock northwest of the city surprised and captured, Jesse James style, two large enemy motorized columns. The 358th Infantry was beginning to get revenge for the hard fighting during its early days in combat.

The Jaws Close

After Le Mans, the division cut north in clouds of dust towards Alencon, following the Second French Armored Division and blocking to the west any effort of the German 7th Army to escape the inevitable and fast closing Falaise trap. No time was lost as the outfit proceeded by foot and motor through Alencon and Sees, and then swung west and attacked through Almeneches and Le Bourge St. Leonard. The First and Second Battalions pushed against bitter resistance to the Foret de Gouffern; while the Third Battalion attacked to seize control of the roads leading northeast from Chambois. The First Battalion captured Bon Menil and pushed west to two more villages, while the Second Battalion after capturing St. Eugenie, moved into Bon Menil.

The Rim of the Bowl

It resembled a bowl with the troops in position around the rim. This was the picture on the 20th of August, 1944 – when all hell broke loose! The bowl became a valley of death. The Germans, caught helplessly in the trap, ran around crazily, in tanks and on horseback, on every conceivable means of transportation, attempting to escape from the iron jaws. From vantage points along the rim of the bowl, the voluminous fire from TD'S, tanks, machine guns, and rifles continuously sprayed the valley. Cub airplanes from the Regiment's supporting artillery kept their hawk-eyed vigilance on the meleé below – hence the classic remark by one pilot, irritated by the delay in firing, "Quit computin' and start shootin'".

Now and then a temporary truce was called to allow great numbers of beaten Krauts to surrender. One N.C.O. alone accounted for 800. Drove upon drove were herded along roads to Prisoner of War Camps in the rear.

The Third Battalion, at the top of the trap, bore the brunt of several German attempts to break through an escape route north of Chambois. A fierce battle raged, but though outnumbered by far, the Battalion stood its ground.

When the smoke cleared from the valley, there was wreckage and debris strewn for miles and only the charred ruins of those who refused to surrender remained in what was, in reality, a valley of death. As the vaunted Seventh Army was being annihilated in the bloody pocket, there came welcome news that American Forces had entered Paris. Upon relief by British forces in the Falaise Gap area, the 358th Infantry assembled north of Sees and awaited further orders.

No Gas

Early in the morning of the 26th of August, 1944, the Division hit the road again and moved eastward one hundred and seventy miles to secure bridgeheads across the Seine River near Fontainebleau. Famous World War I battlefields, Chateau Thierry being the most notable, were fought over again as they continued to advance to secure the bridgehead at Rheims. Lucky "A" company guarded the bridges of the beautiful city, while the remainder of the Regiment carried out security missions to the east near Warmersville. Due to a severe gasoline shortage the advance bogged down and held up movement until the 5th of September when the Third Battalion moved to the vicinity Verdun. The remainder of the Regiment followed the next morning. Meanwhile, transport planes flew in large quantities of gas to relieve the critical shortage.

Rout at Mairy

On the following morning the Regiment attacked again to pursue the enemy towards the Moselle River. The situation, however, remained extremely fluid. During the night of a of the 7th of September, an enemy armored column launched a surprise attack, hit the Division Command Post near Mont, and then turned toward the First Battalion in the town of Mairy, where heavy fighting ensued. In spite of his formidable armor, the enemy was stopped again; the attack was routed and the force severely beaten. The First Battalion knocked out seven tanks and blew more than 48 armored vehicles to kingdom come. Cannon Company accounted for itself in the meleé, taking a devastating toll of enemy personnel with direct fire of its 105's.

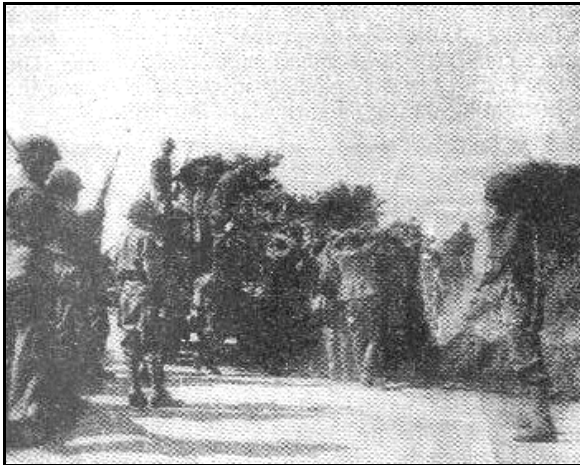
Thionville Captured

The enemy fought a withdrawing action as he was pushed back through Fontoy, Hayange, and Marspich to the Moselle River. To the Second Battalion fell the task of capturing Thionville, an industrial city on the banks of the Moselle. House to house, door to door fighting took place in the town as the enemy was made to relinquish his threshold on the formidable river barrier. Withdrawing during the night he destroyed the last remaining bridge over the river. On the following day the First Battalion was sent in to mop up the north half of the city and together with the Second cleaned it out to the west bank of the Moselle.

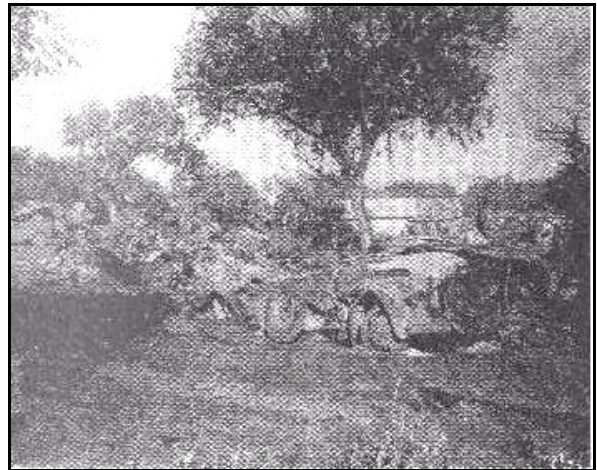
Fort Driant

The Third Battalion was transported south along the Moselle, near the renowned fortress city of Metz, to St Marie Aux Chenes. They were followed in a few days by the rest of the Regiment. They took up the defensive position opposite the gates of Metz, facing the historic forts of Fort Driant, Jeanne d'Arc and the so-called Verdun group of Forts. This defensive position was maintained throughout the month of October. During this period, some of the men left the muddy banks of the Moselle for a few days to rest and cleanup in an improvised rest center at St Marie Aux Chenes. The Paris pass policy was instituted in the Regiment at this time and some fortunate officers and enlisted men visited "Gay Paree" for the first time.

Early morning on the first day of November began an epic that will long be remembered, it saw the front line battalions slip out from under the eyes of Fort Driant and the other mighty forts to move to a concentration area near Morfontaine, France. Election Day in the United States found the 358th Infantry embarking on a momentous military operation – an assault crossing of the Moselle River.



A load of PW's near Le Mans



Smashed German equipment



THE MOSELLE

The Crossing

On the 8th of the month, the Regiment assembled in secrecy on the west bank of the Moselle near Cattenom. By daylight of the following day the First and Third Battalions had crossed the river in assault boats, and begun the attack on the enemy's river defense. The Second, crossing later in the morning, experienced difficulty in finding necessary boats and was subjected to Jerry's observed artillery fire. Meanwhile, the once serene and peaceful Moselle broke into a raging torrent whose flood waters threatened to overrun the entire landscape. Bridging operations by the Engineers came to a standstill. At the same time, the enemy plastered the entire river line with all the artillery he could muster. The situation fast became critical. Medical supplies, rations and ammunition had to be rushed across by boat. On the east bank of the river there were no vehicles, and all supplies were hand carried to the fighting men on the line.

Fort Koenigsmacher

Confronting the First Battalion loomed the mighty bastion of Fort Koenigsmacher that stood defiant before any attacking force. "A" Company was in a hot spot after having launched a determined assault on the great fort. It finally reached the top only to sit there under a murderous hail of enemy fire. For three days and four nights "A" Company, later joined by "B" Company, sat exposed on top of the Fort, all the while subjected to heavy artillery adjusted from within the Fort itself. "C" Company and the Regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon occupied and secured the town of Basse Ham on the Division's right flank.

At All Costs

The men on the Fort refused to back off. They had decided to take the Fort at all costs. At last badly needed demolitions to crack the Fort were flown over by artillery liaison planes and dropped to the assaulting forces. On the third day "A" Company literally blew the enemy from the west end of the Fort and forced them through the tunnels into the waiting arms of "G" Company on the other end. The fall of Fort Koenigsmacher was brought about by unequalled courage and tenacity of the small "A" Company force that had originally gained the top and refused to leave until the job was completed. The battle is recorded as one of the greatest achievements of the 358th Infantry.

The Bridge at Last

The battle against the raging waters and the Moselle continued as hard pressed supply men and engineers worked continuously at the river bank. As the water began to recede on the 4th day after the attack, a new menace was uncovered, in the form of mines, and bridging operations were held up again while they were removed from the river bed.

Finally, the long fight against the mighty Moselle River ended when, on the sixth day the bridge was completed and vehicles and guns rolled across to the beleaguered Regiment on the other side. As the Regiment and other elements of the Division pushed southeast the fortress of

Metz to the south gradually became sealed in an inescapable pocket. Allied forces were now entering the city from all directions.

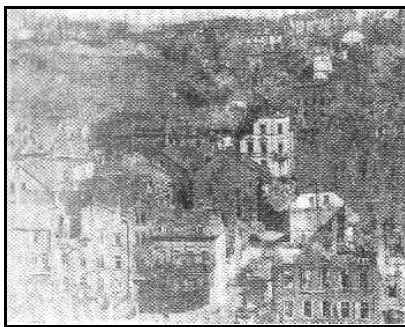
Counterattack at Distroff

While other forces dealt finishing blows to Metz the 358th Infantry continued its thrust southeast with the Second and Third Battalions leading. The renowned “K” Company, “Kraut Killers”, so named because of their reputation for killing five Krauts each, led the Third Battalion in the capture of Inglange while the Second pushed through to Valstroff, later capturing Distroff.

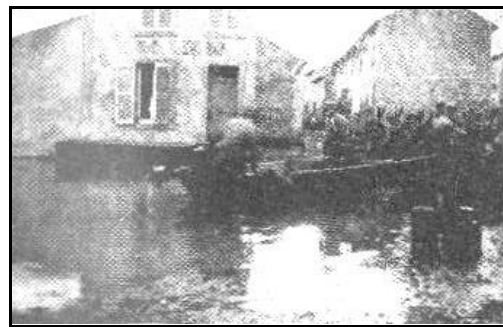
After the capture of Distroff the Second Battalion was subjected to a fierce counterattack by elements of the crack 150th Panzer Brigade. After a fierce battle, climaxed by the entry of the attached armor of Company “B” of 773rd TD battalion and Company “A” of 712th Tank Battalion the attackers were severely beaten and dispersed. Wrecked tanks and armored cars were everywhere to be seen and in a field in “F” Company’s area 120 enemy dead were found. This was the punch that failed and broke the enemy. As German forces withdrew, the Regiment was placed in Division reserve and assembled in three towns, Lutlange, Metzereche and Metzervisse.

The Gate to the Siegfried

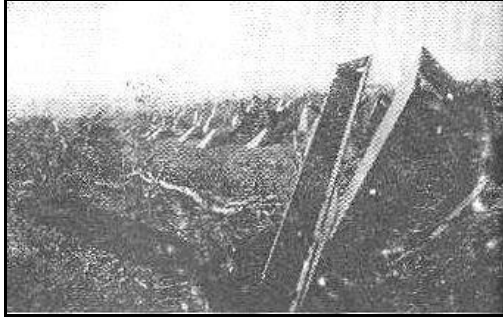
Attachment to the 10th Armored Division on the 19th of November had the outfit retracing its steps toward the Moselle where it turned north towards Sierck and Borg, to find the armor waiting for the doughboy to tear down all the pillboxes, blow up all the mines and booby traps, and install a swinging gate on the Siegfried line. Until the 27th November, the Regiment butted against the steel and concrete Siegfried line while the armor waited for its breakthrough, and the enemy poured in fresh troops to man the fortifications. The task proved too great for one Regiment, however, and the 358th Infantry was withdrawn and returned to the Division in the vicinity of Veckring, France – stopping off place before the Saar River.



Supporting Artillery of the 344th Battalion
France
near Koenigsmacher



Loading Supplies on the flooded Mozelle in Cattenom,



Siegfried Line



Men of 1st Battalion moving forward
in rain near Borg, Germany



A River Again

The navy had nothing on the 358th Infantry; for river crossings were forever on the schedule and the assault boat became as familiar as the jeep. At a quarter past four on the morning of the 6th of the December, the First Battalion with “B” and “C” Companies in the assault crossed the Saar River in the vicinity of Wallerfangen, Germany, home of Franz von Papen. Farther down the river, the Third Battalion led by “I” and “L” Companies, scrambled down the steep banks near Oberlimberg, Germany, quietly loaded into assault boats, and made its way across the Saar. The Second Battalion, crossing after daylight on the footbridge, faced heavy mortar and machine gun fire from enemy pillboxes commanding the river line.

“88” Street

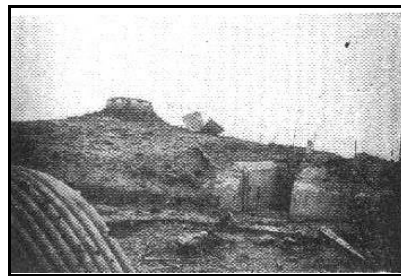
Once across the battalions faced the fortified cities of Pachten and Dillingen, bulwarks of the Siegfried line. The main thoroughfares took on names like “88” street and “Purple Heart Avenue”. It became a war against steel and concrete. Troops were raked by fire from pillboxes cleverly concealed in harmless looking barns and shops. Once again supply men and engineers battled against a river. The Regiment’s supporting tanks and TDs and the guns of the Anti Tank Company, had to be ferried across, for Jerry’s heavy shelling prevented the construction of a bridge. Supply men pushed supplies of ammunition and rations across on every type of boat: alligators, ducks, assault boats and storm boats. Wiremen struggled day and night to maintain communications across the river despite a swift current and constant shellfire. For sixteen days and nights the battalions hit again and again into the enemy fortifications. Continuously hammered day after day, the enemy was systematically blown out of one pill box after another, as all three battalions were employed to clear the major portion of Dillingen.

Rundstedt Strikes

Then one day came the startling news of the great German counteroffensive in the Ardennes. Where they would strike next no one knew. During the hours of darkness on the 21st of the December the Division quietly withdrew across the Saar, forsaking its sizable dent in the Siegfried line and moved to a defensive position in the Saar-Moselle triangle, facing the Siegfried line again. The holidays were days of patrolling and constant alert for unusual enemy activity.



Crossing the Saar in Dillingen, Germany



Concrete observation post and pillbox
knocked out in Dillingen, Germany



ARDENNES

Bastogne – The Black-Out Punch

On the 7th of January, the Regiment with all identification blacked out took to the snow-covered roads and headed north through the city of Luxembourg to the Bastogne area in the Ardennes. On the 11th of January they moved to the vicinity above Bavigne and here attacked along a narrow front northwest into Belgium through Sonlez, Doncoles, and Bras. The bitter cold and heavy snows made progress slow and painful, and with the severe weather came the dreaded trench foot and frostbite. At night the best the Dough could hope for was the chance to dig into a snow bank. Every inch of the frozen ground had to be fought for against an insane enemy determined to hold the gains of his fanatical counteroffensive.

Another Trap

As the division pushed forward toward Bras, the jaws were being rapidly closed on the Bastogne Pocket and the Kraut found his rear threatened and the supply lines cut. As the push continued, Jerry made an effort to withdraw and was caught flat-footed on the roads. Again the Regiment scored knockouts on scores of vehicles, and again the Regimental Prisoner of War cage was bulging with the bedraggled and beaten enemy.

This pocket eliminated, the Second and Third Battalions pushed on to secure an important railroad beyond Bras, but here the resistance was tough and they received everything the Kraut could throw. Supporting tanks, and artillery blasted his positions, however, and the battalions moved up to hold the railroad and the tunnels which they were using as shelter.

End Run

Then came a spectacular end run play – a clever, swift maneuver that sent the First Battalion in a wide flanking movement that caught the enemy completely by surprise and secured Niederwampach. Later “C” and “B” Companies pushed on to capture Oberwampach. On the 16th of January, however, they were hit by a series of ferocious counterattacks while they held the town of Oberwampach. Each attack increased in intensity – as enemy tanks charged on the town from all directions. The attacks were driven off and in the end, the enemy lost more than he could ever have hope to gain, for the country was littered with his burned and knocked out equipment – including fourteen of his tanks.



An AT Gunner Stands By



Smashed Wehrmacht Column Near Bras



This Time on the Ice

Another river crossing was on hand as a Regiment took over from the armor in the vicinity of Troisvierges, and pushed the enemy off the high ground along the west bank of the Our river. River crossings were forced on the 29th of January near Stupbach and with the Second Battalion crossing first on the ice, and the remainder of the Regiment following to secure a bridgehead. The push continued over the most rugged terrain the Regiment had ever encountered, until a firm bridgehead was established just short of the Siegfried Line. Meanwhile, heavy rains continued to pour down for several days; “Ol’ Man Weather” played havoc with supply lines, and roads became impassable with melting snow and mud.

Jerry Times a Blow

A few days later the regiment was pulled out of this position for a crack at the Siegfried line in another spot near Habscheid, Germany. Simultaneously with the relief of the Battalion of the Fourth Division by the First Battalion, Jerry timed a vicious counterattack to recapture Habscheid, but the two Battalions beat him off with severe losses.

Siegfried Smashed

Tanks and artillery helped – the GI guts and fighting skill cracked the Siegfried line. A soldier’s best home was in a pill box in those days; otherwise he stayed out in the mud – so no time was lost in routing the Germans out of them and into the cold. Until the 22nd of February the battle of the Siegfried Line was a pillbox to pillbox job. Then, suddenly came the chance for the final push that made history and opened the way for Allied armor.

Lightning Speed

Driving on through Habscheid, the Regiment pushed up to the Prum River on its north flank. Here it was relieved by elements of the Fourth Division and a new drive toward the river was begun to the south. The First Battalion attacked from the town of Binscheid and later seized the town of Holzchen, while the Third Battalion, in a bold stroke, struck for Arzfeld, and continued a lightning fast, wide flanking, maneuver that paced the Division. All units acted with such speed the enemy had no time to reorganize. The enemy line was broken and he ran around in confusion, while the outfit again pushed up to the Prum River. On the 25th of February the Division was relieved and assembled in the same general area as SHAEF Reserve.

Race to the Rhine

This brief respite did not last long for on the 6th of March, the Regiment attacked across Kyll River and captured Gerolstein and Pelm, creating a bridgehead over the river for the Eleventh Armored Division and the race to the Rhine was on. For five days the battalions followed the armor mopping up bypassed groups of enemy until on the 15th of March the Mozelle River once again obstructed its advance. The Mozelle was breached in the vicinity of Hatzenport and a bridgehead was secured, this time for the Fourth Armored Division. In the expansion of the bridgehead, hard fighting was encountered when fanatical mountain SS troops resisted before the Rhine.

Mainz Captured

On the 18th of March, the Regiment reached the Rhine River. The First and Third Battalions swept up along the Nahe River to its juncture with the Rhine, while the Second Battalion cleaned up the woods east of Rheinbollen to the bank of the river. Once reaching the Rhine, the advance did not stop, for they attacked across the Nahe River and on the following day they pushed forward through the bomb-torn city to the river.

The Rhine Crossed

The 90th Division Crossed the Rhine River over an engineer pontoon bridge on the crossing secured by the Fifth Division; together they secured a bridgehead for the Fourth Armored Division. The Luftwaffe visited the units frequently during these days in a frantic effort to annihilate the Rhine bridgehead, but there was no stopping now, and the advance continued to the Main River. Early on the 28th of March, the Regiment once again took to assault boats, and forced the crossing of the Main River. Only scattered resistance was encountered as the race continued across Germany, through Stockheim, Schlitz, Vacha and Merkers to Bad Salzungen, which was captured on the 3rd of April, 1945. When the Third Battalion seized the town Merkers and the salt mine there, it captured a fortune in the form of the Reich gold reserve and a storehouse of priceless art treasures, stolen by the Nazis from occupied countries.

Misguided Arm Band Soldiers

The extremely rugged, wooded terrain of the Thuringenwald Forest provided a new obstacle as the Unit raced to the Czechoslovakian border. Volkssturm, misguided armband soldiers, put up roadblocks that succeeded in slowing down the advance. However, these very people could be seen an hour later clearing the road for American vehicles. On the 15th of April, the Regiment seized Hof, a large city near the Czech border that was stubbornly defended by SS troopers and the remaining Wehrmacht. However, here the advance was halted temporarily, because of an international restraining line that prevented chasing the enemy to the east.

First into Czechoslovakia

The news spread like fire, when on the 18th of April the 358th Infantry was the first to enter Czechoslovakia, with the Second and Third Battalions and the Regimental intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon sending patrols across the border. These elements were the first of the western Allies to cross Germany completely from border to border. At Flossenberg, on the 23rd of April, the Regiment liberated a large concentration camp with a capacity of eight thousand inmates, and rescued over a thousand starving Poles, Russians and French in the disease-infested prison.

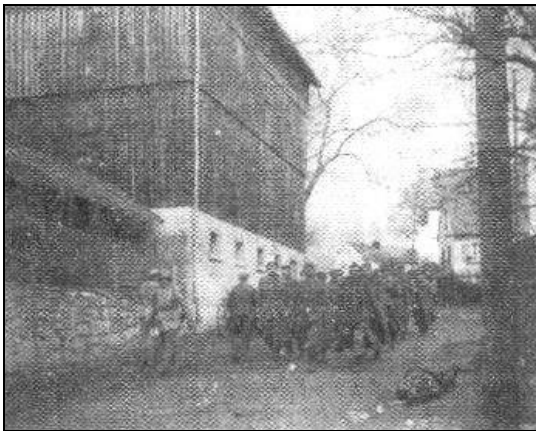
Meets the “Ruskie”

In succeeding days, the Regiment crossed the Czech border and continued the advance into Czechoslovakia towards Susice. Meanwhile, great events had taken shape. Berlin had fallen to the Russians, American troops joined hands with the “Ruskie” in several places, and Allied troops in southern Germany had swooped through the Brenner Pass and made contact with Allied Forces in Italy. German resistance had been smashed to bits – the end was bound to come soon.

The End At Last

At noon on the 8th of May, the battalions were ordered to stop in place and cease offensive action. The war ended with the Regiment well into Czechoslovakia and within a stone's throw of the Russian Armies. The unit contacted the Russians within the next few days, and was immediately hurled into the gigantic task of corralling the wandering soldiers of the broken and the defeated German Army.

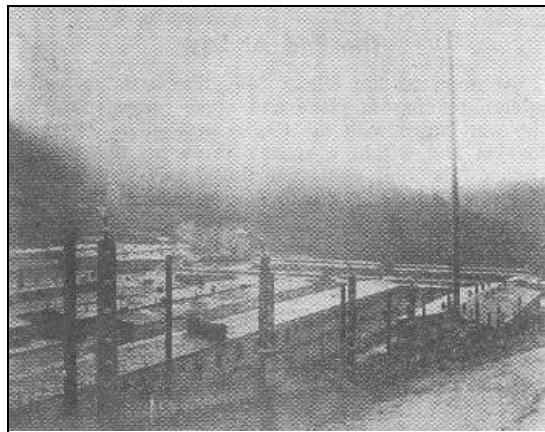
So ends this tale of a battle-tested, hard fighting outfit. Through five foreign countries; France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany and Czechoslovakia, the 358th Infantry carried the motto "Peragimus" – symbol of accomplishment. And so rightly enough, the story is dedicated to the fighting men of a fighting outfit, and especially to those who lay down their lives, or today bear the pain of an old battle wound in order that the job might be accomplished.



Nazi PW's Pass One of Their Own Dead



White Flags and PW's



Flossenberg Concentration Camp