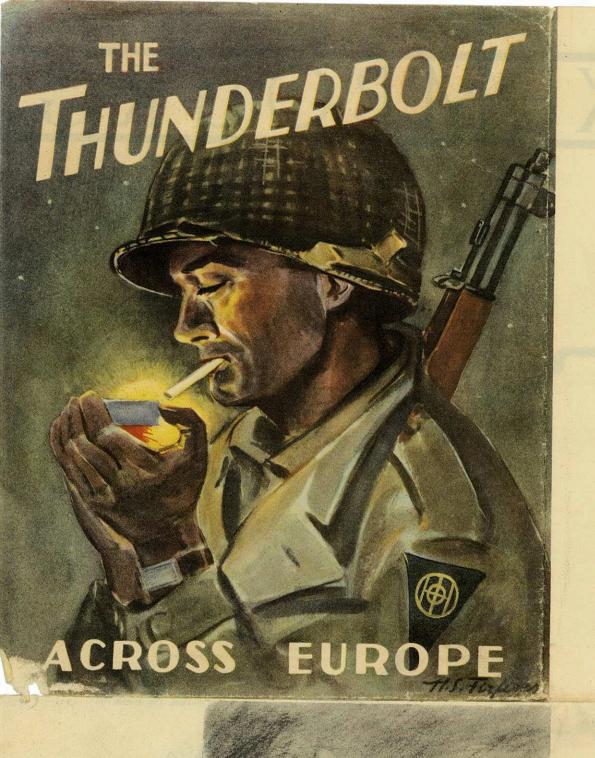


HURTGEN FOREST-THE ARDENNES - NEUSS - HARZ MOUNTAINS - ELBE RIVER





This document tells a little of the life we have known during the past year. It is dedicated to all officers and men of the 83d Infantry Division. We Thunderbolts are proud of the record we have made. We have contributed to the defeat of the enemy. We have grown a little older doing this and we have learned to understand a bit more about men. When finally we go home we shall have grown a

This document is also dedicated to our dead and wounded, left behind along the highways and trails of six nations. Those once strong-fibered, America-loving men gave their lives or limbs that victory might be ours. We owe our stature, our existence to the blood they spilt, to the cries born of their pain. They are gone from us now but we shall never forget them.



"All around us the massive landing fleet"

NGLAND! We left her with mixed emotions. Some were glad the final period of training was ended, glad to get started in battle. Some regretted leaving England, kept remembering how Spring had grown full in May, kept remembering the peace in Midland villages on Sundays, the rain and mud in Wales, kept remembering the pubs, the inns, the girls. It was a little like leaving

We were headed straight for the enemy now. This was the move that would take us from a familiar life of training and playing to the unknown life of battle.

There would be no stopping off places like Stoke-on-Trent, Wrexham, Beston Castle, Shrewsbury, Senny Bridge, Keele Hall, Pleinau-Ffestiniogh, Hadley Hall, Stoke-on-Tern, Shavington Hall, Market Drayton, Newcastle-under-Lyme. The life coming up on the other side of the Channel was an unknown quantity. Quite privately we sensed the void in the pit of our stomachs. We wished, now that it was about to begin, that somehow we had never got tangled up in this thing. Many of us would be losing our lives very soon. Some of us would live to see the Division grow in strength and stature, come of age, rise to fame.

It was to have been short, that voyage across the Channel. Rushed through the staging areas near Stonehenge, the Thunderbolt Division had top priority in everything. The Thunderbolts were needed badly, in Normandy. The voyage was short in point of crossing. But we did not disembark. A storm rose out of nowhere and slashed at Omaha Beach and made life miserable for a week. We sat and stood and laid around on our ships. We sang songs, cleaned our weapons, used our bags vomit, ate our landing rations. We went down into the holds of the ships and drew more ten-in-ones. We steam-cooked and ate ten-in-ones until they were coming out our ears. Still the days and nights passed.

And there were the sheer, forbiding cliffs of France, smack in front of us. Not two miles away. We wondered how in hell the D-day boys had managed them. All around us, to the horizon and beyond, were hundreds of other ships of the massive landing fleet. Scores of barrage balloons tugged with the wind, sometimes broke loose and floundered away. When the wind died down the muffled sound of gunfire could be heard. Some said it was fighting around Cherbourg. Others said it was around Caen. No one knew, really. None of us knew anything about battle. If you were positive about it during the day, like as not you'd change your mind at night. For then the sounds grew louder, and there were fires everywhere along the horizon, east and west. And Jerry was always overhead, raising hell with someone. Those were fantastic, those nights! The sky brilliant with tracer fire rising, it seemed, straight from the water itself. At first no one was sure about what to do

during those raids. It became a question of going down into the bowels of the

ship to escape the flak or staying on deck so if a hit was made you could jump into the water and swim for it. After a while, though, no one paid much attention. We grew impatient about landing. Anything would be better than sitting around in the Channel. Anything would be better than being part of this gigantic target for Goering's Luftwaffe.

The Fourth of July, 1944 is a day the Thunderbolts will never forget. This was the day we launched our first attack against the enemy. We were young, then. Innocent. In spite of all the talking we hadn't learned particularly to hate anyone. We had yet to see our buddies messed up bad. But we did know fear in those days between Carentan and Sainteny and Periers. The kind that hits you sharp in the groin and brings sweat to your face and hands.

It was a fantastic existence. Everything was hedged or walled-in and mined. There was no room for breathing anything but air made putrid by carcasses of horses and cows and what remained of soldiers uniformed in khaki or green. The battle was everywhere, then. We had little desire to eat because, so we said, the food was monotonous. Really, we hadn't the appetite. Our guts hurt. Sometimes at night in slit trenches some of us remembered things we used to do as kids back home. And some of us prayed a little and hoped to Christ Almighty we'd see tomorrow. There were many tomorrows: all alike. All living hell. Nerves stretched. Resistance worn.

I hose blood-wet, stinking hedgerows, those foul wrecks of villages! We can never forget them. And all the churches

French, of course, improved by strides.

with their steeples blown off because we knew the enemy would use them for OPs. And then there was always that sickening feeling of claustrophobia. If for only an hour a fellow could get away from it all, back to England, back to anywhere, maybe he could get things straightened out in his mind and start fresh. Sometimes when we knew this

> use. The battle was close, all around. There was nothing to do but fight on. But strange - those days we didn't realise how mightily we were striking the enemy. Our blows, our continual hammering did the trick. We knocked panzer

was impossible, a bottle of Calvados was

produced. Drained. It was all right for

a little while, then. But still - it was no

and para troops to their smooth knees.



Some people talked about the hysteria of the Parisians when they were freed.

It could not have been more sincere than the weeping, smiling, gurgling joy of

the people in the little towns along the river and in the gentle hills to the north.

Their handshake was warm. They took us into their homes, into their arms. Our

We caught the eyes of the world for a moment while we were in the Loire

country. The German front in France had collapsed and the Wehrmacht boys

were rushing for the concrete comfort of the Siegfried Line. But about twenty

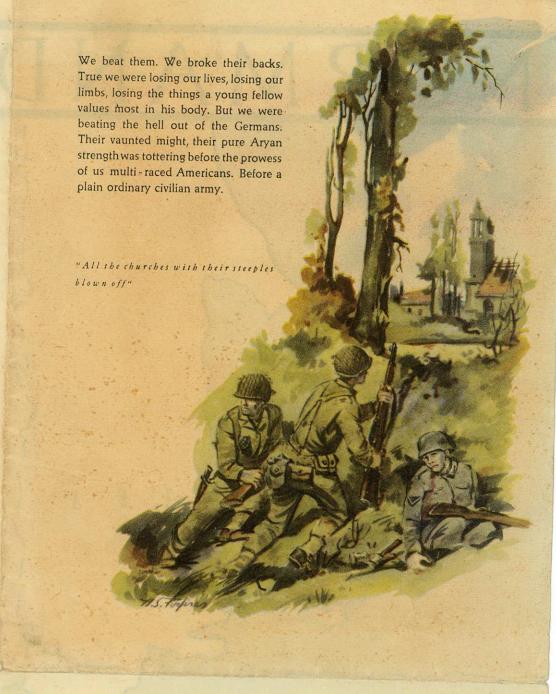
thousand of them had tired feet. They wandered around for a while, were made

to twist and turn on roads south of the river by the FFI and our air force. Finally,

they called it quits. At Beaugency Bridge on the 16th of September almost

twenty thousand of them formally surrendered. Nothing like that had happened

before. But this time we weren't embarrassed by the attention the world paid



I was a quick trip we had out of We went through Coutances and down by Avranches and then west into Brittany. At the same time the to the sea again, to cut our forces in half. Those of us who made that tanks and trucks and staff cars and occasionally lined with good Ger-mans. Men and women and chiltheir eyes out with joy as we wen by. They gave us wine and fruit and eggs. They threw us kisses.

Then when the sun went down and it got dark, the French disappeared into their houses and we were alone in the night. The Lufton the Channel. Ack ack wild in the sky. Searchlight batteries going full tilt. Crazy autographs of tra-cers. And bombs coming down in the pitch night with a hellish whist le, splashing too close to our co lumns and the bridges we had to

We watched the first of man dawns rise out of the mist of Bri

kind of air that made you glad to be alive.

of the soil, the height of the land and the winds of the Channel. But no matter. What sticks most in the "Bombs in the pitch of night" Brittany. It was good to be able to see for more than fifty feet. And there weren't dead animals and burnt-out villages, at first. To many of us the salt air coming from the Channel near Mont St Michel, Pontorson and Dol was good to breathe. Good and clean. The N the 14th of August the Citadel at St Servan surrendered to the Thunderbolts. Unlike Normandy it was a short fight. About two weeks. We were a little excited by it. Being off by ourselves there in the St Malo Peninsula while the rest of the Army was going east in France had somehow got us into the limelight. There were correspondents and photographers from the States around in the forward areas. Everyone wanted to know all about the Citadel, and later



about the tiny island offshore called Cezembre. We were still young enough to be embarrassed by the attention the world was paying us.

"Our guns gave it to Heine positions"

Those clear, clean days in August and September! Our planes came over in droves to dive-bomb the Citadel or the islands offshore. And the hotels we used as artillery OPs - luxury! Our guns gave it to Heine positions square on the button. It was that direct firing that cracked them. And then there was the way we got around the Rance Estuary by building a bridge over the one hundred seventy-five foot gorge at Dinan.



"We were learning to speak French"

We remember those resort hotels along

the beaches in Dinard! That was the life.

Beds! Sometimes with sheets. We could

have slept forever in one of those things,

with the sea air coming in the open

windows. And - there were good look-

ing girls. We were learning to speak a

little more French. That made it easy for

us, sometimes.

useless Atlantic Wall. The Germans had put up those forts, mined the beaches, erected big concrete obstacles in anticipation of a sea-borne attack. And then we crazy Americans came up from the

Some of us weren't there for all that. We had other things to do farther west. Out rough the high wooded and sometimes windswept hills of Brittany to the Crozon Peninsula. That was where we helped to break the back of the garrison defending Brest.

We were growing up. There were still kinks to be straightened out. But we were holding our own now.



Up at Pte de la Varde and Hill 48 we worked over those immense forts of the "A bridge at Dinan"



Late summer in the Loire Valley! We got to know France, then. We cannot recall place names without thinking of some neat little cafe, a restaurant with good French fries and steak and red wine of Anjou. Some bit of civilian and FFI gaety. A shop filled with the very perfumes we wanted to buy. We had the job of protecting the enormous flank of the Third Army as it raced east. It extended for over two hundred miles.

And as we stretched out along that ancient, that noble river, we set up our headquarters in beautiful chateaux in the valley. Company CPs were often more luxurious than regiment. We had parties for the French, they entertained us in réturn. They opened the doors to their homes and their cellars. They greeted us as brothers.

In that great valley there was Nantes! Angers! Chateaubriant, Tours and Blois! Vendome and Orleans and Auxerre! And - there were girls. We were their liberators. That meant a lot. We forgot about the war when we tipped glasses at places like the American Bar in Angers and the Hotel Commerce in any town.

The battle in the Ardennes in December and January is history. While the world held

I its breath we lunged without rest against the panzer might of the German. We surprised

him by our headlong dash through Holland and Belgium in a single night. We moved

against him continuously - for he had aroused us. He was threatening to undo the work

We came of age in the Ardennes. We rose to our full stature. The enemy fought us in vain.



us. We hardly knew we were being watched. For we had come to know that there are other things in a soldiers life besides making history. And we were applying that knowledge. down there in Nantes and Angers

and Orleans!



the right shoulder of the roads. We ate our rations, shifted drivers, and were off again. The places we passed through were crowded with gay civilians, probably celebrating another of the endless series of holidays the French

Suddenly we were no longer needed in

the Loire Country. Rumors flew from one

corner of our vast area to another. We

were going up to the front. We were

headed into Germany. This was it. This

was the drive that would end the war.

Some of us felt a little like the way we

had back in England, on the day we

shoved off for Omaha Beach. For surely

we would be hitting the Siegfried Line.

And there would be the Germans them-

So when word came around we pulled

ourselves together, and hit the road.

Began a three hundred mile journey to

Luxembourg. It was a sight-seeing trip.

ment to logistics. Town after town, city

after city, rolled by. We saw signs poin-

ting to places our fathers used to talk

about when they'd recall the First World

War. Chalons. St. Dizier. Bar-le-Duc. St.

Mihiel. Verdun. Conflans. All day we

rolled on - and all night. And when from

time to time we got fidgety and our

and all of us would get out and stretch.

And most of us would find a spot on

It was an exhausting trip. It was a monu-

selves. It had us wondering.

have. Or maybe they were just trying out their lately renewed right to walk in the open air, saying what they wanted to say, without being checked by Himmler's tough boys.

The long hours wore on. Night came. We were dirty and cold. It rained off and on. We turned on our headlights. And when the road curved and twisted, we could look ahead or behind and see that our convoy was endless. All through the night we drove, through the thick forests of the highland country east of Verdun. By morning most of us neared Luxembourg, the tiny country we knew nothing about. We felt in a few days we would be in Germany. We did not know we would be staying in Luxembourg longer than we had stayed in England!

"The long hours wore on"

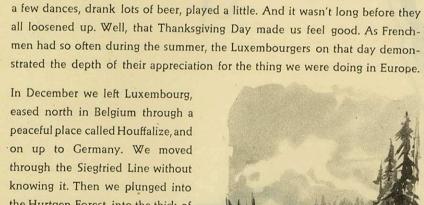




"That looking around helped a lot"

IN the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg we pushed the enemy beyond the Moselle and Sauer Rivers. And there was Germany, right across the water! There was the Siegfried Line! We used to watch the Volksgrenadier boys running to their latrines near the pillboxes. Sometimes, when they felt better, they'd come across to our side. But we knew how to handle them. For some of us it was a kind of a rest - after the long summer.

We remember going down to do a little inspecting of the Maginot Line near Thionville. That looking around helped a lot, later on. Others of us will always remember the Konz Karthaus Express. Konz was a little switchyard west of Trier. Trains used to go through there regularly, and just as regularly we used to shell and bomb the hell out of the place. Then at night the Germans repaired the damage - just so next day trains could operate. Just so next day we could knock them for another loop.

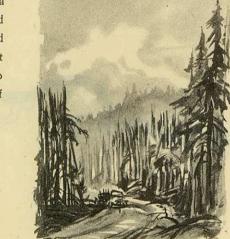


"Into the Hurtgen Forest"

Some of those clear autumn days were marked sharply by brief white trails of V-2s. We saw them and wondered. From east of the river they went up straight out of sight. That was all. Then, just at dusk, or maybe a little later when some of us were ready to turn in, buzz bombs would pass overhead on their way west. And once, on a hellish night of rain, we had a paratroop scare back near Esch.

Thanksgiving in Luxembourg was a day to remember. The people opened their doors, begged us to eat with them. The Prince attended services in the cathedral, and the bishop stood at the door afterwards shaking hands with GIs. We recalled, then, how in September when we'd arrived the people had been a little aloof. It was as if they were afraid the Germans would be coming back. But we threw a few dances, drank lots of beer, played a little. And it wasn't long before they all loosened up. Well, that Thanksgiving Day made us feel good. As Frenchmen had so often during the summer, the Luxembourgers on that day demon-

the Hurtgen Forest, into the thick of the deadly battle for the Roer.



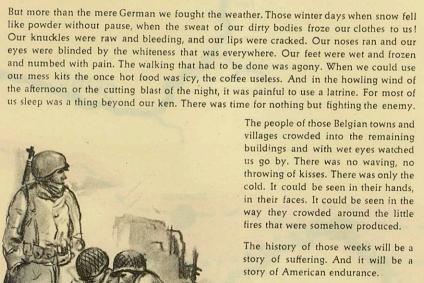
"We had never seen such utter devastation"

It was not for us to decide why the Germans fought so viciously before Duren. All we

We got our Christmas packages - somehow. We took them and wondered how much longer this fighting was going to last. How much longer? We cursed the Germans for their insane desire to fight. We cursed them long for the life they had forced us to lead.



know is that those were bitter, bloody days. Those villages in the shattered forest and beyond - Strass and Gey and Rollsdorf and Gurzenich - when we reached them, we found stinking wrecks. We had never seen so many German dead. We had never seen such utter devastation. All muck and mines and enemy dead. An epithet to the German way of life. At first there was rain and mud. Our feet were wet and cold. Then there was snow. The ground froze and our hands got blue. The smell of the pines that still stood made us think of Christmas. Of days when we were kids. When we hated no one. When war was a thing in books. When Christmas never failed to be white. When our hearts were warm, tender. But here we were in Germany! Some days the sky was a brilliant blue. It was good then, for our planes would be up, making crazy patterns in the glacial sky. Blasting more enemy out of existence. And sometimes Jerry came over, dropped bombs, strafed. We ducked, and then moved forward. We pushed the enemy beyond the Roer. Some of us entered the



we had taken so long to accomplish.

Our thrusts were fatal to him.

The people of those Belgian towns and villages crowded into the remaining buildings and with wet eyes watched us go by. There was no waving, no throwing of kisses. There was only the cold. It could be seen in their hands, in their faces. It could be seen in the way they crowded around the little fires that were somehow produced. The history of those weeks will be a story of suffering. And it will be a story of American endurance.

"Our feet were frozen"



"A story of American endurance"

ucky ones got to Paris on pass. It was unlike anything in the rest of Europe. It was to hell away from the war. There wasn't any real blackout. We could see pretty good at night - except when we'd had too many.

Some of us remember the Metro and the crowds just before supper or just before closing blackmarket or starve. time, trying frantically to get on the trains. Usually when the trains were loaded beyond capacity there was a woman with a broad behind who'd back up to the open door and push her way in. We got lost sometimes in the Metro, sometimes up in the city itself. Map reading came in handy, then. For those of us who knew Parisian families there is the memory of warm hospitality. We

saw how the war had hurt them. At a dinner party for ten a one pound slab of meat to be divided evenly - a little cheese sneaked up from the box of K rations - some fried potatoes - bread and wine. That was all. That was the dinner party. It's easy to remember the embarrassment in the Frenchman's face. And sometimes if we looked carefully at the kids we could see how some of them were getting cross eyed. Lack of food. Oh, there were no



"We hardly knew bow to act" "We got lost sometimes"

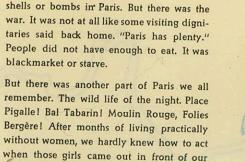


table and wiggled everything they could. We

didn't worry about the terrific cost of the

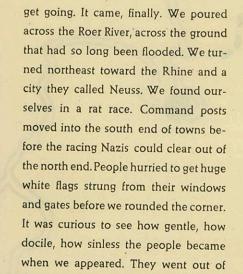
champagne or other things. The show over,

we said yes when the doorman asked if there

"Lucky ones got to Paris"

was anything else we wanted to see. For there was plenty. Those GI night maneuvers around Place

Blanche, Place Clichy-around the Madeleine and the Opera! The world knows those squares. We know them - now. In spite of the thousands of uniforms seen there, the war was totally forgotten. It simply didn't exist. Those other things, the reckless life was all that mattered. A guy was crazy not to cut loose a little. Maybe when he got back to the front he'd be stopping an eighty-eight. Go hog wild in Paris! That was the thing. And let the Parisians stare and point when we were drunk in the streets. Let them stare. They could never know why we were playing so hard. They could never know. No civilian anywhere could.



their way to tell us they were not Nazis,

that they could not conceivably be

blamed for the thing their country had Then, suddenly, on the 2nd of March, we were on the Rhine. Before anyone else. Again the world was looking at us, asking a million questions. Big people visited us, passed around compliments. Once, during that day, the Germans tried breaking through our flank. But it was a clear, clean day and we had friends in

the air. Some one got on the phone.

Crouched, we waited for the word to The trouble was straightened out soon

Some of us were up in Neuss, slapping through the city to the bridges that led to Düsseldorf. During the night there were some loud explosions. The bridges collapsed into the river. We set up OPs along the west bank and watched and directed fire. And we saw the water flowing north over the half-sunken bridges. In time, we knew, we would be on the other side.

"The bridges collapsed"

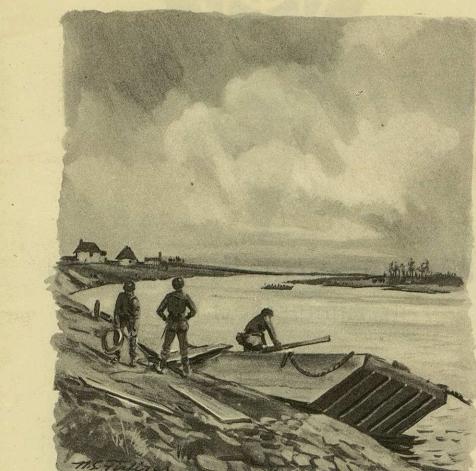
Since the beginning of summer we had helped to drive the enemy from four Allied Nations. Now, during Easter Week, we swept him across Germany. From the Rhineland we moved across the Prussian Provinces of Westphalia, Hannover and Saxony. Across the German States of Lippe, Brunswick and Anhalt. Through the Teutoburger Forest, over the Hills of Hess and the Harz Mountains. Across the Lippe, the Weser, the Leine, the Saale and the Elbe Rivers. This dash of some two hundred and eighty miles we made in thirteen days.



In those thirteen days the Thunderbolt Division threw away the books and improvised. We became a weird caravan. We picked up vehicles of any kind - and kept moving. Some of us drove deep into the Harz Mountains. Some of us dashed toward the Elbe. Our eyes ached, our backs were sore - but there was no let up. At times we were so tired we did not know what we were doing.

There was no les up"

The Germans could not stop us. Rivers and mountains could not stop us. We passed beyond the Elbe, threw back counterattacks, then waited. Suddenly it



read of the barbarisms practiced by the children of Hitler. For years we had tried not to believe. But now we saw with our own eyes. We were nauseated. There, beyond the stench and vermin of the concentration camp wire, was the gentle countryside, blossoming into spring. And there were the huge white

became very quiet. We had time, then, to recollect a few of the things we had

The press acclaimed the fact that we had established and held the only Ameri-

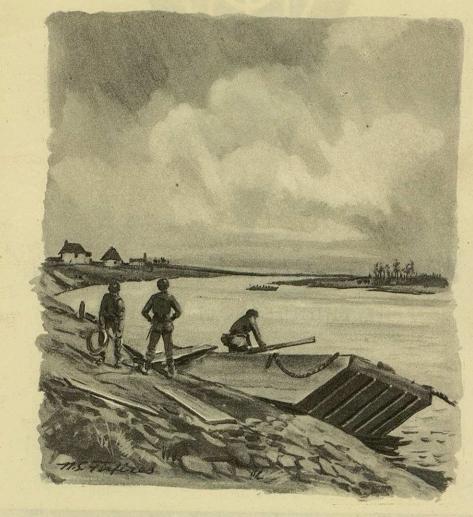
can bridgehead over the Elbe. But we will remember other things. The beauty

of the country - and the horror hidden beneath that beauty! For years we had

done and seen.

flags, the docile, guiltless people. It made a fellow wonder. When our drive was finished and the world had proclaimed our accomplishment for a moment, we could only remember the hate that had risen within us as we passed through those camps, saw those thousands of helpless people. If we had not known hatred of the German before, we knew it now. Its proportions frightened us. We saw the thing that had been done to mankind. We will never

Nor will we forget in years to come the record we made across Europe. We went a long way - from the unnerving days of Normandy to the sure days east of the Elbe. We have grown a little older . . . learned to understand a bit more about men . . . grown a little wiser. It is conceivable that history will not ignore us.



·We passed beyond the Elbe