

Eight Days on the Siegfried Line and Two Hundred Sixty Three Days in the Hospital: Pvt. Chris Vaseff's War.

James Vaseff, 2015

I have worked intermittently for some 11 years to find the military and combat records for my father Chris Vaseff. The Military Records Office in St. Louis had an infamous fire in 1973 that destroyed a significant number of individual military personnel records, his among them. I recently had the good fortune to get most of the information I was looking for through a private researcher and a small pile of books. The following is a synopsis I have made to share with my two sisters and some friends who have an interest in military history or our family.

Briefly: Pvt. Chris Vaseff joined "G" Company, 301st Regiment, 94th Division, XXth Corps of Patton's 3rd Army as one of 83 replacements on February 12th, 1945. On February 19th they were in the Saar-Moselle Triangle of Germany, Near Luxemburg City, and were launching the 94th's assault that shortly became the crossing of the Saar River and the breaching of the Siegfried Line, twice (more on this below). The 94th was attacking the first-line 11th Panzer Division and two other infantry divisions.

On that day they captured the small village of Faha. The next day, February 20th at 0715, they set out for Freudenburg about three miles distant. Pvt. Vaseff's "G" Company was committed from reserve to assist their 2nd Battalion attack in midafternoon. Pvt. Vaseff was wounded about 1430 in the action and the town was secured by nightfall.

He joined the unit on 12 February, just eight days before. His war in the field was concluded after eight days on 20 February. His service continued for another 263 days in the US army hospital system.

This will be a narrative of Chris Vaseff's service. It is not a military history, however I will put this in context with descriptions of his entry into the unit, the situation of supplying reserves in the later part of the war, a brief history of the 94th Division, the conditions of combat that winter, how the Battle of the Bulge and the Saar-Moselle Triangle battles were related, and his subsequent year of recovery.

Pre-service: Chris was born 1920 in Sophia Bulgaria. His family immigrated to the US when he was a child. He graduated from Chicago's Tilden Tech. It was an all boys' school. The class pictures show that it had students of color. Tilden was known as the starting place of school wrestling in Chicago and maybe the US.

The school traces its origins to 1881. It was originally known as Lake High School, since the school served students in the Township of Lake. That township was annexed to Chicago in 1889, and the school became part of the [Chicago Public Schools](#) system. Lake High was rebuilt in 1905,^[3] and in 1915, the school was renamed in honor of Edward Tilden, a former banker and president of the Chicago Board of Education. In 1917, the school became an all-boys' technical school, and it remained so until the 1960s, when it became a general, co-educational high school.^[4]

The current Tilden building was designed by [Dwight H. Perkins](#)¹. The school features over fifty murals of famous engineers, architects, scientists, and writers

A look at the yearbook shows many ROTC activities. The humorous banter by and about students has many references to political matters in Nazi Germany and the Axis in general. In 1939, people knew where this was headed.

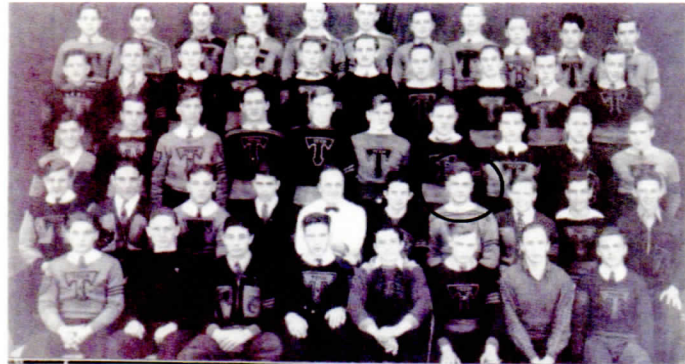


Chris Vaseff

Noted in the “Seniors 1939” are his activities at Tilden: Soph. Football, '36; Varsity Football, '37, '38; Sergeant at Arms of Lettermen’s Club, '37, '38, '39; Chairman Senior Jacket Committee, '39; Craftsman Staff (yearbook) '38, '39; Choral Club, '35, '36, '37; Service Club, '37, '38, '39.

Below, Letterman’s Club, Chris, second row fourth from right.

I have an impression that in that time Tilden Tech and probably some other tech schools in the Chicago System taught and graduated high school students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that would probably exceed many the community colleges of our time. When these students graduated they went to the many enterprises in the heart of the industrial Midwest.



Tilden Tech Letterman's Club

He once told me that he declined an offer to play as center for the Chicago Bears after graduation in 1939. He told them he had a good job at Republic Steel, where he started in the laboratory.

Service: Chris entered the army on July 20, 1944 (This was also the day that Colonel Stauffenberg’s suitcase bomb exploded in the “Operation Valkyrie” attempt to kill Adolf Hitler). It was after D Day and he probably entered via in the draft late in the war that picked up college educated, and other people who had deferments such as critical war work, which may have included the steel industry. I have found out that he was He was 24, married with one child when he went into the Army after working at Republic Steel for 5 years. Following war-time service he returned to his job as a foreman in one of the large-size sheet mills. A “sheet” of steel in those days was usually more than an inch thick. Of note, he was made a foreman while in his early 20s – a nod to the preparation he received from Tilden Tech.

While working at Republic, he was a student at de Paul University. This is a unique private school established in 1889, named for St. Vincent de Paul. DePaul was established in Lincoln Park by the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentian priests and brothers) to serve the children of immigrants and others. My father fit that profile as he was a child when his family came to America in the late '20s. In addition, his family was Eastern Orthodox. He met my mother at an outing of de Paul and University of Chicago students. Also, they lived near each other in Chicago’s Hyde Park neighborhood.

¹ Mr. Dwight Perkins, or Perkins and Will, was a prominent architect, among those in the weekly lunch meeting with Frank Lloyd Wright and other prominent Chicago architects of the time.

Replacements. An inductee at that time had 17 weeks of training, a two week leave to visit home, if possible, and then deployment to Europe or the Pacific. I believe most Marines went to the Pacific. This set the tone for his service. These new recruits were replacements. Their training was not with a cohesive unit that was then going to war, and it was over a much shorter time than those units.

The birth of a unit. A replacement will come as a new member into an organization that has had a significant period of training and “bonding” that he was not a part of. For example, the 85th Division (a Division was about 14,000 in strength – there is an order of battle in the appendix that describes units and their sizes in the US Army in WWII) was founded in May 1942. A leadership “Cadre” unit of about 1,300 (about 10% of a Division) was selected from existing units. After a few months of training, the Officer Corps was filled out and the division was activated. Following that, the division was expanded with enlisted men and draftees.

The division then trained for a year:

17 weeks of basic and advanced training

13 weeks of unit training

14 weeks of combined arms training and large scale exercises

8 weeks of final training

Then there was more training where the division participated in large scale, multi-division training exercises (take the number of divisions and multiply by 14,000 soldiers).

So, the 85th Division was formed in May 1942. After the above activities it embarked 24 December 1943 for more training in North Africa and was in combat from April 1944 until 5 May 1945. They spent more days in training than in combat.



The 94th Division, which Chris was to join, was recomposed from reserve status on 15 September 1942 trained in the US and landed in Normandy, via England, 8 September 1944, 50 days after Chris entered the Army. The 94th subsequently had 209 days in combat; it had some 2 years of formation and training before going into combat.

The dilemma of the replacement. The soldiers in the initial division had some very valuable intangibles in their year plus of training. The smallest unit was a squad; about 9 to 10 soldiers. A platoon had about 44 soldiers (4 squads) and a company had about 180 soldiers (4 platoons). These soldiers usually identified closely with their company; for example, my High School class was about 170 students. These soldiers trained together for the whole period and knew each other very well, especially in the squad. I remember being on school teams and being able to recognize a team member from across a field just by their posture. I knew how he could handle a hot grounder, or a high or low pass, or how to block him or how to avoid him, what were his favorite wrestling moves, etc. in various sports. Most of these guys I knew since 4th grade. In addition to the training, combat was their most severe training – they quickly learned how to survive and trusted those they fought and learned with.

Since writing the above I came across a story that expresses this situation very well. The 26th Infantry Division (Yankee Division, YD) was in Patton’s 3rd Army. When they first went to

Alsace-Lorraine in October 1944 three soldiers were trying to find their way back to their unit in a combat zone in the night. This is one soldier's account of the trip:

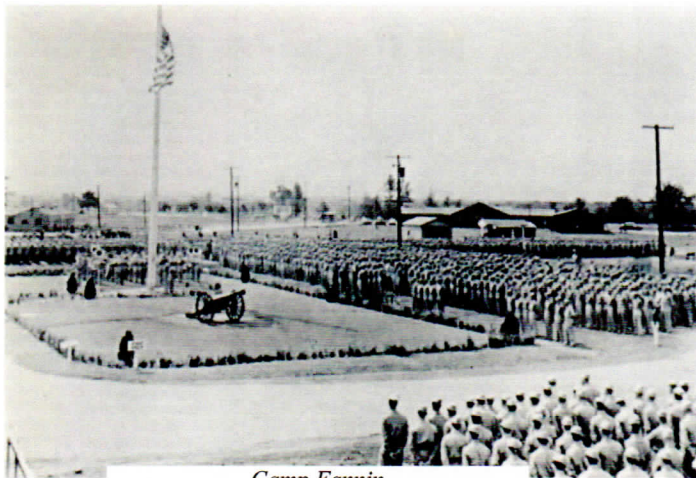
After sloshing through the rain and fog for several hundred yards, wondering how we could get admitted to our lines without the password, a voice called "Halt!" Then he coughed. I recognized his cough. I yelled "Windell!"

He yelled, "Yeah."

I yelled, "It's Dick Courtney!"

He replied, "Come on in Courtney!" And so we did. Whew! Once again, it proved an advantage to know your fellow comrades – their voices, coughs, footfalls. In the YD we had trained so long together that we were well acquainted as a unit. We lost this edge after a lot of casualties in Alsace-Lorraine and later in the Bulge. (My underline).

The Army's replacement system collected both new recruits and those who were taken out of a unit, wounded or sick, hospitalized and then returned for combat. The biggest fear of a soldier in an experienced unit was to be removed from it, never to return – the replacement system just sent him to any unit that they thought needed someone. So, soldiers who were sent to the rear for treatment and scared of being in the "Repple Depple" went AWOL and snuck back to their units. Even soldiers who were fortunate enough to be back in their unit after a long time were not necessarily given a warm welcome. All replacements were a bit scorned. The new ones did not last a long time, many died or were otherwise a casualty before anyone knew their names – you might say there was a severe, and well founded, superstition about replacements. No one wanted to be hurt through their inexperience, and there were numerous examples of that.



Camp Fannin

What does this mean for a replacement? He has had only 17 weeks of training and is in a unit of complete strangers.

Chris's training was in Texas where there were three replacement training camps. For example, Camp Fannin in Tyler, Texas, a replacement training center – picture left was one of them. I remember my mother talking about visiting in Texas with my older sister, an infant at that time. This would have been in the period from July to about mid-November. I have not been able to find

which camp he was in.

I remember my folks telling me that Chris sailed to and from Europe on the Queen Mary. In looking for records of ship crossings during the war I discovered that those records for many of the shipping lines were destroyed in 1951. I was able to find some websites, that through contributions of those who sailed, or knew some who did, reconstructed the crossings of most of the ships at that time.

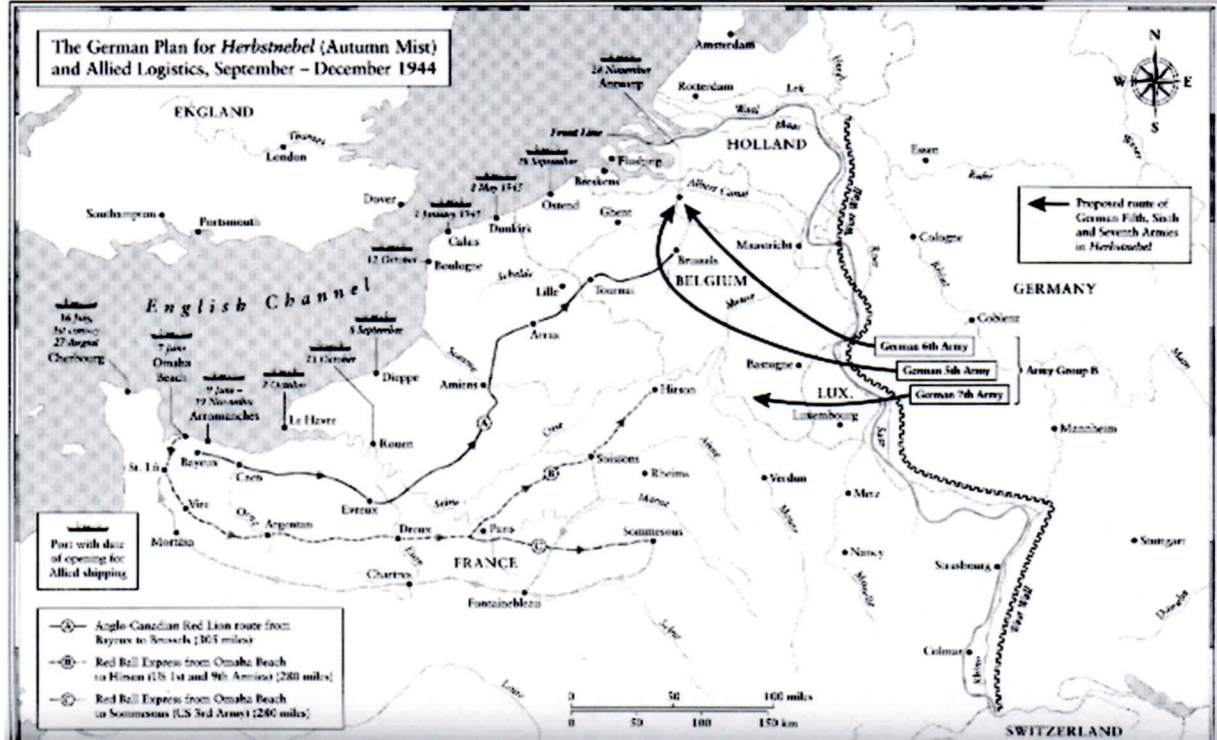


Chris would have finished 17 weeks of training on or about 16 November, 1944. Two weeks of leave would have taken him to about November 30, 1944. His “Separation Qualification Record” shows three occupational assignments in his service: Infantry Basic Training, 4-1/4 months; Photographic Laboratory Technician, 1 month; and Rifleman, 2 months. This put him into the Photographic Technician job at the beginning of December, and the Rifleman position at the end of December. I venture to say that after the Battle of the Bulge started on 16 December, Chris was swept up in the Army’s need to get all available combat soldiers to Europe as soon as possible. If not for the Battle of the Bulge, he probably would have finished his war in the photo lab, a place he was very familiar with. (He taught me darkroom technique in 1955 when I was 8 years old – this started me in a lifelong avocation, and sometimes vocation, of photography).

The Queen Elizabeth sailed from New York to Gourock Scotland, December, 16-20, 1944 averaging 27.59 knots/hour. She also sailed the same route on January 1-7, and January 24-30, 1945. These ships sailed solo at high speed with a zigzag course to avoid submarines. Winston Churchill traveled on the Queen Mary three times during WWII and considered it his headquarters at sea. In fact, he even signed the D-Day Declaration onboard.

Since Chris had to go to SE England to the replacement center and then to the continent, he probably was on the January 1-7, 1944 sailing, coinciding with his change of occupational assignment.

Back to the 94th Division. While Chris was getting trained and shipped to the Continent the Allied armies were pushing the Germans out of Normandy to their backup at the *Westwall* -- called the “Siegfried Line” by the Allies (seen on the right side of this map, note the Allied supply lines as well). In the breakout from Normandy the Germans had massive casualties; that is, being killed, wounded, captured, or missing. Several hundred thousand alone were captured. There were German Divisions (about 15,000 soldiers in each) that were reduced to less than 500. Their armor and artillery were also reduced accordingly. In addition, the German Luftwaffe had been reduced to a shell of itself some time before D Day. There were losses for the Allies but they could replace men and equipment that the Germans could not. This is where soldiers like Chris came into the picture.



Map 1: From Normandy to the Westwall

What seems to be lost to movie history are some facts about the German military mobility. Germany used 2.75 million horses in WWII, the Russians used 3.5 million. The rest of us drove to the war. The inventory of horseshoes for the German army was 60,000 tons per year. Horses were reshod ideally every 6 or 7 weeks. For long distances the Germans relied primarily on rail travel. This was alright for WW I but in a modern war if you did not have air power the trains were very vulnerable. The rail bridge over the Rhine at Remagen was built during WW I (1916-19) and named after General Ludendorff. In 1935 1.6 percent of Germans owned a motor vehicle. 4.5 percent in Great Britain, 4.9 percent in France and a healthy 20.5 percent in the USA – one in five of the entire population in the midst of the Depression.. In the opening days of the Battle of the Bulge, Germans captured a significant number of US vehicles intact. However, they did not have soldiers to drive them; they had to compel GI prisoners of war to drive them. The German army awarded a driver's badge for his uniform to any soldier who could drive. This is summed up well in the TV adaptation of "Band of Brothers" when a Harvard-educated rifleman is ranting to a column of walking German prisoners while the GIs are coming down the road in mechanized transportation: "That's right! Say hello to Ford, and General f***** Motors! You stupid fascist pigs! Look at you! You have horses! *What were you thinking?*" The Germans used 60,000 horses in the Battle of the Bulge.

In all of this, the 94th had been bottling up German forces in the ports of Lorient and Saint-Nazaire in western France. They were the most intact US division after the initial Normandy break out. We will get back to this.



Dragons Teeth on the Westwall

The Westwall/Siegfried Line. The *Westwall* was a creation of Hitler's that ran 400 miles from Holland to the Swiss frontier. Along that distance were 18,000 bunkers and "dragons' teeth" obstacles, minefields, and barbed wire at a depth of about 2 miles along its length. The *Westwall* was conceived in 1936 and built in 1939-1940. Its building consumed 25% of the nation's construction industry. The map to the right shows the *Westwall* up close. Note the areas: above is the Hürtgen Forest, below in German SAARGEBIET – the SAAR Basin. This is the Saar-Moselle Triangle we will see as "Chris's war."

The allies pushed the Germans to the *Westwall* around the end of August. The length of the *Westwall* became a festering neighborhood. On the north end the battle of the Hürtgen Forest started on 19 September and was the longest single battle the US Army has ever fought and was the longest battle in German territory in WWII for Germany. There were a combined 60,000 casualties and there was no clear resolution as it petered out when overshadowed by the start of Battle of the Bulge on 16 December 1944. The Hürtgen Forest was akin to the Wilderness and Chancellorsville campaigns in the American Civil war; a very dense



Map 2: The Westwall: Hürtgen Forest above, Saar-Moselle Triangle below

forest that was disorienting and very dangerous with hand-to-hand fighting. Tomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson was mortally wounded by a Confederate sentry in the Wilderness.

The boil was lanced in this festering line when the Battle of the Bulge was launched by the Germans on 16 December 1944. Many books have been written about this, and there will be more. The "Bulge" was the advance of the Germans in the middle of the *Westwall*. On a map, it had the shape of a light bulb. What is important to Chris's war is that General Patton's Third Army was on the south end of the conflict. They had been engaged in a battle along the Saar Triangle. On 19 December Patton's Third Army sent two Infantry Divisions and an Armored Division up to the bulge. This was done while his Third Army was still engaged in actions on the Saar Triangle. The disengagement from a battle and the turning of direction by 90 degrees and movement of such a large body of infantry and armor into another battle in such a short time is noted as a very historic event.

It was thought that the remaining 3rd Army without heavy armor would "maintain" the Saar-Moselle region. However, generals are not that patient. On 7 January the 94th Division, traveling across France from the Atlantic coast, was placed on the Siegfried line in the XX Corps, which was known as the "Ghost Corps" because it moved so much and the German's could not figure out where they were. As noted earlier, the 94th was the most intact division in northern Europe – it had been assigned the port barricade duty because the unit that was to do that work was in a ship torpedoed by the Germans in the English Channel. Chris was to join the 94th on 12 February.

A note on the weather. Throughout this period it was one of the coldest winters in northern Europe's history. General Patton complained to the Division commanders that they had more non-battlefield casualties than battlefield casualties. Trench foot and frost bite were the common maladies, and troops were not equipped with winter boots, or clothing. Temperatures at night were below 0 deg. F. Any wounded soldier who did not receive quick attention would easily perish in a short time due to exposure as well as his wounds. A body would freeze into "cordwood" in one night. Sad to say, there were times when they were also stacked like cordwood in tight circumstances. Ampules of morphine carried by troops would freeze if not kept warm, usually in the armpit. In addition their uniforms were battle green and they stood out as targets in the snow. There was fighting in blizzards. Some civilians helped Allied troops by making white covers from bed sheets to wear over their dark uniforms. There was constant rain and snow in the ten days preceding Chris's arrival to his unit.

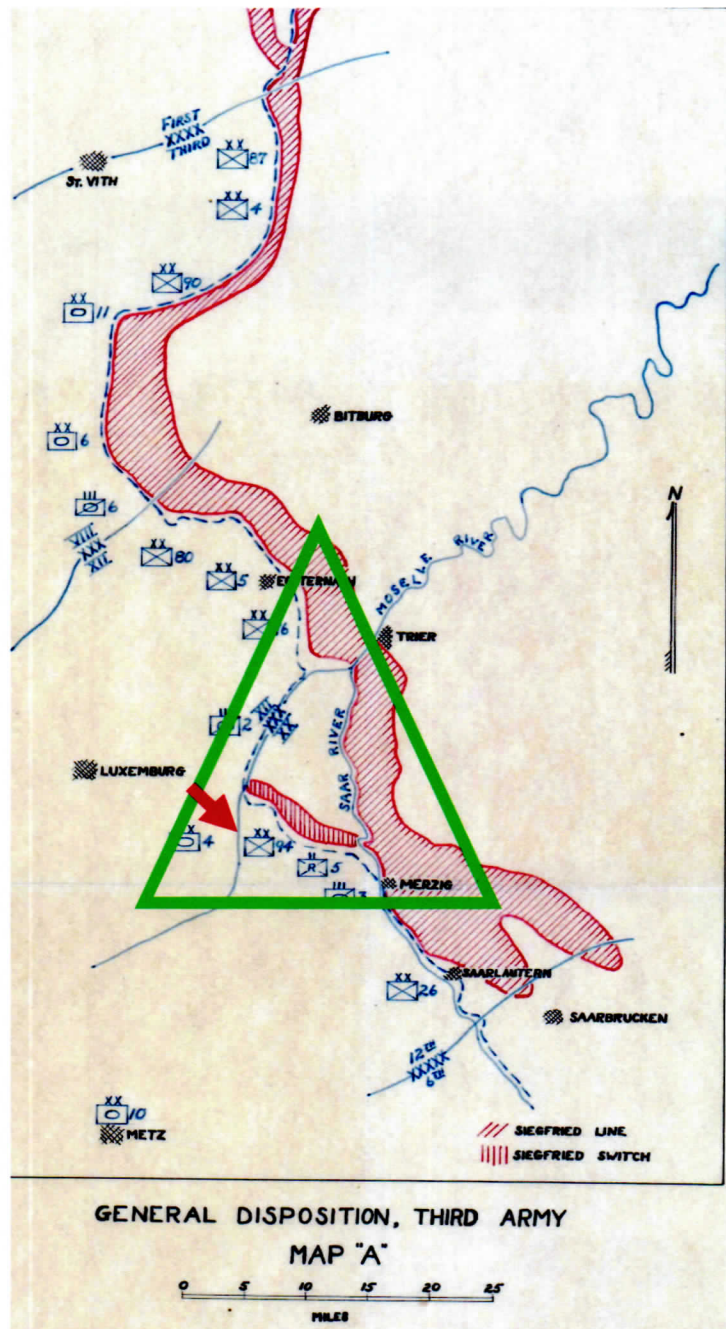
The Saar-Moselle Triangle. The Siegfried line had a juncture of the Saar and Moselle rivers at the Roman town of Trier. This was the major communication center for the German Army. To better protect this town the Germans built the “Saar-Moselle Switch” which formed the Saar-Moselle Triangle. The base, running between the two rivers, is about 16 miles long. The 94th Division of the XX Corps is on the left end of the Switch. You can see the green triangle framing and the red arrow on the crossed box with XX above it and 94 on its right side (Map 3). The Triangle is why the 94th had to cross the Siegfried Line twice to get across the Saar River.

The switch line had the same construction as the *Westwall* with Dragon’s Teeth, bunkers, etc. The bunkers were disguised in numerous ways. One American patrol did not know they were sitting on top of a bunker until they heard German speech below them.

Within the Triangle are the towns of Faha and Freudenburg that were successfully attacked by the 301st on 19 and 20 February 1945. We will get to those dates after the story of Chris joining his unit, Company “G” of the 2nd Battalion of the 301st Regiment of the 94th Division of the XX Corps.

Morning Reports. These figures come from the “Morning Report.” This is very valuable information but little known. They were difficult to read and the format changed mid-stream. Also I do not have information before or after the events logged in here, and there some gaps where not all the pages are included or a day is missing, etc. For example, someone may be entered as wounded, later transported out of the unit and deceased and it will not show up at the Company level. Strength on the Company level is 187 soldiers and 6 officers. Keep these numbers in mind when looking at the table. The most notable information is at the bottom.

The morning reports used here begin when combat activity started for the 301st. Note the number of non-battlefield casualties, as the cold weather and rain and snow took a big toll on the troops from trench foot and frostbite, pneumonia etc.



Map3: The Saar-Moselle Triangle

Tabulation of Morning Reports, 15 January 1945 through 28 February 1945

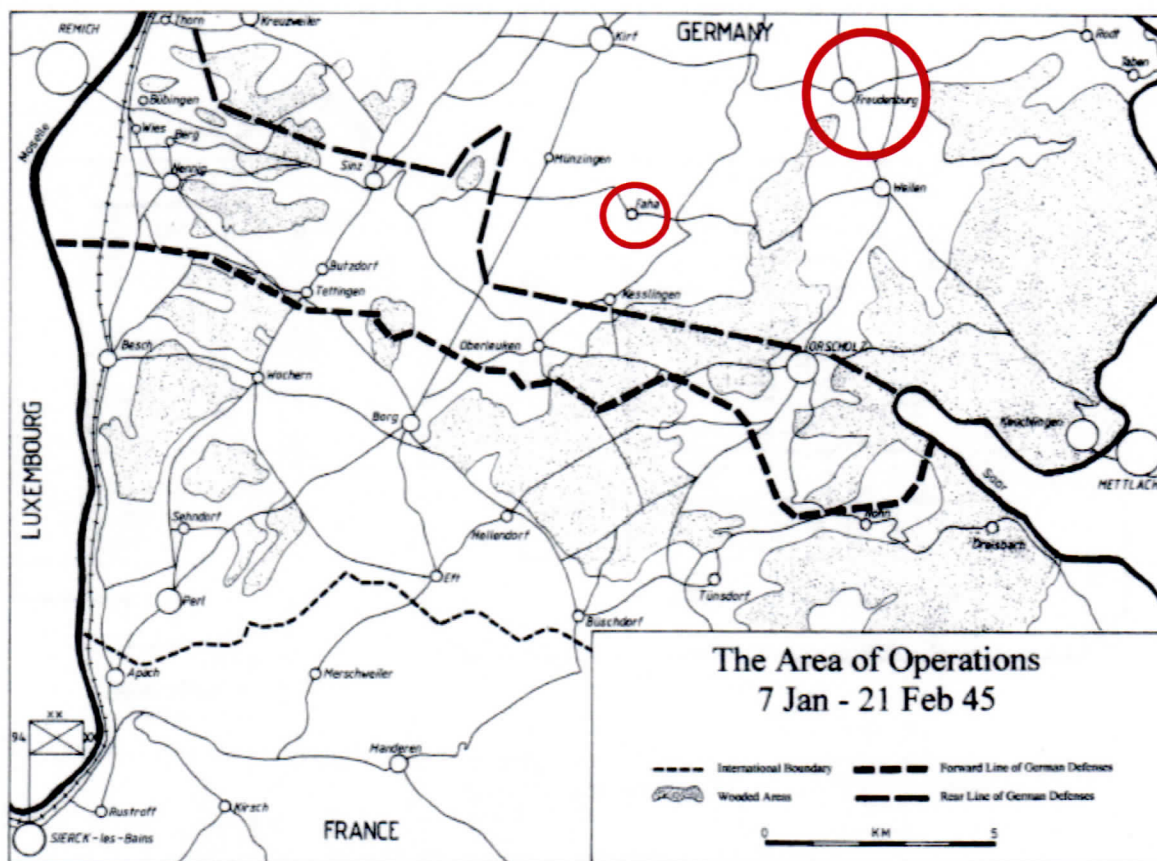
Date	Location	Status	KIA	BC	MIA	NBC	Other	Total #	Officers
15 Jan	Ritsing,Gr	Co. in Regimental reserve					2	179	5
16 Jan	Ritsing,Gr	Co. in Regimental reserve		3		3		178	5
17 Jan	Ritsing,Gr	Co. in Regimental reserve						179	5
18 Jan	Ritsing,Gr	Co. in Regimental reserve						179	5
19 Jan	Ritsing,Gr	Co. in Regimental reserve						179	5
20 Jan	Wehingen	Inf. at 2200 19 Jan. Moved into position along south edge of Staats Forest at 1047 and established contact with companies on both flanks. Occasional enemy artillery and mortar fire throughout the day.		1				178	5
21 Jan	Wehingen	1155 Hrs 22 rnds of enemy 120 MM mortar fell on defensive position. Ordered to withdraw at 1415 and closed on MLR (Main Line of Resistance) at 1615.	2	6			1	170	5
22 Jan	Wehingen	Company occupied ML R right sector on Bn (battalion) zone of action.						170	5
23 Jan	Wehingen	Company received enemy artillery fire at 1300.						170	5
24 Jan	Wehingen	Occupied MLR as right company of Bn Zone of action.						170	5
25 Jan	Wehingen	Occupied MLR as right company of Bn Zone of action.						170	5
26 Jan	Tunsdorff	No enemy action						171	5
27 Jan	Wehingen	In zone of action 20 replacements.	1	1			2	191	5
28 Jan	Wehingen	In zone of action						191	5
29 Jan	Tettengin	Division reserve. Moved to new section.						191	5
30 Jan	Tettengin	Co. moved into new sector at 0300. Received enemy mortar fire on Tettengin.				2		189	5
31 Jan	Tettengin	Received 8 rnds enemy mortar fire on Butzdorf, Germany.						189	5
1 Feb	Tettengin	Received enemy mortar fire on Tettengin, Germany at 1400		1		1		187	5
2 Feb	Tettengin	Assaulted pill box 1830		1				187	5
3 Feb	Tettengin	Assaulted pill box 1400. 11 POWs		6		1		181	5
4 Feb	Tettengin	Occupied 2 enemy pill boxes. Received enemy rocket fire at 0700.		1		1		179	4
5 Feb	Tettengin	Captured 9 German Soldiers. Moved from front to reserve position.		1		1		178	4
6 Feb	Tettengin	In zone of combat						178	4

Date	Location	Status	KIA	BC	MIA	NBC	Other	Total #	Officers	
7 Feb	Tettengin	Co. in Attack		16		7		161	4	
8 Feb	Tettengin	Co. in Attack (missing 2 of 3 sheets.)		1				158	4	
9 Feb	Tettengin	Co. in Attack	1	6			2	150	4	
10 Feb	Tettengin	Co. in Attack		7		4		144	2	
11 Feb	Sinz	Co. in Attack	5	4	13	2	2	125	1	
12 Feb	Veckering	Div. Reserve. Chris Vaseff joins unit. 83 replacements arrive.		3	16	7		183	1	
13 Feb	Veckering	Div. reserve		9		2	1	178	1	
14 Feb	Veckering	Div. Reserve				9	1	174	1	
15 Feb	Veckering	Div. Reserve		1		1	2	173	1	
16 Feb	Veckering	Div. reserve						165	1	
17 Feb	Veckering	Div. Reserve		2		3		164	1	
18 Feb	Perl	Moved						166	1	
19 Feb	Butzdorf	Jumped off at 1230 High Ground N. of Faha		6		2	1	159	1	
20 Feb	Faha	Jumped off at 0700 Fruenburg Gr. taken at 1630 (Chris Vaseff wounded, 1430).		11		3	12	141	1	
21 Feb	Fruenburg	Co. in attack		1		2	5	131	1	
22 Feb	Fruenburg	Prep for attack. Jumped off 1540. (Saar River crossing in these two days.)				7		124	1	
23 Feb	Fruenburg	Co. in attack (missing info).						118	0	
24 Feb	Saar River	Occupied defensive positions over Saar River. "G" and "F" companies merged around this time.		4		7		108	1	
25 Feb	Serrig / Saar R.	Dug into defensive positions. Half of Company remaining in Serrig, Germany. 46 reinforcements received.		1		3		147	1	
26 Feb	Saar River			1		1		146	4	
27 Feb	Saar River	Jumped off at 0700 to secure high ground to front. Dug into positions.	3	5		8		136	4	
28 Feb	Saar River	Co. Holding defensive positions	1	2		3		131	4	
Sub Totals off the roll			13	77	29	73	28			
								Averages	164.8	3.41
Total off roll 15 January to 28 February 1945			220.							
As percentage of average company size			133.5%							

KIA-Killed in Action, **SWA**-Severely wounded in action (low on the triage list but taken off the field alive; I listed them in BC), **BC**-Battlefield Casualty, **MIA**-Missing in Action, **NBC**-Non-Battlefield Casualty, **Other**, **Total**-total enlisted on duty, **Officers**-Total Officers on duty (note the very low numbers here).

Comments on the table: Stand back and look at the Morning Report chart. Look at the total Company count on the right and the Officers number. Note that it goes from a strength of 5 (1 below normal) and goes to 1 and even 0. In combat there were situations where a private led a platoon or even a larger unit. Look at the heavy activity from 7 Feb to 12 Feb, just before the entry of the 85 replacements. The losses for "G" Company from 12 Jan to 28 Feb were 133.5%, that is more than the Company size – in just 6 weeks. Of the 83 replacements that came with Chris Vaseff on February 12th, I found 37% of them on the off the roll list. That was just 16 days.

Joining the Company. Chris was transferred to "G" company in a group of 83 on 12 February. Some of these men probably were put into other companies. (The Morning Report with documents are in the appendix). Looking at the Morning Report data you can see that "G" company had a strength of 125 and one officer the day before. The size of a WWII company was 187 plus 6 officers. The 94th had been at the Saar-Moselle switch since 7 January, just over a month and had considerable combat from the start (Map 4, Faha and Freudenburg are highlighted. The German front and rear lines delineate the *Westwall* at the Switch.). As noted before, the 94th was an "intact" unit, but one month at the front with combat and weather it was feeling the war like all others.



Map 4: Area of Operation 7 January - 21 February 1945

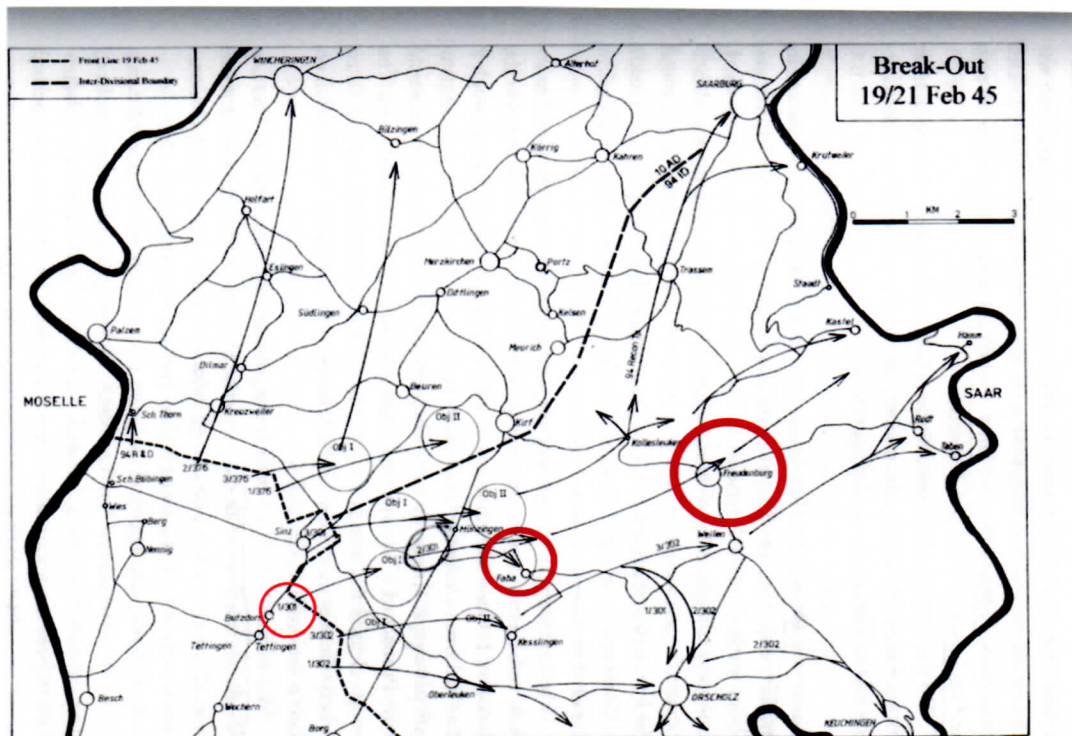
His regiment was the 301st Infantry, which was joined with the 302nd and 376th infantries. Those three units and a number of other units of artillery, MPs, maintenance, engineers, spotter aviation, etc. brought it to a strength of 14,253 for the 94th Infantry Division. In WWII the army division was the smallest military formation capable of operating independently.

I am going to bury you with maps. I am tired of reading military history books with minimal mapping. In addition, the text in those books made note of places that were not labeled on the maps! This map is the smallest area, just the “Switch,” and focused on the place and time that Chris is with his unit. Faha and Freudenburg are circled.

The 94th started combat operations on 14 January with the 376th. At Tettington-Buttzdorf, you can see these two towns just to the WSW of Faha. The 301st was not in that action, but was in several after that date. The Battle of the Bulge was going to have its end declared on 25 January. The 94th was limited in its attacks to only battalion or regiment size, and the forces at Saar-Moselle still did not have armor.

On 19-21 January the 301st was engaged on the east (right) side at what became the “Disaster at Orscholz” where the nearly 1,000 men in the 1st Battalion had only 19 officers and 415 enlisted men remaining. “B” Company had 10 officers and 230 enlisted men surrender and had to be rebuilt. The 2nd battalion’s “G” Company covered their withdrawal. You can see that “G” Company lost some numbers, but was still relatively intact compared to its sister company.

General Patton was not pleased, he wanted to keep pushing even though the forces at the Saar-Moselle Triangle were limited in use of force and had very little armor support. The 94th asked XX Corps for permission to do a Division attack, however they needed armor. In a somewhat weird offer, Patton got permission from Eisenhower to use the 10 Armor, which was recuperating after the Bulge, only when 94th breached the Switch Line. This is kind of like a loan from the old Whitney Bank in New Orleans: you could get a loan only after you thoroughly and completely demonstrated that you did not need it!



Map 5

There is a record of several interesting phone calls between the 94th General and his boss, the XX Corps commander on 15 February. The Corps wants immediate action, the Division commander needs a few days; he has just received two groups of replacements 85 and 175 men each, and notes that the proportion of new men “is about 70 percent.” The 301st will have the lead in the assault. They will “jump off” on 19 February.

Faha. 19 February at 0400 the 301st started their assault from Butzdorf: they were in the first full-scale divisional-sized attack since entering combat nearly seven months before (Map 5). In short they broke through the Siegfried Line and went for their objectives for the day; Münzingen and Faha. By 1630 half of the town was captured and Chris’s “G” company went on to capture a hill north of the town. By 1830 the town was taken and “G” company connected with the 301st 3rd battalion.

The hill was an enemy observation post with the best view of the countryside. Take a look at Google Earth and you can get an idea of the area. A German staff Sargent’s logbook is probably the best description, as he was on top of the hill (Map5):

Suddenly at 0400 hours an abrupt heavy barrage of salvoes fell on Oberleuken, the line of bunkers and the northern corner of the Das Lee copse. It was as if the maws of hell had opened. Half an hour later the artillery hammered Kirf. At 0550 hours phosphor shells fell on Kirf and Freudenburg. At the same time the artillery fire jumped over the rear area with a barrage on Trassem. Towards 0630 hours individual flares rose over the waterworks area, the Münzingen and Faha parish water tower in the Das Lee copse. There were several bursts of machine-gun fire in the direction of Borg[,] and rifle fire from the direction of Das Lee copse could be heard. Shortly after daybreak, at about 0815 hours, the first smoke shells landed with a thump right on the observation post.

0830-0930 hours, seven tanks in the direction of Potsdamer Platz with 20-25 men. 1030 hours, sounds of combat from direction of Potsdamer Platz-Oberleuken. 1215 hours, tanks in the water works area. 1222 hours heavy barrage on Münzingen, 200 shots. 1227 hours, barrage on the Alterberg. 1248 hours, infantry attacking between Das Lee copse and waterworks, among them a lot of men with raised arms. 1300 hours, tanks breaking through to the Kirf road. 1315 hours, enemy in company strength on Münzingen-Faha road.

The day’s operations yielded seven square miles of dominating (high) ground, with the capture of 5 pillboxes, 23 bunkers, and 827 prisoners and the destruction of 4 enemy tanks. This gave the invitation for the 10th Armored to enter the battle; the Saar-Moselle Switch had been breached.

Freudenburg. The next day, February 20th at 0715, the 301st set out for Freudenburg about three miles distant. Pvt. Vaseff’s “G” Company was committed from reserve to assist their 2nd Battalion attack in midafternoon. Pvt. Vaseff was wounded about 1430 in the action and the town was secured by nightfall.

Chris was hit by machine-gun fire in both hands, his right thumb and two left fingers. Several weeks later it was found that an additional bullet had traversed up his leg and resided in his back, apparently damaging nothing. He used to joke to me that he was the next guy in line for the BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle, a .30 caliber rifle/machine gun that made you the prime target of the Germans), so he missed that “opportunity.”

The 20 February Morning Report shows him as a Battle Casualty and dropped from the Company rolls and sent to a hospital, marked as “Unknown,” they usually note the location, but it was not done in this case. Both he and my mother told us, with a laugh, how he flew over Paris with nothing on except a blanket.

301st post Freudenburg. The 301st was now only a few miles from the Saar River. It stands that in the majority of the histories with comments about General Patton, none of them are charitable, however, it must be understood that he would take that as a compliment. Patton “called an audible” and sent the 94th Division’s 301st and 302nd to cross the Saar on 22 February. I read that he personally and verbally ordered the XX corps, while visiting the bridgehead on 21 February, to cross the river and attack Trier. Enlisted men heard him shout that he “did not care how many bushel baskets of dog tags it would cost.” They were not very pleased.

Much has been written about this, the division field order was given eight hours before the crossing was to begin, not any recon or intel here. By 22 February they were across, and on 23 February Lt. Col. Dohs, commander of the 301st, was killed by artillery fire. On 24 February “F” and “G” companies of the 301st were merged into a combined company of 70 men in all. Two separate companies at normal strength would be 384 officers and men. Chris was probably lucky to leave the field at Freudenburg.

(History also shows that apparently it takes a certain driving leader to finish or “Wrap up” a war—to push relentlessly at the end, to keep the opposition on their heels, to seize the moment. Patton was one, sharing those qualities with a few others: Sheridan, Sherman, and Grant. This is only successfully done with the understanding and support of their civilian leadership. Sheridan in the decade following the American Civil War waged the Indian Wars in the west and then consulted Bismarck and the Prussian army on these tactics as well as the strategy of “Total War” – Sherman also learned this from Sheridan. The result was the ethos of the German Blitzkrieg and the Germans’ relentless counter attack reaction to any attack from a foe.

Albert Wedemeyer was, as a young American officer, a visiting student at the German *Kriegsakademie* between 1936 and 1938. He finished the war as a Four Star General. He is little known to the general public, but was one of the most significant strategists the US had between the wars, as well as during WWII. He wrote a 100 page report on his time at the *Kriegsakademie*. In there was one small and very significant fact: The Germans had some 130+ tactical and strategic attack plans and only about three retrograde [retreat] plans.)

There is one more Chris story that I have always remembered. He had only about two or three, and he was not a person to make things up, and I recall he told me this only once. He described how the infantry was being brought to a line of attack by trucks. The soldiers were told to get off as quickly as possible so the trucks would not be hit –the Red Ball Express drivers were all too eager to tell the troops to get out as well! Then General Patton came up, chrome helmet, Ivory pistols, jodhpurs and all. He got out where all could see him, raised his binoculars and surveyed

the field in front of them all. I told this to a military friend and he commented that it sounded like a classic Patton story.

I have been trying to see where this happened because it would have occurred only in the eight days he was with his unit. Patton's HQ was at Luxemburg very close to the 94th's location. There are several comments about him visiting the area, but I could not find dates except for one at the 21st. There were days from the 12th through the 17th (I don't have a Morning Report for the 16th) when "G" company was in "division reserve" and those days have recorded casualties, so it may be that they assembled at a line and were either called or not called for action, and that would have been the time that Patton made his showing.

Chris was in hospital care for 236 days, that counts from 20 February 1945 to 10 November 1945 when he was discharged in Michigan. The medical records show that he was "36 days overseas" so I counted from 20 February to 28 March. The Queen Mary sailed from Gourock Scotland to New York on 29 March, 1945.

I do not know how they clocked overseas time in WWII but this seems close enough.

Chris went to Schick General Hospital in Clinton Iowa. It was constructed for wounded soldiers in 1942, on 10 acres bought from a farm. I am curious to see who represented Clinton IA in Congress during the war years.



On 6 July 1945 he was sent to Percy James General and Convalescent Hospital, Fort Custer, in Battle Creek Michigan. This was the home base of the 301st. He was Honorably Discharged on 10 November 1945. He went home to Chicago, raised his family and worked as a foreman at republic steel for the next 35 years.

Chris's medals and awards, as I know at this time are:

- Bronze Star Medal
- Purple Heart
- Combat Infantryman Badge 1st Award
- European – African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
- World War II Victory Medal
- Good Conduct Medal
- Honorable Service Lapel Button, WWII (The "Ruptured Duck")

The 94th Division awarded 2,538 Bronze Stars in WW II.

I am glad that I was able to discover my father's war. I still have some feelers out for information. When I feel that there is no more to be found, I will amend this letter if needed.

I want to thank Geoff Gentilini, Lead Researcher, Golden Arrow Military Research. He did magic in finding information on Chris Vaseff – truly finding several needles in the haystack.

Also a friend, Bert Engram Lt. Col USA (Ret.). A West Pointer who gave me very valuable information on various aspects of the US Army in the WW II era, and whose father was in General Hodges' 1st Army in the Battle of the Bulge as well.

APPENDIX

Order of Battle for US Army units in WWII. These numbers are the standard used at that time. However, even these numbers would vary depending on the mission or configuration to meet the needs.

The 94th Division had three Infantry Regiments: the 301st the 302nd and the 376th.

Each Regiment had 3 Battalions

Each Battalion had 4 Companies; the Companies were labeled with letters,

The First Battalion had companies “A”, “B”, “C”, and “D”,

The Second Battalion had companies “E”, “F”, “G” and “H”

The Third Battalion had companies “I”, “J”, “K”, and “L”, and an additional “M” (see below)

If a soldier told you he was in “H” Company, you could deduce that he was in the second Battalion.

However, there are always some extra bits in any organization. There may be another company in a Battalion, such as A/Tk Coy (A Tank Company), and any number of designations for engineers and the like. But you could always recognize which Battalion they were in by the first alpha. For example, “I’m in ‘A/Tk’ Company, 301st Regiment.”

Companies are the key to understanding the order of battle. If you rounded up the size of a company to 200 officers and men, then you could see that a battalion had about 800, and a regiment had 800 times 3, about 2,400. The three regiments then counted to 7,200. A Division had about 14,000 soldiers, so who were the rest? As noted in the story above, the Division was the smallest unit that could fight by itself. The 7,200 noted here were the infantry, there were numerous combat units that were either attached to a regiment or worked in support. Artillery and mortar units could fire behind the lines, some miles in the case of artillery. In addition, there were a number of support activities, outlined below.

So, a Regiment will have its three “Organic” Battalions plus attached or supporting units. So a Regiment could have some 3,000 to 5,000 soldiers.

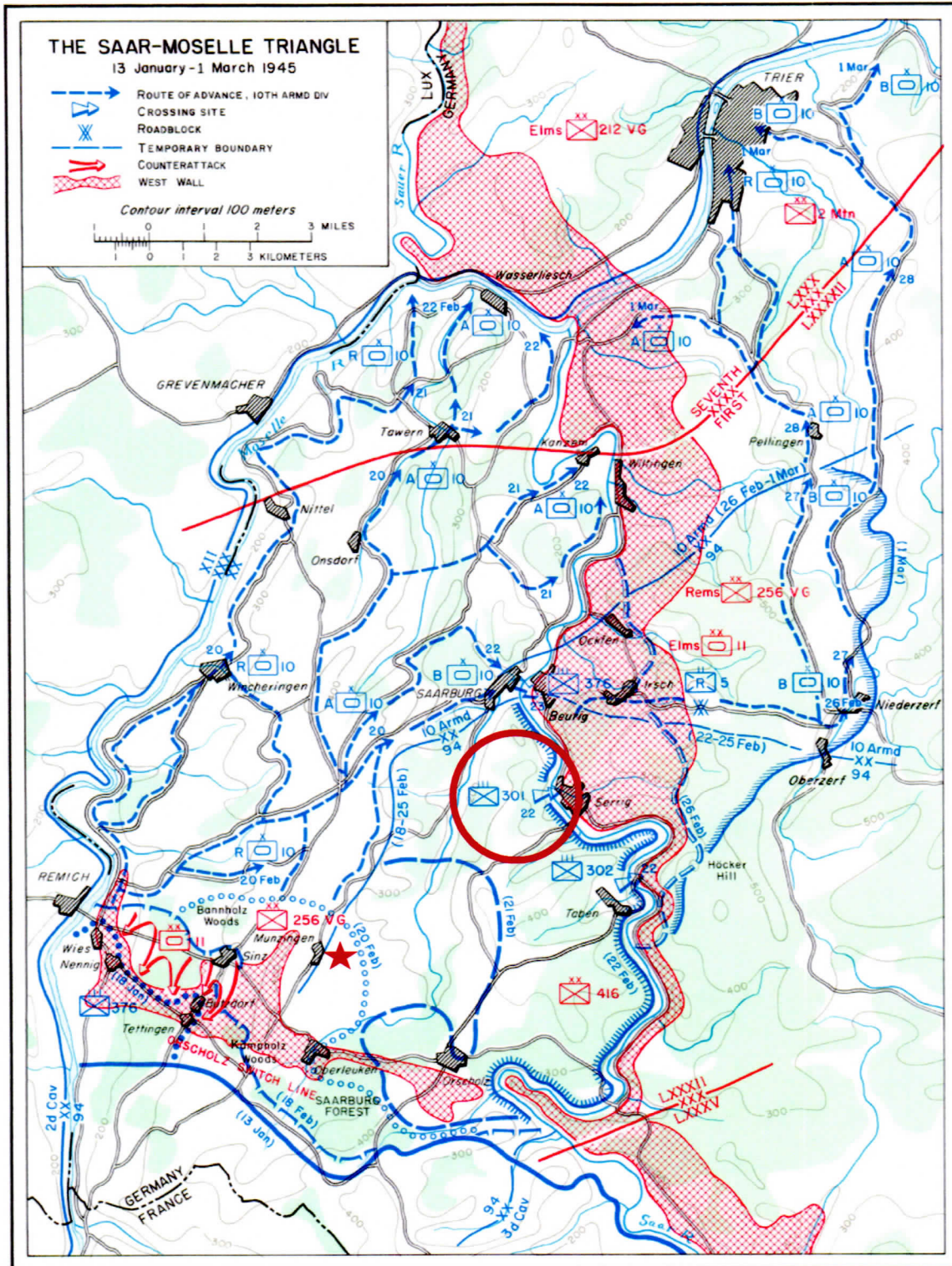
The Division, being a stand-alone fighting organization, has a number of other functions at the top level. The General Staff will have Personnel, Intelligence, Operations, and Logistics units. There is the Special Staff; with a camp Commandant (Mayor), Surgeon, Engineer, and Signal Officer, the Quarter Master, (I had a ROTC Instructor who was a Captain and he took delight in pointing to his QM lapel pin and saying, “God bless this little shield that keeps me from the

battlefield.”) Chaplain, Chemical Warfare, Ordnance Officer, Finance Officer, Lawyers (A/JA), Special Service Officer and Adjunct General. I could go to a South Georgia town and find many similar offices.

Then there are the units that would be closest to the Infantry units in the Regiments: Military Police, Reconnaissance, Air Section (they flew the “Bird Dogs;” beefed up Piper Cubs for an aerial view of the battlefield and artillery spotting. From 1950 to about 1974 the services used the Cessna 140 and 150 [two-seaters] for similar duty and a beefed up 172, a four-seater to carry more radio and related equipment), Four Field Artillery Battalions, Medical Battalion, and an Engineering Battalion, working in planting or removing land mines, blowing up things, building bridges (tough enough work in the civilian world, with being shot at an added benefit).

All of this would end up to a Division with about 14,000+. Today a Division is closer to 20,000, the same as the population of City of Decatur where I live.

From this description, you can see that a private rifleman in a company on the Siegfried Line was at the point of the spear.



D. L. DeFrance

Map 6

Map 6 Shows the action at the Saar-Moselle Triangle from 13 January to 1 March when Trier was captured. The star is the location of Freunburg where Chris Vaseff was wounded, right at the 20 February line. The large circle shows the location of the 301st just before crossing the Saar on 22 February.

Chronology

Activated	15 September 1942
Arrived ETO	11 August 1944
Arrived Continent (D+91)	5 September 1944
Entered Combat - First Elements	10 September 1944
Entered Combat - Entire Division	17 September 1944
Days in Combat	183

Casualties (Tentative)

Killed	802
Wounded	3,842
Missing	963
Captured	
Battle Casualties	5,607
Non-Battle Casualties	5,203
Total Casualties	10,810
Percent of T/O Strength	76.7

Individual Awards

Distinguished Service Cross	20
Legion of Merit	3
Silver Star	339
Soldiers Medal	8
Bronze Star	2,538
Air Medal	66