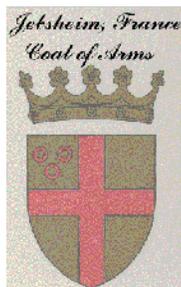


# History of the 63rd Infantry Division

---



<b>Topic</b>	<b>Pages</b>
<b>The 63rd Infantry Division</b>	<b>1 - 5</b>
<b>The Battle of Hill 216</b>	<b>6 - 16</b>
<b>Jebsheim</b>	<b>14 - 23</b>
<b>The Battle of Jebsheim – From a French Point of View</b>	<b>24 - 121</b>

## The 63rd Infantry Division

The proud legend of the 63rd Infantry Division had its beginning at Casablanca in January 1943, when Prime Minister Churchill of Great Britain coined the phrase that the Axis powers would "Bleed and Burn in expiation of their crimes against humanity". From that statement, Brigadier General Louis E. Hibbs, soon to become the division's commander, designed the shoulder insignia and the slogan "Blood and Fire".

On 15 June 1943, the Division was activated at Camp Blanding, Florida. The cadre manning the new division came from Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky's 98th Infantry Division. Following initial cadre training the division relocated some 650 miles to Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, arriving there during the latter part of August 1943.

During the month of September 1943, men from reception centers all over the country rapidly brought the division up to strength, and intensive basic training commenced. In November 1943 the men of the division had completed basic and small unit training and were anticipating advance and larger unit maneuvers. This, however was not to be.

In December 1943, all privates, privates first class, along with some noncommissioned and junior officers were reassigned to other divisions alerted for overseas movement. The process of receiving replacements and training them only to have them reassigned as fillers for other divisions alerted for overseas movement was repeated twice again before the division was at long last alerted as a unit for overseas assignment.

During March and April 1944 the division was brought to full strength with replacements coming from training centers as well as men from the

Army Specialist Training Program and the Army Air Corps Cadet Training Program. The latter two programs had been cut-back and their participants released for assignment to the Infantry.

As the division reached full strength again, training started anew. By November 1944 the division was ready for movement to an overseas area. On 6 November 1944, the 63rd Infantry Division advance party left Camp van Dorn by train for Camp Shanks, New York and ultimate shipment to France. The advance party or forward element of the division was known as Task Force Harris and consisted of the three Infantry Regiments,; the 253rd, 254th and 255th plus a small supporting staff. The Task Force was commanded by Brigadier General Frederick M. Harris.

Task Force Harris arrived in Marseille, France on 8 December 1944 and after a few days in a staging area moved by road and rail to Camp d'Oberhoffen, France located about midway between Colmar and Sarreguemines. By the end of December 1944, Task Force Harris was disbanded and all three regiments were reassigned to various divisions of the 6th Army Group. The 253rd was attached to the 44th Infantry Division in the Sarreguemines-Riming area; the 254th was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division in the Colmar Area, and the 255th was attached to the 100th Infantry Division near Bitche.

Thus the three regiments, separated from 63rd Infantry Division control were destined to make their own history until reunited with the Division in Mid-February 1945. From mid-February 1945 until the end of the war, the 63rd Infantry Division made a path of Blood and Fire from Sarreguemines through the Siegfried Line to Worms, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Gunzburg and ending in Landsberg Germany at the end of April 1945 when the division was pulled from the line for a much needed rest.

By war's end Division units had participated in three (3) battle campaigns and its Infantry Regiments had been awarded seven (7) Distinguished Unit Awards (Now known as Presidential Unit Citations) and a French Croix de Guerre with palm. During the period of December 1944 to May 1945 the division suffered over 1000 killed, more than 5000 wounded, over 1000 missing in action, 63 captured by the enemy and over 4000 non-battle casualties. Division forces captured over 21,000 enemy soldiers.

In September 1945 the "Blood and Fire" division was restaffed with "high point men" from other divisions, returned to the United States and on 29th of September 1945 was inactivated. The 63rd Infantry Division came back to life in March of 1952 when it was activated in the Los Angeles, CA area as a reserve Division. The division was deactivated again in December 1965, only to return to life again as the 63rd US Army Reserve Command in February 1968.

During the period after deactivation in 1965 and reactivation in 1968, elements of the 63rd Reinforcement Training Units (RTU) became involved in the staffing of the National Rifle Matches in Camp Perry, Ohio in the Spring of 1966. The 63rd RTU along with personnel from five other USAR divisions was tasked to staff the National Rifle Matches in lieu of their two weeks of Annual Active Duty Training. All reserve members of the support element were designated as the 63rd Div RTU Reserve Support Battalion and were placed under the command of a 63rd RTU officer who displayed the 63rd Infantry Division colors in the Battalion's Headquarters.

In 1967, the 63rd RTU was again tasked with the mission of providing support to the National Rifle Matches in Camp Perry, Ohio and again was assigned responsibility of command for all reserve component elements in the support unit. As in 1966, the support element was

commanded by a 63rd RTU officer and the colors were again displayed in the support element headquarters.

In 1968 with the formation of the 63rd US Army Reserve Command, the RTU was inactivated and the 63rd Infantry Division colors were turned over to the 63rd US Army Reserve Command.(63rd ARCOM). The 63rd ARCOM embraced California, Arizona and Nevada and was made up of Combat Service and Combat Service Support units and one tank battalion. During DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM 22 units of the ARCOM were mobilized. Fourteen (14) of these units were deployed to Saudi Arabia.

In April 1995, the United States Army Reserve Command, in response to a downsized force and redefined mission, announced its largest realignment in decades. As a result the 63rd was once again re-designated, this time as the US Army 63d Regional Support Command (RSC). Its geographic boundaries were realigned to conform with the standard federal district observed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other government agencies. This new alignment will held the 63rd support natural disasters and other regional crises much more quickly.

The 63d RSC's main mission will continue to be that of providing combat support and combat service support to units during deployments; to support troop projections by filling in for deploying active troops; providing port, rail and other transportation support; and act as the training base during full mobilization. The 63rd has command and control of approximately 14,000 soldiers serving in approximately 140 units in the States of California, Arizona and Nevada, with obligation to control budgets, manage supplies and provide personnel support and planning.

In addition the 63rd RSC has the increased responsibility to support the major reserve commands located within its boundaries, including the 91st Division (Exercise), 104th Division (Institutional training) and the 311th Support Command (Corps). Support includes resource and logistic management, personnel functions, real property management, and regional planning related to military support of civilian authorities.

In 2003 the command was re-designated as the 63rd Regional Readiness Command (RRC). The 63rd RRC is currently commanded by Major General Robert B. Ostenberg and is headquartered in Los Alamitos, California. The 63rd RRC continues to support Active Army mission, both foreign and domestic, including participation in the peace implementation force in Bosnia and the conflict in Iraq.

The World War II veterans of the 63rd Infantry Division are proud "Grandparents" of the men and women of the 63rd RRC. We congratulate and give our support to all who serve our nation today. Thanks for keeping the "Blood and Fire" alive.

It is expected that the current organization will be re-designated in 2008 as the 63rd Regional Readiness Sustainment Command and stationed at Moffett Field, CA.

## The Battle of Hill 216

The following is the story of two significant battles the 254th Infantry was involved with during the period 20 January - 1 February 1945. They were to be known as the Battle of Hill 216 and the Battle of Jepsheim, France. For their part in these battles, the 2d Battalion, 254th received a Presidential Unit Citation for Jepsheim and the regiment earned a Presidential Unit Citation and a French Croix de Guerre with Palm for their battle successes.

HILL 216: At last, after three weeks of mastering the defensive arts, we were assigned an offensive mission.--We were to take Hill 216. Field Order 1, issued on 20 January 1945, indicated the plans of the Regimental Commander for the seizure of this well defended knoll. The First Battalion was designated assault element and assigned a thousand yard front extending from a point south of Mittelwihr, eastward from the easterly power line. The battalion, two companies in a line, was to push forward to the north bank of the Weiss River and establish defensive positions from the junction of this stream and the power line eastward to the Fecht River and thence northward to the highway bridge. An outpost line was to be pushed forward from the Weiss River to a distance of some thousand yards south of the main disposition while the bridge was to be secured by not less than one platoon.

During this action, the Second Battalion was to continue to hold its defensive position facing eastward along the Fecht River. The Third Battalion was to stand by in regimental reserve, although Company L was assigned the mission of patrolling and out-posting to the front upon the attainment of the Weiss River line. Two days before the attack was to be made, the First and Third Battalions were released from their defense positions and brought to rear areas west of Mittelwihr for

training. Here we were briefed on the task which awaited us. We found on the map that Hill 216 was located south-west of the Alsatian town of Bennwihr, about four miles north of Colmar. We knew that there were strongly prepared positions on the flanks of the hill and a reinforced defensive arc running generally parallel to the Bennwihr-Ingersheim Road.

Although there was some tension as the time for the attack drew nearer, a great deal of this was dissipated as we became "armchair strategists". Around each map a group of us would gather and a mild discussion would begin; soon, however, fists would pound the table as each of us realized that the rest of those present had no understanding of what really should be done. The endangering of the flank in our planned zone of advance by the powerfully held German stronghold of chateau de Schoppenwihr became the major argument. Those who believed the attack of the 7th Infantry (3rd Inf Div) in their zone would command the attention of the defenders disputed with the more pessimistic of us. All preferred to forget that twice before the hill had been unsuccessfully attacked by other units.

During the early morning hours of 23 January, the First Battalion (Less C Company in reserve) marched from the assembly area near Beblenheim to the line of departure. It was still snowing and a bitter north wind seemed to tear unhampered through combat pants and layers of sweaters ending in field jackets. Our new shoe-pacs were warm but uncomfortable to walk in, even on the soft snow, nevertheless we were thankful for them. As we moved along the narrow road to the line of departure we looked like a column of hooded ghosts in our snow capes. Company B led the column and proceeded to the eastern half of the battalion front.

A Company followed to the western half. At fifteen minutes before "H" hour, 0700, the 3rd Division as well as the organizational and attached artillery began firing a preparation. We lay in the snow and watched as the big shells flashed against the snow clad hill. As we saw the destruction rained on whatever was out there waiting, we remembered what the 3rd Division doughs had told us. "An Infantryman may be the hero to a lot of people, but when you're ready to shove off in the attack, the artilleryman is the hero's hero". Minds and bodies became tense as we awaited the signal to move forward. We had seen some of war but always it had been we who awaited the enemy in our defensive positions; now it was his turn to wait in a hole, ours to attack. For the Nth time we checked the bolt on our rifle, or adjusted the weight of our mortar ammunition, or made sure our K-rations were properly tied to our equipment.

"OK, let's go!" Before we knew it we were moving forward, a lot of the tenseness had left us, and we had begun our first combat attack. Silently and unseen we moved through the deep snow, our capes blending in perfectly with the world of white which surrounded us. For a few moments after we heard the dull explosions and saw our comrades lying on the ground, we did not realize what was happening. No shell scream, no mortar whistle accompanied the burst. Then our minds began to work once more and we recognized the barrier the crafty Germans had erected--a field of the tiny, foot-shearing Schu-mines. The heavy snow fall of the preceding days coupled with brisk winds had perfectly hidden the mines and the footprints of the soldiers who laid them. Together the two companies began to cross the minefield , in the only way that a minefield can be crossed--slowly, grimly, probing each step before moving, with a foot or a leg or a life the penalty for a misstep. The explosions of the mines alerted the waiting Germans and mortar fire began to pour into the minefield.

This was clearly directed from the top of the hill and came from weapons in the woods south of the Weiss River. The concentration was extremely heavy and B Company began to receive large numbers of casualties from this shelling as well as from the Schu-mines. As the light became better, machine guns opened up from their positions along the road at the base of Hill 216 while snipers on the northern slope of the hill aimed their deadly fire on the men picking their way through the minefield.

Finally, in order to avoid a direct frontal assault on the positions at the base of the hill, the company "gave way" to the east and started working southward with its left flank about five hundred yards west of the river. Fire came in increasing intensity from the Chateau de Schoppenwihr and from the woods along the Fecht River--small arms, machine guns, and 88's. Pinned down by this curtain of fire the advance of the company after 0800 was tortuously slow. So heavy was the resistance and so high the casualties that at 1000 it was decided to employ Company C on the left flank.

A Company, on the battalion right flank, was making better progress. Although many men fell from the Schu-mines, the mortar shells consistently dropped behind the advancing units. As the companies neared the top of the hill, machine gun, machine pistol, and rifle fire became devastating in its accuracy. Courage in the face of superior fire power coupled with heavy small arms, machine gun and mortar fire poured into the German positions on the north slope of the hill forced the enemy to vacate this position. By 0900 A Company had reached the crest, the first platoon in the lead, the second in echelon to the left rear and the third following shortly behind.

When the units crossed the peak they found enemy dug in on the south slope. Even more intense fire than they had received from the north slope met them here as they began again to work their way through another thickly sown minefield. Direct fire from small arms and machine guns in the wooded area south of the Weiss river added to the torrent of fire which the determined Germans threw in an effort to halt the attack. Casualties mounted as men fell from the exploding shells, the accurate small arms, and the fiendish Schu-mines. Nevertheless, the company continued to advance and by 1230 had reached the east-west road on the southern face of Hill 216.

Between this position and the river there was an open field, undoubtedly mined and swept by direct fire from the woods along the Weiss River. Considerably depleted by casualties, the company found further advance to be impossible and the unit commenced digging in.

Company C, in reserve in Mittelwihr, was alerted at 1000 and by noon, the line of departure used by the other companies earlier in the morning was crossed. Sniper and machine gun fire from the Chateau and the woods below it were received almost immediately, By the time Company C had worked down to B Company's former position, the latter unit had pushed forward.

A group of riflemen had inched toward the machine gun nests and silenced the guns and B Company was moving forward again. As they came to the east-west road, the second platoon spread to the right to gain contact with A Company, while a small group from the first platoon, following the edge of a vineyard pushed toward the Weiss River. Contact was made with A Company by B Company's second platoon at 1430.

The other platoon pulled to the west of the north-south road and using an abandoned enemy CP formed a defensive line facing east. The leading element of C Company had not proceeded far along this road before it met B Company's group returning from the river, still under small arms fire. C Company, therefore, built up a defensive line east of the road facing the Fecht River. At about 1400 it became apparent that the now depleted First Battalion without assistance would be unable to reach the Weiss river before dark. The Third Battalion was alerted and moved out at 1650. Only two rifle companies were available to that unit for the operation.

Company I remaining in regimental reserve. In addition, K was short one platoon which had been employed since early morning on the First Battalion's left flank and was still pinned down by fire from the Chateau. Leaving the assembly area near Beblenheim, I and K Company proceeded along the east side of the Bennwihr-Ingersheim road between the two power lines. The advance of both units was slowed down considerably by a mine field encountered on the approach march.

Probing their way through this under continued small arms and machine gun fire, I Company proceeded, under intense fire from the south bank of the Weiss River, to the junction of the eastern power line and the stream. Here, after extending eastward, the men dug in at about 1900.

After I Company had cleared from in front of A, K Company moved out eastward along the road. On turning south the company came under heavy machine gun and mortar fire from below the chateau. Cautiously the unit crossed the minefield as the scream of shrapnel coupled with the sharp crack of well aimed bullets made the men want to leave the single path being probed through the mine studded area.

With the aid of well placed mortar fire, K reached the Weiss River, at its junction with the Fecht. Upon arriving at this point about 2100, the company deployed west along the bank toward I Company. As K began to dig in, the lack of the detached platoon was strongly felt. At midnight a group from B Company was inserted between the two Third Battalion companies.

The night following our first attack came and suddenly all the death we had seen, the noise we had heard, the fear we had felt descended on us like an avalanche, leaving us only cold, wet and exhausted. Our first day of attack was over. Even through our tiredness we realized that each of us was a wiser man than he had been the day before. We knew that battle was not glorious; we knew that our minds had been left with an imprint that even time could not fully erase; we knew that we had been through something that none of us would ever be able to adequately describe.

That night both I and K Companies were harassed: I by small arms fire from positions across the river east of the bridge and K by mortar and machine guns in the woods to the left front. I Company sent a two-squad patrol around its right flank and across the river. These men found and assaulted six foxholes. K discovered that the mortar fire coming from its front was being directed from an OP and after placing artillery on this position, the harassment was eliminated.

Only one further action remained for the regiment to complete its mission around Hill 216--that of "mopping up" the west bank of the Fecht River down to its junction with the Weiss. At 0940 C Company jumped off from its defensive position of the night before to complete this task and to contact the right flank of the 7th Infantry (3rd Div) just south of the Chateau. As C began moving through the open fields which separated them from the thin strip of woods on the west bank of the

river, heavy fire from machine guns and 88's pinned the company down about 800 yards from the river. So intense was this fire that it became necessary for friendly artillery to lay smoke. With this cover the company was able to gain the edge of the narrow strip of woods along the river by 1400. Upon completion of this, we had accomplished our first offensive mission. The green of our reputation lost another coat of its vanishing brilliance.

A new feeling of pride surged through us-a pride born of combat-replacing the cold and the fatigue. Tested in fire, the regiment proved that it could fight beside the veteran units of the famous Third Division. There was never a day after Hill 216, that our heads did not rise just a little higher when we said, "I'm from the 254th Infantry."

## Jebsheim

JEBSHEIM, FRANCE.-"A place of pain and pride, where they nobly fought and nobly died."

Just before midnight on 24 January 1945, the first elements of the 28th Infantry Division arrived to relieve us on position. By noon the following day, the entire regiment was assembled in an area in the Colmar Forest northeast of Ostheim, France. The First Battalion was greatly under strength, A company having only 120 line troops, B company depleted to 80, C company to about 120 and the machine gun platoons of D Company were less than half of their full strength. The Third Battalion had also sustained a large number of casualties on Hill 216 and only the Second Battalion remained in good operational strength. Our stay in the Colmar Forest was destined to be a short one, however, for another mission lay ahead of the regiment. The 15th Infantry (3rd Div) had, the previous day, cleared the area east of the Ill River, pushing toward Reidwihr in its southward drive, leaving isolated groups of enemy in its wake. The route from the west toward the town of Jebsheim was now clear.

It had become apparent as the month of January drew to a close that the hub of resistance, the key, to the entire Colmar Pocket was the well fortified town of Jebsheim, France. The village itself is laid out in a way highly advantageous to the defender. The principal artery of the town is a north-south street with stone buildings on either side. Branching off at both ends of the main street are two parallel ones leading west. Weapons located in the houses along these streets can effectively cover with cross-fire almost all the area to the west of the town.

The Germans had skillfully supplemented Jebsheim's natural defensive virtues. Along the street and road leading northwest, heavy concrete bunkers had been built. In an arc, extending above the northwest street, a row of pillboxes defended to the north, while other steel reinforced emplacements at the southern end completed the strong defensive system.

On the night of 23 January, while the attack on Hill 216 was still in progress, the tanks and tank destroyers attached to the regiment had been released. Now, they were attached once more. Operation Instruction Number 8 specified that elements of the Reconnaissance Company and a platoon of C Company, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion were to maintain contact with the 1st DMI, follow the Second Battalion, and stand ready to reduce such strong points as might be encountered. A light tank platoon of C Company 756th Tank Battalion, was to follow the tank destroyers, protecting the rear and assisting the battalions by fire. A chemical mortar platoon and a AAA/AW platoon remained attached as before. So swiftly had come the decision for the regiment to attack Jebsheim, that when the regimental staff and battalion commanders returned from Third Division Headquarters, it was already the hour set to launch the attack, 1600. There was time for only the barest briefing possible to the company commanders. As we moved out of the Colmar Forest, most of us knew only that the First and Second Battalions were to be employed initially with the First Battalion on the right maintaining contact with the 15th Infantry (3rd Div) driving south below Riedwihr with the Second Battalion on the left linked itself with the 1st DMI by reconnaissance elements. The third Battalion had been designated as regimental reserve, to be used on Third Division order only.

At 1600 the two battalions moved out, each maintaining a two company front--the First on the right side of the northwest road, the Second on the left side. We had supposed that the operations of the 15th Infantry insured us an easy approach to the line of departure. This proved untrue. Shortly after crossing the Ill River, more than fifteen hundred yards short of the line of departure, we received fire from machine guns and small arms in the northern end of the Bois de Jebsheim as well as heavy artillery fire from the vicinity of Jebsheim. Sub-zero temperature combined with a fierce north wind which whipped the deep snow into a frenzy of blinding ice particles slowed our advance to a painful crawl as we fought our way through artillery and rocket barrages to the line of departure. This was reached at about 2100, and already the effect of the cold and exertion began to show on us; the First Battalion especially suffered, their complete lack of sleep and rest for so many hours made their resistance very low.

Because of the difficulty which the Blind River presented, our formation was changed at the line of departure to a column of companies, in each battalion. Upon traversing the road west of the Blind River, the advance became even more difficult under the machine gun, rifle, and pistol fire. We found that a detachment of French troops had taken the burning buildings of Jebsheim Mills. Even though we realized the danger of falling debris, shells directed on the Mills, and the perfect outline our bodies made against the bright flames, many of us were more than willing to take the chance as we huddled for a few minutes as close to the fire as possible. This was reportedly one of the coldest nights of the entire winter; warmth seemed more important than safety. At about 2230 G Company, leading the Second Battalion, crossed the Blind River. With two platoons abreast, one either side of the road, the unit moved toward the town. After advancing a few hundred yards, the company lost contact with the First Battalion on the right and stopped.

The First Battalion meanwhile was running into difficult obstacles. A Company, leading, waded across the icy, swift-flowing river. Emerging on the west bank, the company was pinned down by accurate heavy machine gun fire. Contact was lost as the men of A, soaked from the waist down, crawled through the deep snow. B Company inched its way from behind and finally contacted G. Both companies then moved along the northwestern approach to the town. After another hour of slow advance the two companies came within 400 yards of the outlying bunkers. Here they were completely pinned down as fire rained on them from three directions; the Bois de Jebsheim to the south, the vicinity of Grussenheim to the north, and the bunkers of Jebsheim to the east. Mortar fire was placed on the bunkers, but was ineffective; a patrol sent southwestward to silence the machine guns in the Bois de Jebsheim met with failure as frozen weapons failed to work for their frozen owners. So intense was the small arms and artillery fire brought to bear on us that even after a fifteen minute barrage by four battalions of field artillery, the resistance was still so heavy that we could advance not further. At 0430 the two leading companies began a withdrawal toward the Blind river. The Second Battalion formed a defensive arc around the eastern side of Jebsheim Mills while the First Battalion took positions in a ditch several yards west of the north-south road.

Undoubtedly, this night was the most miserable the regiment ever experienced. Each man had carried only one blanket into the attack, and most of these had been soaked when we crossed the Blind. All of our clothing was wet either from the stream or from the snow melted by our body heat as we lay in it. The clothing had now frozen to our skin. No fires could be lit. Those of us not on guard slept. Somehow, the night finally ended. The following morning we counted our casualties, and met a new enemy, one who accounted for five times as many men as the Germans- the dreaded trench foot. Men who could

hardly walk hobbled back to aid stations to be evacuated to hospitals. The First Battalion suddenly fell to less than company strength. the Second Battalion, which had not been committed on Hill 216, fared much better, although it too, had a share of frozen hands and trench foot. Meanwhile, plans were being made to attack Jebsheim again that evening. The volume of fire which had come from the Bois de Jebsheim indicated that the clearing of this forest would require considerable attention. Therefore, while the First and Second Battalions continued their attack on Jebsheim, the Third Battalion would pass through Reidwihr and reduce the enemy holding in the Bois de Jebsheim. this done, the third Battalion was to advance eastward and assist in the taking of Jebsheim by and attack from the South.

It was just getting dark on the evening of 26 January when the Third Battalion moved out of Riedwihr. I Company was in the lead as the troops crossed the little stream just east of Riedwihr. this unit's mission was to clear the patch of woods just north of the Riedwihr-Jebsheim road. L company was to turn off the road to the south and clear the upper half of the forest which lay on that side; K Company was to keep to the right of L and sweep the southern half of the woods. I company sent its three rifle platoons forward at 1700, two platoons abreast, one to the rear.

The two leading platoons came under mortar and small arms fire, but were able to reach the eastern edge of the woods. The reserve element was fired on and pinned down by a well emplaced machine gun at the stream junction to the north. Two squads sent to silence the gun were unable to close in on the weapon, but it was finally eliminated by mortar fire. Defensive positions were then placed along the east edge of the woods and the company remained here that night.

The attack by L Company began at 2100. Meeting little resistance, the company turned south off the road, then pushed eastward, intending to advance to the east edge of the forest. However, a large clearing in the center of the woods was mistaken, in the darkness, for the fields beyond. When the company arrived at this clearing it went into defensive positions. K Company had jumped off and pushed due south through the western portion of the forest. The advance was successful until the company was within a short distance of the clearing. At this point K Company encountered heavy fire from the southern edge of the woods, mostly consisting of high velocity, flat trajectory fire. Unable to proceed the company fell back to Riedwihr, leaving one platoon in defense positions at the point of farthest advance.

Meanwhile, the attack on Jebsheim had started at about the same time that the Third Battalion moved out. The objective remained the same--the northern half of the town to the Second Battalion and the southern half of the town to the First Battalion. F Company passed through and led G Company, which was to protect the left flank. E company remained as battalion reserve in the defensive positions occupied the night before by one of its platoons. C Company, with A Company following, launched the First Battalion's attack. B Company, initially to rear of the other companies was to stand by until they had cleared, then strike the southern part of the town.

Companies C and F waded through the deep snow toward the bunkers which had turned them back the previous night. Moving along the northwest road toward the junction at the western approach to the town, the battalions again met a furious hail of fire about five hundred yards from the defending emplacements. This was of the same pattern as that received the night before--88mm fire from three directions, automatic weapons from the bunkers, and small arms from dug in positions around

the pillboxes. Slowly they moved forward, inching their way through the snow and attempted to reduce the fortifications with well-aimed bazooka fire. This proved successful with all but one of the bunkers, whose two foot thick walls merely ricocheted the rockets into the air. As a last resort, the tank destroyers were brought up, braving the dangerous 88's east of the town, and fired point blank through the thick walls of the bunker and rendered possible its capture by F Company men. (See Photos below).

At this point A Company and C Company, greatly understrength from the battles of the last four days, joined with F Company for the final push into town. At 2400 we saw one of the most awe-inspiring scenes most of us can recall, as eight battalions of artillery laid a concentration into Jebsheim which lasted for fifteen minutes. As we watched it seemed as if the village, laying peacefully asleep one moment, became nothing but a massive sheet of flame the next. By 0100 27 January, F Company and the remnants of the First Battalion were on the northwest street of the town. Three hours later Jebsheim was clear to the upper square. In this engagement, which was extremely bitter while it lasted, G company worked parallel to F Company along the northwest street.

The now exhausted men of F Company organized defensive positions in houses while G Company set up an arc facing north toward Grussenheim. Since little activity was observed in the southern part of the town, we believed that Jebsheim was clear except for snipers. G Company that afternoon, therefore, began the task of clearing the north-south street. the unit soon discovered that our surmise had been far from right. After in intense battle which lasted all that day, G company finally fought its way down to the lower square. The fighting was of the most severe type possible-

house to house, floor to floor, room to room. Before the company had time to prepare proper defense at the lower square, a strong counterattack developed from the enemy position, and the depleted unit was driven back through sheer weight of numbers and fire power. The counterattack was finally repulsed at the upper square. The following morning, 28 January, the French desired to pass through the town, but failed in their attempt to break the German lines. E Company then resumed the attack at 1400 to reduce resistance in the southern end of Jebsheim.

Gaining impetus as the drive progressed smoothly and swiftly, the company was across the intersection and about five houses down on the left side of the street an hour later. 115 prisoners had been taken at the cost of 26 killed or wounded. At about 1700 the enemy launched another desperate counterattack, and as the company was slowly forced to give ground, G company was committed to aid them. Together the two units repulsed that attack and made plans to continue the advance at 0400 on the 29th of January. Just before the companies began their attack, three Germans entered our lines and asked E Company to surrender, saying "We know you have only a company here and we have a battalion." The men of E company opened fire in answer and began the last most bitter fight for the possession of Jebsheim.

The enemy was being supplied and reinforced by the road leading north into Jebsheim from Muntzenheim. To cut this road and to provide a base of fire for I Company striking Jebsheim from the south, the Third Battalion left its position in the Bois de Jebsheim at 1130 that day. Leaving K Company in reserve, I and L Company moved out along the road. Arriving at the bridge over the small creek, Company L turned south along the west bank to provide a base of fire for I Company, which was to move southeast, by-passing the tip of Jebsheim and turning

sharply north strike the enemy in the vineyards just east of the German-occupied houses. Heavy fire from these houses caused a change in I Company's operation; a flank attack was decided upon. Accordingly the unit moved in by the road leading west from the southern end of the town. A French tank encountered on the outskirts was persuaded to assist them and the newly formed tank-infantry team attacked enemy strong-points on the west side of the north-south street.

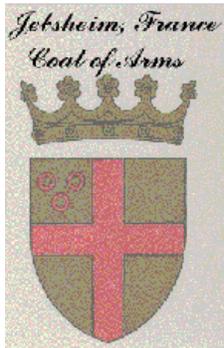
At the time of the Third Battalion's arrival, the fight between the Second Battalion and the enemy in his remaining houses was particularly violent. Compressing the Germans into these few houses below the southern square had necessitated the commitment of the remaining elements of the First Battalion as well as the reserve company of the Second Battalion. From the houses, from the bunkers, and from the foxholes in the vine-yards southeast of the street crossing, the enemy resisted fiercely with automatic weapons while 88mm guns poured fire on the attackers.

The impact of I Company coupled with the blows being delivered by the Second Battalion, broke the German's desire to resist further. At about 1630, they began to march out of their foxholes, first in small groups of five and ten, then in large groups to surrender. The total was about 450, most of whom were members of the 136th Mountain Regiment.

Jebsheim, itself, was now taken. The cost had been high, with the regiment losing sixty-six killed in action. But we felt that the cost was worth the price we had paid for it. According to statements of prisoners of war, the town had been used as a corps headquarters. It was not until later that we learned that the Third Division had not expected us to be able to capture this stronghold.

The question as to why our determination was so strong, our fighting so fierce in taking this town was probably best answered by one PFC. who said, "If you think I was going to stay out in some damn foxhole full of snow while the Krauts were living in nice warm cellars, you're crazy!"

## The Battle of Jebsheim- From a French Point of View.



### Introduction:

A few months ago, I obtained a copy of the wartime history of Jebsheim, France and in particular the villagers' account of what happened during the Battle of Jebsheim from 24 January to 2 February 1945. As most of you know, the 254th Infantry Regiment was the primary American Force during that battle and the accounts of the battle from an American point-of-view have been well documented and in fact are contained in the 254th Infantry Regiment Pages of this Web Site.

I thought it would be interesting to those of you who have participated in combat, to know what goes on with the civilians who are caught in the middle of a terrible and deadly battle. So I have taken the liberty of reprinting in these pages an English language version of the accounts of The Battle of Jebsheim from the pens and photos of the citizens of Jebsheim, France.

Take the time to read it, I think you will find it interesting, particularly if you were in the battle as I was. As you read these accounts, keep in mind that these are eye witnesses to a battle underway right in their own backyards. You will see some favoritism toward the French soldiers, but

that is to be expected since these were soldiers from their homeland; soldiers liberating them after 4 1/2 years of Nazi oppression.

Although the French version of these accounts have photos included, I do not now have the photos, but will add them as they become available.

So, sit back and go back over 54 years to Jebsheim France.

## **PREFACE**

This work does not pretend to be complete. Surely everything has not been said, notably concerning the military operations. Many important facts have never been known, errors of geography and times are always possible. Due to the great numbers slaughtered in battle, many of those who might have been witness to the most heroic actions did not live to narrate these events. There were many units that deserve remembrance for their bravery or their sacrifices whose accounts have not come down to us. ( This is notably the case with the American 254th Infantry Regiment.)

The perspective of our German adversaries on the different phases of the battle would have been useful. Unfortunately nothing of great interest has been sent to us. It is true that an army in flight is never very loquacious and, it must be said, few of their combatants at Jebsheim returned to the homeland.

Before talking about the military operations of 1945, we must first relate briefly the temporary evacuation of the village in 1940 and the destruction that took place at this period. We must do so if only to explain the mistake made by the Allied troops on the evening of January 27, 1945 when they announced the taking of Jebsheim. The "neighboring village" they spoke of was actually the center and southern

part of Jebsheim, which had been cut off from the rest of the village by a no-man's land, the result of German artillery in 1940.

After plans for publication of this work had already been made, it happened that in the summer of 1982, some residents of Jebsheim were watching a television account of the murderous combats in Beirut. A paratrooper who, wishing to stress the severity of the fighting over there, said twice: "As it was at Jebsheim." This caused remembrance among those who understood the reference and created many questions from among those who did not know. This work intends to answer those questions.

Without pretending to be an irrefutable historical document, this work constitutes for the population of Jebsheim a written memory of that dark period and a document for future generations who have the right, the duty even, to know the fundamental role played by the battle of Jebsheim in the hard fighting of the Pocket of Colmar; to know the glorious deeds and the enormous sacrifices on the part of the Allied troops and to know about the painful life of the inhabitants of Jebsheim who survived that hell.

Yes, indeed, "As it was at Jebsheim"

## **FOREWORD**

(NOTE: THESE ACCOUNTS WERE WRITTEN SOMETIME IN 1984, AGES SHOWN, EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED OTHERWISE, ARE AGES AT TIME OF WRITING THE ACCOUNTS.)

More than 40 years have passed since the events of January 1945. Many of those who lived this tragedy are no longer alive and time has erased many memories and the precision of facts to be told has suffered as well.

But on the other hand, time has also healed wounds, appeased hatred, rebuilt a village that really needed rebuilding and given back to its inhabitants the taste of work and hope.

Today, now that former enemies have shaken hands, and everywhere people speak of the slow movement towards a fraternal Europe, this work does not want to reawaken hatreds nor arouse ideas of vengeance. It has not been written therefore in the same spirit as if it had been conceived in 1946 or 1950.

If the military operations have often been related on the occasions of commemorative holidays and by newspaper articles, what has never been told; what must not be forgotten, is how the civilian population spent these dark days of January 1945. Life in the cellars, stables, and bunkers, while the battle was raging; the mad flight from houses on fire towards other places of refuge that were being bombarded in turn; the struggle against hunger, cold, the lack of hygiene: finally the contact with soldiers who, depending on the attack or counteroffensive, might speak German, American, French and Alsatian; soldiers there to protect, bring aid, or perhaps threaten, who considered civilians as enemies or even at times as spies!

## **RELATIONS BETWEEN CIVILIANS AND SOLDIERS**

First Observation:

Considering the large number of soldiers killed or wounded and the tremendous damage done to buildings in the village, it is a miracle that there were not more civilian casualties during those tragic days!

At the end of January 1945, there were more than 600 inhabitants hiding in cellars and stables in Jebsheim. (Webmaster's Note: All the time I was in Jebsheim, about 4 or 5 days I don't recall seeing one civilian). To those, we must add the refugees from Ostheim and Illhaeusern who had fled the combat zones near them. In fact, the Allied offensive had stopped in the autumn of 1944 at the Ill and Fecht Rivers and more than 100 civilians living east of the Fecht at Ostheim and east of the Ill at Illhaeusern had been evacuated to Jebsheim where they were staying with friends and relatives.

Often changing places after a bombardment, leaving one safe place for another after a fire or a breach had been opened by shelling, the civilians regrouped little by little (like a herd of cattle in danger) in the most solid buildings in the village. Some were in groups of more than 20, while others were in groups of more than 40 as is shown by various accounts we have.

Windows and vulnerable spots were fortified with planks, beams, sacks of grain, manure....Provisions and hygiene were very limited.

Even the combatants had not realized, as they advanced through the village that there were many civilians, hiding throughout the area; thus the soldiers were astonished when having surrounded a building and gotten down on their knees, their fingers on the trigger, to see dozens of civilians come out with their hands in the air!

**Second Observation:**

There is no doubt that the civilians were a major impediment to the fighting units and Jebsheim uninhabited would have been taken much faster and perhaps with no more material destruction than occurred.

However, no extortion, no act of foul play or cruelty has been pointed out, not by the German soldiers nor by the Allied soldiers, concerning the civilian population. All of the soldiers behaved properly towards the women and children.

Of course, soldiers aren't choirboys! "War is War!"--especially not shock troops who always charge in the first wave! The man-to-man fighting that was witnessed by certain civilians who happened to be looking on, has to be understood in the perspective of the fighting man. " It's you or me!"

On the other hand, there are many examples of soldiers on both sides aiding the civilians; evacuation of the wounded by the Germans to Neuf-Brisach,; evacuation of the wounded and sick to Guemar and Ribeauville by the Allies. The troops would also discretely withdraw, either on their own initiative or by request, from places occupied by civilians wherever possible, in order to prevent carnage, etc.

As for goods and precious objects, good heavens, everything can be acquired again, except human life, as the Americans were fond of saying. It was their habit to throw everything out the windows because they insisted on occupying empty bedrooms; bedding, the contents of wardrobes, drawers, everything (Security requires it!) "That will be good for business after the war" they would say.

And we must not forget the war rations distributed by Allied soldiers to the civilian population that, for weeks, had lived and eaten in

confinement, having only whatever supplies and foods they could pick up on the spot.

### **Third Observation:**

It was often difficult for civilians to identify the nationality of soldiers fighting or quartered with them. Not only was the white cloth of camouflage the same for both sides; the allied uniforms were the same for all (that is to say American), but the allied manner of conducting the fighting led to some mistakes. To have the legionnaires attack in Riedwihr Street, the Americans in Osthem Street and the paratroopers in the middle and south of the village, that would be too simple. The assault troops, after several hours of heavy fighting, were relieved by fresh combatants sent from the rear and who were not necessarily from the same unit as the men they were relieving. Moreover, certain combat groups, after enormous losses, were aided by neighboring units. This explains the confusion that sometimes resulted and shows how it might have been difficult to tell friend from foe.

It is not surprising if some accounts talk about the arrival of Americans, then French (legionnaires, paratroopers, Moroccans) the Americans again, or the reverse.

Among the German soldiers, there were, of course the infantry, the artillery and tanks already in place before January 24, but also the troops that had come from the far north (Norway and Finland) and also, before January those Asiatics with slanted eyes that are known here as the "Mongolians".

What language did the soldiers speak who suddenly turned up one group after the other in a civilian's house?. French and German, of course, but

also Austrian, with its characteristic sing-song accent; some Americans spoke a little German, others rudimentary French, others spoke only American. The Americans were able to converse in their language with two school girls who had learned English and, for what they didn't know, made themselves understood by gestures. Some paratroopers surprised the inhabitants by calling to them in Alsatian: " I ben fo Hawenaou" (I am from Haguenau). A legionnaire who asked in perfect German were the Germans had gone, was asked by the amazed civilians: "But you're French, aren't you?" and had to repeat the question in French to the civilians who were suspicious; it was only then that they gave him the requested information.

#### **Fourth Observation:**

There are certainly many psychological remarks that might be made concerning civilians, who, for weeks were in close contact with soldiers from both sides and had to answer questions, give, allow, submit, all in the hope of getting out alive, with them and their families and, if possible, with their goods.

Forced to remain in the good graces of the occupier in order to prevent all sorts of reprisals, the people of Jebsheim let the Germans, who were confident of their victory, speak without contradiction. They listened with compassion to the Bavarian father as he spoke nostalgically about his family, and the young "Edelweiss" Austrian, who was only 18, weep over the picture of this mother. These scenes reminded them of their own sons who had been inducted by force into the Wehrmacht or their nephews fighting under the banner of the Cross of Lorraine.

They lowered their heads when the occupier, feeling victory elude him, became suspicious and arrogant. They shouted, "Non" when a French

soldier, machine gun in hand, screamed out: "Are there any German soldiers here?". They shouted "Nein" when German soldiers, in the midst of a counteroffensive, cried out: "Are there any French soldiers here?" They accompanied confidently the American officers, looking for possible enemy troops who might still be hiding in houses or farm buildings, because the civilians felt more protected by the revolvers that the Americans held on their backs than if they had been taken hostage by the Germans.

But each time the civilians were able--and there are many testimonies to this fact--to offer their fellowmen a glass of wine or schnaps and invited them to drink, to show the soldiers that, above all, they recognized their common humanity.

And, oh irony of fate, what would the legionnaire have thought or said who drank with such delight the Schnapps that a citizen of Jebsheim gave him, if he had known that the same glass have been served a few hours earlier to calm the nerves of a German corporal who thought he was seeing spies everywhere?

### **Fifth Observation:**

- 1. The American soldier-** calm, fairly cold, a very experienced fighter, prudent, advancing as much as possible during the night to reach his goal by morning; his job done--careful to save lives; his long term objective to win the war, however long it took. Helpful to civilians, somewhat distant, almost distrustful, preferring in general to follow the civilian with gun in hand throughout the dwelling rather than preceding him; not disdainful of a glass of wine or schnaps, but never drinking until his civilian host had emptied his own glass.

Once quartered in a house, his first action: throw everything that can be moved out of the windows; small furniture, personal effects, dishes, linen, etc...He must have empty rooms, empty beds (even for sleeping) because "Security requires it!"

2. **The French soldier-** Enthusiastic, human, seeking contact with the population, but in a hurry, impatient. Knowing what the immediate objective is (Neu-Brisach, in order to close the Pocket of Colmar), he is quickly disappointed when things don't advance. Impetuous and impulsive, he throws himself immediately (often imprudently) towards the place where, according to the civilians, the Germans have withdrawn.

Irritated and nervous, he threw himself desperately in the final rush to the upper village where the fighting was slowly becoming a general slaughter and a settling of accounts in hand to hand fighting. Almost all of them were volunteers for the duration of the war and had come to liberate their country, their province. Their attitude was in stark contrast to that of the Americans for whom the fighting in Alsace was but an episode in their larger mission to win the war.

3. **The German soldier-** One can classify them into four categories:
  - 3.1. **The Simple Soldier--**The "troufion" or "ladser", man of the people; had little enthusiasm (especially the Austrians), and had known for a long time the ultimate outcome of the war, but was forced to see it to the end. He liked to confide in civilians, talk to them about his family and the coming end to the war.
  - 3.2. **The NCOs--**A good soldier, experienced, had come out alive from all the battlefields of Europe where he had gained his experience and "know-how". He knew how to take advantage of his knowledge of the terrain. He also knew how to profit from the tactical mistakes of the Allied troops and the carelessness of the

French, who, because of their enthusiasm and eagerness to advance, often forgot certain basic rules of security. He believed in the superiority of his military science and his materiel and underestimated the courage, will to win, and self-sacrifice of the liberating soldiers.

- 3.3. **The Fanatics** (Soldiers or NCOs)--These men were indoctrinated visionaries who believed in nothing but their "Further" and victory and were ready to give their lives for the cause, fighting to the last without worrying about what destruction might result from it--They had nothing else to lose.
- 3.4. **Those who willing gave up:** There were also the German soldiers who took refuge at the last moment with the civilians in order to become prisoners. Some "no longer believed in the war", others, harassed, with frayed nerves "couldn't take it any more." Few of them considered the action they were taking to be desertion, but the only way to avoid death--and often they were not lacking in courage. The Alsations who had been forced to join the Wehrmacht and who later deserted on the eastern front to see refuge among the Russians can tell you what courage that took!

## **THE EVACUATION- SPRING 1940**

In 1940 during the German invasion, Jebsheim was part of the second zone of evacuation ( after Artzenheim, Kunheim, etc).

Before the departure of the population, all machines, agricultural and otherwise, had been numbered, house keys had been left at the Obrecht Restaurant, horses requisitioned by the military and cattle taken to Schoppenwihr Park where the German invaders had the good fortune of finding them.

Most of the inhabitants had taken refuge with relatives or friends in the vicinity of Ribeauville or in the Munster Valley. The rest were evacuated to the Lot-et-Garonne region.

There remained in the village only a few old men who were beyond mobilization (The Safety Guard) who made the rounds and prevented looting.

When the long range artillery (posted in the Western Border and in the middle of the village) began firing towards Bade, the return fire was not long in coming. The first objective of the German return fire was evidently the steeple of the church, suspected rightly or wrongly of being an observation post for French artillery. In short time incendiary bombs set several farms on fire, then the entire middle of the village with the church, the city hall, the school, the parsonage, the stable containing the communal bulls (so famous), the Obrecht Restaurant, and ten or so farms were burnt to the ground. In fact everything that is now between the numbers 50 to 70 and 47 to 67 of the Grand Rue was destroyed.

Returning from the evacuation in the summer of 1940, many of the inhabitants of Jebsheim could not find their homes and had to seek lodging elsewhere.

Between 1940 and 1945, the middle of the village was cleared of charred debris, and two farms were rebuilt at the back of the village (as model "Erbhof"). As for the church, the occupation authorities were in no hurry to rebuild it. Thus in 1945, the middle of the village was a large no-man's land that, covered with snow at the end of January, caused the Allied troops to believe that there were two villages at this spot. Their joy in announcing on the 27th of January that Jebsheim was occupied was quickly tempered later in the day..

## **MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE SECTOR OF JEBSHEIM - JANUARY 1945**

Here is the unanimous opinion of all those who took part in the fights of the Pocket of Colmar.

Won after a battle that raged without pause for an entire month, include the major engagements of the northern part of the pocket- Kilstett, Obenheim, Rossfeld, Illhaeusern, and Grussenheim, and the major fights of the industrial cities to the south--Mulhouse and Cernay, it can definitely be said that it was at JEBSHEIM that the enemy broke and that the victory of Colmar was won.

The 19th German Army was defeated and chased from the left bank of the Rhine. The enemy lost three-fourths of its men during the Colmar campaign.

The victory was sealed by the more than 20,000 prisoners taken, 70 tanks and 80 cannons captured intact, thousands of machine guns, trucks, vehicles by the hundreds, shells and munitions by the millions fell into Allied hands.

### **OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE OF JANUARY 29, 1945:**

To the north, in the 2d Army Corps commanded by General de Monsabert, the French and American divisions, vying with each other for courage and endurance, advance 15 kilometers and approached the canal of the Rhone to the Rhine--

We are all along the border of the Colmar Canal and today after had fighting, our infantrymen and our armored divisions have taken Grussenheim and Jebsheim.

(A short concise statement that on the surface would never began to cover the actions described in the following account of the Battle of Jebsheim and in the statements of the citizens of Jebsheim)

Before beginning the battle accounts lets first take a look at the forces in the area:

**The Allied forces present:**

- **The 2d Army Corps, (2CA)** commanded by General de Monsabert, was to form the north wing of the Pocket of Colmar passing by Jebsheim--it was made up of: (All French units unless otherwise indicated)
- **The 3rd Infantry Division(3rd DI)** commanded by General Guillaume
- **The 2d Armored Division (2 DA)** commanded by General LeClerc
- **The 5th Armored Division (5DA)** commanded by General de Vernejoul reinforced by the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers commanded by Lt. Colonel Faure, reinforced by the Shock Battalion Gambiez.
- **The 1st Division of Mechanized Infantry (1stDMI)**commanded by General Garbay
- **The 3rd American Infantry Division (3rdDIUS)** commanded by General O'Daniel reinforced by the American 254th Infantry Regiment of the 63rd Infantry Division and later the 28th American Infantry Division (28th DIUS) commanded by General Cotta.

- **The 2d Group of Moroccan Cavalry (2d GTM)**of Colonel Latour.
- **The Alsace-Lorraine Brigade** and some elements of the French Forces of the Interior (Resistance).

**The German Forces present:**

- The 198th Infantry
- The 225th National Grenadier Regiment of the 16th Division
- The 223rd National Grenadier Regiment
- The 3d Company of the 654th Anti-Tank Division
- The 2d Battalion of the 198th Infantry
- Diemer's Fighting Unit
- The 67th Reconnaissance Battalion of the 2d Mountain Division
- The 137th, then the 136th Mountain Regiment
- The 525th (Schw) Anti-Tank Division

## **THE BATTLE BEGINS**

Beginning of January 20, 1945, any danger of the Germans retaking Strasbourg having been averted, General de Lattre de Tassigny, commanding the First French Army, is ready to go on the offensive in the middle of Alsace.

Two Army Corps will be used in the battle:

- The 1st Army Corps commanded by General Bethouart is to attack to the south of Colmar (Cernay, Ensisheim) towards the northeast in the direction of the Rhine.
- The 2d Army Corps commanded by General de Monsabert, is to attack to the north of Colmar in the direction of Ostheim, Jebsheim, Durrenentzen, then Neuf-Brisach.

The two army Corps must join as close to the Rhine as possible in order to cut off the retreat of German troops with their supplies on the Neuf-Brisach side and thus catch in the Colmar pocket the maximum number of prisoners and supplies. Moreover, this maneuver should keep the fighting away from Colmar.

But the Germans understood this maneuver and threw their elite units between the two jaws of the pincers that were closing shut on them; they gave the elite units the mission of stopping the two Allied Army Corps for as long as possible to permit the evacuation of their troops to the other side of the Rhine.

### **And now the offensive begins:**

Two Division are chosen for the first wave: The 1st DM and the 3rd DIUS.

The 1st DMI of General Garbay to the left (north) is reinforced by the 1st Group of Moroccan Sharpshooters, a combat command of the 2d DA, three artillery groups from the 105th, two artillery groups from the 155th C

The 3rd DIUS of General O'Daniel to the right (South) is reinforced by the 254th US Infantry Regiment , a combat command of the 5th DA, two artillery groups of the 105th.

Finally the entire 5th Armored Division of General de Vernejoul (minus the combat command loaned to the 3rd DIUS) is in the central holding position back of the 1st DMI and the 3rd DIUS. It is reinforced by the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers under Lt. Colonel Faure.

The 1st DMI is to force the passage of the Ill River, take Illhaeusern, then advance towards Elsenheim.

The 3rd DIUS is to take Osteheim, then push forward towards Jebsheim, Houssen, Wickerschwihr, and follow the canal in the direction of Neuf-Brisach.

The 5th Armored Division, as soon as the passages across the Ill River have been opened to Illhaeusern and Maison Rouge, is to bear down on the axis of Jebsheim, the Durrenentzen, the Canal from the Rhone to the Rhine, then towards Neuf-Brisach and the bridges of the Rhine, to meet the 1st Army Corps of General Bethouart, coming from the South.

### **23 January 1945:**

On 23 January, Illhaeusern is taken by the Foreign Legion, opening the route to the East to the men of the 2d Army Corps.

The following day, the Legion takes the mill at Ried (Illhausern mill), after hard fighting by the 6th Company, while the 7th Company advances as far as the forest of Elsenheim.

As for the 3d American DIUS, under General O'Daniel, it occupied Ostheim in the night of January 22 and 23, then advanced to Schoppenwihr woods (7th Regiment), while the 30th Regiment conquered the crossing of the Ill at Maison Rouge and advanced to the edges of Riedwihr and Holtzwihr.

But a violent counterattack by the Germans, with 10 Tiger and Panther tanks, coming from the direction of Riedwihr and Holtzwihr, forced the 30th US Regiment to fall back on Maison Rouge and Orchbach stream.

The 3rd DIUS of General O'Daniel is one of the most remarkable American infantry divisions, perhaps the most remarkable.

Knowledgeable French officers, who have seen it in combat, have said, "We have never seen better infantry, better trained, with a better sense of terrain and more guts under fire than this 3rd DIUS. It's an incredible division."

Behind the 1st DMI and the 3rd DIUS, the motors of the tanks of the 5th Armored Division are already turning. With its three combat commands; the 4th CC, the 5th CC and the 6th CC, this division is getting ready to strike out towards the southeast.

But the weather becomes very bad. The thermometer rises and falls according to the gusting of the wind. The wind has suddenly turned southward. The "foehn" ( a hot, dry, strong wind of the region) is blasting. In one day's time the temperature goes from -20c to +3c. Gales of rain and melting snow soak the paths, the fields and the prairies. The snowy crust gives way underfoot. The infantry sinks up to its knees in cold, muddy water, tanks become stuck in the mud. On the

roads, the paths, and the airstrips, water runs on a continuous layer of ice that is very slippery. Any forward movement for wheels and men requires exhausting efforts..

At every moment, the French and American units request air support, pointing out that the woods opposite are crammed with infantry, stuffed with tanks, and that the air support must bombard and machine gun them. The Allied planes respond to these appeals whenever the gales of snow and fog permit. The bombardment groups prevent practically all daytime traffic on the two banks of the Rhine.

### **24 January 1945:**

All day long on the 24th, American and Legionnaires, who try to advance in their respective sectors are blocked or forced back to their point of departure, with considerable losses. The situation is about to become one of a battle of attrition. We are marking time! Should we dig in or await more favorable weather? Will this become trench warfare?

General de Monsabert's will is not at all shaken. We will move forward again tomorrow morning at dawn.

### **25 January 1945:**

On 25 January, the 5th Armored Division is ready to advance, although the 1st DMI and the 3rd DIUS has not advanced as much as had been hoped.

Commanded by General de Vernejoul, the 5th Armored Division includes the three combat commands previously mentioned, the 4th, 5th

and 6th. The 67th CC is to bear down on Jebsheim, then Durrenentzen. In spite of certain gaps that have not yet been filled, its fighting elements are impressive:

36 medium Sherman tanks; 17 light tanks; 9 tank destroyers; plus one motorized battalion and the 1st Regiment of paratroopers of Lt Colonel Faure. The 4th squadron of the Foreign Cavalry Regiment and the 1st squadron of the 6th Regiment of African Riflemen are assigned to assure the liaisons with the nearby units.

At 11:00 AM, only a part of the 6th CC has been able to cross the Ill. The roads are icy and steep, Six tanks have slid into ditches from which they must be pulled with great difficulty. What's more, the strength of the temporary bridges over the Ill is insufficient. Therefore that are major problems in getting the entire 5th Armored Division to the eastern side of the Ill.

Contact with the enemy occurred quickly. It is serious,. The entire German menagerie lies in wait in the woods carefully camouflaged. Panthers, Tigers, Rhinoceros, painted white with black zebra stripes, all blend in with the snow and the woods. Soon Sub-Group R has lost two tanks and a tank destroyer. The group does not succeed in crossing the gap at the Riedbrunnen. Slipping towards the South, under the protection of smoke screens, it is forced to find a point where it can break free, so that it can correct its marching direction and try to take the Mill of Jebsheim.

It finally succeeds in passing the Riedbrunnen and is soon engaged in violent combat with German tanks of the Panther type, discovered because of their glow. Colonel Lavilleon follows the fighting on the wireless and directs the tank-destroyers to the Panthers that have been located.

At 1500 hours (3:00 PM) two Panthers are burning, covered with red flames and black smoke, characteristic of gasoline burning.. Sub-Group R, pushing ahead vigorously, soon takes the Mill of Jebsheim, at the same time as an element of the 254th US Infantry Regiment and several American tank-destroyers of the 3rd DIUS.

Commander Remond du Chelas takes over the mill where he immediately receives enemy fire. He has the paratrooper battalion with him.

With nightfall, the wind shifts again to the north, bringing with it a glacial cold.

But, apart from the taking of the Mill of Jebsheim, no progress has been made during the day by the other units. It is already the evening of 25 January and the 2d Army Corps is still far from Neuf-Brisach!.

On the other side of the Pocket of Colmar, to the south, the situation is not any better. The 1st Army Corps is fighting fiercely to move to the north. Separated by more than 35 kilometers, the two Army Corps are not about to join together!.

### **26 January 1945:**

At 0300 (3:00 AM) 26 January 1945, the 254th US Infantry Regiment, which has been reinforced, announces that it is attacking Jebsheim;  
**THE BATTLE OF JEBSHEIM BEGINS!**

The Battle of Jebsheim will be very, very hard. Two raging wills are at odds; one wants to pass and the other to prevent the first from passing. The village of Jebsheim is in the midst of the gigantic fight. And, because of the snow and severe cold, the combatant who has a house at

his disposal ( and this is not the case of the attacker) has an important trump card in the fight.

General O'Daniel throws the west wing of his American Division (the 254th US Infantry Regiment) into Jebsheim, while General Garbay throws the right wing of the 1st DIM at Grussenheim. Between the two of them, Colonel de Lavilleon of the 6th CC has known for a long time that Grussenheim cannot be taken by a frontal attack (The Blind River is there) and that to approach it, Jebsheim must first be captured, then the troops must swing back to the north and take Grussenheim from the south, coming from Jebsheim. He offers to do this, by aiding both the 254th US Infantry Regiment aimed at Jebsheim and the 1st DIM aimed at Grussenheim.

It is 0700 (7:00 AM) on 26 January and the Americans announce that they have entered Jebsheim and hold half of it, which is denied shortly afterwards. Rumor has it that at the same hour the Americans took Riedwihr. This too is unfounded!

Towards 1730 hours (5:30 PM), the Germans launch a powerful counterattack against Maison Rouge, The attack , coming from the south, between Houssen and Holtzwihr, is a danger to the rear and to all the units in front of Jebsheim. Colonel de Lavilleon orders his Sub-Group V and the tank-destroyers to pivot and face southward. But shortly afterwards, the German attack is repulsed by the Americans.

Once again it is nightfall. No progress, or nearly none, has been made. The situation is practically unchanged.

The 6th CC has not been able to move out and push southward, because its communications would be too seriously imperiled; Grussenheim not having been taken by the 1st DIM nor Jebsheim by the 254th US Infantry Regiment. The commander of the 6th CC therefore decides to

help these two large units in the task of opening the door that remains closed behind the German tanks. He offers everything at his disposal—tanks, legionnaires and paratroopers.

**27 January 1945:**

At 0830 (8:30 AM) , General Schlessler, commanding the 4th CC to the right of the 6th CC has succeeded in pushing southward. Having passed Wicherschwihl, he reaches the Colmar Canal. But he remains blocked in front of the canal since all of the bridges across the canal have been destroyed.

To the left of the 6th CC (to the north), the 5th CC held in reserve, moves through Illhaeusern in the direction of the mill of Jebsheim, with the order to cover Colonel de Lavilleon's left flank, opposite Grussenheim.

At Jebsheim, the Americans (254th Infantry Regiment) take advantage of the night to penetrate and advance in the northwest part of the village. At 0700 hours (7:00 AM) they signal that they hold half the village (in reality half of the north section.).

At noon the taking of Jebsheim is announced. Cruel error!, The Americans--advancing as far as the church-- have seen in the distance, farther to the south, "the other village". What they saw in the distance was in reality, cut in two by a large no-man's land, the center of the village, which had been completely destroyed by German artillery in 1940 and was now covered with fresh snow!

Sub-Group R of the 6th CC, with a platoon of medium tanks, two Tank Destroyers and the 10th Company of the 3rd RMLE moves on Jebsheim.

The paratrooper battalion holds the mill, the Provencal platoon and the 3 tank destroyers control by their fire the north borders of Jebsheim.

At 1000 hours (10:00 AM) the command post of Sub-Group R moves into Jebsheim.

Sub-Group B of the 6th CC moves toward Jebsheim and reaches the village at noon. At 1500 hours (3:00 PM) the Bouvet detachment moves out of the Artzenheim road with three tanks, a Tank Destroyer , a detachment of the 11th Regiment of African Riflemen and a section of the RMLE. It is engaged by anti-tank weapons located on the borders of Hardt Woods (Bois de la Hardt). Two tanks are destroyed and Lt Bouvet is killed. The platoon of officer- cadet Debrinay continues the mission, then falls back to the vicinity of the cemetery for the night. Prisoners have been taken.

The Guillard detachment, with three tanks, one tank destroyer and a section of legionnaires, gains a foothold in a group of houses to the southwest of Jebsheim (at the end of Riedwihl Street).

Sub-Group V of the 6th CC moves from Maison Rouge to Jebsheim and occupies the eastern borders of the village in the part liberated by the Americans of the 254th Infantry Regiment.

The northern part of the village is subjected to violent fire from mortars and enemy artillery.

Colonel Renaudeau d'Arc takes command of all the elements of the 6th CC that are in Jebsheim and directs the mopping-up operations..

The 1st Battalion of the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers, the Legionnaires of the 3rd RMLE, the 2d Battalion of the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers

arrive one after the other to join in the battle inside the village. Taken and retaken, lost and lost again, taken back again, Jebsheim will be the stake in a fight with no mercy, with furious hand-to-hand fighting.

But this day of 27 January will bring nothing more than the mopping-up of several blocks of houses.

When night comes it can no longer be a question of exploiting a breach in the enemy lines, nor of going to spend the night at Neuf-Brisach, as everyone had hoped for a time. The enemy is not yet broken. The 1st DMI with the support of the 2d Armored Division, has not yet taken Grussenheim, and Jebsheim is still held in part by the Germans. The 6th CC cannot therefore move out.

In fact, events evolved rapidly. The enemy does not wish to die. Holding in front of Neuf-Brisach is a question of life and death for him. He counterattacks everywhere, refusing to yield the least bit of terrain. What might have been true at noon is no longer true at 1300 hours (1:00 PM).

On the enemy's side the 2d GJD(Gebirgsjagerdivision) took command of the sector located between Jebsheim and the Ill River. Its command post is in Urschenheim. The general commanding the 64th AK (Army Corps) receives the following "very urgent" order:

"The breach in the HKL (Hauptkamflinie- Main line of bastle) between Grussenheim, Jebsheim and the canal to the north of Muntzenheim must be closed with all the forces of which the corps disposes, reinforced and defended. The enemy must not be able to overrun this HKL and push in the direction of the East, under pain of causing serious consequences in the conduct of the entire fighting of the Corps. New reserves must be

constituted in the region to the east of Jebsheim and to the south of Muntzenheim."

### **28 January 1945:**

The battle of Jebsheim reaches its culminating point on the 28th and 29th of January. The fighting in the village itself, with troops being constantly reinforced on both sides, slowly took on proportions that, in the beginning, were entirely unforeseen. The battle became one of the bloodiest and most glorious episodes of the war. The Germans still held two-thirds of Jebsheim. They are supported by powerful artillery and the fire from numerous tanks located in Bois de la Hardt (Hardt Woods). The Panthers, Tigers and Rhinoceros come out of cover, advancing frequently half-way through the village as far as the border of the Old Roman Way, at this hour covered with snow. They fire many shells on the north area occupied by the Americans and elements of the 6th CC.

The battle continues all during the night of the 27th to the 28th. At sunrise on the 28th, the streets are strewn with bodies that had been crushed by the tanks, and the fight continues. We receive and return fire from house to house, while machine guns keep the streets and intersections empty by firing long bursts that sweep the street.

The tanks of the 6th CC bring effective aid, making breaches in houses, which fill immediately with assault troops from the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers. Bazookas (Panzerfaust) abandoned by the Germans are immediately put to use by the paratroopers.

Attacks with flanking actions are carried out on the east and west borders of the village and allow us to take a foothold in houses whose defenders are held down by the frontal attack of the tanks.

Towards 0800 hours (8:00 AM). Captain Berg and Captain Masselot, with a platoon of tanks and a section of the Legion, surge from the cemetery towards the south. After 300 meters, Tank #34, hit by a shell burns and tank #32 is immobilized as well as the tank destroyer accompanying it. On all sides the enemy appears armed with bazookas. Advance is impossible. An artillery duel begins. The light has revealed the enemy's anti-tank weapons as well as several Tigers or Panthers. Towards noon, columns of black smoke rise here and there on the Roman way and the west border of Hardt Woods. Many of these fearful beasts (Tigers and Panthers) have been hit by planes that have been called up and directed several times by radio. The brave piper-cub pilots, friends of the Artillery and Infantry are in the air almost all the time and signal by radio everything they see. The heavier Thunderbolts (P47's) pass in clusters, machine gunning and bombarding the targets that we point out to them.

Towards noon, the Deroulede platoon of the 3rd Squadron, fires smoke-shells on the west borders of Hardt Woods to aid the advance of a group from the 2d Armored Division from Grussenheim. At 1700 hours (5:00 PM) a shell falls on the forward section of tank #55 taking it out of action

The Lavilleon Sub-Group with the tanks of Lt Joyau's platoon is near the church. From there he hopes to reach the south area of the village and take it. To do so, he will have to move from the church to the old train station, by Grand Rue and precede the paratroopers who, with elements of Boulanger's Sub-Group, will advance from the south and southwest.

Fresh snow has fallen. Officer-cadet Merel, with a section of Legionnaires, is fighting in Grand Rue, supported by two of Lt Joyau's tanks. The detachment has scarcely gone 30 meters when the first tank is blown up by a mine hidden in the snow. Immediately the windows of

the neighboring house fill up with Germans who open fire with rifles and machine guns. Several Legionnaires are killed or wounded. Among the wounded is Officer- cadet Merel who has a bullet hole through his leg. Under fire, the second tank collects the wounded and takes them on board, but on the return, it is blown up like the first tank by a barrage of mines.

The street will have to be cleared of mines. With calm courage, the American mine clearers go about it and , at the beginning of the afternoon, all of Grand Rue is in the hands of Vieville's sub-group. But the losses are serious.

The losses among the paratroopers of the 1st Regiment have also been enormous. Young and eager, all volunteers for the duration of the war, with taste for bold acts, and not able at the time of this campaign to act as paratroopers, they fight on the ground just like the Infantry. Constantly lending a strong hand to their brothers in arms, with the esteemed Lt Col Faure (a former ski champion), they are admired by everyone, even the Legionnaires, who know what real men are!

The African Riflemen, paratroopers, legionnaires, Americans and Germans all have equipped themselves with helmets, hoods or white garb, often cut out of sheets ( a slash with a knife in the middle of a sheet to make a hole for the head with string for a belt) in order to be less visible in the snow. But mistaken identities occur- friends or foes? With a finger on the trigger, we look each other over, suspicious at each quick appearance and disappearance of a white figure. A number of such errors, comical and for the most part without serious consequences for our soldiers, will be told later!

By the evening of the 28th, no one is talking any longer about Neuf-Brisach, but the disappointment of the first days has given way to a

glimmer of hope. As things have turned out, each day has seen the Allied troops progress and the nightmare can be expected to end the next day.

Only the southern part of the upper village and Vosges Street remain to be liberated. This will be the most difficult part causing the most casualties and destruction.

It is no longer a question, as had been intended, of withdrawing to the northern part of the village and smashing the rest of the center and southern part of the village with heavy artillery. The disengagement of each house is too dangerous. Besides, many women and children are still in houses or buildings held by the Germans. If we act as planned, they will surely die.

### **29 January 1945:**

During the night, the Germans moved in reinforcements from Muntezenheim and advance everywhere. French troops advance slowly along Grand Rue, taking farms in reverse by the east. One after the other the farms fall prey to flames, just as in Vosges Street.

After the strong German counterattack at 0900 hours (9:00 AM), the enemy gains a foothold and then is thrown back towards the south, The Germans return at 1800 hours (6:00 PM) supported by a curtain of Panther Tanks. This counteroffensive is also stopped outright. Two Panther tanks are burning and light up the twilight in the distance. The other tanks turn back.

But Germans still remain dug in at the last farms. Although the outcome of the fight is no longer in doubt, these Germans prefer death to surrender. Some NCOs and a few fanatics are determine to continue the

fight until it becomes hand-to-hand (they have nothing to lose)! A few scores will be settled with knives with the horrified population looking on.

At last, the final three houses are taken. Prisoners come out, throw down their weapons, and raise their arms..Many with frayed nerves and exhausted and many are wounded.

At 1900 hours (7:00 PM) the radio of Boulanger's Sub-Group announces, laconically: Jebsheim mopped up, 600 prisoners, 500 dead.

Never was street-fighting, even at Kayserberg, even at Orbey, so fierce, longer, more murderous. Jebsheim is a slaughterhouse.

People walk on bodies. They are everywhere, in the streets and in the orchards. All the houses are gutted, charred remains of vehicles lie here and there, and the dead, some of whom have been crushed by tanks, litter the streets and gardens.

It is difficult to treat the wounded. There are not enough doctors and nurses. Thus, from 27 January to 3 February, the 3rd Company of the 14th Medical Battalion will treat 602 of the wounded and 29 of them will die .

The enemy is quiet during the night of 29 January. The next day, the 30th, he will attempt to hold onto the north and the south of Hardt Woods and try to bar, in spite of it all, the road to Durrennetzen and the road to Neuf-Brisach. He will not succeed!

During the night of 29-30 January the Colmar Canal is crossed the the regiments of the 3rd DIUS, followed by General Schlessler's 4th CC.

Bischwihr, Muntzenheim, Fortschwihr, Wihr-en-Plaine are taken. During the morning of January 29, the attack on Hardt Woods begins.

The enemy, entrenched in many thickets, had already nearly stopped the advance of the 2d Armored Division. This division, passing by the mill of Jebsheim and the northern part of the village had attacked Grussenheim from the south. Moreover, during the fighting in Jebsheim, tanks and heavy artillery had fired constantly on the village and the east borders to support the German troops. Several times German tanks had come close to the Jebsheim cemetery, but had to withdraw. It was thus essential that Hardt woods be cleared before any advance on the Rhone Canal to the Rhine at Neuf-Brisach.

The Americans under General O'Daniel (3rd DIUS) attack on the right, that is to say on the south of Jebsheim and along the Muntzenheim Canal.

The Sub-Groups V and R are to attack side by side, the first to the south, the second to the north of the Jebsheim-Artzenheim highway. Reinforced by the Shock Battalion commanded by Captain Lefort, their mission is to cover the advance of the 3rd DIUS, to occupy Hardt Woods, and push as far as the Rhone Canal to the Rhine. The attack that had been set for 0800 hours (8:00 AM) had to be postponed due to the late arrival of the Shock Battalion.

The Sub-Group R moves out, after an artillery pounding. But right away, a tank gets stuck in the mud, the others are violently engaged. Tank #51 is hit and burns. Lt Deroulede's tank has its turret shot through- the Lieutenant and his gunner are killed. The enemy reaction grows more and more violent. At 0950 hours (9:50 AM) an enemy tank is engulfed in flames. At 1000 hours (10:00 AM), the Shock Battalion is stopped 50 meters short of its objective. Another tank is hit; the platoon

made up of the four remaining tanks destroys a Jagdpanther Tank and comes to a halt about 400 meters from the woods in the front ranks of the infantry.

At 1100 hours (11:00 AM) a second wave of infantry is stopped in turn by the violent bombarding from mines and time shells. Automatic weapons are spotted and engaged by our tanks. The Captain of the Legionnaires is killed. Two enemy tanks are located, but tank destroyers cannot intervene.

At 1300 hours (1:00 PM) Captain Nodet's tank is hit and burns and the Captain is wounded.

At 1330 hours (1:30 PM) tank #46 is hit and immobilized- Major Soutiere is killed shortly afterwards.

The two remaining tanks cover the withdrawal of the infantry and return at 1500 hours (3:00 PM) to the east boundaries of Jebsheim, ready to fend off any counterattack by the enemy.

Sub-Group V is engaged the minute it sets out. Tank #62 is hit and burns; Tank #61 gets stuck. The tanks go ahead of the infantry, who are pinned down and firing machine guns at groups of fleeing Germans. Some surrender. The armored vehicles surge rapidly to their objective.

Towards noon, Captain Blacas's tank forces a Jagdpanther to flee, doubtlessly because it had run out of ammunition.

Two half-tracks of the Legion, which had followed our tanks, are hit by anti-tank fire and burn.

A violent barrage of time shells and explosives rains down where the five tanks of the 4th squadron have taken cover. This concentrated fire

is followed by an attempted counterattack by the Germans who are easily dispersed by the fire from our tanks.

The Sub-Group whose foot soldiers have been severely tried, is not in any condition to continue the fighting as far as the canal and remains facing the enemy objective, between the armored vehicles of Sub-Group R, on the left, and elements of the American infantry on the right, who are also withdrawing. At 1500 hours, this group receives the order to fall back to Jebsheim and take with it a hundred or so prisoners

The 13 medium tanks and the 12 light tanks that are left, ensure the defense of Jebsheim for the night of January 30-31.

Losses of the day- 6 tanks, 4 half-tracks, 225 dead or wounded, among whom 40 have frostbitten feet. Enemy losses: two Jagdpanther tanks and several anti-tank weapons destroyed, 150 prisoners taken and many dead and wounded.

On 31 January 1945 the Germans withdrew from Hardt Woods as a result of their heavy losses. Elsenheim and Marckolsheim are taken by the 1st DMI in its descent on Artzenheim.

The 2d Armored Division is at Marckolsheim and advancing towards Rhinau. The Americans are on the Rhone Canal at the Rhine.

The die is cast. The 1st Army Corps is about to join the 2d Army Corps and close the pocket of Colmar. The town of Colmar will fall like a ripe fruit into the pouch of the 1st Army under General de Lattre de Tassigny!

On 2 February 1945, Colmar will be liberated.

On 3 February 1945, in the evening, a group of the 1st Regiment of paratroopers leave Durrenentzen in a truck for Colmar and pass by

Jebsheim and Maison Rouge. The ride through Jebsheim is impressive. The sun has melted the snow and thawed the ground. Numerous corpses still lie in the ruins- hundreds of anti-tank mines line the side of the road where the thaw has left them. Thanks to the frozen ground, very few of them went off during the battle.

On 10 February, the Allies occupy the entire west bank of the Rhine!.

**NOTE:** The next part of this narration will include stories about some individual exploits, a recap of military forces and equipment in the Battle of Jebsheim and finally some rather interesting personal accounts from citizens of Jebsheim who were in the village during the battle.

### **The Epic of Lieutenant Michel Durrmeyer:**

Michel Durrmeyer, originally of the Paris region, came from a family of eight children. His father, a general, was deported during the war. A medical student, he joined the Resistance after the Armistice of 1940 then passed through Spain in order to join the soldiers of Free France.

In the 1st Shock Battalion, under the command of Major Gambiez, he lead the 2d Section of the 2d Company until his death, first as an officer-cadet, then as Second-Lieutenant. He was well liked by all, especially by the men of the 2d Company. We are told that he was fairly tall, slightly above the average, with rather long legs. With his calm assurance, poise, and aura of strength, his entire being inspired confidence.

He distinguished himself in particular in the campaigns in Corsica (1943), on the Isle of Elba (June 1944), near and in Toulon (August 1944), in Dijon (September 1944), in Haute-Saone (October 1944), in the Vosges Mountains (end of October 1944), than at Belfort (November 1944), and in Alsace near Masevaux (November and December 1944). At the end of January 1945, the Shock Battalion is near Strasbourg (in Molsheim and Cronenbourg) and on 27 January he is assigned to the 5th Armored Division.

On 28 January, the battalion is quartered in Selestat, in a state of alert, and on the 29th it is ordered to leave for Jebsheim. It is to leave at night and attack Hardt Woods to the east of Jebsheim at dawn. But the trucks are late arriving, the roads are practically impassable, and the battalion has to go by way of Saint-Hippolyte and Maison Rouge. The cold is bitter. The battalion does not reach Jebsheim until 0815 hours (8:15 AM) on 30 January. Objective of the attack: first reach the boundaries of Hardt Woods, then clean out the woods and proceed to the Artzenheim Canal.

The attack, set for 0845 hours (8:45 AM) could not be carefully prepared for; moreover, two trucks do not arrive. The battalion, very tired, moves along terrain that is perfectly flat and covered with a thick blanket of fresh snow, making walking very difficult. On the right, the Americans are attacking also, along the Muntzenheim Canal. The old Roman way (Heidastressel) is quickly reached. There, two minutes rest, and then the advance continues. But suddenly, in a hail of intense fire, they are ambushed by the enemy from his cover in the woods. Precise mortar fire from 81s and machine-gun fire soon join the firing by the German artillery.

The tanks are called for and when they reach the front line of attackers, they try to knock out the heavy weapons facing us. Lieutenant

Durrmeyer rushes to find the tank commander to show him the precise position of the two auto-cannons that are causing so much destruction.

The tank stops and Lieutenant Durrmeyer is indicating the position, when an anti-tank shell comes in and explodes at only a meter from him. A scream, Durrmeyer falls, a moan of death escapes his lips, he is severely wounded and loses all sense of pain. The captain rushes to the side of the wounded man who mutters a single word: "Captain", then he awaits the end, the end of his hard and brief heroic career. Several men from his platoon try to pull him out of this hell, but the enemy is fierce, he strikes blow after blow at this small huddle of men. Three men are killed and several are wounded. Lieutenant Durrmeyer is hit again by an explosion and this time he dies.

The fighting continues for another hour and at 1700 (5:00 PM) the order to withdraw is received. The objective was not reached. But the Shock Battalion will have the chance for its revenge!

Losses of the operation: 32 killed including 6 officers and 100 wounded including 10 officers.

Lieutenant Durrmeyer, buried in the cemetery of Jebsheim, lay among us until the day when his family came and claimed his remains.

In order to honor all the brave men who died in the Battle of Jebsheim, the city decided to give his name to a street in our village. Who better merits this honor than Lieutenant Michel Durrmeyer?

## **COMMENTS OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL - FIRST FRENCH ARMY**

Here is what General de Lattre de Tassigny, CG 1st French Army, had to say after the battle of Jebsheim:

"Nothing can give you an idea of the deplorable state of the unfortunate village. Five hundred German bodies turned the streets into a real slaughterhouse. We ourselves had three hundred men disabled and the Americans at least as many. But we had taken 750 prisoners and the 254th IRUS more than 300.

Jebsheim is indeed the symbol of Franco-American brotherhood that reigns in the hearts of the men of our 1st French Army. It is also the symbol of the heroism heeded to breach the enemy front and reach the line from which the decisive push will begin in the direction of Brisach."

### **THE MATERIEL OF THE BATTLE OF JEBSHEIM:**

- 1) **Mines:** The Germans had buried all kinds of mines in Jebsheim and its immediate surroundings. These included anti-tank, anti-personnel, metallic, glass and bakelite. Fortunately, the thick layer of snow and ice prevented them from fully playing their deadly role.

The work of the mine-clearers was not easy, because the means of detecting mines that were furnished by the American army, were not effective when mines were in insulating substances. Bayonets and daggers were the only effective means of finding and neutralizing them.

- 2) **Tanks:** From a material point of view, our tanks and tank-destroyers were outclassed by the German counterparts. When you think that our armored cars could be pierced at 2000 meters by the German 88, whereas our tank-destroyers could not expect to destroy an enemy tank farther away than 800 meters and often then only after several

hits and that our tanks were nearly powerless when put up against the heavy protection devices, one can only admire the heroism of our men who, in demoralizing conditions, took up the fight and emerged victorious!

**3) The Panzerfaust (German bazooka):** This compact individual weapon allowed a simple soldier, hiding behind a tree or a wall, to destroy a tank a short distance away and then to disappear in the ensuing confusion, without being seen. But the paratroopers of the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers became quickly familiar with these bazookas and were only too glad to make good use of the ones the enemy abandoned on the field.

**4) Equipment- Clothing:**

The lack of warm clothing for the troops was obviously a great handicap for our soldiers. Certain units from Africa were still fighting in the cotton clothing from the Tunisian and Italian campaigns, the very ones they had been wearing on disembarking in the south of France on 15 August 1944. American boots, light and supple, were not practical for bitter cold and slush. But it had been necessary to send essential supplies to the front lines first, supplies such as munitions, rations and above all, gasoline which was essential for rapid advance---the rest could wait!

The German soldiers, on the other hand, had come from Norway and Finland (with their equipment suitable to the far north) and those from Austria were used to the very cold weather of the high mountains and they suffered less from the cold. Moreover, the German troops on the defensive were stationed in villages, sheltered from the misery of snow and cold, whereas those on the offensive were forced to spend the nights in the open countryside. This explains the many cases of frostbite.

## 5) Equipment- Camouflage:

The men on both sides had taken to wearing white linen from bed sheets in order to be less conspicuous in the thick snow--mistakes of identity were numerous.

- a) One day, during the attack on Illhaeusern by the 1st Battalion of the Foreign Legion, there were several mistaken identities, one of which was very amusing.

A German officer, not knowing what was going on, arrived on a bike on Elsenheim Road at the French line. There, he calmly gets off his bike. Having noticed in a foxhole one of "his" soldiers without white clothes and with a helmet cover, he chews him out: "This is too much! You're going to pay for this--the order is strict--Why are you not wearing white? You are not in order!"

To which, the soldier who had been challenged replied facetiously, in excellent German while holding the barrel of his machine gun against the officer's chest: "Hands up! I'm very sorry, lieutenant, if I am not in order, but I am about to be! Give me your hood, your revolver, and your bike and be so kind as to follow me!" He was a legionnaire from Sairigne's Battalion.

- b) A small group of paratroopers near Linden-tree Square, seeing in the twilight soldiers in white crossing the street two houses down, and not knowing if they are friends or enemies, shouts to them "Are you Americans? Are you Americans?". They see the men panic and take shelter so they fired at them. They never would know if the "whites" on the other side were Germans taking our men for Americans or Americans taking them for Germans.

## THE CIVILIAN POPULATION DURING THE BATTLE OF JEBSHEIM

Starting on 22 January, the misfortunes began and claimed the first victims.

The Germans had set up a communications post in a house at the beginning of East Street (la rue de l'Est) and in the house at 22 Reed Street (la rue des Roseaux), near the intersection of Ostheim Street. Allied planes came and bombed these two objectives. A bomb fell at the entry to East Street (J J Selig's farm) and seriously wounded two people, Mr. Fritz Rieg of Jebsheim and Mr. Feuerbach, a refugee from Illhaeusern. A few seconds later, two bombs fell at the intersection of Reed and Ostheim Streets, killing an eighteen-year old girl, Miss Jenny Zimmerlin.

The second civilian victim was Mr. Robert Herrmann who, requisitioned, to lead some cows to Vieux-Brisach with other men from Jebsheim was hit by a shell near the Neuf-Brisach bridge and later died at the hospital at Colmar.

In the night of 26-27 January, Mrs. Berthe Frey, wife of Alfred Scherer and Mr. George Selig were wounded in Ostheim Street. She was aided by American soldiers, then evacuated by French soldiers across the Ried River to Ribearuville and Ste-Marie-aux-Mines.

On 28 January, Mr. George Oberlin, seriously wounded by a shell, was taken by German soldiers to Neuf-Brisach where he died.

In the night of 28-29 January, Mrs Jerg (Helda Cathel) and Mr. Jean Herrmann were killed in the upper village.

And this is how the people of Jebsheim lived out these memorable days. Not just the days of 27, 28 and 29 January; for long before that, they

were living in cellars, listening to artillery and aviation fire regularly raking the village, which was full of German soldiers. And for a long time after January 30, German artillery in its turn, fired on Jebsheim, forcing civilians to remain in their cellars--sometimes they even had to find new shelters. It was only after the departure of the last Allied soldiers from Jebsheim, that the inhabitants could move back into their homes and make them temporarily livable.

But let's listen to them by reading their stories. As far as possible, we have placed the stories in order to follow the progress of the Allies towards the upper village, that is to say towards the south.,

These accounts confirm, for the most part communiques sent out by the Allied troops.--25 January, the Mill; 26 Jan, Ostheim Street; 27 Jan the village as far as the church: 28 Jan, as far as Linden-tree Square and Riedwihr Street and part of East Street: finally 29 January the upper village.

We have had to omit certain things and not repeat each time the problems of sanitation and provisions that were the lot of each island of refugees. We must not bore the reader by repeating each time the danger of death to which all three witnesses were constantly exposed.

THE NEXT SECTION OF THIS ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF JEBSHEIM WILL INCLUDE THE PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF CITIZENS OF JEBSHEIM WHO WERE IN THE VILLAGE AT THE TIME OF THE BATTLE

\*\*\*\*\*

AT THE MILL OF JEBSHEIM, THE OBJECT OF BITTER FIGHTING WITH LARGE LOSSES OF MEN AND EQUIPMENT- MR DANIEL OBERLIN, 52 YEARS OLD

The mill of Jebsheim is located 1500 meters from the village on the road to Ostheim, near the stream that we call "The Canal."

It has belonged to the Berckheim family since the Middle Ages, but ceased working in 1916. It was inhabited by the Oberlin family who farmed there. But, let's listen to the son, Mr. Daniel Oberlin, today adjunct to the mayor, who was 14 years old at the time of the battle.

Evacuated in 1940 like all the inhabitants of Jebsheim, we have sought refuge at the house of friends in Riquewihr, while our livestock was at Beblenheim. After our return here in 1940, we began farming at the mill again , that in the meantime had been declared "enemy property".

In September 1944, we see the first German soldiers arrive--six or eight men with an NCO. They quartered at our place and mined the two bridges that lead to the Ried and also the bridge at Maison Rouge. Then, day and night, one of them is posted at each bridge to prevent sabotage and, if need be, to blow up the bridges.

At the end of January 1945, the Germans install two 105 cannons in front of the mill, in trenches dug by requisitioned civilians. When the artillerymen fired a few trial shots, a soldier on guard said to me, "Well, that's it. Now those of the other side will know where we are". And

sure enough, in no time at all, two smoke shells came in from the direction of the Ried and landed not far from the mill. Then, little by little, the firing becomes more frequent -- planes begin to fly over and it was then that we decided to leave the house and take refuge in the mill itself where the walls were much thicker.

On the morning of 25 January, everything was very quiet. I took my bike and my papers and went to the village to see my uncle, Charles Ludwig, to ask him if we could come and take refuge with him.

Arriving in the village, I was amazed to see that the rooftops of houses that were covered with snow were dotted with big black spots. The snow had been melted by exploding shells, some of which were still smoking. My uncle agreed to let us come and I quickly went back to the mill to get our things. Coming out of the village, I passed a bunker next to the road. A German soldier who was there stopped me. " Where are you going young man?" "I'm going to the mill, where my parents live" "To the mill? Don't even think of it, you'll never get there. The Americans are there"

I assured him that I had been there myself half an hour earlier and that there were no Americans there, and I went on my way. Once at the mill, my father loads a wagon with what was strictly necessary; food, a sow (alive) and two cows, which we tied to the wagon hitched to our two mules. At the moment of departure, planes passed overhead; we heard them firing, but my father remained calm and said: "Surely they will see that we are civilians and won't harm us"

My mother and I were to follow on bikes. Our precious objects and silver had been hidden in a safe place in the hold under wheat. I can still see myself leaving with my mother who, in certain spots where the snow was too high, would run in front of me, pushing the bike " to make things go faster".

The Germans had placed two anti-tanks in action --you could hear their firing in the distance, the noise of machine guns growing nearer, a sheet of smoke was spreading across the plain, from the smoke shells, and you could not see 50 meters in front of yourself.

However, we arrived safe and sound at my uncle's where we remained night and day in the cellar.(In all there were about a dozen of us there). The next day, a German captain came to my uncle's house. He was dejected, harassed and almost deaf and said that everything was finished, that he had no more men and he asked if he could hide and wait the arrival of the Americans to surrender. My uncle, who fought in World War I, agreed, but he asks the captain to give him his revolver. Then the officer began to think about what he was doing and says that he cannot do that--so he refuses and asks where can he go. My cousin goes with him as far as the barnyard and the barn, then shows him the direction of the Rhine and the soldier disappears.

On the dawn of the 27th, an unusual silence stretches over our part of the village, as suddenly cannons and machine guns are quiet. I climb up to a ventilator window and chance a look at the street. I see human forms that are still and spaced at regular intervals in front of houses as far as the beginning of Ostheim street. At the entrance to that street there is posted a kind of low box-like vehicle with an unusual shape (a jeep) behind it, tanks, tanks in Indian file, in front of the house on Ostheim Street.

Shortly afterward, American soldiers enter the cellar and search the entire farm looking for enemy soldiers.

We have been saved, but all danger is not past--on the path next to my uncle's property, the tanks still have to fight hard with the Germans who

are positioned in Hardt Woods--what's more, the shells start to rain again on the roofs and in the yards.

About 10 days later, when the soldiers have left the village, my family returns to the mill. Everything has been destroyed and burned--our silver, still where we left it, has been melted--everything we had hidden is lost. The only thing left standing is the bread oven in the kitchen. Therefore we must continue living with our uncle. Finally we were able to erect a shed in East Street on a piece of land that belonged to us. We lived here until the construction of our present farm in 1952. But for several months after the departure of the soldiers, my mother and I, every Saturday, would go to the mill to make the bread and do the washing.

***WEBMASTER'S COMMENT:***

This next account is of particular interest to your Webmaster, in that #5 Ostheim Street is where I stayed for a couple of days after entering Jebsheim. Several years ago I had the pleasure of sitting with Mr. Reinhart in the courtyard of his farm and spent several hours recounting our experiences and enjoying some of his homemade wine. During the war and the time I stayed in Mr. Reinhart's barn, along with his cows, I don't recall seeing him or the other citizens who were hiding with him, I might also add that I didn't see any of his great wine either. Mr. Reinhart died a few years ago and his old barn and farm have been completely remodeled, but not before I was able to get a couple of pieces of the structure..

OSTHEIM STREET, FARM #5 MR ROBERT REINHART, 77  
YEARS OLD (At time of writing this account)

We have been living in the cellar for several days to protect us from the shells that exploded at regular intervals in our neighborhood. The cellar is on ground level, but the walls are very thick and the ceiling is of thick cement. On the courtyard side we have piled up manure and bales of hay.

There are 32 of us in all- among others, the Gaunitz, Jacques Reinhart, Selig (neighbors) and Ludwig Glaser families. We are giving shelter also to four refugees from Illhaeusern.

In the night of January 25-26, 1945, exactly at 2 AM, and I am sure of the date, Mrs. Salome Benz's barn, right opposite us burns. I run over to help the woman, 70 years old, who lives alone. We quickly load her personal papers and various objects in an old carriage and I help her to come to our place. But just as we are crossing the street, a hail of projectiles (shell bursts or grenades) falls on us. We throw ourselves flat in the gutter and wait for calm to return. At that moment, a German soldier coming from the direction of the Ried, passes by us. I ask him: "Are there other soldiers coming behind you?" He answers: " I am the last; in a half an hour the Americans will be here- take cover!"

I showed him the barn that is burning and asks him if he is not willing to take the old lady to the center of the village where she has relatives. He agrees, takes her under wing and leaves with her, while I drive the carriage to my house. The two of them must have arrived safely, because a few minutes later, her sister and brother-in-law arrive and the three of us go to the burning barn to see if we can contain the damage. With buckets of water, we succeed in saving the house but it is too late to do anything about the barn.

Suddenly, I hear a soldier moaning somewhere between the house and the neighboring farm. I run over; the soldier has a leg that is shredded. I pick him up on my shoulders and alert the brother-in-law and the old lady. But the brother-in-law is busy wetting the walls, and irritated, he yells at me:

" Put him down and come over here!" "But, I've got an American!" I tell him. "Oh Goddam (O Gott verdammi!)" he swears, throws down his bucket and runs as fast as he can, with his wife, to tell the good news to the village.

I carry my American in front of the barn that is still burning. In the light of the flames, I see other American soldiers who are gathering and I bring them their wounded comrade. An ambulance comes shortly and takes him away, with the other wounded, for he is not the only one.

I return home. I am scarcely inside when three other Americans come in. The officer speaks a little French. He asks me what I am doing there. He sees that I am out of breath and that my clothes are soaking (from fighting the fire). I explain everything to him. Then, with a revolver in my back, I have to show him all the rooms in the house to see if there are any German soldiers hiding there. After the house comes the barn, the stable, the cellar occupied by civilians--no German is found. But it is not over. Still with the same officer, we visit the neighboring houses, towards the Reid, as far as Market Street (la rue du Marche) and School Street (la rue des Ecoles). I am not really afraid. I was a soldier in Algeria in 1927-28 and, even at that time, we had seen a lot of things over there!

In front of Gerad Schmitt's hours (#13 School Street) a tank is posted. It is still dark. The American officer looks at a kind of enormous wristwatch that he is wearing, points his finger at the end of the street

(towards the east) where the Clausen house is (#15 ) and says: "There are Germans there." He didn't realize how truthfully he had spoken because immediately a fusillade broke out. The officer threw himself down on one side of the tank between the tracks and I on the other side. At the first moment of calm, I fled, jumped over the wall and into the gardens on School street and ran towards the back of my farm. But I had to lie flat in the snow at several points because the Germans took me for an American and fired at me every time I got up. I finally got home. No one knew where I had been during the long hours of my absence and my wife was beginning to get worried.

Our house was to be occupied by Americans. They enjoyed our schnapps, but not until I had tasted it in front of them first.

On the evening of the 27th, they are all happy. One of them tells me that Jebsheim is taken and that they have advanced to the edge of the "neighboring village!" Astonished, I ask him: "But, did you pass the bridge?" "Bridge? What bridge? There is no water there"

In fact, they had gotten only as far as the church and having seen the big no-mans land, towards the south, covered with snow, they thought the upper village was already "another village" that is to say Muntzenheim. They didn't know what yet awaited them, poor fellows at Jebsheim. It was January 27.

Later, we would have French paratroopers in the house and then Americans again. All danger was not over, however, because shells hit the courtyard and the house. At the end of February, calm returned and we could finally take possession of our home once again.

IN REED STREET (La rue des Roseaux) MRS CATHERINE HUG, 48 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME OF THE THE BATTLE.

I live in the little house at #24 rue des Roseaux. At the time of the battle I had with me my mother, 75 years old, and my two nieces: Marlene Hug and Aline Husser.

Towards the evening on 22 January, we suddenly head a bomb explode in the upper village and a few seconds later, the noise of a detonation in the house next to us. It was a bomb that had been dropped by the same plane. It is true that the Germans had been quartered in this house and, a little farther along, in the Sembach house (today it belongs to Andre Zimmerlin), they had set up a command post or an important communciations post and this seems to have been the target.

A portion of our roof was knocked off, our yard is full of roof tiles, beams, and chunks of walls. We go have a look--the beginning of a fire is quickly put out, the Germans free one of their soldiers who was buried in the rubble, our neighbor Jenny Zimmerlin is dead--she was hanging out the wash. A German soldier says that two bombs were dropped and that since the second one did not go off, we could not stay there. And in fact, a bomb nearly a meter long and weighing 250 kilograms had fallen on our barn, slid on the hay, and is lying there, near the entry to the barn.

We cross over to the other side of the street to our neighbor's, Frederic Fritsch, where we spent the night. It is still snowing. Around 5 in the morning, a bomb falls on the roof of the house where we are, crosses the attic, exits near the front door and explodes under the shed. Three German soldiers who had taken shelter there are killed immediately and a little later their lieutenant is found dead, covered by the fresh snow.

Once again we have had a narrow escape, but we cannot stay here. The Fritsch family goes to stay with Henri Zimmerlin, my mother and I, we

go to the upper village to Jules Husser's, my brother-in-law. We get there after stopping several times because my mother was very old--there was snow and we keep hearing the cannon booming. In the distance, the mill is burning and fires in Grussenheim can be made out in the distance.

At my brother-in-law's we sleep first in the kitchen and then when the situation grows more dangerous, in the cellar. German soldiers move in with us. They ask us for firewood and food- they offer leave in the daytime and return in the evening, always with bottles of schnapps. They are not very kind to us.

But the Allies must not be very far away. A shot rings out in or near the house. My brother-in-law who wanted to go feed the livestock is suddenly surrounded by Germans who take aim at him, maintaining that we have arms in the house, that someone fired. There are nervous and excited. My brother-in-law, pale as death, thinks that the end has come. We run out, succeed in calming the soldiers and suggest that we all search the entire house. But they no longer want to come in and quickly disappear at the back of the yard. It is true that our house, hit by a shell, has a large opening on the north side, making it possible for someone to enter and leave without being seen.

Early in the morning, someone knocks at the door. It is an American officer who speaks a little German and asks if there are still any enemy soldiers within. At that very moment, an American soldier came down the stairs from our attic. He had already looked everywhere within. He must have spent part of the night in the house without being seen.

We consider ourselves safe now, but the fighting still continues in the south of the village--one fire after another breaks out--my brother-in-law wants to leave no matter what and gets a horse and wagon ready. But

the women want to stay. I cross the street to speak to my brother Henri Hug and Henri Oberlin. A French officer calms us and assures us that if the battle were to continue, we would be evacuated in military trucks. He also admits to Henri Oberlin that if the Germans insist on continuing the fight the next day, the entire upper village will be flattened by bombs.( This is confirmed in military accounts. But the bombing cannot be carried out because of the many civilians in the houses)

After the Americans leave, we have French soldiers in the house; an officer with his dog and about seven men, all very nice. On the 29th, in the evening, we saw a long file of German prisoners being taken to the rear.

Yet, a shell coming from the direction of Muntzenheim, pierces the south wall of our bedroom, killing one soldier and seriously wounding another---the dog on the other had is unharmed.

When calm is restored we decide to go back to my house on Reed Street, but that cannot be done without serious difficulties. My brother-in-law comes with me to look things over. I find the house occupied by other soldiers who refuse to let us in. I spent yet another night at my neighbor Fritsch's and the next day, after long negotiations, we are finally allowed to enter my house since that are still empty houses elsewhere.

I finally take possession, send for my mother, and temporarily plug up the holes that were letting in rain and cold.

ON THE FARM, GRAND RUE # 75 AND 75a, MR. ALBERT SCHERER- 78 YEARS OLD (At the time of this writing)

We had taken refuge in the cellar of our second house at #75a. Although not very deep, it seems better protected than the first house that sits

directly on Artzenheim Street on the east and on the courtyard towards the north and west. Here we are surrounded by inhabited buildings and by our neighbor's house. Counting the Schott family, the smith across the street, there are seven of us in all.

The Germans had set up a transmitting station in our courtyard. No sooner is it working than a shell hits the roof of our house. So I start talking to the soldiers and explain to them the danger to the civilians who are so close by. The Germans take down their equipment and set it up again in the empty restaurant next door. But there, once again, they have barely started transmitting when a shell comes crashing through the roof of the restaurant, falls right on the counter, destroying the installation and killing several soldiers.

My mother who was sixty-six and crippled, unable to move about, had wanted to stay in the house at #75. Seated in her armchair that she cannot leave, she remains alone in the bedroom next to the porcelain stove. From time to time, we go and check on her, bring her some food, and light the fire in the stove. One day, after many shells had exploded in the vicinity, we hear my mother moaning and screaming for help! We run to see what is the matter. A shell had come through the roof and the bedroom on the second floor and rolled up to her feet without exploding. She is covered with plaster and debris, but she is not wounded. With Mr. Schott's help, we carry her in her chair to the cellar where she has to settle down as best she can. A German soldier goes and gets the shell, a fine specimen, that he picks up and carries. He wants to place it on the manure heap, but with a glass of schnapps, I persuade him to put this deadly device at the back of the garden.

In all, seven shells hit the building where we are in the last days of January.

On the morning of the 27th, the first Americans arrive. The Germans had already withdrawn and everything is going well. With an American soldier holding a revolver to my back, I make a tour of all the rooms and the farm, but I am not afraid, because we did not have any Germans present- at least at that time.

Then some strange Americans moved in with us. A Platoon, doubtlessly under discipline, stayed in the room next to the cellar where we were. As soon as they returned from duty, they were locked up in the room, their rifles and shoes were left out in the corridor and an armed guard placed at the door that was locked. It was the reverse stratagem when they went back out to fight!

In our courtyard was parked a vehicle with tracks and an anti-aircraft turret, as well as a big truck. The guard spoke neither French nor German, but appreciated a good glass of wine or schnapps!

One morning, I don't remember if it was the 28th or the 29th, in any case, it was very early because it was still dark, I had gone out to feed the stock.(This was not done at fixed times, but whenever the relative calm permitted.) Coming back from the stable, I poured a glass of schnapps for the guard who was in the courtyard. At the same moment, I still had the bottle in my hand, I saw the small door on the barn crack open. Surprised and uneasy, I pointed the spot out to the American and immediately we saw a long blue flame streak out from the door and race towards the bren-gun carrier that caught fire at once.. (It was a bazooka!) The American pushed me toward the door and signaled to me to take cover. He got in the big truck and screamed: "dynamite, dynamite.". In the bren-gun carrier, ammunition was exploding at regular intervals. The blasts flew up to the roofs, the windows, the doors and under the truck. (I learned later that the truck contained explosives for the entire division for the destruction of bridges, etc) There was a mad scene in

the courtyard and in the house. The truck driver who had been sleeping in the room above our cellar, came flying down the stairs (He was still in his underwear), jumped in the cab of the truck and cranked it up. I attempted, with Mr. Schott's aid, to open the gate to the courtyard, but the snow was too thick and we couldn't get it open. The driver was waving for us to get out of the way. He screamed: "dynamite, dynamite!". Then he bore down on the gate, knocked it off its hinges with the front of the truck as he ran over it, and took off at high speed towards the lower village. We had once again had a narrow escape because if the truck had exploded, it would have leveled the entire neighborhood.

The munitions of the bren-gun carrier continued to pop and when the gas tank exploded, a part of the motor went flying up on the top of the barn. Fortunately, the melting snow prevented any fire from catching.

**IN ARTZENHEIM STREET, FARM #78, MR ANDRE OBERLIN, 51 YEARS OLD**

Ten days or so before January 27, we were already set up in the stable and the forage area, which offered much better protection against the Allied artillery shells and later the bombs. There were ten of us in all: My family (5) and a refugee family from Illhaeusern (also 5).

From time to time a shell exploded on our property or in the vicinity. The Allied artillery was firing on Jebsheim. After 29 January, it was the German artillery that sent us its shells, the only difference was that with the latter, one shell in three did not go off. We called the defective ones. "Blendganger." In all, sixteen shells exploded on our buildings.

With us was a German soldier, an Austrian, who had put down his rifle and his gun belt, He wanted to be taken prisoner. Papa took his rifle from him. On 27 January at about 0800 hours (8 AM), the first American soldiers came into our courtyard. A few of them spoke German. One of them asked my father, "Are there any enemy soldiers here?". My father replied, "one, I will get him for you.". He got the Austrian and led him to the Americans. Then my father said, "I will get you his rifle". He went to the barn and brought the rifle to the Americans who led the prisoner away.

Around 1100 hours (11 AM), French soldiers with three tanks arrived. At the intersection of Artzenheim and Grand Rue, a tank pointed its gun towards the upper village, another towards the lower village, and a third towards the cemetery and Artizenheim.

A few French soldiers went up to the attic. I accompanied them. By lifting up the tiles, they hoped to see what was going on over by the cemetery. I had some binoculars and looked out at the same time under a raised tile. On the first path beyond the cemetery, less than 100 meters away, German soldiers were busy digging in., The French soldiers fired on them and killed several.

The same day, the French advanced towards Artizenheim, but did not reach the Roman way. They had to turn back. On 28 January, the Germans launched a counterattack from Hardt Woods and came at us with tanks and infantry as far as the edge of the cemetery. The tank "Alsace" positioned in Nussbaumer Garden, was destroyed and its men killed. A French soldier trying to exit through our courtyard was killed by a German soldier hidden behind the wall that closes off the garden. At the same time, a shell exploded in the stable where we were, killing a soldier and a cow.

On 28 and 29 January, the French set up a command post in our house and civilians were denied entry. In our courtyard, there were ten tanks assembled, ready to leave.

From the cemetery, the Germans continued to fire at our roof because the scouts were scrutinizing the countryside. A legionnaire, who spoke German very well, screamed through a megaphone: "Give up, or we'll come at you with tanks." A tank followed by a legionnaire moved forward towards the cemetery. Some Germans came out, arms in the air, and were taken prisoners.

On 30 January, after the attack on Hardt Woods, a large number of the dead, nearly 100, were collected and laid out in front of the cemetery to be buried later. The wounded were brought to our house. The kitchen and corridor were filled with wounded who received their emergency treatment here before being transferred elsewhere. But many of them, some of who were horribly mutilated, died in our house.

In spite of my youth, I was 13 at the time, I didn't know what fear was and I was always to be found among the soldiers. Adopted by them, I became their mascot. They taught me how to use all the weapons and organized shooting matches with cardboard targets for my benefit. Thus all that spring and the beginning of the summer, together with other pals from the village, I collected weapons and munitions that were lying in great profusion all around our place and organized games of "little wars." We shot the German "Mauser", the American Garrand Rifle, machine guns including the German MG452; we launched grenades, took apart all kinds of shells to get the powder, set fires in shell holes that we had first filled with ammunition- entire strings of machine gun bullets. We did this to have fun from behind our shelters and to show that we knew how to make explosions just like big people. We took apart the treads of tanks to play marbles; we set off smoke shells that

were one meter tall by rubbing the cover as one strikes a match. We did all this in a mockery of safety rules and in spite of the anguish of our mothers. It took an accident and the death of two young men of the region before the authorities took measures to stop these dangerous games.

**AT THE CORNER OF ARTZENHEIM STREET: THE BUSSER GROCERY STORE AT #76 GRAND RUE, MRS. ROSE GANTZ**

I was 25 at the time. The cellar of our house had walls that were 60 centimeters thick, and so had been converted by the authorities into an air raid shelter for school children. But since the children were no longer going to school, we fixed the cellar so that we could live in it and be safe in times of danger.

The doors and windows of the house were barricaded with mattresses, planks, and objects of all kinds. Little by little neighbors and friends sought refuge at our house so that we soon had fourteen people living in our cellar: My family (3), and Emile Ludwigs (4), J. J. Baltzingers (4) and the Klacks (3). A man from Jebsheim who had been forced to join the Wehrmacht, was also hiding in the cellar, behind a cask.

My mother prepared the meals. If things were calm enough, my sister would go a few houses up the street to bake bread. Today, the house she went to is the Ernest Oberlin house. It was the location of the toilet in the back of the courtyard that worried us most because it was inaccessible during fighting and we had to make do with buckets.

And then on 27 January, if my memory is correct, in front of our house, on the border of Grand Rue, there was an enormous German tank parked in our courtyard awaiting repairs. An anti-tank barricade (Panzersperre)

closed the street off a few meters farther to the south. Suddenly a shell (or a bomb) hit the big tank and knocked in the front of our house, which faced the street side. The wooden floor was not very solid and a cloud of dust and debris invaded the cellar. We were covered with dust, but fortunately no one was injured. We quickly plugged the holes with kapok, vegetable fibers and mattresses because it was cold outside and because other explosions might injure us.

One day, two German soldiers came into the cellar. They wanted to put on civilian clothes and hide, but other Germans came in behind them and dissuaded them: "This place is not safe!" Then they all went out. A few instants later, my sister coming back from baking the bread, told us that one of the Germans was lying dead in the street. She had also seen soldiers covered in white sheets going up the street, hugging the wall.

However, what really intrigued us, is that except for those two Germans, no other soldier, Allied or German, came into the house even though we kept hearing rifle bursts from the courtyard and the nearby Artzenheim Street. Later I believe that I discovered the answer to this mystery. The only opening that went to the exterior to the house was the window of a little room off the courtyard. The window was in pieces. In that room, we had placed a funereal wreath in memory of a schoolmate who had been forced to join the Wehrmacht. We had just received news of his death. We had placed this wreath, without really thinking about it, on a kneading trough used to make bread. Looking in this room from the courtyard, this arrangement resembled a coffin covered with a wreath and it is quite possible that the soldiers from both sides, busy killing each other in the courtyard, the workshop and the street, felt obliged to respect this place.

This may also explain why all the reserve stock of our grocery store, piled up in the courtyard, remained intact, allowing us to serve our customers barely two weeks after the conclusion of the fighting.

**ON THE FARM AT GRAND RUE # 40, MR EDGAR BENTZ, 58 YEARS OLD**

In our courtyard, the Germans set up an ack-ack, and another in the courtyard opposite, at Mr. Henri Hug's.

On 23 January, the day after a bomb fell on East Street (la rue de l'Est), the Allied heavy artillery fired on our property. Then the Germans removed the two ack-acks, painted them white and disappeared with them.

We moved into the cellar with the Adam family. There were seven of us in all. Some German soldiers with a cannon that was being pulled by a mule, came into the yard. Their servants came to us looking for milk and asked us not to make a fire in order not to be spotted by Allied artillery- they would drink the milk raw. They confessed to us that they had only 80 shells left and that after those it would all be over. And, indeed, they fired several shots, but the next morning they too had disappeared.

In the neighboring house, #42 (today Leon Schweitzer's), lived the Merius family, refugees from Illhaeusern. Every day I took them milk, going through the garden that runs along Grand Rue. In order to look very "civilian" I always put on an old black overcoat that belonged to my grandfather and a cap. On the morning of 28 January, if my memory is correct, when I brought the milk, I saw the two Merius girls speaking English with American soldiers, and there were still Germans in our

house!. Back home I didn't breathe a word of what I had seen at the neighbors. Risking a glance out of an attic window, I saw in the Grand rue, by the church, two tanks pointing their guns towards the upper village. I came back down quickly, because the slightest movement of the curtains might bring a spray of machine gun fire our way. A short time later, our house is besieged by Americans who come in through the windows on the north side and by a small nook between the house and adjoining buildings. They take aim at us, line us up against the wall, and ask us if there are still any enemy soldiers at our house. I have to make an inspection of all the floors in the house, lamp in hand, followed by a soldier with a machine gun. Of course the house is empty. But just then, in a back corner of the courtyard, the hens began to cackle in a little shed. The soldiers become nervous and look at me. I assure them that there is no risk and go towards the shed, with the soldiers following me, ready to throw grenade--but in the little hut there are no Germans. The Americans lower the machine guns and I feel more at ease.

Then came the quartering of the Allied troops, for several days, because the upper village has not yet been liberated. Now it's the German shells, coming from the southeast, that sprinkle our farm. Later, we counted thirteen shells of all calibers that had hit our buildings and seventeen in the garden. When a shell knocked out a wall of the cellar where we were staying, it became impossible to stay there. I took my sled, we piled on the suitcases of the Adam's family and the only things of strict necessity and started out on foot towards the lower village. In front of the church, the temporary shed being used by the baker Obrecht was still burning. In Ostheim Street, people screamed at us;"Where are you going? It's over! It's over!". But we had just experienced the opposite and we continued to walk towards the mill. At the bunker, going out of the village, some French soldiers took us on their truck and evacuated us

to Ribeauville. The Adams family remained there, whereas we went to live with some relatives in Riquewihr.

**ROBERT HUSSER'S FARM, GRAND RUE #34- MRS ALICE  
RITZENTHALER, nee HUSSER**

I was 12 at the time. On 28 January some Allied soldiers invaded our house by coming in from the neighboring house, # 36. The two houses are separated by a gallery one meter wide that cannot be seen from the street and communication between takes place through two windows. The soldiers got into our house by placing a plank on the ledge of the two windows in order to surprise the German occupiers.

On 30 January when the fighting in the upper village stopped, I left with my father and several French soldiers from the neighboring house to check on the livestock that had not been fed for two days because the Paul Bentz family had taken refuge with Mr. Henri Oberlin. Coming back home at 1600 hours ( 4 PM) I was wounded by a shell exploding in the courtyard. I felt warm blood running down my back. Someone came to my aid, In the street, in front of our house, a tank was posted. French soldiers took me to it and lifted me onto the tank that took me to Osthem Street to Sembach's house- today the house of Andre Zimmerlin- where a nurse gave me emergency treatment. From there I was taken to the Guemar School where a surgeon, after cutting a large hole in my clothes, operated on me on the spot. I had a hole from my shoulder blade to my lungs, but my spinal cord was intact.

Then I was taken to Selestat to the cellar of a house that had been converted into a hospital. I remained there without care. My wound was becoming infected. This provisional hospital was hit by a shell and burned while we were in the cellar. Then I was evacuated to the Pasteur

Hospital in Colmar with two other women who were wounded in the battle of Durrenentzen. I remained for three weeks in the cellar of the hospital where the doctors finally succeeded in curing my wound which had been seriously infected.

On 5 March, my birthday, we were brought up from the cellar. For the first time since mid-January when we had taken refuge in the cellar of the house where I was born, I slept in a real bedroom again!

**FARM # 36, GRAND RUE, MR. PAUL BENTZ, 59 YEARS OLD**

In January of 1945 my family lived in #36 Grand Rue, in a house that belonged to an aunt of my mother's because our farm had been entirely destroyed by German artillery in 1940. There were three of us and we had taken in the Haeberle family (4) from the restaurant of the Ill in Illhaeusern.

When a bomb fell in East Street (La rue de l'Est) on 22 January, we took shelter in the cellar and stuffed up the windows and doors with planks and sacks of wheat. When the explosions became louder and more and more frequent, we covered our heads and ears with a quilt to soften the noise.

But, when a shell knocked out part of a wall in the house we had to leave. We went across the street where Mr. Henri Oberlin took us in. The farm where he lived had stables with solid walls. Moreover, Mr. Oberlin had put the main door of the barn across the entries and windows. Soon there were more than forty of us over there. We were very packed in and three men had to sleep over behind the communal bulls that Mr. Oberlin was raising. It was Mr. Paul Haeberle who did the cooking for us on a stove put together with pieces of metal that he had

found lying about. Thanks to a ladder placed against a wall, the neighboring family, The Henri Hugs, communicates with us and sleeps with us at night. As for hygiene, it was distressing. One toilet in the courtyard, and during the last days of fighting when no one could go out in the courtyard, Henri Oberlin, with a bucket and pots, had to look out for the person who was in the biggest hurry. Fortunately a hand pump was in the stable and furnished us with the water necessary for cooking and bathing.

During the last two days, the noise of cannons, machine guns, and various explosions did not cease. At every moment, we received news of farms that were the prey of fires and we began to despair of coming out alive.

Finally on 28 January, Sunday, the sun came out and the first French soldiers appeared in the courtyard--it was safe to go out. Three of our young men started singing the "Marseillaise" and Aunt Haeberle took out the French flags that she had always carried under her skirt. Mr. Oberlin had to temper the general joy because the upper village had not yet been liberated and the Germans might come back!

Two days later, we spotted with astonishment and joy a resident of Jebsheim among those wearing French uniforms. It was Mr. Jules Fleith. Resigned, but happy to be still alive we moved into our temporary house at #36 and set about making it livable. My mother, whose optimistic attitude had returned concluded. "Now we will be happy because after what we have been through these last days, nothing terrible can ever happen to us again."

Our new farm has been rebuilt on practically the same spot where the old one stood, that is at #55 Grand Rue.

**IN THE FARM AT # 33 GRAND RUE- MR HENRI OBERLIN, 72  
YEARS OLD**

Before 1940, I lived at City Hall with my family. I was the beadle of the village and also looked after the communal bulls. In 1940, German artillery destroyed the City Hall, the stable and also my farm. I then moved with my family to the farm that is now #33 Grand Rue. We had five bulls in the stable to take care of.

And then came January 1945!!

Our stable is very solid, with a cement roof and thick walls. What's more, it is protected on the west, north and east by other buildings that form a screen against the shells and any kind of explosion. Towards the courtyard on the south side, we had placed the barn door as protection. Whole families came one after the other to join us until we had 20, then 30, then 40 and by 30 January we had 51 people living with us. Everyone slept in the stable and the forage room. Some had to sleep back of the bulls and others spent the night on a bench or chair. I still remember a girl, Lucie Husser, who was handicapped and had nothing but a little stool on which she sat night and day!

We got water from the house, and during the last days, from the hand pump in the stable. The toilet was in the courtyard; food was prepared in the stable on a makeshift stove. We even managed to make bread. In the beginning of January, we had collected the sacks of wheat in the commune and Spitz Mill gave us flour (without tickets) with which our baker, Chary Obrecht, was able to make us sufficient bread. Of course, on 27 January, the bread delivery stopped. As for meat, we were supplied on the spot because two bulls were killed in the course of these memorable weeks.

And who did the cooking for the forty to fifty people who had to be fed? None other than Mr. Paul Haeberlin, the chef from the famous "Inn of the Ill" (Auberge de l'Ill) from Illhaeusern! A refugee in Jebsheim since November-December 44 with his father, his mother--she was originally from Jebsheim--and his aunt. Although Mr Haeberlin was not yet world famous, he performed to the satisfaction of all concerned. If the little special original dishes were not yet to be had in our branch of the Inn of the Ill, on the other hand, the price of a meal did not matter since the menu was free!

We had Mr. Feuerbach of Illhaeusern with us also. He had been wounded 22 January by the bomb that fell in East Street (rue de l'Est), but he did not want to be evacuated and was looked after by my sister. Berthe.

On the farm proper, we did not have any German soldiers, but I saw a lot of them, the young "Edelweiss" going along the walls in Indian file on their way to the Ried where, it was said, the Allies were.

Beginning 27 January, no one left the stable any more. except for two or three men who went out during moments of calm to see what was going on. On 27 January, the first Allied soldier came to the farm. He was a French lieutenant coming from Riedwihr Street, by way of the garden located to the west of our farm. He asked questions, then left immediately. He returned several times. At one point, I noticed that every time he came, alone or with his driver, gunfire came into the courtyard from the neighboring farm #31.. On the other hand, when one of our men, that is, a civilian, was out in the yard, nothing happened. I pointed this out to the lieutenant who said: "It's an isolated sniper- I'll take care of it". He left and returned with a few soldiers, hugging the wall so as not be seen, slipped into Boeschlin's farm and a few minutes

later, it was all over. The German who had been firing at us, after having raised a tile on the roof of the building opposite us, became quiet.

On 28 January , French troops occupied our farm--everything seemed over, at least in our neighborhood. Towards evening, the fighting ceased in the village. We saw our fellow citizens leaving their neighborhoods in the upper village, leaving behind them their houses in ruins. Some of them moved in with us.

Then the long file of German prisoners passed, dejected, exhausted their heads lowered.

After 30 January some Americans quartered with us. Having placed a tank in front of a window, they came in and out of the window by climbing on the tank. They had stopped up all the doors and forbade entrance to the house to civilians.

It was then that they collected a number of their dead in our courtyard. They brought the dead by the jeep loads and put them on two big trucks, as you see people here loading bales of hay or sacks of potatoes. These trucks would be full to the top with frozen, packed bodies held together by a heavy rope. What an unbearable and unforgettable sight for all who were there!.

**AT THE END OF RIEDWIHR STREET, HOUSE # 31, MR ERIC ENGEL, 74 YEARS OLD**

Before 27 January, it was the Allied artillery that fired on our neighborhood. The German transmitting station, located in the house at #23, Riedwihl Street, was the target, but the trajectories were for the most part too short. and many shells fell in the fields to the west of the village.

The first Allied soldiers who arrived here were French with tanks and legionnaires, one of whom was from Cernay. There was also a Moroccan captain. The Germans were still in the Meyer sawmill, very close by, and the two sides kept shooting at each other.

I was going to take refuge with my sister in George Herrmann's stable at #20 because it was more solid than our old house. There were still Germans over there. When the fighting got closer, the Germans left. But the situation changed every minute--there were advances and withdrawals--and when the Allies had to pull back again, the Germans returned to Herrmann's farm. Then George Herrmann would get angry and yell at them saying: "I fought in the war of 1914, but not like this! There are thirteen of us civilians here--we are going to be massacred!" Finally the German officer said: " Very well, we will leave!". And indeed they went away.

Slowly Riedwihr street is occupied once and for all- the French arrive and remain. They parked their tanks at the end of the street and go several times towards the upper village where the battle is raging, then return. But isolated German snipers manage to destroy two tanks, one of which was in front of Albert Rieg's house at #23. I also remember that before the French arrived, I had gone once again quickly to the hayloft to throw down some hay for the animals. Later a Frenchman told me: "You, I saw you with my binoculars, throwing down hay, and I could have shot you like a rabbit!"

After 29 January many shells coming from the Rhine fell on and near our property.

**IN RIEDWIHR STREET, THE MEYER SAWMILL-FARM AT #29,  
MRS LISBETH FONDADOUZE-MEYER, 64 YEARS OLD.**

We had been sleeping for several days in our barn-cattle shed on the other side of the feeding troughs, where the food for the animals is prepared.

There were seven of us in all: my father, my mother, the Ritter widow and her son, Marcel, Sigmund Selig and myself. My parents slept on a mattress while all the others slept on hay that my father changed every day.

One evening--we knew that the French were not far away- the door opened and a German soldier entered. He was a tall fellow, about 40, very nervous. He said, "I want to stay here- the French arrive tonight- I can't take it any longer and want to be taken prisoner!" With that, he fell to the floor like a dead weight and went to sleep. Early in the morning-- it must have been 27 January--he was still sleeping. Papa, looking out saw an Allied tank on the little bridge of the Saubach, 30 meters from our property and another in our garden, next to the bunker. This was it--the French had come! We waited very impatiently. Suddenly, soldiers camouflaged in white sheets knocked down the planks in the fence, next to the stable, that separated our place from the Durr farm. We woke up the German soldier who went out, hands in the air, in front of papa. But what a surprise we had. The men in white were Germans who, after having withdrawn were attacking now. One of them, an NCO, screamed:"Get back you" to the deserter who, surprised, quickly lowered his arms and disappeared through the opening in the wall.

Papa who saw that things were about to take a violent turn, spoke to the officer. "What good will that do you? You can see that there are French soldiers everywhere! Do you want to destroy everything?" Then the German screamed "Get back in there and close the door. I am putting a guard in front of the door."

Papa said "Take cover now!" We put covers, quilts, even mattresses over our heads and waited. The silence lasted a good while, then suddenly machine guns burst; there was a real uproar and a German soldier yelled out, "There's a fire over your heads". Then we go up and began to panic. Papa untied our horse, Hansi, opened the door and wanted to let the horse out, but it was impossible to get him through the door, as well as the cow. Outside, the German soldier, who had been guarding the door, lay covered with blood in the white snow. We quickly threw our blankets and quilts in the Durr's garden and got ready to pass through the hole in the wall. But Papa Said; "I am not going to let these animals to die. If we wet the walls and troughs, the frame and hay will burn, but the metal beam and transoms will stop the fire". But no one would stay with him. We went without him through the wall to our neighbor's Albert Durr. The Germans had carried their dead soldier into Durr's courtyard and were standing there, not very pleased with themselves. All six of us went to the Durr's, to their cellar. There were four steps to go down. We waited there, sitting on makeshift chairs. An old lady, known as "schumachera" from next door, was still with the Durr's

Mr. Durr, in spite of a bad leg, was always running about to see what was happening. He saw the Germans leave through the back, leaving their dead comrade in the yard. I was thinking of my father, all alone, in the burning stable.

Suddenly, we heard Mr. Durr speaking French with some soldiers and immediately, the cellar door opened with a great bang, a soldier tumbled down the steps and fell, feet in the air on old lady "Schumachera" who practically asleep screamed "What is it, what is it?". The soldier went back up the steps and left, swearing. He had leaned against the door,

which was not well shut, intending to ask Mr. Durr for something to drink.

I went out in the courtyard and spoke to the three or four French soldiers who were there. "Have you seen my father? He was in the burning barn." "There was no one in that barn" "I want to see for myself. Come with me." " Okay, but you go first"

Then Mr. Durr, who agreed to go first, took off, hobbling along with the soldiers behind him, machine guns ready and I after them. The barn had completely burned. The two doors of the stable, of which there remained only the walls, were shut. Mr. Durr called out "Meyer, Meyer". Then the door opened and papa was there, black as a chimney sweep, but alive. The memory of that moment still makes me cry, it was so un-hoped for. The horse and cow are safe also. The frame of the stable, with its tiles, had caved in and the beams, nearly burned up, were lying in the melted snow. Papa stepped over all that and came towards us. The soldiers, who had been so noisy, now were silent. We went back to Durr's cellar. Papa sat down next to mother and began crying like a baby.

He told us later how, with a bucket and the water from a little hand pump in the stable, he had climbed up each time between the troughs and thrown water as far as he could to keep the flames from spreading down lower. Then, the pump had stopped working. Fortunately, he found a adjustable wrench to repair it. But during that time, the fire almost got out of control and was already burning near Papa's horse, Hansi, that he loved so. Happily, papa got there again in time to put out the fire and save the animals from certain death.

Unfortunately, the next day, a German shell hit the stable or what was left of it, while my father was watering the horse. He had to resign

himself to moving the animals. So here we were, moving again, this time to George Herrmann's farm, almost opposite from where we were. There, we joined about 40 other civilians who were lodged in the stable and cattle-shed. One day, a German shell exploded in the courtyard and the fragments, coming through the door where we were, seriously injured Yvonne, Mr. Herrmann's daughter.

Later, American soldiers came and occupied our house. One of them stopped me in the street to show me a framed photograph that he had taken from the wall of my room and that he was carrying in his fatigue jacket as "a bullet shield". I hope the photograph brought him luck and that he got through the war without harm.

Later there was an incredible amount of traffic in Riedwihr Street. It was because the Battle of Jebsheim was not over yet. All sorts of trucks, tanks, jeeps, etc came through day and night. The street looked as though it had been plowed and from time to time trucks loaded with all sorts of debris came and filled the ruts.

Under the shed of our sawmill, the Americans had installed a garage and repair shop. They were nice to us and gave us canned beans, corned-beef, cigarettes and above all, some chocolate that we found extraordinary. But in the house where they were quartered, they were strange. They had to empty rooms and therefore as soon as they entered the room all the small furniture, trinkets, personal effects, everything was thrown out the windows.

**RIEDWIHR STREET, FARM #6--MRS EDGAR OBRECHT,  
WIDOW, 70 YEARS OLD**

There were twenty of us in the cellar, among others, the Jacques Boeschlin and Jugo Nussmaumer families, and five refugees from Ostheim. In the night of January 27-28 there were still about 30 German soldiers in the courtyard. At 2200 hours (10 PM) we locked the cellar for the night. Towards morning, there was a knock at the door. My husband went to open it. There were French soldiers there, legionnaires. They asked us if there were any German soldiers here. My husband told them that in the cellar we were all civilians, and that, doubtlessly, there was one in the house. The legionnaires answered that their lieutenant had been killed coming into the courtyard, and therefore they had to find the person who had killed him. They went through all the rooms, my husband in front, they following carefully with their fingers on the triggers of their guns. In the house- nothing; in the courtyard- nothing. Nothing in the other buildings, the stable, the barn, still nothing.

"If we don't find the sniper, we'll take you!".. We all moved towards the door. My husband began to fear for his life. Next to the door to the courtyard, there was a small washroom. My husband noticed that the door was slightly ajar. He pointed this out to the soldiers. "Usually that door is shut!". They went to see and , indeed, they found seven German soldiers. The legionnaires were getting ready to massacre them on the spot when a French officer arrived and interceded. "They are soldiers in uniform--you don't have the right to kill them. You have to take them as prisoners even if they killed your leader." The legionnaires calmed down a bit. But the Germans had a very narrow escape.

We were liberated, but the shells continued to rain down for several more days on our farm and vicinity.

While soldiers were quartered in our house- I believe it was the command post of the area--we were still living in the cellar, dirty, full of

lice--some had not had a bath for six weeks- and fearing at every instant for our lives.

You can imagine that we will never forget that painful time.

**RIEDWIHR STREET, FARM # 8- MRS LUCIE OBRECHT, 50 YEARS OLD**

Long before 27 January, we had been living in the stable because it appeared to be the most solid building. We had piled vine-props and all sorts of stakes in front of the windows to act as protection.

There were 36 of us, counting three refugees from Illhaeusern, living there with the animals.

During the night of 27 January, no one dared to out to the toilet that was in the courtyard. There were still two or three German soldiers in the house. Early in the morning, I saw an Allied soldier climb the wall that separates us from farm #10 (Jacques Selig's hours). He yelled to me in Alsatian. "Are there any more German soldiers in there?" I answered- "But are you a French soldier?" He answered that he was and the he came from Haguenau. What a surprise! He was a legionnaire. As for the Germans, they had left. Our house would be liberated without fighting.

I chanced a glance in the street and saw a tank burning in front of George Rieg's house, at #21 and another vehicle that had been immobilized in from of Oscar Bentz's house at #19

**AT THE RESTAURANT DEL LA GARE- MRS CLAIRE BENTZ, nee BASS, 52 YEARS OLD**

After a bomb fell near our house on 22 January, we moved into the cellar under the ballroom. We set up a stove for cooking, mattresses, etc. But we were not alone. There was my family (8), the Wantz family (6), and the J.J. Danner family (5), plus five refugees, four of whom were from Ostheim- that made us 24 in all. From time to time, Mr. Wantz would return to his house, going through the garden that runs along the wall to Linden-Tree Square (Place des Tilleuls).

And what a life we led in the small cellar! Now and then, to pass the time, we sang and told stories, but when the shells exploded above and around our shelter, we would pray because we did not think we would leave the hell, alive. This is because, occupied first by the Americans and then again by the Germans, our area was the stake in fierce combat.

During the fighting on our property on 28 January, it was very difficult. Crouching in our makeshift chairs, silent with fear, we heard over our heads in the ballroom, the noise of soldiers chasing each other, gunfire interrupted by the screams of the dying, doors slamming, the wounded moaning and then the noise of fighting that continued farther in the distance.

In the dining room of the restaurant also, the fighting must have been fierce, because we found everything topsy-turvy and covered with blood.

It was also from the restaurant that the attack on the old train station began. The Germans had left a large number of bazookas (Panzerfaust) piled up by the doorway and these were seized by the Allies. We learned later that the seven German soldiers, who came out of the burning station, their arms in the air, had killed their leader before surrendering.

After 29 January, our restaurant was turned into a field hospital. Wounded that were brought there from Muntzenheim, Durrenentzen, etc received emergency treatment here before being evacuated elsewhere.

And everyone, friend or enemy, numerous civilians, German prisoners, Allied soldiers, everyone was treated with the same alacrity and kindness by the good nurses.

Always ready to help them in any way I could, I remember that one day I became sick while aiding the nurses treating a woman whose chest had been cut to shreds by a shell burst.

The ambulance driver who brought the wounded from other villages was an Englishman. Seriously injured while bringing back the wounded, he died here and his remains lay for a long time in our barn.

You can well imagine that these moments of continuous danger, the spectacle of all the dead and the wounded, made an impression for life on this girl of fourteen which is what I was at the time.

**IN THE FORGE, AT THE CORNER OF LINDEN-TREE SQUARE  
(PLACE DES TILLEULS) MRS FRIDA WANTZ, WIDOW, 72  
YEARS OLD.**

After the bomb fell on 22 January, only 100 meters from us in East Street, we decided, my husband, my mother-in-law, my three children and I, to seek refuge at the neighbors', in the cellar under the ballroom. There were a lot of us and I had my hands full with my youngest child, Roland, who was only a few months old. Each time he started to cry, I would try to quiet him with his bottle.

From time to time my husband would go to our place to see what was happening--to get there he would follow the wall along the garden next to the square.

Our baby, Roland, was baptized in this cellar by Pastor Schneider, who came on his bike just for the purpose from Muntzenheim, in spite of the snow and the shells that were already beginning to fall on Jebsheim. Lying on a vat that served as the altar and in the light of a single candle, my son was baptized the same day as Edith Woelffle from the upper village. The pastor must have judged the situation to be very serious indeed since he did not want to postpone this sacrament.

As for food, we were well supplied with meat, because as soon as a cow was wounded or killed by a shell on one of the neighboring farms, Mr. Jacques Danner, the gamekeeper, who was also the butcher, would come and butcher the animal and divide the cuts among the various islands of refugees.

Then, little by little, the fighting reached our neighborhood. One day, the French soldiers occupied our forge, not knowing the Germans were still in our house. The fighting was very hard; the firing of machine guns could be heard night and day and moments of calm were seldom.

**ON THE BUHART FARM, EAST STEET #4--MR ROBERT  
GAMER--80 YEARS OLD**

In the Spring of 1940, we had been evacuated with our five children to Lot-et-Garonne, to the town of Serignac near Marmande. We had been very well received over there and have a nice memory of the three months we spent in the South.

Back in Jebsheim, after the Armistice, we found ourselves plunged once again into the miseries of war in 1945.

At the end of January, when the fighting reached the upper village, my family took refuge at Mr. Buhart's farm, today Albert Rieg's, in East

Street. This large farm with thick , solid walls inspired confidence and so, there was about forty-five of us, who had come there to live in the barn, cattle shed and adjacent buildings. The food was prepared in the main house.

As soon as there was the slightest break in the fighting, I would go out in the street to see what was happening, because I was very impatient for the Allied troops to arrive.

I remember once there were a few German soldiers passing in the street with a French prisoner, perhaps a soldier from the African Riflemen Regiment. We felt sorry for the poor lad and asked him where he was from. He answered, "I am French, but, it's all over for me" No one understood what he meant. The Germans took him to the intersection of East and Grand Rue and there, they killed him in cold blood.

When the neighboring farm, Mr Matin Frey's, was on fire, I was outside and saw a French soldier in a hole in the wall across the street, he was motioning other French soldiers through with wide sweeps of his arm. They assembled in the street. They asked me what I was doing there. I explained to them that I had taken refuge in the farm opposite, and there were more than 40 of us civilians there, and there were no German soldiers with us. It was perhaps my intervention that saved the farm from destruction and the civilians from certain death.

Since I always had my nose out the door, I also witnessed the destruction of the old trains station by the Allied troops. They were firing from the Retterer Restaurant, point- blank at the station. The Germans who were barricaded there did not want to surrender. To the screams of "Give up" they answered with more gunfire. It was only after they had killed their leader that they finally came out from the smoking ruins of the old station, harassed and nerves frayed.

Little by little, the fighting moved towards the upper village and the burning of the farms followed. It was over for us, except for the German shells that continued to rain down for a long time.

**IN THE UPPER VILLAGE AT # 18 AND 20, MRS SONIA HERRMANN, WIFE OF RENE BALTZINGER, 50 YEARS OLD.**

In the month of January, some Germans were quartered at our farm. They had set up their field kitchen in the courtyard and a command post in our second house, that still stands today, where my grandfather lived.

On about 25 January, the soldiers became much more active; they came and went, bringing messages to the command post. There were many young men among them, some almost children, and the news that they brought from the Ried must not have been very encouraging.

Towards 27 January, the sound of cannon fire was getting closer; shells were falling in the vicinity, and we took shelter in the washhouse, a little adjacent building with thick walls and a cement ceiling. There were about twelve of us; my family, the Gantzer family, a neighbor who was fairly old, Mrs. Helda Cathel and my grandfather. In Grand Rue at the entrance of Vosges

Street (La rue des Vosges), the Germans had set up a tank barricade (Panzersperre). It was here that they intended to stop the Allied troops. Into our courtyard they had brought fresh troops and great quantities of ammunition.

My father was not at all afraid. As soon as the situation allowed, he went outside to see what was happening and to bring us the latest news. I should point out that he had been taken prisoner by the Germans in 1940, near the Rhine, and had almost been killed at the time.

Now we come to 28 January. The Germans, positioned in our barn, had cut holes in the walls, through which to fire in the direction of Ernest Frey's farm on Hyppen Street, and towards East Street, where some French soldiers had already arrived. Lying flat in a long file, the Germans fired without stopping. An NCO ran behind them constantly screaming: "Keep you positions, keep your positions". My father, who saw the end coming was amused at that. But in fact, they did hold their positions..to the last--not a one came out of that barn alive.

When the farms on East Street starting catching fire, one after the other, the Germans in the courtyard gave us the order to leave--it was too dangerous. At the moment of departure, a German soldier said to my father; "Poor farmer, take a last look at your place, because you will never see it again." Unfortunately, as events proved, his words were only too true.

So we set out towards the upper village and landed at Charlot Selig's house #7, Grand Rue, where the German field Hospital was located. But grandfather and Helda Cathel did not want to continue onward with the rest of us. Grandfather said that he didn't want to leave here, even if he must die here.

In the night of 28-29 January, the fighting doubled in intensity because the Germans, coming from Muntzenheim, launched a counterattack. Other farms began to burn. Why had Helda Cathel and grandfather not remained where they were, we would never know. They had left us to go across the street to Helda Cathel's house and were about to become victims of a fierce battle. Her house, at the entrance of Vosges Street, at what today is #13, was attacked in the middle of the night by Germans, burned and destroyed. The six or seven French paratroopers and Helda Cathel who were in the house perished together. My grandfather, who

had perhaps tried to escape, was found the next day, after the fighting on the edge of the street. He had six bullet holes in his chest.

On 29 January, towards the end of the afternoon, as soon as the fighting stopped, everyone came out of hiding and set out towards the lower village. Everyone ran, without really knowing why, with only one idea in mind--to leave this hell--to leave this wretched neighborhood.

My father stopped at our house and went in the courtyard to see what remained of our farm. Everything had burned, except grandfather's little house, now at #18. The courtyard was full of bodies. My mother continued on and went down Riedwihr Street to a house belonging to some friends.

As for me, I don't know why I did not stay with my parents. I was no longer myself. Apparently shocked by the sight of the fires and the roof's caving in, the heart-rending screams of the dying, the horribly mutilated corpses lying everywhere--all that was too much for the little girl that I was then. As in a dream, I went down Grand Rue towards the lower village. Overhead, planes were flying at low altitude and cannons were thundering in the distance. Going by, people stared at me with wide eyes. At farm #39, I was stopped, taken in and looked after. I stayed there several days, during which time my parents did not know my whereabouts.

You can be sure that those events marked me for life. I will never forget.

**IN THE UPPER VILLAGE, FARM #12, MR. JEAN OBERLIN, 52 YEARS OLD**

This is the famous farm that saw the bloodiest fighting of the entire sector. The taking of this farm on 29 January 1945, at approximately 1500 hours (3 PM), marked the end of the Battle of Jebsheim.

Here is what Mr. Oberlin, who was 13 at the time, has to say.

Long before 22 January we had taken refuge in the cattle shed, the most solid building on the farm. On 22 January, a bomb fell in East Street and another behind our barn--making quite a crater but not exploding, thank God. The situation was becoming very dangerous, and little by little, other families came to seek refuge with us. The families of George Selig (4), Sigismond Bents (3), the Lischers (5), the Ludwig widow (4), Jean Selig (2) and the Woelffles (6), making, with my family (3) a total of 27 people quartered in the stable that is located in the courtyard, perpendicular to the street. We were separated from the street by a small cellar that is on street level, but on one lodged there because it is cold. In the stable we had the advantage of the warmth that came from the animals.

Many young soldiers came to reinforce the German occupiers and moved in with us. There were the Austrians with the Edelweiss patch on their uniforms. If these reinforcements had not come, the battle of Jebsheim would have been less murderous and much shorter.

The Germans set up their defense in the barn facing the orchards to the east--everywhere in the walls of 40 centimeters are holes, with machine guns and other weapons pointing in all directions. Above their heads, they had stacked bales of hay for protection. Even the dung heap in the courtyard had been dug out, cut up and transformed into a little fort packed with soldiers who could not be seen from a distance. The

courtyard was full of munitions of all kinds. The civilians had only one toilet located in the courtyard.

During the day of 27 January, a German soldier climbed over into the stable and set up a machine gun in a window from which he could see down Grand Rue all the way to Linden-Tree Square. Then my father, a former seaman who was not afraid, went up to point out to the soldier that he would attract all the Allied fire on the building and endanger the lives of all the civilians. The discussion got very hot, but my father did not give in and finally he made the young fanatic see reason and come down. We breathed a little more freely.

On 28 January, my father slept with us in the stable, but near the door. There he was seriously injured by a shell fragment. He was transported to the field hospital set up across the street at #7 Grand Rue, then evacuated by the Germans towards Neuf-Brisach where he died soon afterwards. At the time he left his native village, he was still able to see the farms of the upper village burning one after the other, without knowing if ours would meet the same fate.

During the night of 28-29 January, almost all the farms on the east side of Grand Rue were destroyed by fire. There were, from south to north; Jacques Danner's barn at #8; George Selig's entire farm at #10; Henri Woelffle's at #14; Jean Selig's at #16; Jean Herrmann's at #20, Sigimond Bentx's barn at #24 and all the houses on Vosges Street.

At our place, nothing, except for the shell fragments that hit the walls, doors and windows. But George Selig's house burned one meter from the stable where we were and it is only thanks to the snow, melting on the roof and running along the walls, that our building with all the hay over our heads, did not also catch fire.

And now we come to the ominous day of 29 January. The sun was shining, but it was very cold. The Allies invaded the neighborhood from all sides. Our barn became the objective in the last fight. But it seemed to be impregnable. Fighting became hand-to-hand. A plane came to bomb the barn and set it on fire, which seemed to be the only way to dislodge the Germans. The last fight took place in the courtyard with knives.

And then, suddenly, it was over. The firing stopped. It was around three in the afternoon. We came out of the stable, astonished to be still alive. The French soldiers were disarming the last Germans and breaking their rifles by striking the barrels on the ground. The dead were everywhere, littering the courtyard.

Sad and dejected, we took a few of our belongings and started out towards the lower village. What desolation; ruins, corpses, buildings that were nearly burned down. We went to our relatives house on Riedwihr Street and stayed there for more than a week. From time to time, we went to look at what remained of our property. In the big shed of corrugated metal that houses the Department of Civil Engineering, opposite what is now Selig's garage, the dead soldiers were stacked up to the ceiling, waiting to be transported elsewhere. The German dead lay where they fell. No one bothered with them and it was not until later, with the thaw, when a nauseous odor spread through the village, that the bodies of the soldiers and animals were buried all together in an enormous shell crater back of our property.

**ON THE FARM #12, GRAND RUE- ANDRE SELIG, 46 YEARS OLD AND MRS EMMA SELIG, A WIDOW, 70 YEARS OLD.**

At the time of The Battle of Jebsheim, I was only seven , but I have forgotten nothing about those days and I often think now about the drama that we lived and that marked me so profoundly.

We lived in the upper village, next to Jean Oberlin's farm, near the constabulary, there where Jules Scherer's family lives now.

In January 1945, the order came to take all precautions because the war would soon reach our area. So my father buried all the dishes, some food and other utensils. Unfortunately, during the fighting a shell landed on the spot and ruined everything we had hidden..

We found refuge at our neighbor's George Oberlin, as did other families from the village. We were all living in the stable because it was the most solid building. We slept on the ground on straw with a few blankets. Mrs. Oberlin did the cooking in the kitchen of the house, but no one stayed there. Every morning and evening, Mr. Sigismond Bentz went to feed and milk his cows that were at his farm a few hundred meters farther down in the village, where Fernad Bentz's place is today. My father did the same thing, and all the others, women and children, remained in the stable.

The Germans had set up their field hospital across the street at Charles Selig's house. The German stretcher bearers who went out everyday looking for the wounded, would come and see us in the evening to find out if anyone was sick. He had a big red cross on a white background on his chest and back. At nightfall, the war machine cranked up again; shots, detonations, shell bursts, etc. That went on for a long time, until the day when the stretcher bearer told us that he could no longer allow Mr. Bentz and my father to go alone to their farms--they would have to be accompanied by a soldier. And now when they went out they wore a big white sheet over their heads so that they would not be recognized. That

lasted two or three days. But the shooting got closer and closer and became more intense.

On the evening of 27 January, the German stretcher bearer was himself wounded on the way to see us. He managed to drag himself to his infirmary, but we never saw him again.

By 28 January, no one went out of the stable any more--everyone feared that from one moment to the next a shell might fall on us and blow everything up. I hid under the blankets--now and then, I would raise my head and ask mother:"Mama, are you still praying?" Mr George Oberlin was wounded and evacuated. The noise of airplanes, shooting , the shells bursting, the sound of buildings collapsing all around, created an atmosphere that was enough to drive you mad.

That evening, a German soldier came to warn my father that our farm and house were on fire. My father told him to go free the cattle and horses. After a while, the soldier returned to report that he had done what my father told him, except for one horse that was too violent and would not let him approach. My father told him where he could find an ax that would allow him to knock down the feeding trough and cut the tie that was holding the horse. The soldier left and came back again to announce that he had succeeded in freeing the horse. My father was much relieved at the news, because he liked that horse very much.

What an evening..No one felt like sleeping. Our house, which was being consumed by flames, was scarcely one meter away from the stable where we were. Everyone was seized by panic. What could we do? If we went out, we were sure to die. We could only sit and wait. Through a miracle, there was a lot of snow on the roof and it was melting from the heat of the fire and running along the wall of the stable and this gave us some hope. Moreover, the north wind was blowing somewhat and

kept the flames away from our walls. I still remember the sound of the melting snow. What trickling--one would have thought a violent storm was taking place! And then the cracking of the beams, the noise of tiles falling from roofs, the planes, the hissing of shells--we were in the midst of the battle--and should one hope to come out all that alive?

The morning of 29 January arrived and the battle continued with as much intensity until about 1500 hours (3 PM)--and then, suddenly you heard nothing more, not a single shot. There was a general sigh of relief. It's over Outside you could hear the coming and going of soldiers who spoke French. After a while, a soldier came and opened the door and told us to come outside with our hands in the air. A sad spectacle awaited us. In the courtyard, French soldiers were assembling numerous German prisoners. Mr. Oberlin's barn was still burning. At his house, the doors and windows were smashed and full of bullet holes. On the ground, there lay the dead, munitions, and debris of all kinds. Next door, the buildings of our farm were nearly burned down.

It was time to see if anything useful could be done. A soldier gave us permission to leave, with our hands in the air. We had scarcely gone out of the courtyard, when about ten soldiers, crouching in a row, aimed their rifles at us, ready to kill us at the slightest movement. My mother was screaming in fear, whereas, I didn't yet understand what was going on. Finally, we went down the street slowly. What a sight. Mr. Woelffle's farm was still burning as was Mr. Jean Selig's. On the little square, in front of Selig's garage, where a small house used to stand, there was nothing left but a pile of smoking beams. Marie Husser's house, next door, had just burned down. Jean Herrmann's little house seemed intact--We went in but found on one. In the courtyard, I tripped over a dead soldier. We went on down the street. Mr. Sigismond Bentz's barn was still burning. Across the way, in Haller's courtyard, we heard a

dying soldier moan. On the road, the way was more or less cleared, but on the sides there lay munitions, armored cars that had been knocked out of action, and all sorts of debris.

We continued in Riedwihr Street and entered Geroge Husser's house at the corner. There we finally found some residents of Jebsheim, but there were already twenty of them so we continued to George Herrmann's farm, where we found room in the stable and where we stayed for two weeks. We had nothing left, but the same clothes that we had been wearing for weeks and a few blankets. My father found one of his cows and two heifers, as well as a horse that he had to go to Muntzenheim to get back. It was with this meager stock that we set to work again to start farming again.

We lodged for two months in Charles Selig's house, then we had a rented farm for a few years. in 1952, we finally moved in the farm we have now that was rebuilt in the middle of the village.

**THE FIRST BIRTH IN JEBSHEIM AFTER THE LIBERATION.  
MRS MARGUERITE BOESCHLIN, A WIDOW, FARM #34,  
RIEDWIHR STREET, 73 YEARS OLD**

In January 1945, when we knew that the lives of the inhabitants were beginning to be endangered, my husband built a sort of blockhouse in the garden to shelter us. He had put in a stove, a small iron bed in anticipation of the approaching birth of our child, and a reserve of food.

But the Germans had installed a radio transmitting post not far from us and the Allied shells began to rain in our garden. We could no longer remain in the shelter. So we left to join my brother-in-law in Jacques Boeschlin's stable at #31 Grand Rue. But there too a shell damaged the

building and we left again. My husband, my daughter, and I went to Paul Obrecht's farm, located next to ours at #32, Riedwihr Street. From time to time, my husband would go and visit our house. It was occupied by Germans. After the fighting in this neighborhood, it would be occupied by French soldiers. My husband saw in our courtyard numerous German prisoners lined up against the wall and being searched. In our bedroom, nurses were treating without any letup numerous wounded soldiers. All our linen and white sheets were taken for the wounded and the room was strewn with bandages and spots of blood.

Then 29 January arrived. The upper village was burning, planes passed overhead constantly, and shells were exploding everywhere. Our house and Paul Obrecht's farm were hit by shells. Since I was approaching term, it was dangerous to remain there--I would have preferred to stay and give birth among my people, but a French soldier persuaded me to leave the village.

on 29 January, I left in a military ambulance with my daughter, Huguette, who was ten, and some wounded soldiers. When we got to Ostheim Street in front of the Sembach's house, today Andre Zimmerlin's, an alert forced the ambulance to stop. The driver ran to shelter and we waited for half an hour in the street, exposed to the shells that were coming in from the direction of the Rhine. The crossing of the Ried River also left me a poignant memory. In front of us, the Allied artillery was firing towards Hardt Woods, while behind us, the German artillery attempted to knock it out. And our ambulance, moving at a high speed across fields, shell craters, jolted the wounded who did not stop moaning.

At Guemar, we were among those selected to go on and I was placed in a hammock attached to the top of an ambulance. We left, with some

wounded, for Ribeauville. There, a new selection- I was among those chose again- a new ambulance, and still in my hammock, my daughter sitting with the driver who was a woman, we left in the night. At midnight, I was dropped off with my daughter at a house that took people in at Saint-Marie-aux-Mines. The night caretaker did not want to, or for some reason could not, take us in. So there I was in the middle of the night with my two suitcases, my ten-year old daughter, Huguette, out in the cold with snow up to our knees. I will spare you the rest of the story, about how we spent the night, how we managed--I had brought a turkey in one of my suitcases--to find people who understood our needs, and finally were taken in by the good sisters. It was with them that my son Marcel was born on February 1. He was the first inhabitant of Jebsheim to be born after the liberation.

It was also there that I was able to see two other wounded civilians from Jebsheim, George and Berthe Frey. A lady who was originally from Jebsheim, Mrs Ritter, who was living in Saint-Marie-aux-Mines lodged me and my daughter for a time.

Three weeks later, thanks to the help of a charitable railroad employee who passed us off as his wife and children, I was able to return to my village. In fact, it was impossible at that time to obtain a pass and all circulation in the area was blocked

## **A TRAGIC BALANCE SHEET**

The loss in human lives in the fighting units were enormous on both sides. The exact number will never be known and can only be estimated.

500 German corpses, cited in the first official communiqué, nearly 200 French soldiers killed and at least as many Americans dead, add up to

nearly one thousand dead. (WEBMASTER'S NOTE: ACTUAL AMERICAN DEAD WAS SIXTY-SIX FROM THE 254TH INFANTRY REGIMENT). To these must be added more than a thousand wounded, many of whom died in the ambulances and hospitals. For example in the 3rd Company of the Medical Battalion, from 27 January to 3 February, 602 wounded were treated, 29 of whom died while waiting treatment.

If the Allied soldiers killed at Jebsheim were moved very quickly towards the rear, this was not the case with the German dead. A routed army does not have time to carry away its dead; everyone is trying to save his own skin and if flight is no longer possible, they can only die or surrender.

The occupation authorities were no longer here and those named by the new government had not yet arrived. And so, for a long time, the bodies of animals and German soldiers lay in the courtyards and gardens. It was only with the thaw when a pestilential odor began to spread throughout the village, that groups of civilians were requisitioned to bury all the cadavers in order to avoid an epidemic. The bodies of men and animals, the tattered remains and debris of all sorts, were buried by men who were barely able to surmount their feelings of horror and disgust, in heaps in the large bomb craters- one was as deep as a one-story house. It was necessary to wait many years before the soldiers had a grave worthy of human beings.

During the summer of 1945 and even the following years, many bodies were unearthed in the fields and neighboring forests, by plow and tractors. The last two German bodies were found during the 1960s, when a gas pipeline was being laid to the east of the village.

## DESTRUCTION AND CIVILIAN VICTIMS

### 1. Destruction:

In these numbers are included buildings destroyed in 1940

**Destroyed:** 46 Houses---56 Barns---54 various buildings--one Church--one Train Station--one City Hall--one School--one Depot belonging to the Agricultural Cooperative.

**Damaged:** 72 Houses--45 Barns--73 Various buildings.

That makes a total of 118 houses, 101 barns and 127 various buildings that were hit by shells, bombs, incendiary bombs, bazookas, mortars, machine guns and other weapons.

### 2. Civilian Victims:

Given the number of soldiers killed and the great destruction of buildings, everyone considers it a miracle that there were not more victims among the 600 to 700 civilians huddling in makeshift shelters throughout the battle.

Five were killed: Mr. Jean Herrmann--by bullets

Mrs Jerg (Hilda Cathel)---by fire

Mr. George Oberlin----by shell fragments

Miss Jenny Ziommerlin---by aviation bomb

Mr. Robert Herrmann----at the Neuf-Brisach bridge

Four were seriously injured.

And we must not forget the three inhabitants of Jebsheim, who died on the field of honor in the French Army and the 13 inhabitants who were inducted by force into the Wermacht, and who died for a cause that was not theirs.

#### **ST MARTIN'S CHURCH OF JEBSHEIM:**

During the hard fighting of January 1945 the gable of the Romanesque facade was damaged again. It was not possible to complete the restoration of the facade until 1956. The tricolor flag (The French flag) that floats proudly in the breeze over the church today was raised immediately after the liberation by Mr. Albert Hild (Future Mayor of Jebsheim) and Mr. Emile Scherer (Londoner). This is proof of the patriotism and also the courage of these two inhabitants of Jebsheim.

#### **THE ALSATIANS AMONG THE COMBATANTS**

There is a popular saying that you cannot go anywhere in the world without meeting an Alsatian. Since we know that an Alsatian was implicated in the attempted assassination of the Fuher of such sinister memory, another in the escape of General Giraud into Switzerland and an Alsatian was among the first men on the moon--Schweickhart, whose father was originally from the Bas-Rhin, a Department of Alsace, it would have been astonishing had there not been a group of Alsations among the combatants of the two sides in the battle of Jebsheim at the end of January 1945.

This also explains the completely justified anguish of those inhabitants who saw one of their own forced to join the Wehrmacht, or volunteer, usually under a false name, to join the French army of the liberation.

1) On the German side there are few names. It is true that the Wehrmacht never trusted Alsatians very much. "They look French" they would say, and send them to the Russian or Italian fronts or to the Balkans.

--A citizen of Colmar took advantage of the good fortune, at the moment they were crossing the Rhine, to get himself taken prisoner at Jebsheim. He crawled towards a French tank and ended the war with them, serving as an interpreter.

-- One of our fellow citizens who was forced into the Wehrmacht came home on leave, hid out with some relatives and on 26 January introduced himself to the Americans who furnished him with one of their uniforms in order for him to avoid reprisals, in case the Germans came back.

-- Another inhabitant of Jebsheim who had been inducted into the Wehrmacht took advantage of a leave to desert. Hiding out with some neighbors, he wisely awaited the conclusion of hostilities before rejoining his family.

--Another of our fellow citizens who had been forced to join the enemy, came from Marckolsheim with German reinforcements and advanced as close as 100 meters to the house where he was born. At the last minute, he was unable to escape and had the misfortune to be taken prisoner by some Americans who spoke no French. They took him to the other side of the Vosges Mountains where he remained for three months.

- 2) On the side of the troops of the liberation: The tanks of the Regiment of African Riflemen, the Shock Battalion, the French Forces of the Interior, all the fighting units without exception who fought at Jebsheim had a number of Alsatians among them.

These men surprised the inhabitants by calling out to them in Alsatian, rekindling hope by telling jokes in Alsatian dialect to the despairing civilians who thought they would never come through alive. Our Alsatian soldiers were admired with envy by the women who had a son or a husband far away and from whom they had received no news. Each year at the end of January, these men come back to us, to the scene of their exploits.

--**Heinrich** from Mulhouse, Loessle from Colmar, Huss from the Bas-Rhin, all former paratroopers who never miss an opportunity to be with us and to shake the hand of the former leader, General Faure.

--**Loos** from Colmar with his tank-destroyer of the 6th CC. George Hitter from Colmar, who died in his tank, the "Alsace."

--**Jules Fleith** from Jebsheim, inducted by force by the Germans, who deserted his unit and returned with French troops to Henri Oberlin's farm.

--**Chalot Selig** from Jebsheim, who proudly introduced himself to his fellow citizens in the uniform of the French Army.

--**The Shock Battalion** finally, the company of Lieutenant Durrmeyer, which counted 20 or so Alsatians among them, all volunteers. And did you know that most of the men in the Shock Battalion were former inductees by force in the German Army? That having deserted on the Russian front, going over after

enormous difficulties to the Russian side, interned in the terrible camp of Tambow, taken to North Africa to be released as a result of the agreement between General De Gualle and the Russians, these men then volunteered to join the Shock Battalion to fight against those whose detested uniform they had been forced to wear the year before.

And last, a great sorrow overcomes us in evoking the name of our comrade from Colmar, **Francois Ehlinger**, who, after the Russian front, Tambow, North Africa, the Alsatian campaign, was seriously wounded as he advanced towards his objective and died just 12 kilometers from the house where he was born and his city of Colmar that he had come to liberate.

## **AFTER THE TURMOIL**

After the turmoil of war, a great silence fell over the village. We had to find lodgings, rebuild, and find hope again for the future. As was the case everywhere in Alsace, there were purges and scores to be settled. Jebsheim was no exception to the rule that wanted to see those punished who had collaborated with the Nazi occupiers. Moreover, the first anniversary celebrations of the Liberation were not feasts of joy and rediscovery. First of all, what day should be chosen? 27 January for those on Ostheim Street? 29 January for the south of the village since that was when the fighting stopped for them? Or the day when the last soldier left Jebsheim and the inhabitants moved back into what remained of the buildings?

Every year the newspapers relate the wonderful celebrations of the Liberation of Colmar on 2 February, but Jebsheim did not have the heart to celebrate. Our people lowered they heads, collected themselves in

silence--rather than laughing and dancing they felt like crying and taking a walk to the cemetery.

A Liberation where the shutters and windows open to display the flag upon the passage of Allied troops was unknown to us. Girls rushing out to climb up on the tanks and kiss the rugged liberators was not what we had known. Here in Jebsheim,, to risk opening a window or cracking open a shutter meant receiving a machine gun blast. And to go out in the street, you had to first climb up out of the cellar or makeshift shelter and clear the bodies that blocked the courtyards and stairs.

A lot of the former combatants of the battle of Jebsheim who returned here in the years following the war, found a population that was traumatized, silent, sad, almost defiant, and not very inclined to share memories. But the years pass, the wounds heal, the miseries are forgotten- the memories remain, but become clearer, freed as they are from passion and resentment.

## **20 YEARS--30 YEARS LATER**

We had to wait years before we finally had liberation celebrations that were worthy of the event and contacts between the citizens of Jebsheim and the men who fought to free them.

Under the guidance of a dynamic mayor of the time, Mr. Albert Hild, contacts that were more and more frequent and friendly, became established between us and the veterans of the Shock Battalion, the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers, the legionnaires and the African Riflemen.

And what a moving ceremony, after 10 years at the cemetery before the monument to the dead, when a choir, the Choral Society of Hope,

touched us with its singing. The voices of two school children rose in the nascent twilight to give this message to the assembled throng:

"Those who have piously given their life for the Country, merit that at their tomb the people come and pray.. and Glory to our eternal France. Glory to those who died for her."

Even the commander of the Shock Battalion, General Gambiez, could not hide his emotion.

On the 25th anniversary, the names of the soldiers killed in the Shock Battalion and the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers were engraved on the Monument to the Dead. Planning for the 30th anniversary, Mr. Hild, with the assent of the entire population, had the Monument to the Dead moved to the center of the village.

Then the day of the 30th anniversary came--it was celebrated 8 June 1975, with all the pomp appropriate to such an occasion. Those present included the Secretary of the Veterans' Administration, our much esteemed Prefect, Mr. Burgalat, delegations from the Paratroopers of Pau with their colonel, veterans of the African Riflemen, Legionnaires, men of the Shock Battalion, veterans of the Paratroopers with General Faure, a delegation of American soldiers stationed in Germany, in short representatives of all the troops who formed the prestigious 5th Armored Division of January 1945. Wreathes were laid, the eternal flame brought expressly from Paris was rekindled, and street named in honor of our liberators were inaugurated. All of this was followed by a very successfully executed parachute drop at the Sports Arena by men who are champions of precision jumping and an entire company of paratroopers jumped above the neighboring fields.

And at last the wonderful voyage to Pau, at the end of January 1976, when Mr. Hild and 60 inhabitants of Jebsheim, with General Faure and

some veterans of the Paratroopers, were invited by the 1st Regiment of Paratroopers to come visit their quarters near Pau. They came to participate in the inauguration of Jebsheim Square and take part in an impressive parachute jump. The celebration was to end with a select ball at the Casino of Pau.

No question but the Paratroopers won the hearts of the inhabitants of Jebsheim. This roundtrip in a military airplane will remain for all, an unforgettable memory.

### **STREETS NAMED IN HONOR OF OUR LIBERATORS.**

**5th Armored Division Street** (Rue de la 5e D.B.)

**3rd U. S. Infantry Division Street** (Rue de la 3e D.I.U.S.)

**1st Regiment of Paratroopers Street** (Rue de 1er Bataillon de Choc0

**Lieutenant Durrmeyer Street** (Rue du Lieutenant Durrmeyer)

### **EPILOGUE**

The reader who has read to the end of this account will understand that there is nothing more to say.

It was our goal to make him understand what the name JEBSHEIM meant to all in the Victory of the Pocket of Colmar and to leave for future generations, a trace of what this tragedy meant to the inhabitants of Jebsheim. We wanted also to urge on those who are preparing to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our Liberation a moment of reflection or quiet meditation.