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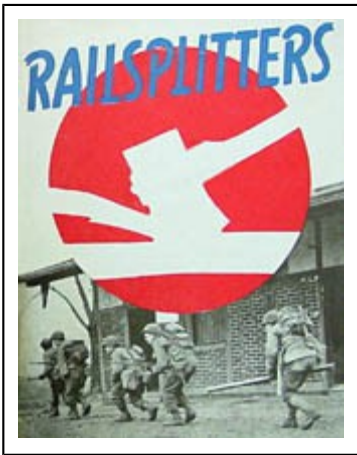
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## Railsplitters: The Story of the 84th Infantry Division

[ [booklet text only](#) ]



"Railsplitters" is a small booklet covering the history of the 84th Infantry Division. This booklet is one of the series of [G.I. Stories](#) published by the Stars & Stripes in Paris in 1944-1945.

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*The following story is of you, actions and accomplishments to date. Much history is yet to be made. Mere human words cannot express the valor, human effort and suffering necessary for the writing of your glorious history on the pages of life's book, but I, as your commanding general, am deeply aware of your faith and courage. Many of our comrades have made the supreme sacrifice on the field of battle. To them we dedicate this booklet and for them we will complete our final mission.*

A.R. Bolling  
Major General, Commanding

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### THE STORY OF THE 84th INFANTRY DIVISION

**J**AN. 16, 1945, 0945: Outside a farmhouse near the Ourthe River south of Petite Mormont, a brawny infantryman, walked through the icy snow and shook hands with a group of men who waited in two jeeps and an armored car. Then he handed them a message.

"It is with the greatest pleasure that I greet you across the Ourthe," the note read. "May we meet again, and soon, across the Wilhelmstrasse."

The message was signed by Lt. Col. Lloyd H. Gomes, CO of the 334th Regiment, 84th Infantry division. This was the meeting of the First and Third U.S. Armies which closed the gap of the dangerous German salient in the frosty Ardennes of Belgium.

One month earlier, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt had launched his mighty counter-offensive designed to split the Allied armies in the north. For the Allied nations, end of a particularly anxious phase of the war. For doughs of the 84th, it climaxes two months of savage fighting which saw them strike powerful blows in three critical sectors of the Western Front.

Led by Maj. Gen. (then Brig. Gen. A.R. Bolling, they had made a record crossing of the English Channel to rush into furious battle in the Geilenkirchen sector of the Siegfried Line.

Operating with the Second British and Ninth U.S. Armies, Railsplitters of the 84th took Geilenkirchen, then second largest German town to fall to the Allies, and proceeded to knock out 112 pillboxes and bunkers in Hitler's West Wall. Trouble-shooters in Germany, they were chosen for the important job of cracking what had been a stalemate. Hard-fighting men from all the states did their job well -- a fact which Germans tacitly admitted when they dubbed 84th doughs "Hatchet Men" for the way the division hacked through the Siegfried Line.

Then Germans drove into the Ardennes through a lightly-held line in the First Army sector, pushed towards the historic Meuse River. Called on again as trouble-shooters, Railsplitters were pulled from the Siegfried Line and sent to the Ardennes.

Although they faced numerically superior forces, men Of the 84th, their flanks unprotected, made a rock-like stand south of the important road center of Marche. Facing the main German threat, these offensive-minded doughs lashed back with a vengeance, virtually destroying one of the Wehrmacht's panzer divisions.

The German drive halted, the 84th was shifted to the northern side of the Bulge von Rundstedt had created. Less than two weeks later, it helped smash the Germans back across the Ourthe River.

Railsplitters now had driven to a meeting with Third Army. The infantryman who walked out from the farmhouse on the Ourthe was Lt. Byron Blankenship, Texarkana, Ark., leader of a 32-man patrol from the 334th. The men waiting for him were members of Third Army's [11th Armd. Div.](#) In the distance, they could hear scattered shots as the defeated Wehrmacht retreated to the German frontier.

With bullets and bayonets, the 84th stood squarely behind Col. Gomes in his expressed wish for an early meeting across the Wilhelmstrasse.

#### RAILSPLITTERS SHARPEN AXE FOR GEILENKIRCHEN

**T**HEN known as the Lincoln Division, the 84th had landed at Cherbourg and Le Havre in World War I, eager for action against the Kaiser's armies. Most of the 1918 Railsplitters got their chance at combat but not as a unit. The Meuse-Argonne offensive and an epidemic of influenza had created a vast manpower shortage, and the 84th, like many other divisions, was used as a reinforcement pool.

The new 84th was activated Oct. 15, 1942, at Camp Howze, Tex., about 60 miles north of Dallas. Then, as now, it was composed of the 333rd, 334th and 335th Inf. Regts.; 325th, 326th, 327th and 909th FA Bns.; 309th Engr. Combat Bn.; 309th Med, Bn.; 84th Sig. Co.; 784th Ord. Light Maintenance Co.; 84th QM Co.; 84th Recon Troop. Basic training for the division's 16,000 men began Jan. 4, 1943. It was cold on the wind-swept plains of north Texas, sharp foretaste of what was to come two years later in the Ardennes.

From Camp Howze, the 84th went to the Louisiana Maneuver Area for eight weeks of large scale war games beginning Sept. 19, 1943. So-called "free maneuvers," combining the operations of infantry, artillery, tank destroyers and other branches, climaxed the training.

Brig. Gen. Nelson M. Walker, then Asst. Division Commander, hailed Railsplitters as the "first team" on maneuvers, predicted they would see combat in 1944.

During maneuvers, Gen. Bolling joined the division as assistant commander, succeeding Gen. Walker, who went with another division and was killed in action.

The 84th moved to Camp Claiborne, La., following maneuvers. This was the one-time home of the 164th Inf. Regt., which fought at Guadalcanal, the 34th Inf. Div. and the [82nd Airborne](#), veterans of fighting in Europe.

In February 1944, regiments went out into swamps and hills around the camp for unit training to test the effectiveness of individual platoon leaders. Unit leaders were strictly on their own. Virtually all movements were made at night, camouflage was emphasized, at all times. To accustom men to battle conditions, units were limited to one jeep each. Map reading, patrolling and security measures were stressed.

April saw the entire division in the field for the first time since maneuvers, signaling the start of a series of problems which featured development of attack against outpost lines and conducting active patrolling and air reconnaissance. To avoid losses in future amphibious operations, hundreds of Railsplitters learned to swim at Valentine Lake. Doughs received training in air transport operations, including the use of parachutes and securing of equipment in planes. Several important administrative changes were made. In April, the division's first chief of staff, Col. Charles Barrett, was made CO of Div. Arty. Col. (then Lt. Col.) Louis W. Truman joined the Railsplitters in May to succeed Col. Barrett. Gen. Bolling took over division command June 15.

With all phases of their training complete, Railsplitters left Camp Claiborne in September for their staging area, Camp Kilmer, N.J. By Oct. 1, they were in England.

Crowded conditions at Cherbourg altered the original plan of landing at the Normandy port. Troopships docked instead in England. One of the 84th's transports was the first troopship to enter the English Channel and land at Southampton in World War II.

Their headquarters at Winchester, Railsplitters remained in England for a month. Mines and military police schools were conducted, The division supplied personnel necessary for ten provisional Quartermaster truck companies formed to assist in the operation of the famed Red Ball Express, shuttling supplies to fighting fronts.

**A**T Cherbourg, Brig Gen. John H. Church, former 45th Inf. Div. regimental CO, joined the advance detachment of Railsplitters as Asst. Division Commander.

The bulk of the division, preparing for action, waited word that would start it to the combat zone. Orders came in late October. First units landed, at Omaha Beach Nov. 1 with the remainder arriving the next three days. Crossings were made in LSTs, LCTs and Liberty ships.

Wasting little time, doughs sped through France and Belgium into Holland. Rarely had a division been moved from the States to the flaming Western Front with such speed as the 84th's. Within a week after the division CP was set up, Railsplitters were attacking one of the strongest sectors of the Siegfried Line.

For some time, Allies and Germans had been swapping punches along the northern sector of the Siegfried Line with

neither side able to land a solid blow. Jutting out into Allied lines the enemy salient at Geilenkirchen, a mining and transportation center with a population of 20,000.

Germans were just as determined to hold the city as the Allies were to take it, and they prepared for a fight to the death. Pillboxes, fire trenches, mine fields, tank ditches, dragon's teeth and concrete shelters studded the area around this anchor of the Siegfried Line.

Joos of the 84th, untried in combat but anxious to see how they stacked up against the vaunted Wehrmacht, were given the job of breaking the stalemate. For men whose combat experience had been limited to mock skirmishes in Louisiana swamps, it was a large order.

Loaned to the Second British Army for the operation, the 84th hit the Siegfried with two of its regiments, the 333rd and 334th, and attached Sherwood Yeoman Rangers. Its 335th was working, with the 30th Inf. Div.  
FIRST OBJECTIVE "A PERFECT OPERATION"

**T**O the 334th Inf. went the distinction of being the first 84th unit to seize the initiative in the Geilenkirchen sector. It jumped off at 0700 Nov. 18 to take Prummern. Subsequent thunderous action demonstrated the division's offensive spirit.

When their tank support bogged down in mud, 334th doughs, guns blazing under a pale November sun, poured through two gaps in an enemy mine field near Breil, knocked out pillboxes to their right, cut the road between Geilenkirchen and Immendorf, then charged into Prummern.

These were men who had seen New York and London sights just a few short weeks before. A dazed German officer said: "We knew we were facing new troops and expected it to be easy, but these men fight better than any troops I saw in Africa, Russia and France."

By evening, the 334th had moved through Prummern and occupied high ground before Geilenkirchen. Germans scratched 450 more names from their company rosters. Three hundred and thirty German fighting men huddled behind barbed wire in the 334th PW cage.

Fighting raged through the night in heavy-defended Prummern. From this knock-down, drag-out fight emerged the 84th's first heroes of World War II.

Lt. Carl C. Palm, Brooklyn policeman, cut off from the rest of his anti-tank platoon, climbed into a loft and spent the night firing into a German CP across the street.

T/Sgt. Ellsworth Dover, Miami, Okla., and his platoon laid a mine field from the front porch of the enemy CP to another house across the street. During the night a Tiger tank plunged into the mines and was wrecked.

Typifying the spirit of the 84th, this was just the beginning. Nov. 19, another 84th combat team, the 333rd Inf., launched an attack on Geilenkirchen. Germans, as expected, laid down a gauntlet of fire from pillboxes, machine guns, mortars and 88s, but Co. B smashed ahead to fight its way into the center of town within two hours. Hardly pausing, troops swept on toward Suggesterath.

Co. A met stiff opposition, engaged in bitter house-to-house fighting. Germans hurled 88s point blank. Snipers lurked in cellars, church steeples, on roofs. That night 1st Bn. took Suggesterath and dug in on high ground to the north, while 2nd Bn.

cleared Geilenkirchen.

In a few hours, Railsplitters had broken the Geilenkirchen salient and, in crushing the resistance, had taken the second largest German town to fall to the Allies up to that time.

Wes Gallagher, veteran Associated Press war correspondent, wrote of the operation: "It was revealed today that the 'Railsplitting' 84th Division was the American unit which teamed with the British to capture the German stronghold of Geilenkirchen in a "perfect operation."

While infantry did the heavy work, four division engineers claimed credit for being the first Railsplitters in Geilenkirchen. They had followed the infantry advance, had stopped to clear the road of mines. Resuming the march, these engineers took the wrong road and found themselves in the middle of the blazing town. To make certain no one contested their claim, they brought back 47 prisoners as proof.

In the next few days, Railsplitters pushed on from Prummern and Suggestath to consolidate newly-won positions. Resistance came chiefly from topflight Panzer Grenadier and SS troops. Gen. Bolling said: "The crack Panzer Grenadier and SS troops looked no different than those that were met in the initial stages of the campaign."

**R**AILSPLITTERS were detached from the Second British Army Nov. 23 and joined Ninth Army, XIII Corps. The Ninth was an offensive army and the 84th became one of its hardest-hitting spearheads.

Back to the division came its still-fresh 335th Inf., operating during the early phases of the 84th drive with the 30th Inf. Div., and the 2nd Armd. Div.

Before dawn Nov. 29, the 335th attacked Lindern, part of the Siegfried's formidable Wurm-Beeck-Leiffarth-Lindern triangle. Enemy infantry resistance, backed by pillboxes and tanks, was fanatic.

Lt. Creswell Garlington, Jr., Rollo, Mo., his platoon held up by machine gun fire, crawled 300 yards to knock out two guns with hand grenades. Lt. (then Pfc) Michael Citrak, Endicott, N.Y., silenced two others.

Sgt. (then Pvt.) Robert L. Nordli, Milford, Ia., saw six Germans running from a pillbox. One shell from his bazooka dropped them.

Two Co. K platoons, with Lt. Garlington's unit, Co. I., fought into Lindern at daybreak. They held the town against fire from all sides until help arrived.

Beeck was easier. Railsplitter artillery poured such a heavy barrage into the village that harassed Germans withdrew that afternoon. Two 333rd Inf. companies and two troops of the 113th Cav. Group, attached to the division, entered the town that night.

Elements of the 333rd and 334th ripped through the staggering Germans, taking high ground west of Lindern and north of Beeck. Furious fighting raged for Lindern during the night. Four or five Germans slipped back into the town and wounded a battalion commander, but sharp-eyed Railsplitter riflemen cut them down. By nightfall, Jan. 30, there was no question of who controlled Lindern and Beeck. The division was there in force and had no intention of leaving.

Germans had little time to catch their breath. December was only two days old when doughs went after Leiffarth which

fell before a perfect infantry-artillery operation.

The 909th FA rocked Leiffarth with a vicious barrage at 1200. Simultaneously, a smoke screen blocked the enemy's view of the town and high ground to the south. Five minutes later, when the artillery concentration shifted to Wurm, Mullendorf, Flahstrass and Hornsdorf, Cos. A and B, 334th, jumped off. Never more than 50 yards behind the artillery -- "so close they looked as if they were walking midst the bursting shells" -- 84th Joes moved into Leiffarth, dug in north of the town. The operation required only half an hour.

Germans struck back the next morning with tanks and infantry. Div. Arty. and bazookas quickly blotted out the attack, Railsplitters broke up a second counter-thrust before it could get started.

In preparation for future operations, the 84th spent the next few days in special training for assault on pillboxes. Suddenly, Krauts counter-attacked in the Leiffarth area, their most ambitious assault against the 84th up to that time.

Two Wehrmacht battalions smacked Railsplitter lines, one against the 335th's 2nd Bn., the other against the 334th's 1st Bn. Within four hours, doughs had blunted the thrust. One group of 200 enemy was boxed up. There were two choices -- retreat through mine fields or surrender. A German battalion commander was killed, his successor captured. This thrust cost the enemy 80 dead, 200 wounded, 73 prisoners.

Railsplitters had unfinished business -- taking Wurm and Mullendorf. First Bn., 334th, cleaned up Wurth in less than two hours Dec. 18. German prisoners complained of the paralyzing artillery barrage preceding the infantry attack. While 1st Bn. was taking Wurm, Maj. (then Capt.) James V. Johnston, Portland, Ore., led 2nd Bn. against Mullendorf. Within 15 minutes, the major, a six-shooter swinging from his hip, strolled from Nazi headquarters, smoking a cigar and carrying a Nazi party flag.

So ended the original mission of the 84th which had begun with the capture of Prummern a month before. Railsplitters, taking stock, counted 1549 prisoners, 112 pillboxes knocked out.

#### TROUBLE-SHOOTERS RACE TO RESCUE

**W**HILE the division prepared further assaults against the West Wall, Nazis unleashed a do-or-die counter-offensive through the Ardennes in Belgium. Von Rundstedt opened his drive Dec. 16 against a thinly-held line in the First Army sector. Three days later, strong enemy forces were penetrating between Houffalize and Bastogne and driving south of Marche toward the Meuse River.

Same day, the 84th was ordered to prepare for a move in the general direction of the German threat. Railsplitters resumed their trouble-shooting role. Preceded by Gen. Bolling and a small staff, the crack 334th Inf. led the division into Belgium, arriving at Marche early Dec. 21. Remaining division elements roared into town later that day. Although the weather was bad, the entire movement was made without the loss of a vehicle.

Railsplitters immediately were faced with problems they had never known in Germany. Information about the enemy was lacking. Reports circulated that German forces in American uniforms and vehicles had spearheaded the drive, that disguised German paratroopers had dropped in rear areas, that Germans were seizing American supply dumps.

The division did know that Germans had overrun an entire American division and had pushed others back as much as 40 miles. The Luftwaffe was out in greater strength than at any time since D-Day.

As in Germany, the Railsplitter unit which met the enemy onslaught was the 334th Inf. At Hotton, Co. F fought off an attack of seven Mark V tanks, a half-track and 20 infantrymen. Four tanks were destroyed. Co. E repulsed a sharp assault at Hampteau.

In the overall picture, these were mere skirmishes. Establishment of a line was the big job and doughs were ordered to hold rampaging Germans south of the Hotton-Marche road at all cost.

This was no simple job of digging foxholes and waiting. Railsplitters lacked flank support; they were an island of resistance to the all-engulfing tidal wave of German Panzers.

Hatchet Men calmly took positions along a 12-mile front extending from Menil to Hampteau and on to Melreux. Foxholes were spaced every 150 yards.

The greatest danger was a wide flanking movement that would cut the division off from the rear rather than a direct assault on its lines. To prevent this, Gen. Boiling sent out two battalions as a counter recon screen.

Third Bn., 335th, was to hold Rochefort and set up road blocks at Tellin, Grupont, Massigny and Harsin. First Bn., 333rd, shifted to Wanlin, Beauraing and Wellin.

Companies and platoons often operated independently during this confused situation. Co. L, 335th, was cut off between Marloie and Rochefort. Co. K, led by Lt. Leonard R. Carpenter, Fall River, Mass., fought its way out of a trap near Grupont, then joined Co. I in the defense of Rochefort which was under attack by enemy tanks and infantry. Fighting raged for 18 hours, with the Germans losing six to eight tanks. Later, hard-charging Railsplitters smashed into Marloie and relieved Co. L, which had lost all its officers when Germans scored direct hits on the CP.

First Bn., 333rd, the other unit of the recon screen, skirmished almost continually with the enemy. Three times, the battalion knifed its way out of a trap.

Lt. August Hundt, Madison, Wis., showed Germans how Railsplitters can fight even against unfavorable odds. Ambushed while leading a convoy near Wanlin, he drove his jeep full speed ahead, ran down a German, was fired on at point blank range, jumped from his jeep when an anti-tank shell hit it and then hiked back to his lines.

Germans weren't stopping the 84th. Enemy propaganda tabbed Railsplitters as the "Terror Division." That was sufficient praise.

It was bitter cold in the Ardennes. Hills and woods were covered with ice and snow. ' The mercury dropped to zero. Ground was frozen so hard it took five hours to dig a foxhole three feet deep. GIs suffered, but fought savagely.

Surrounded by an entire German company, five members of Co. G., 334th, knocked out a machine gun, killed or wounded 45 Krauts before returning to their lines.

Lone survivor of his ambushed patrol, Sgt. John E. Bell, Jetersville, Va., killed three attackers, then returned to his company through blinding snow.

Ordered to capture several Germans for questioning, T/Sgt. Harold L. Howdieshell, Dayton, Ohio, crawled forward under heavy machine gun fire. He snatched one Nazi from a foxhole by the nape of his neck, ordered a second out at the point of

his sub-machine gun.

When flaming guns failed, Railsplitters employed other means. Pfc M. L. Johnson, Asco, Tex., a medic, was captured on his way to a battalion aid station. Before night, he had talked his captor into becoming his prisoner.

The 84th fought minor skirmishes for three days before its flanks were filled in by two armored divisions. In the process, some of the Wehrmacht's best Panzer outfits were badly mauled.

**W**HEN the big attack came, Germans hit the center of the 84th's lines; Third Bn., 334th, spread out before the Verdenne-Marenne-Bourdon triangle, was in a hot spot. By taking Bourdon, Germans would cut the Hotton-Marche road, whose defense was the division's primary mission.

Because of widely spaced foxholes, Krauts had infiltrated two reconnaissance companies behind Co. I into woods half a mile west of Verdenne, Dec. 23. Supported by Co. A, 771st Tank Bn., doughs attacked the next afternoon.

Railsplitters smashed back as Germans deployed for an attack against Verdenne. While tanks spewed flame, yelling troopers closed in with machine guns and rifles. Panic-stricken Germans attempted to withdraw. The effort came too late. Sixty-seven prisoners were taken.

Simultaneously, another German force drove on Verdenne in a frontal assault, pushing ahead to a chateau 200 yards north of the village. Immediately, Germans began reinforcing their troops, extending the salient further north.

At 0100 Christmas Day, 1944, Co. K, 334th, and Co. L, 333rd, pushed back into Verdenne to catch surprised Germans in holiday celebration. GIs, who spent the day cleaning out Verdenne and the shell-riddled chateau, collected 305 prisoners. Smoking hulks of six tanks and other German vehicles cluttered snowy fields near the village.

Recapture of Verdenne made a pocket of the salient to the north. This pocket was approximately 800 yards long and 300 yards wide in woods midway between Verdenne and Bourdon. Huge cedar trees concealed at least two companies of infantry and five tanks.

Twice before dawn Dec. 26, Railsplitters clashed with Germans in the pocket. First, Cos. A and B, 333rd, launched an attack which was repulsed by heavy tank fire. Later, behind an artillery barrage, Germans struck back with infantry and tanks. Div. Arty. broke up the attack.

Shortly after daylight, Krauts tried to break out and succeeded in pushing 100 yards into the division's over-extended lines before being repulsed. Four tanks broke through to join the five already trapped during the battle.

The see-saw scrap continued all day. Elements of the 354th, along with Co. D, 87th Chem. Bn., smacked the pocket in an attack backed by Div. Arty. Four German tanks were destroyed.

Before midnight, desperate Krauts pushed tanks and infantry out again, but alert Railsplitters blasted away with everything they had. Three more Nazi tanks were wrecked. Germans withdrew to the woods to lick their wounds.

Meanwhile, another Railsplitter force handed the Wehrmacht a resounding blow when Germans attempted to break through at another point further north, between Marenne and Hampteau.



Eight tanks, ten half-tracks, several motorcycles, jeeps and 80 infantrymen struck the positions held by Co. I and a machine gun section of Co. M, 333rd. Hitting a string of mines planted across the road, the lead tank exploded, careening into a ditch. Bazooka teams went to work on the other tanks.

Pfc Clarence E. Love, Cherry Valley, Ark., and Pfc Alex V. Tiler, Paris, Tenn., set a second tank afire, while Pfc Carl R. Tisdale, Parteskala, Ohio, and Pfc Robert C. Holloway, Englewood, Calif., blew tracks off a third. Sgt. James M. Scanlan, Danville, Ky., a one-man team, scored a hit on the fourth, then saw it strike a mine and explode.

The second wave of tanks ran through Co. I's positions. One hit another mine. Sgt. Jesse Tenpenny, Morrisson, Tenn., and Pvt. Stephen Theil, Beaver, Pa., bagged a sixth with their bazooka. Two German half-tracks tried to bull their way through, but Sgt. Scanlan sent one into a mine field and set the other afire with his sizzling bazooka. Hand grenades killed two motorcyclists who had opened fire on him.

In half an hour, the flight was over. Germans fled to a nearby hill. Artillery was called and the big guns splattered them and their equipment all over the hillside. Seventeen wrecked vehicles later were counted.

What was left of the pocket at Verdennes produced still another battle. Railsplitter artillery blunted still another attack. When the shooting ceased, a patrol shoved forward, scooped up 15 prisoners and returned with the report that the pocket no longer existed.

#### "THESE GIs CAN DO ANYTHING"

**G**ERMANS had repeatedly attacked the Railsplitters -- Hatchet Men as they chose to call them -- and had been set back on their heels, suffering heavy losses. In the 334th's 3rd Bn. sector alone, the enemy had lost 16 tanks, eight half-tracks, an armored recon car, three motorcycles.

Said Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, VII Corps Commander, to Gen. Bolling: "The Army and the Corps Commanders have commended the division for its fine work since its arrival here. We nearly have them beaten. We must keep holding them."

The crushing battles near Verdennes and Menil had been enough for the Germans. As early as Dec. 27, prisoners admitted that the 116th Panzer Div., which had been one of the units facing Railsplitters, no longer existed as a fighting force. Germans again were on the defensive.

A decorated veteran of World War I, Gen. Bolling showed admiration for American doughs when he said: "I'm forever amazed at what these GIs can do -- anything!"

Railsplitters had been fighting with little rest for 45 days in raw weather. Harold Denny, veteran observer for the New York Times, wrote that conditions in the Ardennes were the worst in which American troops ever had fought.

**W**HEN the command had decided to push back the Germans without delay, the 84th was called for a leading role. Gen. Bolling, completely confident of his troops' ability, pronounced the division fit for any mission.

Railsplitters turned over their positions south of Marche to British troops Jan. 2 before rushing to the upper Ardennes to jump off in a new attack. The 84th now was teamed up with the 2nd Armd. Div.

Spurred by fanatical officers, Krauts resisted strongly. They had the advantage of dug-in positions, mine fields, road blocks. German artillery and mortar fire were heavy.

Weather was against the doughs. Although Railsplitters primarily functioned as support for tanks they usually led each assault. Several times doughs found it necessary to attack unsupported by armor, which was contrary to orders. The reason was that heavy tanks couldn't move forward on slippery roads. Driving snow almost blinded charging riflemen. Correspondents covering the campaign gave the weather and German resistance equal space.

Railsplitters plunged through deep snow to hit the Germans just as hard as they had at Geilenkirchen and Menil. Within three days, the enemy suffered such heavy losses that he grudgingly began a withdrawal.

Second Bn., 333rd, overran Marcouray. Bedraggled, cold German prisoners were stunned. "We were told to expect armored attacks and didn't know what to do when infantry attacked," they told interrogators.

If Germans resorted to new warfare tricks to meet difficult situations, Railsplitters proved they weren't born yesterday. Twice repulsed in attacks on a small village, 1st Bn., 335th, under Maj. William C. Stone, Brownwood, Ga., pulled one for the books. The major sent a rush order to QM for enough white woolen underwear to outfit the whole battalion. Doughs pulled long johns over their normal battle dress, advanced 900 yards across an open field and got within 100 yards of the village before sighted. Eight German tanks pulled out, followed by the infantry, which absorbed a solid drubbing.

First Bn., 334th, took Cielle Jan. 8, while 3rd Bn., 335th, bore down on the important town of Samree. Here, Germans fought viciously, groups of eight to ten tanks attacking north of the town. By nightfall next day, heavy losses forced them to withdraw. Troops of the 335th marched into the shattered town the next morning.

Elite SS troops were taking a terrific lacing. By now, Railsplitters virtually had destroyed the 2nd SS Panzer Div. Germans rushed forth the 9th SS Panzer Div., but it fared no better. The 84th rolled onward. Patrols of the 334th found Laroche, a key communications center, practically deserted. Cavalry units attached to the division hardly bothered to occupy it next day when they moved through.

Germans, who envisioned Christmas in Paris when they launched their December counter-offensive, now ran like beaten dogs. Railsplitters gave them little time to reflect on their misery.

Swift-advancing doughs grabbed Berismenil; cavalry seized Barzee and Mabage. Next, Railsplitters gobbled up Nadrin, Filly, Petite Mormont, Grande Mormont, Ollemont.

Maj. Roland L. Kolb, Fond du Lac, Wis., CO of 1st Bn. 334th, took a personal hand in disrupting German organization. Leading a five-man patrol into the woods behind enemy positions near Nadrin, he stuck a pistol into a tall man walking in the forest. His prisoner commanded the battalion facing him. The Nazi was astounded by the speedy, silent approach.

Houffalize, where the Germans were expected to make a stand, was the next big objective in the drive against the Bulge. But soundly whipped Nazis hardly paused in their retreat. A 333rd patrol under Lt. Jack Geneser, Chicago entered the town Jan. 16.

Earlier that day, a patrol under Lt. Blankenship, established contact with Third Army south of Laroche to close the gap. The 84th was commended by VII Corps for being the first division to gain its objective.

Railsplitters weren't finished despite two months of continuous battle. Cold mists concealed three key villages -- Gouvvy, Beho, and Ourthe. In its last Belgian, operation, the division was assigned the mission of taking, holding these points

midway between Houffalize and St. Vith.

Second Bn., 335th, jumped off Jan. 22 with its sights set on Gouvy. Withdrawing after stubborn resistance, Germans left a road block in front of the town. This obstacle overcome, Co. G entered the objective only four hours after the attack was launched.

Meanwhile, elements of the 334th assaulted Beho, a communications center. Against heavy opposition, 3rd Bn. swept into the town next day.

The 84th's Belgium mission was a closed chapter.

### A REPUTATION IN RECORD TIME

IN late March, 1945, Railsplitters stood on the banks of the historic Rhine, eagerly awaiting the signal that would send them across the river into the heart of Germany.

Back in November, new to combat, they had attacked the Geilenkirchen sector of the Siegfried Line, knocking out 112 pillboxes and bunkers within a month. Then they were rushed to the Ardennes in December to help stem von Rundstedt's counter-offensive and drive back the Germans. In January, they moved secretly to an assembly area in Holland. The Allies prepared for the last round against the foe.

Before they could meet the bulk of the German armies, these doughs had to cross the small but treacherous Roer River. Allied commanders planned carefully. The 84th, resting after the Ardennes battles, was picked to play a prominent role. Early in February, Railsplitters moved to positions along the river under cover of darkness. Feb. 23 was D-Day; 0330 was H-Hour.

A thunderous, 45-minute artillery barrage opened the attack. Amid bursting shells, 1st Bn., 334th, pushed off in assault boats. First waves received little opposition as Nazis were caught off guard.

Soon after the attack began, engineers had thrown bridges across the river and infantry streamed to the opposite shore. Anti-aircraft batteries drove off German planes sent over the bridges in bombing and strafing attacks.

Once across the Roer, the division experienced particularly heavy artillery and mortar fire. The advance roared ahead, Korrenzig fell, then Baal, Matzerath, Hoven, Golkrath, many others.

Battle-wise now, Railsplitters still kept their sense of humor. When his 3rd Bn., 334th, took Baal, Lt. Col. William J. Sutton, Fort Worth, posted an "Annexed to Texas" sign on a tree just inside the city limits.

Under sledge-hammer blows from division forces, German opposition weakened. Gen. Bolling sent a motorized column battering into German lines Feb. 27.

Commanded by Brig. Gen. John H. Church, Asst. Division Commander, this task force was composed of the 334th Inf. motorized; 771st Tank Bn., attached to the division; 326th FA, and smaller units.

Riding this time, 334th troopers lashed machine guns to the sides of trucks. First Bn., aboard tanks, was the point. Task Force Church moved out with all guns blazing. Behind, on foot, followed the 333rd and 335th.

The task force advanced 12 miles the first day, plunging along roads in a breakthrough reminiscent of earlier victories in France.

Doughs waved prisoners to the rear, kept going ahead. One complete FA battalion was captured intact. An officer replacement pool was overrun and the entire police force of one town taken prisoner.

Boisheim, important communications center, was attacked by the task force that night when most of the garrison was asleep. One officer, roused from his sleep, asked: "American, British or Russian?" Told his captors were American, he said, "Good," and surrendered his weapons.

Smoke still was spewing from Dulken factories when the 333rd delivered an ultimatum that the town surrender or be destroyed. When the terms were ignored, the division's big guns plastered the town and the infantry walked in to mop up. Railsplitters were in high gear now. The 335th headed for Krefeld, large manufacturing city. Down the road raced a German staff car. Doughs opened fire. Out jumped a colonel, arms raised.

After cleaning up Krefeld, the 335th took Moers and swept on to the Rhine Co. E was the first division unit to reach the river bank.

Meanwhile, the 334th battled through to Homberg, fought savagely for the town, then mopped up in the dark of night. Another 84th regiment was at the Rhine.

**F**ROM the Roer to the Rhine in ten days -- an advance of nearly 50 miles. Railsplitters had accounted for more than 9000 Germans killed, wounded or captured.

This was the pay-off to four months of fighting in the mud of Germany and the snow and ice of Belgium -- bitter fighting that tore chunks out of the German army. The trouble-shooters had built an enviable reputation in record time.

Railsplitters now looked back on Geilenkirchen and Lindern where they had crushed the enemy in their first taste of combat. They looked back at Marche, where they had stood alone before the might of the once-powerful Wehrmacht and where they held fast in the face of a potential Allied disaster.

And they looked ahead -- ahead to Victory and to Peace.