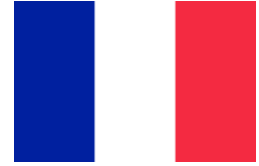




USA



USAREUR 7th US Army



FRANCE



3rd Inf. Div.



36th Inf.Div.



45th Inf. Div.



442nd RCT



USAAF

French-American Commemorations From Besançon to St-Dié

On the trail of the Soldiers of the 7th US Army and the USAAF

September 2011

Part V : Vosges Mountains 1/4

- **Saint-Nabord (Noirgueux), the crossing of the Moselle river**
- **Cleurie, the Purple Heart Valley**
- **Vagney, Medal of Honor 2nd Lt James L. Harris**
- **La Forge, Medal of Honor 1st Lt Victor L. Kandle**
- **Epinal American Cemetery**
- **Fremifontaine and the crossing of the Mortagne river**

Eric Vandroux

The crossing of the Moselle river



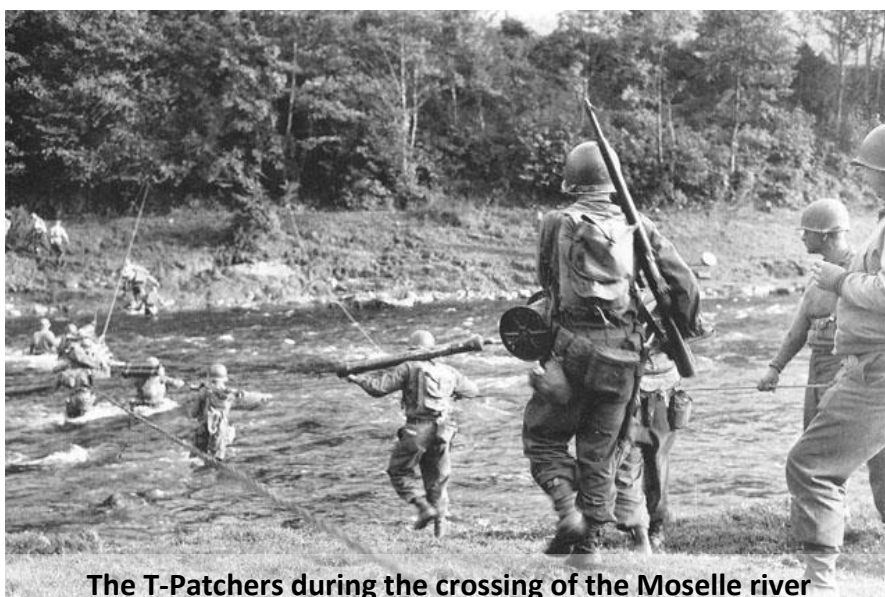
SAINT-NABORD



Noirgueux
September 21st, 1944 **36th Inf. Div.**

... “As was his custom, Truscott established a series of phase lines for the new VI Corps offensive, which was to begin at 0630 on 20 September. Phase Line I lay generally ten miles west of the Moselle and included the forward assembly areas needed for the Moselle crossing. Phase Line II included the Moselle River, the rail and highway center of Epinal on the Moselle, and the rising ground east of the river. After crossing the Moselle, Truscott planned to have the attack move in a more northerly direction, pivoting on the 45th Division at Epinal while the 3d and 36th Divisions swung north to Phase Lines III and IV, which included Gerardmer and Rambervillers. An advance to Phase Line V would carry the corps' center and left flank across the Meurthe River between Baccarat and St. Die. From the corps' forward positions on the morning of 20 September, it was twenty-five to thirty miles to St. Die and another forty miles from St. Die to the corps' long-range objective, Strasbourg on the Rhine.

On the eve of the new offensive, substantial portions of VI Corps were already on or beyond Phase Line I and were in position to start crossing the Moselle. The 3d Division was to cross in a zone that stretched from Le Thillot northwest eleven miles to a point a mile or so south of Remiremont, also on the Moselle. Once across the river and on Phase Line II, the 3d Division was to continue northeast, cross the Moselotte River, seize Gerardmer on Phase Line III, and drive on to Phase Line IV, supporting a 36th Division attack toward St. Die.



The T-Patchers during the crossing of the Moselle river

In the center, the 36th Division's crossing zone along the Moselle extended northwest about ten miles from the vicinity of Remiremont to Arches and Archettes. The division's ultimate objective was St. Die. The 45th Division, which had to redeploy from VI Corps' right to its left, was going to be a day or two behind the other divisions in moving up to the Moselle. The division's sector along the river

was about eight miles wide, and the first important objective was Epinal. After seizing Epinal and crossing the Moselle, the 45th was to continue northeast to secure Rambervillers and Baccarat.”...

From “US Army in World War II, Riviera to the Rhine”



3rd Inf. Div.

"...The 15th Infantry approached one of its greatest battles in the Vosges (and the entire war) as it neared the Cleurie Quarry. During the afternoon of September 26 the 1st Battalion relieved elements of the 36th Infantry Division in the vicinity of St. Ame. The enemy still held a roadblock on the bridge crossing the stream south of the town, which was covered by fire from positions a mere 300 yards from the bridge. The battalion immediately seized it and the crossroads there in the face of heavy enemy fire, just in time to prevent the enemy from detonating 250 pounds of dynamite laid to demolish the bridge. The 1st Battalion had thus secured the southern extremity of the line of departure for the following day's attack, and seized an important bridge.



The same afternoon, 2d and 3d Battalions moved into positions in preparation for the attack; 2d Battalion to an area just west of St. Ame, and 3d Battalion farther to the north.

At daylight, September 27, the 2d Battalion attacked east through the densely wooded sector following a 15-minute artillery concentration. The battalion pushed through the gloomy, rain-soaked foothills and almost at once the leading elements drew enemy mortar fire. The first group of enemy was contacted immediately north of St. Ame and was protecting the secondary road leading north from the town, from the woods west of the road. Elements of the 2d Battalion surprised the enemy from the rear and there was a brief skirmish, during which thirty-two prisoners were captured.

The battalion continued to the northeast through small-arms, machine-gun, and mortar fire, and boobytrapped roadblocks. By 1400 it had reached the secondary road running southeast from Bemont. Resistance then slacked off and the 2d Battalion pushed rapidly to its objective on the high ground northeast of St. Ame..." It was the beginning of this great battle..



From "HISTORY of the 3rd Infantry Division in World War II"

Two of the KIA of the 15th Infantry Regiment during this battle are :

Pfc Earl SILVERSTEIN

Died : September 28th 1944

Pvt Thomas J. LANDERS

Died : September 29th 1944



3rd Inf. Div.



7 October 1944



756th Tank Battalion

2nd Lt James L. HARRIS *Company A*

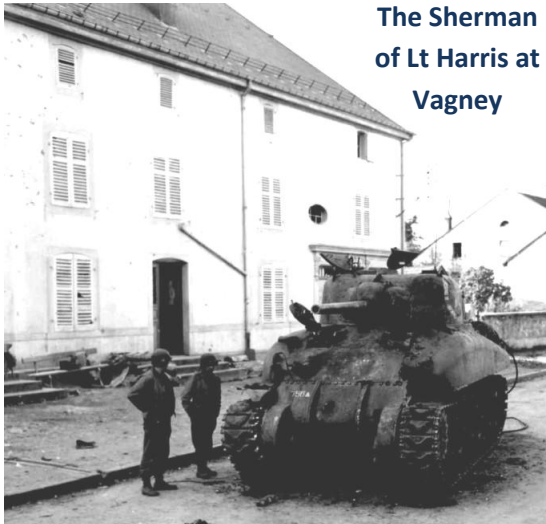


MEDAL OF HONOR

James L. Harris † 7 Oct. 1944

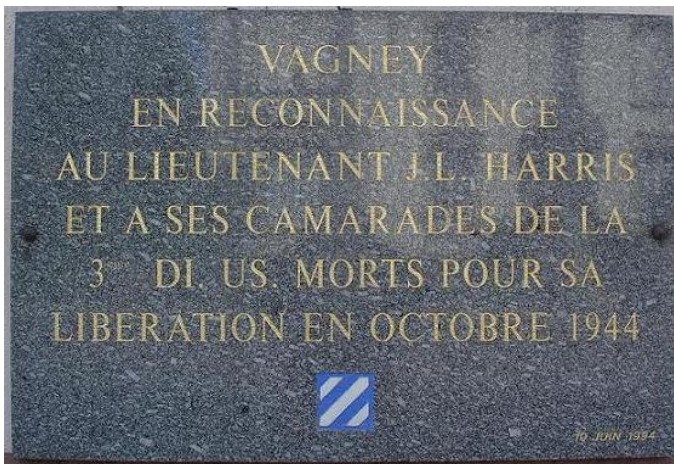
“Rank and organization:, U.S. Army, 756th Tank Battalion. Place and date: At Vagney, France, 7 October 1944. Entered service at: Hillsboro, Tex. Birth: Hillsboro, Tex. G.O. No.: 32, 23 April 1945.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty on 7 October 1944, in Vagney, France. At 9 p.m. an enemy raiding party, comprising a tank and 2 platoons of infantry, infiltrated through the lines under cover of mist and darkness and attacked an infantry battalion command post with hand grenades, retiring a short distance to an ambush position on hearing the approach of the M-4 tank commanded by 2d Lt. Harris. Realizing the need for bold aggressive action, 2d Lt. Harris ordered his tank to halt while he proceeded on foot, fully 10 yards ahead of his 6-man patrol and armed only with a service pistol, to probe the darkness for the enemy. Although struck down and mortally wounded by machinegun bullets which penetrated his solar plexus, he crawled back to his tank, leaving a trail of blood behind him, and, too weak to climb inside it, issued fire orders while lying on the road between the 2 contending armored vehicles.



The Sherman of Lt Harris at Vagney

inside it, issued fire orders while lying on the road between the 2 contending armored vehicles.



Although the tank which he commanded was destroyed in the course of the fire fight, he stood the enemy off until friendly tanks, preparing to come to his aid, caused the enemy to withdraw and thereby lose an opportunity to kill or capture the entire battalion command personnel. Suffering a second wound, which severed his leg at the hip, in the course of this tank duel, 2d Lt. Harris refused aid until after a wounded member of his crew had been carried to safety. He died before he could be given medical

attention. »

From “U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY”



3rd Inf. Div.



9 October 1944



15th Inf. Regt

Victor L. Kandle

First Lieutenant



MEDAL OF HONOR

Victor L. Kandle † 31 Dec. 1944

“Rank and organization: First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, 15th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division. Place and date: Near La Forge, France, 9 October 1944. Entered service at: Redwood City, Calif. Birth: Roy, Wash. G.O. No.: 37, 11 May 1945.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On 9 October 1944, at about noon, near La Forge, France, 1st Lt. Kandle, while leading a reconnaissance patrol into enemy territory, engaged in a duel at pointblank range with a German field officer and killed him. Having already taken 5 enemy prisoners that morning, he led a skeleton platoon of 16 men, reinforced with a light machinegun



Silver Star



Purple Heart

squad, through fog and over precipitous mountain terrain to fall on the rear of a German quarry stronghold which had checked the advance of an infantry battalion for 2 days. Rushing forward, several yards ahead of his assault elements, 1st Lt. Kandle fought his way into the heart of the enemy strongpoint, and, by his boldness and audacity, forced the Germans to surrender. Harassed by machinegun fire from a position which he had bypassed in the dense fog, he moved to within 15 yards of the enemy, killed a German machinegunner with accurate rifle fire and led his men in the destruction of another machinegun crew and its rifle security elements. Finally, he led his small force against a fortified house held by 2 German officers and 30 enlisted men. After establishing a base of fire, he rushed forward alone through an open clearing in full view of the enemy, smashed through a barricaded door, and forced all 32 Germans to surrender.



Epinal American Cemetery

His intrepidity and bold leadership resulted in the capture or killing of 3 enemy officers and 54 enlisted men, the destruction of 3 enemy strongpoints, and the seizure of enemy positions which had halted a battalion attack.”

From “U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY”



EPINAL AMERICAN CEMETERY

The Epinal American Cemetery and Memorial, 48.6 acres in extent, is sited on a plateau 100 feet above the Moselle River in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. It contains the graves of 5,255 of American soldiers dead, most of whom lost their lives in the campaigns across northeastern France to the Rhine and beyond into Germany.

The cemetery was established in October 1944 by the 46th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company of the U.S. Seventh Army as it drove northward from southern France through the Rhone Valley into Germany. The cemetery became the repository for the fatalities in the bitter fighting through the Heasbourg Gap during the winter of 1944-45.

From “American Battle Monuments Commission”



Memorial Day By Children of France, May 2010



45th Infantry Division



180th Inf. Regiment

and the crossing of the Mortagne river



The battle for the liberation of Frémifontaine started on the morning of 1 October 1944.

It was over on 23 October when the site “le Moulin” was taken and the Mortagne River crossed, in force.

During the 3 weeks of intense fighting, on a particularly difficult and heavily mined wooded terrain, attacks and counter-attacks, patrols and ambushes, took place successively.

On 6 and 7 October, a powerful enemy counter-attack, with the support of a tank company, submerged 2 companies of the 180th Infantry Regiment. During that action, the heavy shelling, by the division artillery, could not save F Company from disaster.



During that month of October 1944, the 180th Regiment of the 45th Division, recorded its heaviest casualties in the history of the Regiment : 119 dead, 554 wounded and 86 MIA.

**“FREMIFONTAINE TO ITS LIBERATORS
AMERICAN SOLDIERS
OF THE 45th INFANTRY DIVISION
WHO FOUGHT HERE FROM 30 SEP TO 24 OCT 1944
TO LIBERATE THE VILLAGE
IN ONE OF THE MOST SEVERE BATTLES
IN THE VOSGES MOUNTAINS
MORE THAN 100 OF THEM GAVE THEIR LIVES
PASSER-BY REMEMBER”**

From : - “The Story of the 180th Inf. Regt”,

- records from Jean-Marie Siret

