

ST. WENDEL, GERMANY

day 21

During the four-day respite, Melvin rested while most of the 10th Armored were able to visit the sites of historic Trier. There was an old Roman Coliseum, the



Present day St. Wendel

Porta Nigra arch and other Roman sites. One building in particular became a favorite haunt of most soldiers of the 10th Armored. This building, though bombed days earlier, had once safely stored thousands of bottles of fine champagne. While many of the bottles had been

broken during the bombing raids, there were dozens of cases of champagne still intact, and the young soldiers strongly felt they shouldn't let any of it go to waste.

The 11th Tank Battalion was assigned to Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Chamberlain and his Combat Command B. On Friday, March 16, at 3:30 a.m., Combat Command B departed Zerf, Germany, located just south of Trier. The ultimate destination was east to the Rhine River. To reach it meant encountering German pillboxes, barbed wire, anti-tank ditches, road blocks, and enemy troops.

The immediate destination on this day, however, was St. Wendel about thirty miles southeast of Trier. St. Wendel had long proven itself a communications center for the German army.

The route to St. Wendel was obstructed by a number of roadblocks which were easily blown from the road by the Shermans. Anti-tank mines were more problematic but surmountable nonetheless.

Following Combat Command A (CC A) by about thirty minutes was Combat Command B (CC B). Both combat commands were within twelve miles of St. Wendel by nightfall of March 16. Anti-tank mines placed in the roadway had slowed the column's progress to a crawl in some areas as Engineers were called forward to safely clear the mines.

On Saturday, March 17, CC A was the first to reach the Prims River northwest of St. Wendel. As CC B approached, both commands received strong small arms and artillery fire as the 55th Engineers built a pontoon

bridge across the small river. Heavy return fire by the 10th pushed the attacker into retreat. This meant the enemy was still ahead of them, somewhere, waiting once again for another opportunity to attack.

Closing in on St. Wendel, the 10th (CC A and CC B) captured an intact bridge at Castel only eight miles northwest of St. Wendel. Intact bridges meant no delay and faster resupply, which in turn meant swifter advances. This was to be the hallmark of General Patton's 3rd Army. Soon Combat Command B found themselves within three miles or so northwest of St. Wendel just outside of Bliesen, Germany. As other divisions headed directly south, CC B, notably the 11th Tank Battalion, continued east to achieve a distinct advantage of a second approach on the German Army's communication city.

The attack on the city of St. Wendel began just after midnight on Sunday, March 18. Both CC A and CC B attacked simultaneously using searchlights to expose the darkened battlefield.

As suspected, they were met with heavy resistance from the Germans. At this point in the war they could scarcely give up a single city, much less a city as important to the war effort as St. Wendel had become due to the communication equipment located there. On the evening of March 18, after heavy fighting and losses, CC A had reached the outskirts of the city. Other elements, including CC B, were within three miles of St. Wendel.

March 18 had proven itself to be a difficult day indeed. The

battle to capture St. Wendel continued all that day and into the night with CC A taking the brunt of it. They lost five medium tanks. In the process they destroyed at least one German King Tiger (it is believed that the 10th Armored was the first American division to encounter one of the new heavy German “super” tanks) and four German 88mm anti-tank guns.

Monday,
March 19,
1945, the
German
troops re-
treated from
St. Wendel.
Both ar-
mored divi-
sions of CC
A and CC B,



Capture of St. Wendel

without delay or rest, immediately rolled eastward twenty miles in the direction of Kaiserslautern, their next ordered destination.