

MIDWEST MEN WIN 7TH ARMY RACE TO REICH
DIVISIONS IN CONTEST TO CROSS FIRST
INTO GERMANY

DES MOINES REGISTER
dated 17 Dec 1944
by Gordon Gammick

FRENCH-GERMAN BORDER (Friday) ———

Numerous Doughboys from Iowa were among the first troops of the U. S. 7th Army to enter Germany Friday at 1:05 P.M.

Three infantry divisions vied for the honor of being first across the border, and the race was a typically American affair of "I wanna be first".

The winner was a comparative newcomer — the U.S. 103d Division, composed largely of midwesterners, and in combat one day short of a full month.

Maj. Gen Charles C. Haffner, commander of the 103d Division is a former vice-president of a Chicago, Ill., bank and probably the only American division commander in Europe who is not a professional soldier.

The 103d Division was a sort of dark horse in the contest to be first into Germany with the U.S. 79th Division to the right and another division to the left considered more likely winners. The division to the left reached the Reich 45 minutes after the 103d and the 79th Division facing severe resistance crossed the border a little later.

(Gammick did not identify the third American Division, but it was disclosed by the Associated Press to be the veteran U.S. 45th (Thunderbird) Division from Oklahoma and Colorado that has seen 367 days of action in Sicily, Italy and France).

To Doughboys making the crossing it was just hard and bitter fighting, but there was jubilation at division headquarters when a phone call to corps headquarters confirmed the honor.

"Hot dogs," exclaimed Capt. Harold Pasha of Richland, Ia., as big guns boomed nearby, relentlessly pounding Germany.

The Germans yielded the border positions only after bitter fighting all along the front northwest of Hagenu. The 103d Division bypassed the town of Climbach on both sides and Thursday repulsed THREE COUNTERATTACKS.

I was in a group of correspondents who first visited the 79th Division where a map-filled room was packed by officers receiving telephone reports from the front.

After one call, an officer grinned, "They say one town is so smashed there is nothing left for fraternizing, and this is the last chance for fraternizing for the boys," referring to Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower's strict ban on American soldiers fraternizing with anyone within Germany.

Maj. Gen Ira Wych, 79th Division commander, entered the war room.

"The situation looks pretty good," he said. "I think we will get across today."

Then we went to 103d Division Headquarters and found General Haffner puffing on a big cigar and looking pleased. It was fitting he should be, for his division has had a splendid record in its first month of fighting.

Veteran correspondents say they never have seen finer division morale.

"I didn't say anything to the men about the chance of being first across, but I guess they knew it," General Haffner said, "I've always fought to keep my name out of the papers, but I am glad to see my men get the credit."

"How far up can we get?" one of the correspondents asked.

"You can get right into Germany if you want to, but you'll get the hell shelled out of you," the general said.

Germany can wait, we decided.