

STORY OF THE 708TH....

(Continued from Page Five)

quietly up to Holland to join the fight there.

For one week after arriving in Liege, the 708th supervised the operation of military railways from Paris to the Belgian city — at that time the longest jurisdiction ever delegated to a grand division. From mid-October on, the territory changed in accordance with temporary situations, varying from jurisdiction east of the Meuse river only, to all territory east of the Meuse and west of the river back to Namur, Belgium.

Liege was found to be practically unmarked by war, except for a limited area along the river front which had been blasted by Allied bombing. Foundries and mills were humming, and stores displayed clothing, fruit, and ice-cream. Later the situation changed drastically with the advent of the famous December "Belgian Bulge". Aimed at Liege, the German drive fell 15 kilometers short, but went 40 miles past to the south.

It was on November 20th that the first German V-1 bomb attack began, and records show that in a ten-day period 331 buzz-bombs fell and detonated in the vicinity of 708th Headquarters. On many occasions it was necessary for all personnel of the outfit to sleep in an air raid shelter.

A Second Siege

There was a lull in V-1 activity until Dec. 15th, when a second siege, obviously timed to coincide with a big Nazi counter-attack south of the city, began to descend. By Christmas the V-1's had marked the city of Liege with scars resembling a prolonged artillery attack. Coupled with the buzz-bombs and the counter-attack, the Luftwaffe became active over the city, strafing and bombing at times in considerable strength.

Shortly before midnight on Dec. 22nd, a Nazi plane braved heavy flak and swooped low over the main railroad station to drop bombs. One bomb hit the 708th Headquarters building, knocking off a whole corner. But railway operations continued all the while, in spite of enemy interference. The 708th declined to evacuate, as so many other units were doing, but stayed on to control rail movements evacuating supplies from areas in danger of being overrun, and moving war materiel to U. S. combat forces fighting the Germans almost at the gates of Liege. MRS railroaders under 708th jurisdiction evacuated 10,324 loaded freight cars for a total of 134,212 net tons, and operated 26,120 train miles during the "bulge" period.

In Belgium the problem of telephone communications was much less serious than in the drive across France, because progress was slower, and existing Belgian lines were used to good advantage. There was some extremely good work done by battalion signal crews, supervised by the 708th's engineering department headed by Major John B. Arter, former B&O railroader from Pittsburgh, Pa. His signal officer is Capt. Frank H. Drake, off the DT&I.

Tonnage Always Moved

Backhaul and relocation of army supplies to safer areas during the enemy counter-attack required close figuring in the control of forward movements, supplying of empties and the balancing of power. But never once were lines tied up due to failure to move tonnage.

During the counter-attack not one unit of the 708th's jurisdiction backed up an inch, and not an ounce of supplies



The B&O gets a little foreign advertising in the form of a stencil on a captured German engine, (top photo). That's T/Sgt Russell Hurst (UP), a draftsman in the 708th equipment department, holding the stencil, while Lt. Col. John S. Major (B&O), 708th Supt. of Equipment, looks on.

In the lower photo, Colonel Carr is shown as he received the Bronze Star Medal at Liege, on Jan. 16th, from Brig. Gen. E. G. Plank, CG of Com Z Advance.

entrusted to their care was lost to the enemy through capture.

After the German bulge had been smashed, and U.S. forces began their inevitable drive into the Reich, the 708th found its jurisdiction inching eastward little by little. Units under the 708th operated the first trains into Holland and Germany, and in late February the division territory east of Liege alone encompassed almost 600 miles of rail lines, most of them over pretty rugged terrain. In February a total of 78 railheads were served in the territory. These were the unloading points for men and materials for the First and Ninth Armies and Advance Section of Com Z.

Rain or shine, sleet or snow, and in spite of enemy strafing, every one of these railheads was kept supplied with as many cars as could be promptly unloaded.

In February three operating battalions were assigned, and trains over each unit's division averaged from 90 to 115 per day. An average of 1700 loaded freight cars of war supplies, including foodstuffs, were handled daily through the railroad yards at Liege. This figure also included an extensive coal movement out of Holland.

As a good example of rail tonnage hauled, take the 24-hour period ending at midnight March 22nd, 1945. During this period the following number of cars

BRITISH DECORATIONS....

(Continued from Page One)

driving power. Under his leadership, American and British resources were successful combined for the fulfillment of the common purpose. The Allied Armies in Italy owe to General Gray a great debt for the magnificent work which he did while Director General of the Military Railways."

The citation covering Lt. Col. (then Major) McLellan's activities in the Italian campaign, recalls that "in his capacity of Supt. of Car Service, MRS, he has been the officer who has dealt directly with Mov AAI regarding the details of all British requirements for personnel, freight and AFV movements from November, 1943 to September, 1944. He has, through this period, made every possible effort to meet all requirements. He employed his excellent technical knowledge to advise how it was possible, by making minor changes, to make fuller use of the available rail capacity, thereby enabling the heavy and complicated movement, entailed by the regrouping of one Armies for the 1944 offensive, to be carried out in the minimum time and with the least effect on freight traffic. He cheerfully worked very long hours during the frequent periods of pressure, and readily complied with the many last minute changes resulting from alterations in operational plans in spite of the heavy extra labor involved."

THREE NEW COLONELS

Promotion of three field grade officers to the rank of full colonel has been announced at 1st MRS Hq. They are:

Lt. Col. Benjamin H. Decker, 2208 E. 22nd St., Salt Lake City, Utah. Now, serving as Executive Officer for 1st MRS Colonel Decker is a veteran of 30 years' service with the D&RGW Railroad, where he was a division superintendent.

Lt. Col. Oscar R. Diamond, 719 Minnesota Ave., McComb, Miss., 21 years with the Kansas City Southern. He's Ass't. General Manager, Equipment, for 1st MRS.

Lt. Col. Oliver W. Kempster, 235 S. Jefferson St., Peoria, Ill. He is head of the Security Section, 1st MRS Hq.

A very mean man once said: "There are three kinds of women: the beautiful, the intelligent, and the majority."

were handled on the grand division and delivered to armies at forward railheads: Ammo, 492; rock, 80; mail, 16; petroleum and other products, 130; Engineer bridge materiel, 460; coal and coke, 240; rations, clothing, vehicles, etc., 765; salvage, 89; Jerricans, 70.

This total of 2,342 loads represents a movement of 29,788 net tons in one day. In addition, three deadhead passenger equipment trains, eight troop trains, two POW trains, and 31 empty trains of 975 cars were handled. Practically all of this movement was over 352 miles of single and double track, 140 miles of which was operated by MRS only, without the help of Belgian or Dutch civilians.

On April 16th the 708th moved to Bad Godesberg, Germany. This was not the first time for operation in Germany, since the first USA locomotive had pulled into Aachen in early November, 1944, in 708th territory.

With the war moving at a rapid pace toward conclusion, another change of location was made three days later, to a spot 150 miles east of Cologne, from where rail operations both east and west of the Rhine could be handled.

— Capt. A. G. Gregory.