The summer of 1944 was initiation for the 442nd Combat Unit, composed mainly of Nisei Americans, second-generation Japanese-Americans. The Japanese-American soldier fought in Europe, the Pacific and Asia with assignments ranging from military intelligence to frontline combat service in the 100th and 442nd; 10,000 were combat veterans. They passed through Rome in mechanized convoy on June 9 and made contact with the German on the 26th, in between Suvereto and Campiglia. They participated in the liberation of Livorno (Leghorn) and crossed the Arno River in late August. Some participated in the glider landings of Aug. 15. It was at this point in history that practically most American ETO units were being redeployed to France. People do not realize, but in one of the little “unknowns” of history there were no plans for this unit to go anywhere but Italy. Because of the persistence of Colonel Charles W Pense the unit got the important Okay for France.

On September 30, the 442nd joined the Seventh Army and disembarked on the port of Marseille, France. They boarded their mechanized convoy and drove away from the seaport and its silvery balloons for the bivouac interior. They were given new French notes with “Emis En France, Serie De 1944,” printed on them, just like every new Allied unit. On the reverse of these was the tricolor in full color and the motto “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.” Troops were ordered to turn in old greenbacks from home for the money, which resembled store coupons according to one GI.

It was in their first bivouac that the young green troops got their lessons on how to cope with the weather. Within three nights of arrival, the weather at their bivouac area became downright unpleasant, and they were still considered inside the “nice” part of the Mediterranean region. Winds blew constantly. Tents were blown down constantly.

“This is the French Riviera?” troops were heard to query.

In three successive nights that followed, the winds then rose to bizzare gale proportions; life in camp was miserable. Timing was always “just right” (in reference to the sarcasm which people of the forties were more prone to make as compared to today) for no sooner had the tents gone down on each of those nights when it began to rain. And pour it did from all accounts.
The hills of the U.S. Seventh Army was situated around the mountainous country surrounding Épinal. Battles lay in forcing open icy passes, such as the Sionnem Gap and Saulces Pass. The U.S. Seventh Army to which the 443rd was attached, was stretched out some 90 miles across the round topped Vosges Mountains and hills about Sarrhebourg and Strasbourg—both the Vosges and its company the Jura Mountains are great natural barriers in Europe, though not as imposing as the Sierra Nevadas or the Rocky Mountains of America. On the eastern flank toward the Alps were the newly formed French 1st Army. Major passage was through a low pass, little more than 300 meters high and 20-30 kilometers wide known as the Belfort Gap, or Burgundian Gate, an ancient namesake. But all the rail lines and highways through the Belfort Gap were smashed.

Both those armies were given the assignment of liberating the region of France known as the Alsace-Lorraine. In this area, the mountain French were quite poor. Allied lines encountered the lower half of the so-called Siegfried Line. U.S. lines generally ran between Strasbourg and Wissemburg on a 22-mile front. Everybody's mission; press the Germans back to the Rhine.

The valleys around Brumieres, Biffontaine, St Dié and numerous others were full of knee-deep icy fox holes, command posts and forward lines that were always on red alert because the enemy was not only close; they launched bitter counterattacks. During one counterattack near St Dié, the 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment of the 36th (Texas) Infantry Division was encircled and cut-off by the Germans. For two days U.S. units had been thwarted in their rescue attempts. This part was so forested, that tanks alone would not do the trick. On October 25 the doughfoot of the 100th and 442nd began moving, along with various artillery and support units, including the 636th and 752nd tank battalions. Despite telescopic snipers, prodigious minefields, tanks and hand-to-hand combat— they managed to made contact with the "Lost Battalion." Sgt Tako Senzaki, leading I Company of the 3rd Battalion, was the first to break through on October 30. The drive, the determined mission, took a high toll, as over 800 Japanese-Americans were killed or wounded.

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Since the end of WW II, stories of heroic daredevil pilots have formed legendary accounts to all who request them; some are legend but some are true stories of the heavens. They flew P-38’s, P-47’s and what is seen at left, P-51’s, considered by many the best Allied aircraft. The P-51 with red-tail is the 332nd Squadron; they never lost a bomber they escorted to enemy fighters; bomber squadrons requested them; they were the only American outfit to sink an enemy destroyer in Europe with fighters, and they shot down the last German fighters in their theater of operation. Over 800 pilots were college graduates from Tuskegee Institute in the war years, and many flew in the 332nd. Their exploits were rarely told in the war. Tuskegee was an all-black college. Tuskegee pilots destroyed 111 enemy planes in combat. They were a well-kept secret of WW II.

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All American troops occupied the central part of a great European Forest Belt (Deciduous) where a cordon of man-made battle lines extended some 500 miles. Those 500 miles of battle front lines roughly paralleled Nazi Germany’s border through December. Along northeastern Belgium, both the U.S. Ninth and the U.S. First Army lines were lined up just below the British Second and Canadian First Armies that went up into Holland. The XXIX and IX tactical bomb aircraft of the U.S. Ninth Air Force, under Generals Quesada and Weyland, gave them air protection.

In the central position stood the U.S. Third Army with the aircraft from the XIX tactical Ninth A.F. Nearest the Swiss border
Forward command posts had to be reestablished all along the front and on the 22nd of December American GI’s launched a counterattack in the snow and fog. Patton’s Third Army was responsible for the operation. 19,000 Americans paid with their lives before the entire Battle of the Bulge ended; a world minus computers. On December 23, the fog which had concealed the German columns began to lift and the sun came out and so did Allied air support. Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg comprised the center of the battle. Many trains crisscross both countries. Bastogne calls (continued on p 225)