

Rounds Complete Mission Accomplished

Sgt. George R. Hall

Nous soutenons

324 th FA Bn

Casualties are often heavy in battle. But, if only one man dies in taking a strong point, a pill box or a city – if that man is a friend, the cost seems unbearably high.

These men were our friends. They died doing their jobs – and doing them well. Long after the thunder of howitzers has died away and Peace comes to the world again, we shall remember their gallantry – and their sacrifices.

KILLED IN ACTION

Pokela, Melvin W.	S/Sgt	2 July 1944	Detroit, Michigan
Fuschillo, Richard	Pvt	9 July 1944	New Britain, Conn
Giannotti, Andrew J.	S/Sgt	9 July 1944	Richmond, Virginia.
Staggs, James C.	Pfc	9 July 1944	Paragould, Ark
Dunn, Daniel J.	Pvt	6 Aug 1944	Philadelphia, Pa
Whorton, Randale J.	Pvt	3 Sept 1944	Moundsville, W.Va.
Watts, Joe	Pvt	21 Oct 1944	Haddix, Ky.
Whitehead, Jerom. E.	S/Sgt	21 Oct 1944	Denver, Col.
Camardi, Frank J.	Pfc	21 Oct 1944	Washington, D. C.
Leonard, Hugh J.	1st Lt	23 Nov 1944	Windsor, Ont.
Citrock, Joseph R.	Pvt	30 March 1945	Orelando, Pa.

CAMP ATTERBURY, INDIANA

The 324th Field Artillery, a battalion of 155 mm howitzers, became an integral part of the 83rd Infantry Division when the latter was reactivated at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, August 15, 1942.

Its cadre had arrived July 16, 1942, followed four days later by Battalion officers. During this period of formation and the initial phases of training the battalion was under the command of Major Edwin C. Walker. Selectees, scheduled to report August 15th, began to trickle in on October 15th, two months later.

Basic training started in earnest the middle of November and the slow and exceedingly painful transition from civilian to soldier was underway. Camp Atterbury was merely a collection of new buildings standing upon consecutive layers of dust until an unprecedented amount of rainfall obligingly turned it into a sea of mud. But training slogged on despite the conspiracy of the elements to retard the growth of the embryo cannoneers.

Thanksgiving brought the first grisly experience of spending a night in the field. It was unusually cold and the recent civilians chattered noisily in their tiny tents.

The winter of 1942-1943 was the coldest Indiana had experienced in many years and to the green battalion it seemed the coldest they had ever known.

December brought a change of leadership when Lt Col William J. Daniel replaced Major Walker as Battalion Commander. Major Owen A. Kirkland became Executive Officer in February and a group of officers and enlisted men were shipped as cadre to the 75th Division located at Ft Leonard Wood, Missouri.

There was talk of including the division in the coming Second Army Maneuvers although much of its preliminary training was yet to be completed. When the decision was definitely made to take the green division, two additional weeks were spent in the field in feverish preparations.

On June 19th the 324th left Camp Atterbury for two months of mock warfare in the hills of Tennessee.

MANEUVERS, TENNESSEE

Maneuvers took place in the Cumberland River area bounded on the north by Lebanon and Hartsville, south to Murfreesboro. The battalion was stationed in the vicinity of Springfield and Lebanon, Tennessee. Prior to the maneuvers that started in July, the 83rd held preparatory exercises to sharpen its teeth against the older more experienced divisions.

To the uninitiated, maneuvers consisted merely of a confused wandering about in the wilderness saluting command cars, outwitting umpires and searching vainly for food. But unconsciously the artillerymen were learning the lessons of warfare well.

Three divisions participated — one complete Corps and part of another. One armored and one infantry division was pitted against a reenforced infantry division. Corps artillery took part on both sides.

In all, eight exercises were held, each division having an opportunity to play the attacking and defending forces. Problems involved fighting over all types of terrain, projected river crossings, defense against river crossings and a wide variety of military tactics.

When pieces were laid, an umpire in Fire Direction Center computed where the fire would land, radioed a »fire marking detachment« which indicated by means of flags where shells were estimated to be falling and a defense umpire then proceeded to assess the casualties inflicted.

Light artillery fired blank cartridges and the medium artillery detonated dynamite charges to provide realism, create combat atmosphere and aid umpires in establishing position and identification of various pieces.

A night crossing over a pontoon bridge was successfully accomplished bringing the battalion in behind the defending forces.

The maneuvers physically were more rigorous than actual combat. No lights were permitted at night and more foxholes were dug in the sandy soil of Tennessee than ever were excavated in the heat of combat.

Supervision was exercised over food and a strict water discipline maintained. The purchase of unauthorized food from civilians was expressly forbidden and a substantial fine levied upon all officers of men found guilty of a violation in this category. Only water allowed to be used had to be derived from approved supplies.

Naturally, in a situation of this nature, there occurred slight irregularities and a few mild and innocent evasions. One watermelon cost an officer the staggering sum of 75.00 and an entire battery developed the G. I.s and milled around the latrines after drinking water from an unauthorized source.

Wood ticks and chiggers cheerfully contributed more than their share to the horrors of the imaginary war, harassing both sides impartially.

The 155s were never roadbound and laid fire wherever and whenever it was needed, surprising both umpires and enemy. The

battalion was commended many times for rapidity of movement and the fluidity with which it surged across fields and difficult terrain to achieve objectives.

Problems were completed during the week and weekends used for returning to assigned areas. Oddly enough, later in Europe, most of the battalion's moves were made on Sunday.

When maneuvers ended in September both battalion and division had performed excellently, displaying aggressiveness, initiative, and unusual combat discipline.

Fifteen day leaves were granted 50% of the organization at the termination of the mock hostilities. As a final conditioning for the strenuous days of motor stables to come, the remainder of the battalion alternately rode and walked the 150 miles to Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky.

CAMP BRECKINRIDGE, KENTUCKY.

In contrast to the mud of Indiana and choking dust of Tennessee, Kentucky was a walking soldier's paradise. Camp Breckinridge boasted hard surfaced roads – with mud available for field problems.

Evansville, Indiana replaced Columbus as the »pass« city and long lines of impatient GIs waited for the bus every Saturday afternoon. Tiny Morganfield bulged at the seams struggling to provide entertainment at the USO and care for the overflow of weekend visitors. In surrounding towns and villages men found new friends, new sweethearts, new favorite hangouts. And the monotonous regimented existence of life in the Army went on.

Training proceeded along lines designed to eliminate the few weaknesses disclosed by maneuvers. Two of the coldest weeks of every month were spent in the field living in pup tents and crowding around battery fires for warmth. Trucks, crowded to the tail gate, sped back to the barracks every evening so that men could attend movies, take showers, or merely stretch out on sagging bed springs in an effort to soak up a little surplus heat before returning to a cold nights sleep in the great outdoors.

Early in December all batteries were put overstrength by the arrival of a number of officers and men from Fort Bragg, N. C.

Football games between the batteries were discontinued and a battalion basketball team represented the 324th in a division league. Several clever fighters gave notable performances in the division Boxing Tournament.

Wonderful rumors were afloat in December of 1944 and January 1945. The 83rd was going to California. Musing upon

such a delightful possibility carried us cheerfully and happily over the cruelest months of a long cold winter.

In December, Lt Col George W. Irvine assumed command of the 324th F. A. when Lt Col William J. Daniel was transferred to the 323rd FA Bn. Major Norman R. Bottom was assigned to duty as Battalion Executive Officer and Major Owen A. Kirkland took over the duties of S-3.

When the California bubble burst, the long grind started anew-calisthenics, motor stables, care and cleaning of equipment and the hundred other garrison duties that men dislike.

CAMP BRECKINRIDGE, KENTUCKY (Cont'd)

Now a new rumor sprang to life and ran like wildfire through camp. The 83rd Division, on the basis of its performance on maneuvers, had been designated for overseas. Schedules speeded up and interest in training brightened perceptibly. Emphasis was placed on night problems and two nights a week were spent overnight in the field with no fires permitted after dark. There were Service Practices, Rsops and a long Motor March in the dead of night. On Infiltration courses men crawled on their stomachs under machine gun fire and barbed wire entanglements. All individual qualification requirements were completed.

Pictures on »Why We Fight« were attended by roster. One short informative film explained the procedure to be followed in boarding the transport. Twice a week on the screen we viewed the elaborate interior of a spacious troopship filled with hundreds of comfortable bunks. An authoritative voice stated over and over, »You will place bags and equipment on your own individual bunk and remain there awaiting further orders.« How well we were to remember those words.

The physical training program stiffened and the Obstacle Course exacted a daily toll of casualties. A surprising number of men developed alarming symptoms of illness prior to the start of each 25 mile hike.

February 10, 1944 the organization officially changed from truck to tractor drawn. Picked men attended a Tractor School and upon their return all drivers quickly became proficient at handling the tracked vehicles.

GHQ tests were successfully passed. Men straggled back into camp from furloughs, weak and exhausted.

The transfer of several officers and 52 men on March 7th brought the battalion down to T/O strength.

Hectic weeks set in. Excitement and tension mounted. Supply sergeants had little time for rest. There were numerous inspections day and night. Battery property was crated and packed. Duffel bags strung up in the Supply rooms swelled with new clothing and equipment. When summer clothing was turned in, hearts sank. Could we be going to Iceland?

Service Clubs, Guest Houses and surrounding towns filled up with wives, sweethearts and relatives. In the midst of this feverish preparation a billeting party secretly slipped out for an undisclosed destination.

On March 29th came frantic last minute dates-goodbyes-tears.

On the 30th of March the battalion fell out of the barracks for the last time, formed a column of twos and marched silently up the road to board a special train at 1750 hours. As the train pulled out and men watched the familiar landmarks of Camp Breckinridge fall back and fade out in the distance, all wondered what the future held in store for the 324th Field Artillery Battalion.

CAMP SHANKS, NEW YORK

Ask men what they remember most about Camp Shanks, New York and there will be many answers. The long march up the hill and quarters in ramshackle barracks that had given the best years of their lives to World War I-our being the last unit to arrive and, with immediate shipment a probability, the disappointment of having no passes made available-the maddening frequency of inspections-the inevitable gas mask drill-all night poken games after our last pay day in the states-the swell food-final opportunities to make allotments, insurance changes and the interesting »8« ball speech. Some will mention the cordon of sentinels around the area where it was simplicity itself to slip out of the area but an officer's presence necessary to get back in after going to chow-the daily Abandon Ship Drill and the individual with the microphone who prefaced all his remarks with, »When you bo'd that transport«

And, finally, the rigorous physical inspection some said would disqualify one third the battalion, apparently intended to determine by casual medical appraisal whether each man possessed the required number of arms and legs.

April 5th, after standing for one hour with heavy packs in snow covered streets in accordance with some strange regulation, we marched or lurched to the train, made a short run to Weehawken, New Jersey, and a quick transfer to New York City by ferry. After

last minute coffee and doughnuts by the Red Cross, the battalion came face to face with its future home – H. M. S. Orion.

H. M. S. ORION

His Majesty's Ship Orion could scarcely be called a floating palace. Formerly engaged in West Indian Trade before War had elevated her to a position of respectability in the Battle of the Atlantic, in the eyes of a few irreverent individuals she was a grimy tub of questionable ancestry and doubtful vintage. Months later when word came that she had been sent to the bottom, many an artilleryman heaved a grateful sigh of relief at such an ultimate triumph of justice.

Crowding into the limited confines of a narrow room, men glanced vainly about for the bunks the movie had insisted we sit upon while awaiting further orders. There was a bit of contusion at the door and fifty additional men pushed in. That night two hundred and fifty men swung disconsolately in hammocks suspended from the ceiling while the remainder slept under the tables, atop the tables and two deep on the floor.

Next morning as the ship pitched and tossed, arguments arose as to how far we had travelled during the night. A few less hardy and slightly seasick men groped weakly topside for a breath of fresh air and discovered the Orion still tied firmly to the dock.

Shortly thereafter, everyone was sent below and at 0800 hours, April 6th, the Orion slipped its moorings and set out to sea, past the Statue of Liberty, to join the convoy forming offshore.

Breakfast. Tables were cleared, a few late sleepers swept up off the floor and the morning meal served by disgruntled KPs. There was strange food in our plates that day. After the first horrible experience with English food most men relied solely upon the Ship's Store for daily rations.

Shipboard diversions consisted mainly of movie everyone saw six times, poker and black jack games, Abandon Ship Drills, and the ship's amazing public address system. Trough the loudspeaker a mysterious unidentified voice in the precise clipped speech of the English dispensed such choice tidbits of information as, Garbage! » Garbage may be dumped aft over the starboard rail at 1000 hours.«, »Smoking will be permitted on the upper deck«, and Bla-a-a-ckout! Bla-a-a-ckout is now in force!«

There were the usual rumors, considerable conjecture, but no official information as to our destination.

There was no enemy action and, after a voyage of eleven days, on April 16th we pulled alongside the Hersey Docks in Liverpool, England.

ENGLAND AND WALES

An additional 24 hours spent aboard seemed the most difficult of the entire trip. That night we staggered ashore in blackout under a crushing load of equipment and duffel bags, wavering a little uncertainly on legs unaccustomed to firm land. A short walk and then up into one of those miniature English trains. The American Red Cross came to the rescue and a debatable point was raised as to which was more welcome – coffee and doughnuts or the reassuring sight of smiling and pretty American girls again.

A brief ride and at Ruabon, Wales, the organization was transferred to trucks that proceeded in disturbing fashion and in great haste up the wrong side of the road. Arriving at Bryn-y-pys, Flintshire, Wales at 0300, April 18th. The men were assigned to pyramidal tents and dropped off to sleep with little effort.

A battalion kitchen was set up and the batteries ate in turns. Considerable trouble was experienced with the water supply that developed the annoying habit of shutting off, when a man was all soaped up in the shower.

Passes, unhappily, were not immediately forthcoming and many mused on the incongruities of War, standing inside the fence, watching Italian PWs, free to roam the countryside, wander over to stare curiously at the imprisoned Americans.

In a few days passes were issued to Wrexham, Chester and Overton. We became familiar with the strange English habits, customs and perplexing monetary system, but the utter lack of modern plumbing facilities caused many a Yank to shake his head in puzzled disbelief.

With the WAAFs and ATS girls and Pubs with weak beer, our futures looked brighter. Kids begged for "Cum Chum", and Fish and Chips became a steady part of the GI diet when on pass.

On May 2nd the battalion marched to Camp Aston Park, Shropshire, England, near Oswestry, bivouacing first, in pup tents, later in pyramids and shared the fairways of an exclusive golf course with a flock of English sheep.

Passes were frequent to Oswestry and Shrewsbury. Motor and Gun Parks were established along a secondary road four miles from the battalion area, and the Puns took a beating enroute. Into a regular

training schedule were inserted classes in waterproofing of vehicles and howitzers.

Appetites improved to a point where night guards were placed on every kitchen.

May 16th, Corps Exercises were held on the hills around Ystrad-felte, Wales, in cold rain, wind and fog. There were Corps Shoots, Service Practices and Calibration of pieces. On May 27th the battalion returned, exhausted and happy indeed, to the paradise of Aston Park.

On June 6th, news of the Invasion electrified the battalion, and it turned to training with renewed vigor and a grimness of purpose. Everyone knew he would soon be in combat.

Under cover of darkness June 17th, at 0235, the 324th slipped out and headed southward toward the Channel Ports. A long noisy column of howitzers and vehicles thundered over narrow cobblestoned streets, through England's medieval cities and towns. Curbs lined with excited Englishmen that day waving good luck and goodbye.

In the marshalling area at Camp Winterborn, Abbas, Dorchester, where we arrived at 1550, ammunition was issued, life preservers, anti-seasickness pills distributed, equipment shortages frantically made up and a shower available, the last for many months. Our many hours of practice in waterproofing vehicles and howitzers were gladly thrown into discard when we were told that waterproofing would not be needed. Only 24 hours had elapsed before we boarded four LCTs and one LST at Weymouth, England, and pulled out into the harbor to await darkness.

CHANNEL CROSSING

The night of June 18th our boats joined up with the convoy and started across the English Channel in the worst storm in eighty years. Angry seas buffeted and wrenched at the vessels – swept across decks and tore equipment loose from its moorings. Men huddled weak and miserable against the rails for protection against the howling wind that drenched them with cold sticky salt water, so sick they wanted to die. Some LCT's turned back but our entire organization arrived off Omaha Beach at 2200 hours, June 19th. One LCT almost smashed the famous floating dock.

That night we experienced our first enemy air attack when German bombers flew down to destroy shipping crowded into the harbor. There were exploding bombs, the deafening, earsplitting noise of tremendous concentrations of ack-ack fire. The

sky was brilliant with tracers cutting strange and beautiful crimson patterns in the night. Parachute flares threw a ghastly half light over the weird scene of pitching creaking craft that constantly threatened to break apart and spill the sick men into the sea.

Next morning the storm had subsided and from the coast of France, dark and forbidding against the skyline, came the sound of battle. Silver barrage balloons swayed overhead and out to the very horizon ships of all shapes and sizes rose and fell on the turbulent waters. Tanks lay grotesque and half submerged in the shallow water. The broken-up condition of the floating dock necessitated landing through the surf, and we wished our vehicles had been waterproofed.

Headquarters Battery was the first ashore on the morning of the 20th. Rapidly rising tides drowned numerous motors, and amphibious bull-dozers came to the assistance by pushing these vehicles ashore. Battery A's LCT sank just short of the beach but the hazardous salvaging operation was completed in 48 hours.

The battalion moved up from the beach through battered Treviers and scenes of utter devastation, to an assembly area near Bricqueville, France, to service and clean its salt-water soaked equipment.

NORMANDY

On June 27th the 83rd relieved the 101st Airborne Division and Battalion went into firing position north of Carentan. The first round against the enemy was fired the 27th of June, 1944 at exactly 2114 by Battery »B«, working in general support of the division, the howitzers laid harassing and counterbattery fire on enemy guns shelling the Carentan bridge. The first Base Point was a church tower in Sainteny that the Germans were using as an OP.

July 1st, the batteries displaced forward to a position south of Carentan to better support an attack scheduled for the 4th of July. This position proved so close to the infantry lines we were constantly subjected to small arms fire in addition to the usual mortar and artillery shells. In this position we suffered the first casualty of the war when one of our L-4s crashed while flying observation.

In Normandy the awful odor of Death hung heavy in the air, bloated cattle killed by the terrific concussion dotted every field, and German and American equipment was strewn recklessly about.

All batteries participated in firing one round at 1200 hours on July 4th, with every gun in the ETO. Howitzers fired almost continuously throughout the day.

Enemy artillery scored a chance hit near a Battery »B« howitzer, killing the Section Chief and two cannoneers, and wounding a third.

As the enemy fell slowly back through the hedgerows, we occupied new positions near Sainteny and Bois Grimot, firing TOTs on batteries picked up by air OPs. Here the battalion witnessed the terrific Allied air assault preceding the crushing St Lo offensive that drove the German Army in disastrous retreat from Normandy.

On July 28th the enemy withdrew from range and we moved to cover Division's objectives with defensive fire.

There were wide spread rumors that the war would soon be over, and most of us were half way home.

From four positions in Normandy the battalion fired a total of 13,695 rounds. Success of the Allied bridgehead was now assured, and the action dispelled the last threat that the tiny beach head might be thrown back into the sea. The back of enemy resistance in the hedgerow country had been broken.

On July 29th, in a rest area at Hauteville, Le Guichard, France, vehicles and equipment were checked and cleaned. A drill schedule was inaugurated and, after hours, a few stray chickens were liberated.

All members of the battalion were authorized to wear a Bronze service star for the Normandy campaign.

In Normandy the battalion had taken quickly to the grim ways of combat – learned the bitterness of personal loss – realized the sacrifices necessary for ultimate victory. It had accumulated battle wisdom, developed courage and patience and daring. From the crucible of combat the 34th emerged a smooth and cohesive unit – a powerful and effective fighting force destined to play a major role in the conquest of Germany.

NORTHERN FRANCE

After five days »rest« at Hauteville, the Battalion assembled in the vicinity of Pontorson, France for an attack on the city of Dol.

Placed in general support it was not necessary to fire a round as the infantry overcame weak and scattered resistance to take the city with no artillery preparation.

Close on the infantry's heels we moved to Hirel on August 5th, then again to Limonay France, next day for the assault on St Malo. Almost immediately a fierce artillery duel broke out. One of C Battery's howitzers was knocked out of action when an enemy shell ignited powder charges and burned a tire. Five casualties, all wounded, were sustained during the exchange.

Service Battery's ammunition train was subjected to a sustained bombing attack by enemy aircraft but escaped damage. Several prisoners were taken by one of the ammunition trucks after an exchange of hand grenades between them and the driver.

Although the Citadel held out until the 17th, the town of St Malo was cleared on August 10th and we moved on Dinard, a French resort town, taking up positions one mile north of Pleslin, France.

This city was defended by numerous strong points consisting of heavily reinforced concrete pill boxes connected by a series of underground communication trenches. A direct hit by one of the howitzers neutralized the entire system forcing 600 occupants to surrender. Dinard was cleared and occupied on the 14th of August, and the howitzers turned on the Ile de Cezembre.

The Ile de Cezembre was a fortified island in the harbor, that had been harassing 83rd Division troops during the battle of St Malo. An OP was established on Hill 42, near St Lunaire, France, and picked gun crews, manning three captured 15 cm SP guns, placed effective fire on the island until ammunition ran low. Two of our 155's were brought forward August 16th and promptly knocked out an entire battery of 15 cm guns with a single shell.

Shortly afterwards the island lost its last remaining artillery piece, and leaving the garrison imprisoned in the battered stronghold, movement was made to a bivouac area near La Germondais, France to overhaul and Service equipment.

In the battles of St Malo and Dinard 4460 rounds were fired in a type of warfare distinctly different from that of the Normandy hedgerows. The men faced savage resistance by an enemy who fought from specially prepared stone and concrete positions, who had considerable heavy artillery at his disposal and, as usual, a previous well established knowledge of the terrain. Despite this definite disadvantage the 324th displayed magnificent courage by setting up in open fields and, from comparatively unprotected positions, under accurate concentrated enemy shelling, pounding the dazed defenders of these elaborate positions into helpless submission.

Members of the battalion were privileged to wear a second battle participation star for the Northern France Campaign.

LOIRE RIVER

After a long motor march, howitzers went into defensive positions along the Loire River, just outside the city of Angers, France. The 83rd Division was holding a ninety mile front, maintaining a strict

surveillance of the sector in an attempt to keep the enemy south of the river. Later 20,000 German troops in this area surrendered.

Battery »A« was detached and sent to a position west of the city and shelled a small town south of the line to soften it up for an attack by the FFI.

There were many pretty French girls in Angers so naturally, after firing only 390 rounds, the battalion was suddenly ordered back to Dinard for decisive action against the Ile de Cezembre. Completing the 130 miles of march on August 29th, the guns immediately went into action.

The garrison, still holed up with sufficient food to last many months, had consistently refused to surrender. The plan was to reduce the island by artillery fire and if unsuccessful, commit the infantry to an amphibious landing. As the enemy's artillery had been neutralized, fire was directed from OPs located in luxurious summer homes along the beach. Additional artillery was brought up and a heavy fire maintained against the island. Liberator bombers dropped tons of explosives and flaming oil on the installations while hundreds of French civilians and GIs attending movies in town, watched the strange war from vantage points along the shore.

On September 1st, the garrison, unable to hold out longer under the terrific pressure, surrendered. The battalion fired 3,072 rounds during the siege and its accurate fire proved largely responsible for the island's final capitulation.

CHATEAUBRIANT, FRANCE

On September 3rd the battalion moved to Chateaubriant, and daily drill schedules were placed in effect. A Softball tournament featuring many tight and bitterly contested games saw Battery »B« finally emerge winner.

September 12th found us in an assembly area near Vendome, France. Passes were issued. On September 18th, at a battalion formation Maj Gen. Robert C. Macon, Division Commander, presented Silver Star Medals, Bronze Star Medals, and Air Medals to several members of the battalion.

The next move was on September 20th and took us to Montargis, France. Here we remained for four days until orders sent us into the Duchy of Luxembourg and re-entry into combat.

LUXEMBOURG

A gruelling march of 324 miles, including a 3 hour layover north of St Mihiel, brought us to an assembly area one mile south of

Leudelange, Luxembourg, on September 24th. The battalion remained in Luxembourg until the 4th of December, occupying ten positions near the towns of Brouch, Berbourg, Canach, Mondorf, Beyren, Ellange and Wecker.

When the remaining Germans were driven across the Moselle the Division adopted defensive positions designed to prevent their recrossing the river. During this period a crisis in ammunition supply found us using shells originally manufactured for use in World War I howitzers. Terrain here was well suited for fixed observation posts, and each battery maintained one most of the time.

In Berbourg we were subjected to heavy enemy fire from large calibre artillery, that fell on the area, generally at meal times. Once again Battery »B« was hard hit, losing a Chief of Section and two cannoneers, while four others were wounded. Batteries changed positions, Berbourg civilians were evacuated and men billeted in houses. During the lengthy Berbourg stay from October 9th to November 8th costly fire was laid on installations, personnel, rail lines, and batteries. At almost extreme range, 15,000 yards, hits were registered on freight and passenger trains running through the city of Konz-Karthaus.

Total number of rounds fired in Luxembourg was 6141. The first round to land on German soil was fired by Battery »B«, September 26th, at 0934 hours.

When in Mondorf the battalion had an OP in France while howitzers in Luxembourg were firing at targets in Germany.

HURTGEN FOREST

December 4th the battalion left Canach, Luxembourg and bivouaced that night in the woods near Houffalize, Belgium. Little did we realize that 6 weeks later this area would be a bitterly contested portion of the »Bulge«. On December 5th the 324th entered Germany and went in to firing position next day in the bloody Hurtgen Forest, relieving the 4th Division's 20th FA Bn.

We were now entering a new and disagreeable phase of fighting – winter combat. The weather was wet and cold, mud lay ankle deep in the roads that twisted and turned through the dark and gloomy forest. The ground was thick with anti-tank and hated anti-personnel mines. Log cabins were laboriously constructed the men went on a menu of »C« rations the chill of winter seeped through summer uniforms and left everyone cold and miserable.

The long dormant Luftwaffe suddenly came to life and on December 18th a low flying plane bombed and strafed Battery »C«, wounding six men and damaging four vehicles. There were ominous reports of a serious German counter-offensive in Belgium. Enemy paratroops dropped in our sector causing increased vigilance on the part of night guards. A tractor was completely wrecked when it hit a mine – the men escaping with minor injuries.

Support was given the infantry attacking the villages of Gey, Strass, Gurzenich, Birgel, Hufferath and Rolsdorf. The enemy was driven back across the Roer, and our infantry patrols entered Duren. The approaches to Germany were cleared and the Cologne Plain lay open before us. During the 20 days in Germany 7,368 rounds were expended. Due to poor visibility most firing was done by forward observers. A blanket of fog obscured all targets, keeping Allied planes grounded until December 24th when the skies cleared.

With rumors of enemy success in the South substantiated, a rather grim Christmas was spent on the outskirts of Duren but a genuine turkey dinner contributed considerably towards restoring our sagging morale.

The battalion was authorized to wear a third Bronze service star for the Germany campaign.

March order, on 26th December, took us to Havelange, Belgium, where sleeping bags were issued and the next day we were placing pressure on the northern shoulder of the Bulge. As the year 1944 ended the 324th was supporting infantry in an attack on the city of Rochefort, Belgium. We had fired 35,741 rounds and travelled 1,405 miles.

ARDENNES, BELGIUM

The fighting in Belgium was a slugging match in a nightmare of cold, over uneven terrain, into small villages and through irregular patches of snow covered woods. There were two enemies to fight – a confident Wehrmacht, cocky now, and flushed with initial successes in the counter-offensive and the most relentless foe of all – Nature, with its snow and ice and a bitter cold that killed quickly, indiscriminately and without mercy.

The German fought cleverly while he was winning and utterly without quarter. When the tide of battle turned he clung stubbornly to each inhabited place crowding into the buildings for warmth. He defended every house, every barn, every meager shelter with

a desperation born of the knowledge that to withdraw meant fighting in the frigid open fields.

In the numbing cold of these same fields, the battalion brushed aside waist deep snow, dug in the howitzers, fired and serviced them without complaint. For these were the kinds of targets they had been awaiting so long. The snow was a sea of white and friendless space. Winds screamed down the valley filling gun pits and covering ammunition with drifting snow.

But the 155s roared on through the short days and the long winter nights, smashing attacks, halting tanks, toppling the sturdy little houses down upon their occupants and driving the survivors back up the road which they had rolled so triumphantly a few weeks earlier.

New Years Day, 1945, was just another day except for the turkey dinner. Jan 1st was spent at Biron, Belgium, firing on tanks, troop convoys, installations, and an enemy assembly area. From Biron we moved on Jan 2nd to assemble at Lantroul and then to a firing position at Harre on the 4th, where harassing fire was laid on enemy troops. German prisoners, their arrogance gone, came down the road staring fearfully at the 155's as they plodded dejectedly to the rear.

Tanks put in an appearance on the 5th, and a barrage broke up the column. On Jan 6th one gun section moved up to Vaux-Chavanne for registration. Next day the entire battalion crept forward over icy roads to Hierlot and from a position near Lierneux, Belgium, placed heavy fire on houses and cross roads in the vicinity. The corridor was narrowing now, and the enemy was slowly pulling out his men and equipment.

From Hierlot, the batteries moved Jan 12th to positions near the towns of Verleumont, Hebronval and Joubieval, Belgium. Four Battery „B“ men were injured when their truck hit a mine in the latter position. Targets here were towns, enemy columns, and road junctions. The battalion fired its 40,000th round.

January 16th, the battalion moved to Petite-Langlir, Belgium, the last firing position in the Ardennes, and about 4000 yards closer to the enemy than the light battalions. Batteries „B“ and „C“ were subjected to a heavy concentration of German artillery fire but suffered no damage. Service Battery trucks on the way up with ammunition were pinned down by the intense shell fire on the road. Some harassing fire bracketed the CP, seriously damaging an ambulance outside.

A strong German counter-attack was launched on the 17th. The 155s smashed leading tanks, destroyed an entire company of enemy infantry, and completely smothered the attack. The 83rd then struck back quickly after a thorough artillery barrage. Our infantry, riding 3rd Armored tanks, crashed through the forests cut the road from Houffalize to St Vith, knocked the last props out from under the defense of Bovigny, and, rolled on into the city. The Ardennes Bulge was now squeezed off, and the enemy withdrew northeast leaving a trail of burnt-out armor and dead Panzergrenadiers.

In that bloody pilgrimage from Rochefort to Houffalize the German losses from 155s were heavy. Thus it was that in the tiny villages of Belgium the myth of the German superman died forever, and the 324th helped write his tragic finish on the crimson snow of the Ardennes.

The batteries packed up and moved to assigned billets in the nearby towns of Chene-Al-Pierre, La Fourche and Mont Derieux. The inevitable training schedule was set in motion but there were compensations in the form of hot showers, clean clothes, movies, passes to Paris and Viviers, USO shows, and above all, the wonderful experience of living in houses again.

Brigadier General Montague, Division Artillery Commander, presented awards and decorations for valor and achievement to many members of the battalion.

All equipment was cleaned, given proper maintenance – carbines, pistols, machine guns fired on a hastily constructed range knee deep in snow. Howitzers calibrated February 2nd and the battalion placed on a three hour alert. A break in the weather caused the removal of cleats from the tracts of all prime movers.

The pending move being of top secret importance, to gain strategic surprise all division insignia, were removed from outer garments, unit markings from vehicles and the organization referred to as »Task Force Irvine«.

At 2015 hours, February 6th, in the usual heavy downpour of rain, the battalion set out for Mortier, Belgium, arriving 0230 hours next morning. Later that same day our guns were crossing over into Germany once more for another crack at the vaunted defense line.

THE ROER RIVER

Durboslar, Germany, was a wrecked and battered town, its empty ruins barely distinguishable in the artificial moonlight, when the battalion arrived near midnight. A cold rain had been falling

since late afternoon, and orders to dig in every vehicle and thoroughly camouflage all equipment before retiring seemed particularly irritating to wet and tired men that night.

When morning came there was a full appreciation of the circumstances necessitating more than the usual degree of camouflage discipline. For as far as the eye could see, enemy held territory, flat and unbroken, stretched out before us – the bursts of our exploding projectiles, clearly visible along the horizon, appeared uncomfortably close. This position was just west of the Roer River, swollen to a raging torrent by enemy demolition of the Schwamman Dam, a tough obstacle for attacking troops. Poised on the banks of this formidable natural water barrier, the battalion sat back to await the assault.

Comparative inactivity marked the three weeks spent at Durboslar. Top secrecy of our presence in the vicinity was maintained, and all addresses on incoming mail destroyed. Our telephone Code name was temporarily changed from „Blank“ to „Armor King 63“. One man evacuated to a hospital took the secrecy so literally that he would not disclose his unit designation, even to the colonel commanding the hospital, until he had talked to Captain Martz, our battalion surgeon, on the telephone and received permission. Vehicles not actually needed were sent back to Service Battery at Alsdorf. Movies and showers were enjoyed frequently.

There was little enemy fire save on February 12th when a moderate concentration was laid among the batteries. Periodic night bombings were carried out by the Luftwaffe – a particular prolonged and determined strafing attack reminiscent of Omaha Beach, occurred on the 21st.

Preceded by a terrific artillery barrage of 45 minutes duration, the attack jumped off on the morning of February 23rd. It was an experience few will ever forget, for the night was ablaze with crimson flames and the earth shuddered and trembled for miles around. Infantry of the 29th Division crossed the river and drove ahead with little opposition.

During this 24 hour period the 324th fired 1600 rounds at varied targets while participating in one of the greatest artillery concentrations of the War.

The enemy was driven from range February 26th, and the 324th was released from 29th Division control, but remained in the XIX Corps, and was placed in Reserve.

The battalion left Durboslar February 28th and moved 14 miles to an assembly area at Stetternich, across the Roer River. The German retreat had by now turned into a hopeless rout and the 83rd, committed to action, drove headlong toward the Rhine.

At times our forward parties were reconnoitering one part of a town while the enemy was still fighting in the building down the street. White surrender flags appeared on all the houses as the 155s rolled into towns and villages along the route. Civilians seemed stunned at the speed of advance and size of the guns so close to the German retreating columns.

At Luttenlehn, Germany, the first rounds from the battalion were fired across the Rhine by Batteries „A“ and „B“ on March 2nd at 1100 hours.

On March 3rd they took up positions in the city of Neuss, on the banks of the Rhine opposite Düsseldorf.

NEUSS, GERMANY

The 83rd had been the first American division to reach the lower Rhine. The 34th rolled into Neuss, a city of 56,000 population, and took up positions just off the paved streets. Civilians evacuated nearby houses to provide living quarters for the battalion and fearfully remained indoors for several days.

Having gun positions in town was a new and somewhat pleasant deviation from muddy trenches and confining fox-holes and presented distinctly new possibilities. Orders were issued to curb the art of „Liberating“, an art that had attained a high degree of perfection from Normandy to Neuss. And when the timid population finally emerged from their homes, the appearance of large numbers of pretty frauleins on the streets introduced a new note in the sour symphony of War-Non-Fraternization.

Roadblocks were established along roads leading in and out of the city to prevent mass movement of civilians and establish security precautions. Men visited the morgue and an elaborate underground hospital.

The War went on and across the river the great industrial city of Düsseldorf began to take a terrific artillery beating. Targets included an enemy CP, tanks, railyards, factories, pill boxes and dugouts. A strong flank counterattack, launched on March 4th, was turned back with heavy enemy losses.

A survey of the city turned up several all-purpose 88 mm guns abandoned intact when their crews fled in disorder. Further search revealed huge stores of ammunition in dumps throughout the area.

On March 6th, under the supervision of Lts Bercik and Baber, these were placed in operation against the enemy and during a period of two weeks threw a total of 3551 shells, of his own manufacture, back into the enemy's positions.

During the stay in Neuss we were favored with an Ordnance inspection, a Lily Pons Concert, a few passes to Holland and Paris. Softball games, and the surprise resurrection of an old delightful pastime - listening to the Articles of War.

On March 20th the 360th FA relieved the 324th, and we left the next day for a short rest in the German towns of Heinsberg, Aphen and Schelfendhal. Passes were issued to Maastricht and Sittard, Holland.

The capture of the Remagen bridge was changing the entire complexion of the war and on the 27th of March the battalion moved out of this rest area to become involved in what was to be the strangest fighting of its career.

GERMANY

After a 48 mile march to Anrath, near Krefeld, the column crossed the Rhine, Germany's last great water barrier, at 2300 hours, March 29th, and then assembled at Uverhof, just south of Wesel. Men again became acutely Mine conscious when a Battery „A“ cannoneer was killed by one of the many anti-personnel mines sown in the area.

Starting March 31st the 324th set out on the wildest maddest pursuit in the annals of military history. Disregarding all the orthodox rules of warfare, including the established principle of securing supply lines, the battalion struck quickly and recklessly into the heart of the Reich. German vehicles, picked up along the way, were repaired and pressed into service carrying ammunition, supplies and gasoline.

The long line of howitzers slid ahead of tanks, passed the infantry, and in one instance waited for the recon armored cars to catch up. There was rain and mud and biting wind and burning sun. Men grew bearded and dirty - their faces gray with dust and lined with fatigue. As many as four positions were occupied in one day for the procedure was to pull into position before a suspected strong point, prepare for quick firing, down a fast meal, load up and move forward again.

The risks were great, but the battalion cheerfully accepted the increased hazards involved in what constituted the last phases of the war. As the military disintegration of Germany

set in, the vaunted Wehrmacht changed over night into a helpless frightened fugitive mob. The few remaining obstacles were hastily constructed fortifications - rough haphazard defenses thrown up on the spur of the moment by half-hearted Volksturm who remained to take them down again. There was a growing conviction that the war was over.

April 1st, the battalion moved up on the city of Hamm, where fierce enemy resistance was still being made. A strong German patrol ambushed a Battery „A“ reconnaissance party, capturing three and permitting two to escape. One of the three later returned with several of his erstwhile captors in tow.

From April 2nd to the 11th we moved from Wadersloh to Paderborn, where a powerful counter-attack was beaten off, to Haustenbeck, Holzhausen, Horn, Steinheim, Ottenstein, Tüchtfeld, Luerdissen, Imsen, Wispenstein, Rhuden, Oker, Veckenstedt and the airplane center of Halberstadt, making a notable effort to keep up with the 2d Armored Division on our left.

At night the sky was aflame with piles of burning foodstuffs, and thick black smoke from destroyed oil and gas stocks, military installations and warehouses obscured the horizon. Liberated slave workers streamed down the highways - thousands of soldiers from a demoralized and disorganized German Army, waved white handkerchiefs and pleaded frantically to be taken prisoner.

The 12th of April saw the battalion at Wegeleben, and on the 13th, at Wespen, the howitzers opened up in support of the Elbe River crossing. One battery advanced up the road for a distance of 2 1/2 miles but returned to aid in repelling a determined counter-attack. The entire battalion crossed the river on the 15th, at Barby, taking up positions on the east bank of the Elbe between two bridges that both rated a high priority from the German Air Corps. Bulldozers dug the guns in and the action started.

On the night of the 16th an enemy tank slipped through and threw 60 shells at the bridge. JU 88s flew in every few minutes after dark to blast away at the thin strip connecting us with the opposite shore. Aircraft jettisoned their loads in the limited confines of the narrow bridge head.

The guns were turned on Zerbst, and the town, refusing to surrender, was slowly pounded to pieces. Rations were drawn from a captured warehouse - trucks were sent back to haul

ammunition. There were rumors of meetings with the Russians, whose position was estimated at 15,000 yards to the front.

On the 24th of April a few shells turned enemy tanks back toward Zerbst. On April 29th the battalion left Barby to take up new duties – policing the rear areas and administering Military Government.

MILITARY GOVERNMENT

Military Government duties were new, complex, and confusing but somehow order was restored from that first existing chaos. The batteries settled down to extended guard duties, a daily struggle with DPs, the non-fraternization problem, the burgo-master and the German language.

Headquarters Battery was assigned the city of Schneidlingen and Bornecke; Battery »A«, Tartun, Unseburg, Nunsleben; Battery »B«, Hakeborn; Battery »C«, Schadeleben and Nachterstedt; Service Battery, Cochstedt.

Extensive preparations were made for the care, feeding, sheltering and shipping of Displaced Persons. The problems, numerous and varied at first, were handled with the finesse of a Charge 7 in repelling a counter-attack, then gradually modified as the artillerymen developed tact and a highly improved social technique.

Nazi slogans disappeared from the walls, rubble was cleared up and stones piled neatly along the walls. A few SS were flushed from hiding, arms caches uncovered in out of the way places and two crew members from a crashed German plane were put under arrest. Hostility softened in civilian faces – German kids clustered around the kitchens – frauleins eyed each GI Joe slowly and speculatively.

On May 6th the 30th Division took over the area, and during the remainder of the month the batteries moved from town to town in Landkreis Helmstedt, part of the province of Brunswick. Headquarters remained in the city of Helmstedt; Battery »A« controlled Beendorf, Harbke, Rickensdorf, Boimsdorf, Supplingenberg and other towns; Battery »B« moved to Sommersdorf, Grasleben, exercising control over Barmke and Emmerstedt; Battery »C« went to Runstedt, Walsdorf, Frellstedt, Konigsutter and back to Runstedt; Service Battery held Esbeck, Emmerstedt and Supplingen.

News that World War II was to be over at 0001 on May 9th, strangely enough, to men who had seen such prolonged and ferocious fighting, seemed anti-climatic.

Men reported for Profiling May 11th - VE Day was celebrated the 13th - there was the movie „Two Down and One to Go“ - and on the 16th the first high point men left Battalion for the States and home. Censorship regulations were lifted the 18th - passes to Bad Harzburg and Holland. Helmet liners were painted with name, rank and serial number. Division Artillery Commander presented additional Awards - there seemed a possibility of receiving five battle participation stars instead of three. Memorial Day Services were held in the Helmstedt theater at which an impressive tribute was paid to men from Division Artillery Battalions who had been killed in Action. On May 31st, British troops relieved American troops in the area and preparations were made to move to the American Occupation Zone in southern Germany.

To many men, the days spent in the vicinity of Helmstedt were the most enjoyable of the entire period overseas and an extremely reluctant departure was made on June 9th. The long trip through the beautiful Bavarian hill country took three days with overnight stops at Eisleben and Bayreuth. Being combat soldiers, men griped loudly and lengthily at orders to maintain some vestige of alignment in setting up the pup tents.

On June 11th the 324th arrived at its destination, just north of the Danube River, and batteries were immediately assigned to surrounding towns. Headquarters stayed in Neukirchen overnight and moved to Tittling the next day to join Battery »C«. Battery A was billeted in Aicha, Battery »B« at Namering and Service Battery at Haselbach.

Military Government was resumed, a huge PW Enclosure taken over and German soldiers discharged at Tittling, miles of ammunition dumps guarded day and night, hospitals checked and civilians cross-examined in an intensive search for SS men and individuals with strong Nazi Party affiliations.

On June 28th an „A“ Battery vehicle was badly damaged while returning from a sight-seeing tour of Berchtesgaden. The rigors and dangers of Peace were already setting in.

In the next few weeks the high-point men and others eligible for discharge were transferred to units outside the division, including about one quarter of the enlisted men and one third of the officers, thus writing a finale to the organization of personnel which had carried the battalion through combat.

