

S E C R E T

HISTORY OF THE 324TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

1944

The history of the 324th Field Artillery Battalion for the year 1944 is not only outstanding as far as this battalion is concerned but by its deeds and actions has helped change the history of the entire world. The first of the year found the battalion still undergoing training at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, and looking forward to combat while at the close of the year the outfit had changed from one of green troops to a battle-seasoned, hard hitting outfit that knew how to handle itself on the field of battle. The following history will attempt to record in order all events that have taken place that has brought the battalion through this critical year.

The only change for the entire year in officers of field grade took place 27 January 1944 when Major Norman R. Bottom was assigned to this organization, and took over the duties of Battalion Executive Officer. Major Owen A. Kirkland, who up to this time had been handling the duties of both S-3 and Executive Officer, was relieved as Battalion Executive but remained in the battalion as S-3. Lieutenant Colonel George W. Irvine has commanded the battalion during the entire period.

The battalion as a whole during the month of January was engaged in vigorous training in preparation for GHQ tests that were scheduled to take place the following month. In addition to this training, a great deal of emphasis was placed on night exercises and three nights of each week were spent in field work. Also, all members of the battalion lived out in the field in pup tents two weeks of each month, and it was during these two week periods that we found that the Kentucky winters were far from warm as the temperature averaged around ten above zero.

On 10 February the battalion was changed from truck drawn to tractor drawn in accordance with General Order # 5, Headquarters, 83rd Infantry Division, dated 9 February, 1944. This change placed us under the T/O & E 6-336, dated 3 July, 1943. This change did not greatly affect us as to personnel but did, however, change our materiel as to prime-movers. This necessitated training tractor drivers which was accomplished in surprisingly short time. The battalion Motor Officer and four mechanics attended a four week tractor course at Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, while another officer and four men attended a similar course at International Harvester Co., Bettendorf, Iowa. GHQ tests were satisfactorily completed during the month and the outfit was given notice to complete all necessary work and training required in Preparation for Overseas Movement.

The month of March was known as the "clean-up" month as each member of the battalion was brought up to date on his training and equipment so that he would be qualified to go overseas. Up to this time we had been overstrength on personnel but between 14 and 27 of the month a total of 7 officers and 52 enlisted men were transferred in order to cut the battalion down to its authorized T/O strength. The bulk of these men were sent to the 42nd Infantry Division, Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, and to the 259th Quartermaster Railhead Co., Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

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Finally, on 30 March at 1730 hours, part of the battalion boarded a special train for Camp Shanks, New York, in accordance with Special Orders # 89, Headquarters 83rd Infantry Division, dated 21 March 1944. The remainder followed a few hours later on the last train of the division. After an uneventful trip we arrived at Camp Shanks, New York, at 0630, 1 April, 1944 and were placed in barracks and once again started to undergo inspections of clothing and equipment. Here all members of the battalion received training on how to abandon ship and also had the opportunity to make any last minute changes of allotments, insurance, or any other personal items they had neglected to take care of before leaving Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky.

With rumors running high as to our final destination, the battalion once again boarded two trains on 5 April at 1715 to take us the short distance to New York City where we boarded HMS Orion at 2100. The next morning at 0800 we steamed out of New York harbor and took our place in convoy and headed out to sea.

After a trip that was marked by good weather and numerous abandon-ship drills, we silently pulled into the famous Mersey Dock at Liverpool, England, on 16 April, 1944 at 0930. The battalion remained aboard ship until 2015, 17 April, when we disembarked and boarded a train at the docks and pulled out for Raibon, Wales, at 0015, 18 April, 1944. Upon arriving at our destination at 0240 we boarded trucks for our final bivouac area and were the first battalion of Division Artillery to arrive at Bryn-Y-Pys, Flintshire, Wales, at 0330, where the men were assigned to pyramidal tents. Here we received our howitzers, tractors, and other equipment that was not brought over with the battalion. Training consisted of physical training; and numerous lectures on military subjects.

On 2 May, 1944, the battalion moved on permanent change of station orders to Camp Aston Park, Shropshire, England, completing the move the same day. Here we established a new bivouac on part of a golf course, and training continued along the same lines as that which we received in Bryn-Y-Pys except that the men were given additional training in water proofing of vehicles and howitzers. Our battalion motor and gun park was on a blockaded secondary road about 4 miles away.

On 16 May, 1944, the battalion moved to Ystradfellte, Wales, arriving at 1300 the same date. In this area the battalion participated in VIII Corps exercises which consisted of service practice and Corps shoots. The exercise lasted until 24 May. Then, after three more days of service practice and calibration of howitzers, the battalion moved back to Camp Aston Park arriving there at 1700, 27 May, 1944. The period in South Wales is particularly remembered for the exceptionally cold and foggy weather.

On 6 June the battalion received the news of the invasion and the morale of the men soared to new heights, and work and training were vigorously carried on with the knowledge that we would soon be in battle. Then on the 17 June, 1944, we received secret orders for movement and moved out at 0235 arriving at Camp Winterborn Abbas, Dorchester, England at 1000 same date. Here in the marshalling area further equipment shortages were filled and also additional items such as life belts and sea-sick pills were distributed. After remaining in this marshalling area for only twenty-four hours, the battalion moved to Weymouth, England, boarded 4 L.C.T.'s and 1 L.S.T. and pulled out of the harbor at 2330, 18 June, 1944. The trip across the channel was made through a high running sea and while some of the L.C.T.'s in our convoy were forced to turn back, all of our battalion continued on their way. At 2200, 19 June, 1944 we pulled into Omaha Beach but by this time a heavy storm was raging and it was impossible to land at night. It was decided to anchor off shore for the night

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and again attempt to land in the morning. Headquarters Battery was the only battery able to get ashore the next morning with battery B coming ashore that afternoon. Battery A's L.C.T. with their prime movers and howitzers sunk just off shore in shallow water but all equipment was finally removed by the aid of a crane furnished by the Engineers. All L.C.T.'s used by the battalion in this crossing were wrecked on the beach and destroyed. No enemy action was experienced during this entire operation, but the weather made it a dangerous and costly one. However the battalion made a landing without the loss of a man and no loss of equipment. Upon leaving the beach, the battalion moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of Bricqueville, France, and here serviced their materiel and vehicles which had been thoroughly soaked by salt-water.

At 1400 on 26 June the battalion was alerted to move into firing positions just north of Carentan as the Division was relieving the 101st A/B Division which was then in that sector. Moving down to an assembly area under cover of darkness, we made our reconnaissance the next morning and occupied positions the same afternoon. Our first round was fired against the enemy at 2114, 27 June, 1944. "e were placed in general support of the division and from this position fired harassing fire and counter-battery fire on enemy guns that were shelling the bridge in Carentan. Our first Base Point was a church in Sainteny, from which the enemy was believed to have observation. On 3 July the battalion displaced forward to the south of Carentan to an area nicknamed "Dead Cow Lane", in order to give closer support to the attack that was to take place the next day. It was in this position that the battalion received its first taste of enemy fire both from small arms and artillery. Infantry front lines were close enough that ricochets and stray small arm rounds were continuously coming through our area. Enemy artillery consisted of harassing fire but a lucky hit near one of Battery B's gun pits claimed the lives of one chief of section and two cannoners, and wounded one other cannoner. As our attacking infantry continued to gain ground we displaced forward to two more firing positions near Sainteny and Bois Grimot, France, and continued to support the infantry attack by firing TOT's and on enemy batteries that were picked up by our air OP. On 28 July the enemy withdrew out of range and we displaced forward to take up positions to cover Division objectives with defensive fires as the Infantry re-organized and checked equipment.

On 29 July the battalion moved to a rest area at Hauteville, Le Guichard, France, and there proceeded to clean and check all vehicles and materiel. The action from 27 June to 28 July participated in by this battalion resulted in clearing the enemy out of Normandy, France, and wiped out any doubt that the invasion forces might be pushed back into the sea. During this campaign this battalion fired from four positions, a total of 13,895 rounds. All members of the battalion were authorized to wear a bronze service star in accordance with Letter, Headquarters, European Theatre of Operations, dated 16 November 1944, Subject: Battle Participation Awards - Normandy Campaign (No 1).

On 3 August, after 5 days of being out of action the battalion once more moved out of their rest area on a long march down to the vicinity of Pontorson, France, arriving there the next morning at 0110 and occupied an assembly area. At 0700 reconnaissance parties moved out to pick firing positions which were occupied by the battalion that same morning. We were placed in general support for the attack on the city of Dol but due to the fact that Dol was occupied the next day, with very little enemy opposition, we were not called on to fire a round. As the infantry continued to advance rapidly we moved 5 August to a firing position near

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Hirel, France, and supported the attack on St Malo, France. The next day we were forced to displace forward again and moved into position near Limonay, France. Once again we were placed in general support and fired on enemy batteries and installations. Here we received a large amount of enemy artillery fire and Battery C had a howitzer knocked out of action when an enemy shell set powder charges on fire, which in turn burned a fire on the gun. Five men were wounded due to the shelling. With the town of St Malo itself cleared of enemy, the battalion on 10 August 1944 moved to support the attack on Dinard and took up firing positions about one mile north of Pleslin, France. We remained in this position until 17 August during which time we were in general support and also reinforced the fires of the 908th Field Artillery Battalion. One direct hit scored by this battalion on a strong point consisting of a series of thick reinforced concrete pill boxes connected by underground communications trenches of similar construction caused the whole series of tunnels to fill with powder gas making the whole strong point untenable. Over 600 prisoners were taken from this one fortified hill. On 14 August all enemy troops were cleared out of Dinard, France except for those still on Isle de Cezembre and which had been firing harassing fire on our troops in the vicinity of St Malo, France. The battalion established an OP in the Chateau on Hill 42, near St Lunaire, France, and with picked gun crews manning 3 captured German 15 cm SP guns effective fire was placed on the island using these weapons. As ammunition was running low for these pieces, on 16 August we placed two of our own howitzers near the OP and precision adjustments were conducted. One battery of 15 cm guns were neutralized on the island using a single shell with quick fuze. On 17 August, the Citadel, which had been still holding out at St Malo surrendered and thus ended all enemy resistance on the mainland. The garrison on Isle de Cezembre did not surrender at this time but they were completely sealed off with all their artillery pieces knocked out of action by our effective precision fire. With this situation existing, this battalion moved back into a bivouac area near La Germondais, France, and the men had an opportunity to clean up and to service the vehicles and materiel. During the battles for St Malo and Dinard, France, the battalion fired 4,460 rounds and supported the Infantry in capturing all enemy troops that occupied both cities. Both battles consisted of blasting the enemy out of heavily reinforced strong points from which they savagely resisted each advance of our Infantry. Each member of the battalion received his second bronze service star in accordance with Letter, Headquarters, European Theatre of Operations, dated 1 December 1944, Subject: Battle Participation Awards - Northern France Campaign (No 1).

On 24 August the battalion moved into firing positions just outside the City of Angers, France, arriving there at 1300. As this was a defensive sector along the Loire River very little firing was done, outside of registration. The Division was holding a ninety mile front and numerous reconnaissances were made for alternate firing positions to be occupied in the event the enemy attacked outside of our immediate zone of fire. OP's were established in church steeples in the vicinity of Angers, France, and a constant watch over enemy territory was maintained. After firing only 390 rounds from this position we received orders to move back to positions from which to fire on Isle de Cezembre, so on 28 August the battalion made the 130 mile march and arrived there in the early morning hours.

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Enemy troops on the island still commanded the entrance to the harbor of St Malo. As from all indications they had enough supplies on the island to last many months. It was decided to give the artillery a chance to bring about their surrender and then, if this failed, to make an amphibious landing with our infantry. The battalion established OP's in the luxurious summer homes of Dinard, France, and while sitting in large soft easy chairs, fire was directed on enemy installations on the island. As all enemy guns had been knocked out there was no need to take precautions against the enemy fire. The island garrison surrendered on 1 September without having to storm the beaches with our infantry. PW's claimed the constant artillery shelling fire almost drove them crazy and finally they had no alternative but to surrender. This battalion fired a total of 3,092 rounds during the siege and was largely responsible for bringing about the complete surrender of the island garrison.

On 3 September the battalion moved to a position of readiness in the vicinity of Chateaubriant, France, and remained in this position until 12 September, when it moved to an assembly area near Vendome, France. All batteries organized soft-ball teams and a battalion tournament was played which was won by Battery A. From here the battalion moved near Montargis, France, on 20 September, arriving on the same date. After remaining in this assembly area for four days we received orders to move to the Duchy of Luxembourg and to once again get back into combat.

After making a march of 234 miles the battalion closed in an assembly area one mile south of Leudelange, Luxembourg, at 1900, the 24 September. The battalion remained in Luxembourg until 4 December during which time ten firing positions were occupied and no day passed without firing a round. Firing positions were near the towns of Brouch, Berbourg, Canach, Mondorf, and Wacker. The battalion occupied positions near Berbourg for the longest time since arriving on the continent being there from 9 October to 5 November. It was in this position that the battalion received heavy counter-battery fire on four different occasions and once again Battery B was the hardest hit losing one chief of section and two cannoners while four cannoners were wounded. During the period spent in Luxembourg, the battalion supported the Infantry in driving the enemy across the Moselle River and then set up defensive positions to prevent the enemy from recrossing the river. OP's were established for each position and firing consisted of firing enemy installations, personnel and batteries. While at Berbourg, Luxembourg, the battalion fired on freight and passenger trains moving through the city of Konz-Karthaus and obtained direct hits although firing at a range of 15,000 yards. A total of 8,141 rounds were fired during the time the battalion was in Luxembourg. The first round to land on German soil was fired at 0934, 26 September, by Battery B. While in the city of Mondorf on 12 November, the battalion had an OP in France, howitzers in Luxembourg and was firing on targets in Germany.

On 4 December the battalion moved out of Canach, Luxembourg at 0700 and bivouaced that night in woods six miles north of Houffalize, Belgium. Next day we moved to an assembly area one mile south of Schevenhutte, Germany and contacted the 20th Field Artillery Battalion of the 4th Infantry Division whom we were to relieve the following day. Occupying the positions vacated by the 20th Field Artillery Battalion on 6 December, we registered and fired T.O.T.'s on enemy installations. Occupying two other firing positions in this area we supported our Infantry in their attacks on the towns of Gey, Strass, Gurzenich, Birgel, Hufferath and Rolisdorf and drove the enemy across the Roer in the vicinity of Duren, Germany and cleared the approaches to the Cologne Plain.

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All battery positions were in the famous Hurtgen Forest and although the weather was cold and wet, the men constructed log cabins and managed to live fairly comfortably. Enemy air force was quite active and on the night of 18 December at 0100 Battery C was bombed and strafed by a low flying enemy plane. Six men were wounded and four vehicles were slightly damaged. Enemy mine fields were encountered and Battery B had a tractor hit one which totally wrecked the vehicle but only slightly wounded the occupants. The battalion fired almost continuously until 26 December expending 7,368 rounds during the twenty days spent in firing positions in Germany. Two OP's were established but due to poor visibility, most firing was done by forward observers. The battalion became extremely security conscious due to reports that enemy paratroopers were being dropped behind our lines but none were captured by members of this battalion. Christmas was spent much the same as any other day except that all members of the battalion enjoyed a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. For the excellent work in supporting our attacking Infantry each member was authorized a third bronze service star in accordance with Letter, Headquarters, European Theatre of Operations, dated 24 December 1944, Subjects: Battle Participation Awards - Germany Campaign (No 1).

On 26 December the battalion moved out of position at 1930 and marched to an assembly area near Havelange, Belgium, arriving there at 0530 the next morning to take part in the battle against the German offensive that had penetrated deep into Belgium. Reconnaissance was made and the battalion moved into firing position that same afternoon. The year 1944 ended with the battalion firing in support of our Infantry attack on the city of Rochefort, Belgium, which proved to be highly successful.

Up until 1 January 1945 the battalion had fired a total of 35,741 rounds against the enemy and since arriving on the continent had marched a total of 1,406 miles. Although the complete of the enemy has not yet become a fact, this battalion will continue to put forth every effort to bring the war to a successful conclusion.

The following awards and decorations have been received by members of this battalion for heroism and meritorious service:

BATTLEFIELD APPOINTMENTS

Samuel A. Dorshow	2nd Lt	Per SO 212 Hq. TUSA dated 26 September 44
George W. Baber	2nd Lt	Per SO 345 Hq. FUSA dated 16 December 44

SILVER STAR

John R. Blackburn	1st Lt	Per GO 31 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 25 Aug 44
Glen J. Sundberg	Captain	Per GO 31 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 25 Aug 44
Samuel A. Dorshow	2nd Lt	Per GO 31 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 25 Aug 44

SOLDIERS MEDAL

Donald E. Dager	Pvt 1st	Per GO 61 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 24 Oct 44
Stanislaus A. Kusmierok	S/Sgt	per GO 61 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 24 Oct 44
Joseph L. Sopelak	Tec 4	per GO 61 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 24 Oct 44
James E. Steib	S/Sgt	per GO 61 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 24 Oct 44
Peter Constantino	Cpl	per GO 28 Hq 83d Inf Div dtd 24 Oct 44