

1-1-1945

# Battle history of "A" battery, 391st Armored Field Artillery Battalion; Third Armored (spearhead) Division, first United States Army, 24 June, 1944 to 24 April, 1945

United States Army

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# BATTLE HISTORY

OF

“A”

## BATTERY

391<sup>th</sup> ARMORED FIELD ARTILLERY  
BATTALION

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THIRD ARMORED (SPEARHEAD) DIVISION  
FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY

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24 JUNE 1944 TO 24 APRIL 1945

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DEDICATED TO

\* \* \*

T/5 JAMES CONLEY

\*

PFC. ROBERT HORTON

\*

PFC. JEAN PARENTEAU

\*

PFC. NICOLAS CAPRINOLA

\*

PFC. JOSEPH POPOVICH

\*

T/5 TRUMAN FANNING



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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to those who had to pay the supreme sacrifice so that the others could go on. We wish you were here to read it and when, in later years, one of us happens to meet another the conversation will be most certain to include you. When special days come and toasts are drunk by those of us who made it, one will always be to you. We lived, ate, slept, travelled together, rode the same ship to England, cursed the English weather, were all frightened together, sloshed through the mud, and shared foxholes together. Some of it was fun and some of it was hell. The worst of it was having to see you die and feeling so helpless about it. We made them pay and pay heavily for you. You are gone but you will never be forgotten by any of the men you lived and fought with for so long. It seems as if the best always have to go and we hope that you are happy in that great beyond where valiant warriors have always gone. So to you, Jim Conley, Bob Horton, Jean Parenteau, Nick Caprinola, "Pop" Popovich and Truman Fanning, who were with us so much, the author and the men dedicate this book.

## PREFACE

This book is for and about the men of Battery "A", 391st Armored Field Artillery Battalion. It tries to relate, in detail, what happens while a war is being fought. It tries to tell what men do and think while under the strain of battle and what they do when one battle is over and preparations are being made for the next one. It started to be a history, but histories are cold and lifeless and in a story about a group of one hundred men it is possible to include intimate details of a lot of the things that happened.

It is to be noted that as a diary of a combat outfit engaged in fighting the enemy this is an artillery story, and as such reflects the actions and reactions of artillerymen and the part they play in total war.

If anyone, any section or any part of the battery, feels that his or their part in the war has been slighted or has not been given their just due in this book, the author offers his humble apologies. If there were incidents which should be in this book and are not, it is not intentional. Everything is here that could be remembered, and in the absence of written notes it is certain that much has been left out. All of you will understand that.

All of us put something into the battery but we got a lot back in laughter, fellowship, and enjoyment. It's been a pleasure to know all of you and most of you will agree that the guys and the officers were a pretty hard bunch to beat, especially when the chips were down.

The author hopes that his efforts will be rewarded by all of you enjoying and appreciating this book for you and about you. That will be more than enough.

H. Glen Jenkins.



## THE CAMPAIGN IN NORMANDY

The bright sun and blue skies that greeted us at 6:00 hours on Saturday, 24th. June 1944, in marshalling area near Dorchester, Dorset in England were matched by the gay spirits of the men of Battery "A". 391st Armored Field Artillery Battalion. We knew it was our last day in England and that the next stop was to be the battlefield of Normandy but we were old soldiers and had been expecting war — with us playing an active part in it ever since leaving the states. Morale was high, the men were part of a crack outfit, and everyone was very conscious of that fact. Then, too, we remembered our very successful campaigns in Louisiana, California, Virginia, and our most famous one — that of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Not exactly war but good campaigns and well conducted ones none of the less.

Breakfast was good and we left for the vehicles shortly afterward with a full stomach and the fascination of the unknown ahead of us. After mounting up we had only a short wait until our escort arrived to lead us to L. S. T. 75, off Weymouth Roads. It was 9:00 hours when we started down winding roads through the beautiful country side of southern England. It had never been prettier than on this June morning, our last in England. The people of Weymouth gave us a nice farewell as we drove through the city and across a causeway to the beach. It was lined with columns of vehicles, and "A" Battery had to wait their turn. SOS troops passed out life preservers while we were waiting, and most of us hoped that the wait would be long enough for us to eat some of the dinner we could smell cooking in field kitchens nearby. But the first section of the column was called before they could eat. We wound our way around the roads of the island, past a large cage full of German prisoners up to our L.S.T. It looked like a huge whale with its mouth open, the large opening dwarfing the tanks as they rumbled up the plank to the ship. We started boarding at 12:30 with Cpl. Paul Meehan and Pfc. Albert Mayer in the leading peep. The battery



was all aboard by 15:30, the vehicles all tied down, and every inch of deck space filled. We pulled out into the anchorage at 17:30 hours and awaited sailing orders. We spent the intervening hours looking the ship over and exchanging tall stories, facts, fancies, and rumors with the ships crew. Some of our men, led by 1st. Sgt. Allen and S/Sgt. Albritton were in the mood to stay with the ship when they found out that a certain spigot in a companion way near the galley gave out with hot coffee instead of water. The two Sergeants mentioned above, established an all time record of coffee consumption in the next 24 hours. Supper was served by the ships crew the and rest of the evening was idled away under the hot showers, then looking for a place to sleep and after finding it using the place so no one else would crowd the finder out. We sailed at 23:00 hours, our two sausage ballons overhead swaying from side to side as we gathered speed and headed for the French coast.

The coast was in sight when we got up the next morning. A coast that looked hazy in the distance, and most of us were wondering just what was behind those hills that we could see on that sunny Sunday morning. Our L.S.T. arrived at the French coast at 13:00 hours, June 25th, and dropped anchor in the midst of a host of all different sorts, sizes, and shapes of ships. We studied the shore through glasses and could make out some of the effects of the land, sea, and air bombardments which preceded the initial landings. Not all of ours had made it either because there were the hulks of sunken, bombed out, and beached ships and barges to tell us that others had been before us. The beach and water were full of trucks and ducks unloading the ships and getting the vital materials to the troops who were inland. Orders came for us to beach at 16:45 hours and we did, at Omaha Fox Red, but the beach didn't slope at the proper angle and the gang plank did not meet it when let down. A bulldozer made a run way to the gang plank and the Sixth Section tank, led by Sgt. Willie Carawan and driven by Tec 5 George Stein, was the first vehicle ashore. Others followed quickly and before long the whole battery was on the road to the first marshalling area. The road was marked not only by signs and MP's but by wreckage of German guns and equipment. We stopped and removed enough of the waterproofing to keep the tanks from overheating. Then an engineer officer told us where we were going that night and that all, the warnings about mines had been over emphasized. We started off led



by Captain Robert E. Fiss, over dusty roads parallel to the coast toward Isigny. It was almost dusk and it was somewhat ironic that shortly after starting, the rest of the column passed the maintenance tank and there — trying very hard to get a thrown track back on — were Tec 5 Morris D. Birchard, Tec 5 Ernest L. Bradney, and the rest of the maintenance section. The only vehicle to fall out and it happened to be the maintenance tank.

After passing what seemed to be solid miles of gas dumps we got to the main road near Isigny. On each side of the road in the gathering dust we could make out bivouac areas, hospitals, and a hurriedly constructed air strip. Soon we got to what had been Isigny. It was our first view of what shelling can do to a city. The central part was wrecked and the engineers were leveling off the debris and cleaning the roads. Our first view of the French people was here but they did not seem too enthusiastic over our being there. American troops were no novelty to them by this time — D plus 19. We turned south off the main road at Isigny to our bivouac area. It was one o'clock in the morning when we arrived; our area was a combination pasture and orchard. Out came the camoufluge nets and with them the order to dig in. Most of us were content with a shallow hole at that late hour. That is, until an hour later when a battery of 155s mm opened up nearby. They sounded quite a bit closer than they actually were but at the time we didn't know that. It didn't really interfere with our sleeping the few remaining hours of that night. Most of us slept well enough but not long enough.

The 26th June was spent in getting acquainted with 10 in 1 rations. We liked them — then. It rained and we had our first experience with Normandy weather and mud, an experience that was to grow into an unpleasant story as the days passed. We added to our already large stock of cigarettes and life savers. Foxholes were deepened and camoufluge was improved.

This evening saw the firing battery go up forward about one thousand yards. The gun sections, the executive section, led by Lt. John F. Sterne, and the Recon section led by Lt. Harvey D. Patterson went up to support an attack on St. Jean De Day by the 30th. Infantry Division. Our first firing in France and our first blows at the Germans. The firing position reminded the battery of the Bayou Blitz days down in Louisiana. Mud and water everywhere with continuous rain all night. Our part of the mission was accomplished by the morning of June 27th

and the firing battery returned at 9:00 hours. The returning men brought with them first hand reports of battle conditions and of life at the front — 1000 yards away. The rest of us were duly amazed and impressed just as they expected us to be. By this time we had sampled at least three menus of the 10 in 1 rations and still thought they were rather good — then.

After several days of rain we were favored by a little sunshine on the 28th of June. Captain Fiss called a meeting to tell us what was to happen later and at 13:30 hours we left our position south-east of Isigny and went through St. Clair. The railway station and the town were badly battered and the tiles were shaken off the roofs of all the houses. We saw our first German prisoners in France at this point. At 14:00 hours we pulled into an assembly area North of St. Clair and stayed until 17:25 hours. Supper was cooking when we got "March Order" but that was only the first of many times that this was to happen. We left, and arrived at a firing position not far from Caumont at 18:15 hours. At this point, while digging a super de luxe foxhole, Tec 5 Leonard H. Green uncovered a partially decomposed German soldier who had been very well taken care of by someone else, presumably by the Free French. Needless to say, he dug his hole elsewhere. We were supporting Combat Command "A", Third Armored Division in an attack on a hill south of St. Lo, and were also tied in with the XIX Corps Artillery consisting of the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions.

During the next 24 hours, the night of the 28th and the following day, the battery participated in 35 missions and fired a total of 725 rounds at a variety of targets including artillery, infantry, and strong points of different sorts. Some very good firing that day by "A" Battery. High on the list was some precision shooting done by the 2nd Section led by Sgt. Eugene J. Reiners with Cpl. Samuel I. Frankel as gunner. Lt. Thomas J. Kelly was up in the cub as observer when he saw an enemy 88 mm gun hidden in a tunnel in the side of a hill. He asked for "A" Battery — of course — and used Sgt. Reiners' gun for the purpose. The range was about 6000 yards and the shells landed all around the mouth of the tunnel. Everyone in the battery was trying to help guide the rounds and the 10th round was squarely in the tunnel. No more 88's there. It was here that we first saw our best friends, the air force, in action. The P-47's quued up to dive bomb and strafe a target. We decided then and there that they



were strictly our friends and that friendship grew during the passing months, with a few notable exceptions.

The ground shook with the thunder of the artillery the night of the 29th but we slept through it — battle hardened veterans of 3 days in combat. The afternoon of the 30th we heard the whistle of the first incoming enemy shell. It was a 150 mm and passed directly over the heads of Tec 5 Melvin K. Jensen and Sgt. Lawrence G. Howard, landing some 50 yards behind. The above mentioned men flattened themselves out so flat they could have been slid under a door as an air mail letter. Reports that haven't been denied say that Tec 4 Charles A. Coppens, Tec 5 Robert V. Breymeyer, and Tec 5 Harry C. Blanchet crawled faster to get to their foxholes than most men could run. That Tec 4 Coppens isn't built for speed either but he certainly was that day. It was a dud, however, and was later exploded by the engineers to remove the hazard. The battery fired all day and night of the 30th, but not so much and not so fast, a total of 9 missions which used up 170 rounds.

July 1st was a very nasty day, rainy and wet, and we were glad to get march order at 16:30 hours even if it was just to an alternate position. At this position was the only soft ground that we found in all of Normandy. While on a social tour of the battery that evening we thought that Lt. Sterne must be ill when he was seen in a big-foxhole up to his wish bone and still digging. His was small, however, compared to the one occupied by Pvt. Charles Weiss. Charley had his up to his eye brows and was still going strong when last seen that night. Out of our first week in France the battery had fired four days, expending a total of 895 rounds.

We were glad to go back to our area south-east of Isigny the following day, Sunday July 2nd. There was a lot of necessary cleaning up to do and it was done when we got back. We came back from our firing position with a little French puppy about big enough to fill up a combat jacket pocket. She was christened Queenie and was adopted at once as the battery mascot, remaining as such throughout our entire period of combat. She was acquired by Pvt. George (Gravel) Radcliffe one afternoon when he was out on a selfimposed scouting mission. A successful one too; he returned with a full cargo of Cognac and the puppy, just about all he could manage.

The afternoon of the 2nd was largely spent cleaning guns and equipment in what was officially called a rest period. Really not



too much rest with all the maintenance work involved. Old soldiers always manage though, so we did get some rest. All except the 6th section who had to change the engine in their tank. This day and the following day, July 3rd, was when almost everyone decided that he had had enough of everything except coffee. Captain Fiss said "Almost everyone has asked for it in the mail to day". Quite a few were willing to substitute cider for the coffee at that time and it wasn't long before there was a well beaten path leading from the battery to the wine house at a nearby farm. The village of Cavigny had a cafe and it was there that most of the men first became acquainted with Cognac — to the tune of 300 francs per canteen full. A very explosive effect too. Good stuff, that Cognac.

We welcomed a former comrade on the afternoon of the 2nd for a short visit. He was Pvt. Bill Gottle who had left us back in England to join the Rangers. He had landed on D-day and told us quite a bit about the first few days of the invasion. He had a lot of narrow escapes but got through alright.

The morning of July 4th, Independence Day, saw the firing battery move forward 1000 yards to take part in the July 4th salvo that all guns of the entire U.S. Army within range fired into the German lines that day. Our part was 15 rounds and they were fired into German positions near St. Jean de Daye. The battery returned to its bivouac area at 14:45 hours and prepared to move into another position later. At this time Captain Fiss shifted a few of the men within the battery to make for a more efficient unit. The changes made, the battery moved out once again at 18:30 hours to the same position from which they had fired the Independence Day salvo. It was still wet and muddy in this swamp-like position even if it hadn't rained for several days.

The following two days, were lazy days for the men of Battery "A". So lazy, in fact, that the Commander of Combat Command "B", Third Armored Division ordered all available men to take a one-hour road march every day. His idea didn't meet with too much favor from anyone concerned. It hardly seemed the time or place for road marches — that close to the front. Nothing we could do however, except to take them, and we did. The only firing done was light harassing fire each night at 1:00 hours, 19 rounds being fired the morning of the 6th, and 59 rounds the morning of the 7th.

The morning of July 7th found the battery taking an active part



in preparation for a corps advance through St. Jean de Daye and Ariel. During the day we fired 31 missions for a total of 840 rounds. Our targets were mostly in St. Jean De Daye as the Germans were using the houses and a pickle factory there for strong points. The town was pretty badly battered as a result but the Germans were driven out, and that is the main thing. We moved forward to a close and better position for firing on the same targets at 11:00 hours, getting consolidated in the new positions at 16:00 hours, after which we fired a total of 380 rounds. It was in this position that Sgt. Claude J. Myers performed his first duties as burial Sgt. The fact that the one to be buried was a German and a rather smelly one at that, irritated Claude more than just a little. The first dead German he had seen, and he had to bury him. "That's fate", we told him. The feat was accomplished, though aided by some superb digging on the part of Tec. 5 Oscar J. Brown and Tec 5 John O. Roberts. A long rope placed around the ankle of the deceased and given a sharp jerk by the above mentioned trio played a big part too. His duty performed, Sgt. Myers and his crew were given a loud cheer by the rest of the battery. While the digging was in progress the rest of the boys offered a lot of helpful suggestions which were politely ignored by the hard working trio.

The Germans staged a large scale counter attack on the 9th. It was later found out that this attack was supposed to break through to Isigny and then to the sea, thereby splitting the allied beach head in half. The early stages of the counter attack seemed quite successful. A sizeable force of tanks broke through our screening infantry, the 30th division. The artillery had a very large share in stopping this counter attack and "A" Battery, despite heavy counter battery fire falling among the guns, did its share, and more. We fired a total of 1155 rounds that day and helped stop a counter attack which, if successful, would have played havoc with the allied plans at that time. The men worked like Trojans that day handling and loading ammunition and it was a tough job very well done. A lot of good work was performed by the executive section and by Lt. Sterne and Lt. Plummer, who took turns firing the battery. The day included our first session of heavy counter battery fire and even if we were scared it didn't interfere with the firing. The enemy tanks were either stopped or knocked out, and the counter-attack failed.

When the counter battery fire started coming in Sgt. Myers decided suddenly to enlarge his foxhole. He was digging vigorously



in a foxhole not yet quite large enough for himself when the whistle of an incoming shell sounded like it was going to hit right there. Myers huddled down but by doing so he made a mistake because about that time Tec 5's George Podrosky and Roberts dove in on top of him. Seconds later 1st Sgt. Allen joined them after making a beautiful swan dive from at least 10 feet away. Not a man was visible above ground in that foxhole which seconds before had been too small for even one man, but which now contained four — to say nothing of the shovel. When they started climbing out Myers could barely make it from the beating he had taken. A size 11 G.I. shoe was on his neck all the time. He would have done better to relinquish his hole to the other three but he found out the hard way.

Firing was kept up throughout the night at enemy positions and concentrations to soften them up, because they were still in a counter attacking mood. The next day we moved to a new position to be better situated to repel this brewing counter attack. We fired a total of 611 rounds on July 10th, knocking out several tanks and breaking up some enemy troop concentrations.

It was here that our friendship for the P-47's suddenly ceased for a short time and remained in doubt for several days thereafter. Things were going fairly smoothly when a P-47 roared over us at tree top height. We didn't mind that so much but when he dropped that wicked 500 pound bomb it was a different story. He turned it loose over one end of the position and it kept falling, getting nearer to the ground and to Cpl. Thomas J. Lattinville Jr. who was trying desperately to flatten himself right into mother earth. It missed him, but not by far; and skipped over the ground into the side of a house nearby. The fact that it turned out to be a dud didn't keep it from giving most of the battery a more or less severe case of heart failure. Not a pleasant sight; to see a bomb falling that close.

The counter attack continued with us in the same position near Cabigny, the morning of the 11th of July. Tanks broke through again and at times the battery was firing at a range of 900 yards. Pretty close for Artillery. At one point the battery had to send out bazooka men to wait for them. There were snipers in a house nearby and bullets were rattling off the sides of the first section tank for a while narrowly missing Cpl. Fred Billingham. Others were whizzing over the heads of Pfc. Albert M. Mayer and Cpl. Samuel I. Frankel.

The snipers were chased out with small arms fire however before anyone was hurt. Counter battery fire was falling in the next hedge-row from the battery and suddenly it was right in on us. One exploded near the Recon peep, narrowly missing Pfc. Robert E. Horton and Pfc. Leonard G. Plasse. The peep was perforated with shrapnel and had two tires blown out. The battery had a fire mission about this time and was working on it when a salvo of 88's landed squarely in the position, one round exploding at the left front of the First Section tank. Pfc. Charles J. Lewandowski was preparing ammunition at the left rear of the tank at the time and a jagged piece of shrapnel ripped into his right side. Even though severely wounded Chuck didn't lose consciousness and told the rest of the section to take cover and not to mind him. At this point Lt. Plummer, Sgt. Wm. Huizel, and Pvt. Arthur Brown (one of our medics) ran through a hell of exploding shrapnel to see how badly he was hurt and to administer first aid. For this Pvt. Brown was awarded a richly deserved Silver Star Medal and Lt. Plummer and Sgt. Huizel a Bronze Star Medal at a later date. Chuck was evacuated to the 105th treatment platoon and from there to an unknown evacuation hospital.

He was our first battle casualty and his being hit made the rest of the battery fighting mad because Chuck was a friend to every man in the battery, having been with us for three years. The battery fired a total of 660 rounds that day to help break up the determined counter attack.

The next day, July 12th, saw an attack on St. Lo by the 30th Infantry Division with the battery in general support. We shelled enemy positions around St. Lo throughout the day and night.

The following day, July 13th, was much the same. Just a steady shelling by the battery of enemy installations of all sorts in support of the attack on St. Lo. It was here that we saw "Hedge Row Warfare" at its worst and a days advance from one hedgerow to another — probably two hundred yards — was considered good at that time. It was perfect country for defensive warfare and the Germans took full advantage of it. There was nothing to do but shell them with artillery and then have infantry go in and clean the remaining ones out. There were some very tough and bloody battles around here but nothing spectacular.

Tec 5 Reinhold A. Wetzel was promoted to Corporal and Pfc. Bill



Overes promoted to Tec 5; the first promotions in France in "A" Battery. We fired 570 rounds that day.

From July 14th to 17th inclusive the battery remained in the same position as before, near Cavingny, and lobbed shells into enemy positions near St. Lo. We fired 227 rounds July 14th and 1100 rounds July 15th. Each day our planes would bomb and strafe the Germans and every so often an occasional German plane would sneak in. The resulting Ack-Ack and dog fights livened the day up for us and every night the German planes would come out and, if their purpose was harassing us, they were successful. There were enemy shells whistling around all during this period and occasional forays up into the infantry country by individual members of the battery. We had moderate counter battery fire at intervals all day July 15th. It was here that Sgt. Allen received the nickname of "The Mole". Even though it was July, he was getting a pallor from too much time underground. Firing slackened up the next two days, down to 154 rounds on the 16th and 170 rounds on the 17th. Orders came on the 17th to prepare to move to a new position to support an attack that was shaping up. The 18th and 19th were largely spent waiting orders to move and we fired only 10 rounds the 18th and none the 19th. The weather wasn't any too good these days with hardly any sunshine and too much rain. Quite a bit of Cognac was consumed during this time and a large nick was put into the available supply of cider in this vicinity. We still needed coffee but no one needed cigarettes at this time. It seemed as though they gave us a carton every other day besides the ones in the rations each day. By this time we didn't appreciate the 10 in 1's nearly as much as before and most of us didn't care for any except the No. 4 menu. The abundance of cigarettes wouldn't last but we didn't know it at that time.

The evening of the 19th was largely spent in foxholes. The Luftwaffe made several visits in strength over us and near us that night. More than a score of flares were dropped, lighting up the sky and our position as well as everything else for miles around. It looked like the midway of a large carnival, the flares were so bright. Bombs fell near enough for us to hear them whistling down and for the ground under us to shake. They also strafed but their aim was bad and we suffered no damage to equipment and no casualties. Everyone was scared for a while though some will probably deny it at this later date.



Orders came for us to move the morning of the 20th. Our mission supporting the 30th Infantry Division in its attack on St. Lo had been a successful one and the weight of our metal had been felt by the Germans in their dug in positions around St. Lo. We moved and were established in a new position one and one-half miles north of Le Haye at 13:00 hours. We were to take part in a secret attack that was being organized for the near future. The new position was a good one, that is, until the rains came when it went the way of all good positions in Normandy. It changed to a mess of mud, and the rains which followed for four days didn't help the mud any. The battery was out of range of the enemy at this point so no firing was done or even thought about.

Friday morning, July 21st, Capt. Fiss called the battery together and told us of the secret attack that we were to take part in. It was to break through to Coutance, a distance of 9 miles, and scheduled to take place in one day. After our 200 yards a day progress through the hedges the whole plan sounded out of the question. It would be tough and only armored vehicles and a stripped battery would be included. If a vehicle was knocked out the rest were to go on by and forget about it. The main purpose was to break through and keep going. We were glad to get away from the 30th Infantry Division and get back with C.C.B. of the Third Armored Division again, which was in control — for the breakthrough — of the 4th Infantry Division. We were waiting for a 12,000 ft ceiling so the air force could blast a path through the enemy main lines around St. Lo. From the looks of the sky that morning it seemed as if the required ceiling would never get there. All this day and the next the rain came down and everyone and every thing got soaking wet. There was a little excitement on the afternoon of the 21st. A service battery half track and trailer loaded with ammunition caught fire in a field nearby and a large part of the afternoon was spent dodging pieces of shrapnel — as well as large pieces of the halftrack — as the shells exploded in groups of three or four. It was evening before the fire burned out and the noise quieted down. It wasn't quiet for long, however, because even if we were out of range a battalion of Long Toms across the road were not, and they fired at intervals all day and night. Then, too, the enemy sent quite a few shells over and around our own selves.

On the evening of Saturday, July 22nd the Germans were sending



a lot of heavy stuff over and some were landing pretty close to us. About 22:30 hours that evening, after quite a few shells had burst not far away, we heard a siren and a cry that we all dreaded — "Gas". Only half of us knew where our gas masks were and there was a mad scramble to find them and get them on as quickly as possible. Among those not knowing where his mask was at the moment was Private George "Gravel" Radcliffe. Gravel dashed hither and yon, frantically searching for the lost mask and getting more panic stricken by the moment. After a few minutes, which seemed like hours to Gravel he got Tec 4 Charles Coppens to help him go through a pile of duffel bags to find the life saving mask. It wasn't in the first nor the second nor even the third, and by this time Gravel was clawing at his throat and was choking. "Im getting faint, Coppens", he said, "We have to find it quick or it will be too late". After what seemed an eternity to the choking Gravel he pulled it out of a duffel bag and put in on. He was safe now but he still had enough gas in his lungs so that he had spells of choking for half an hour. Others who couldn't locate their mask and who had decided that they would face death without it were Tec. 4 Elisha Wornell, Tec. 5 Roberts, and Pvt. Ellis M. Luman. The all clear sounded about this time and every one tested for gas in the approved army manner. Most of us were sure we could still smell it. So we left them on to make sure. Shells were still coming in and soon there was another gas alarm. The ones who had masks were hoping it wasn't a new type of gas that would penetrate our masks while the mask-less ones were still prepare to die heroically. We didn't have long to wait this time, for the all clear sounded and after testing for gas we removed our masks. There wasn't too much sleep that night for Battery "A". We were still excited over the "Gas" attack and were more than a little afraid it would be repeated while we slept.

The next morning we found out that it was all a false alarm when Lt. Col. Garton called us together to tell us there had been no gas and that the Germans couldn't mass enough artillery or planes at that time to launch a successful gas attack. When we stopped to think we knew that ourselves, but the powers of imagination and the instinctive tendency to join the panic had made us certain that the air was full of gas. At any rate Radcliffe will never live that night down and if he sees a member of Battery "A" in 1965, he no doubt will be reminded of the time when his anguished cries pierced the night air and he

was certain he was a victim of gas. Sunday, July 23rd. it didn't rain, and the kitchen truck and crew, led by S/Sgt. Clyde "Curly" Johnson and Tec. 4 Kermit Clark, cooked us our first meal of "B" rations in almost a month. Rather good too. The clouds were breaking up that afternoon, enough for several German planes to come streaking over. They were met by a hail of ack-ack from our attached anti-air-craft men, "A" Battery of the 486th A.A.Bn. The sky was full of tracers and heavier shells, and we were happy to see at least one of the enemy planes trailing smoke and losing altitude as he vanished into the haze. It broke the monotony but then there had never been many dull moments with the boys of Battery "A". There really are a lot of characters in the outfit.

The rest of that day and the next, Monday, July 24th, were spent doing maintenance work, writing letters, having bull sessions, and taking trips to a certain cider barrel which wasn't too far away. The clouds weren't so thick but they were still too much for the kind of an air attack we needed to launch our break through.

The clouds had thinned out considerably by the morning of Tuesday, July 25th. The blue sky could be seen behind the lacy network of clouds and at 9:30 hours we heard the drone of hundreds of engines. The bombers were there at last. They came in formations of 36, how many we don't know, but the sky was full of them. They sailed majestically overhead, hundreds of B-17's and B-24's, while far above and looking like tiny silver specks against the background of blue was their escort of P-38's and P-51's. The fighters banked and turned and reminded us of another hen watching over her brood. As they passed over, strips of tin foil were released to confuse the enemy's radar system, and quite a bit fell in our position. Enemy flak started to fill the sky, the black puffs of exploding shells so thick it seemed as if nothing could pass through successfully. The leading bomber released a smoke marker, a signal for bombs away, and we could see hundreds of bombs hurtling down onto the enemy positions. It took several seconds for the sound and rumble of the exploding bombs to reach us but when they did the ground shook and so did we. Just like a mild earth quake. We saw with heavy hearts a B-17 get hit; it broke into four pieces and fell flaming to the earth. Two others met the same fate but the rest sailed on without breaking formation. They were truly queens of the sky. Wave followed wave and it kept up for more



than an hour. After each wave passed the enemy flak got weaker and weaker and no more of our planes were shot down. Shortly afterward squadron after squadron and wave after wave of A-20's and B-26's passed over and dealt death to the enemy. Our knees shook with the concussion of each wave of bombs and we were all glad that the bombers were on our side. Here was air power at its best and on a scale that Hitler had never even dreamed about. It was good for the morale of Battery A to witness such a blow against the foe.

The rest of the day and evening was spent cleaning equipment and getting prepared so we could move out and take our part in the break through. Conversation was mostly about the air raid and its probable effect on the Hun.

## SPEARHEADING THROUGH FRANCE AND BELGIUM

This was the second such tremendous tactical air preparation in direct support of ground forces. The first had been on D-day. This one marked another turning point in the fighting against the German Wehrmacht, and was the beginning of the second campaign of the war which ended with a final streak across Eastern France, Belgium, and into the Siegfried Line on the border of Germany.

We left our position at 6:30 hours on the morning of the 26th and moved into a position by Le Glinel, near Marigny. Here we were ready to support the attack on enemy positions at Marigny and to run the gauntlet of enemy fire we knew would be there. Nothing of great importance happened to the battery, but in and near Marigny there was a terrific tank battle and the noise of it and other battle sounds were plainly audible. Every once in a while a screaming shell would pass over, or an armored piercing shell would ricochet and bury itself into the ground nearby. This continued the rest of that day and the next, the 27th of July. This sort of battle gives men a rather strange feeling. Its hard to be that close to a battle and have shells whizzing by or falling near and not fire a round back, but we did fire 40 rounds on the 27th in support of our tanks. The tank battle was won by the 33rd Armored Regiment, and a breakthrough was made. We moved forward the morning of the 28th to a position near La Chapelle. While en route to the new position we passed a Panther tank which had been knocked out in the battle. A dead German was draped over the barrel of the long 75 gun and most of his clothes had been blown off. We later saw a picture of this in the Stars and Stripes. On this day a couple of our men were wounded and there was a narrow escape by another.

The first wounded was Pfc. Truman Fanning. He saw a knocked out 88 and went over to investigate and set off a booby trap which was attached. He was more frightened than hurt by the explosion which



inflicted a flesh wound in his hand. He was given first aid and returned to duty the same day. Sgt. William Huizel also received a slight injury to his hand when an ammunition trailer fell on it. Tec. 5 James Coley narrowly escaped death or serious injury when a mortar shell landed not more than 5 yards from him. He flattened out onto the ground and wasn't scratched. Several close calls in the battery that day but the worst was yet to come.

Late in the afternoon things were fairly hot when we heard the drone of approaching planes. We had been warned by radio that enemy planes were in the area. We saw them seconds later, about 30 of them a mixture of ME-109's and Focke Wulf 190's. They roared over at low level straffing the positions and releasing rockets. They were the first rockets we had seen fired and they were fired right at us. The fact that their aim was bad didn't keep the men from being frightened when the sheets of flame from the rockets swept past. Some of us ducked to cover, while others stood by, sort of petrified, to watch the spectacle. That was a lucky day indeed for the battery, with so many close calls but no one injured enough to be evacuated.

We moved forward the afternoon of the 29th to a new position near Countances still supporting C.C.B. in an encircling movement. It was a successful movement and we passed wrecked and burned out hulls of enemy tanks, guns and vehicles. Scores of enemy dead littered the ditches and fields on either side of the road.

The battery moved further forward on the 30th and in doing so we suffered our first total casualty. The B.C. section, led by Capt. Fiss, was with the forward elements of Task Force No. 1, C.C.B. 3rd Armored Division, acting as artillery liaison party in the attack. They were moving down a road out of Hamby, as they came to a curve in the road heavy enemy shell fire was encountered. On the right side of the road was a high bank — level with the half track — while on the other was a level field without even a hedge. The column halted and the B.C. track pulled up close by the side of the sheltering bank. A salvo of 88's whizzed directly overhead and the men in the track were undecided as to whether they should get out but finally decided they would be as safe inside as any place. The second salvo was close and the last round hit the door on the drivers side. It was an oil shell, but jagged pieces of the shell case ripped into Tec. 5 James J. Conely's back, side, and legs, killing him instantly. Other pieces went on through



to lodge in Capt. Fiss's legs, four pieces in one and 3 in the other. Pfc. Stanley A. Wronko was sprayed with blazing oil and suffered severe burns on the chest and face. Capt. Fiss jumped out and broke his injured right leg. The remainder of the B.C. party, S/Sgt. Michael P. Taggart, Tec. 5 Melvin K. Jensen, Pfc. Leonard G. Plasse, Pvt. Otis Michael, Pfc. Truman Fanning. and Tec. 5 Eugene M. Michl called for the medics and helped administer first aid and make to the wounded men as comfortable as possible. Neither Capt. Fiss or Pfc. Wronko lost consciousness and they were taken away to the 42nd Field Hospital. "Jim" Conelly was our first man to be killed and there wasn't a better liked man in the battery. He was quiet, easy to get along with, hard working, and good natured. Truly a very good soldier was "Jim" and when the battery received the news of his death there was a lump in the throat of every man. Capt. Fiss was the kind of a man that most soldiers wish they could have for a C. O. but which very few ever get. His loss was keenly felt, too, but we knew he would be all right. Pfc. Wronko was another boy who had been with us ever since the battery was formed. He was well liked and we were glad to know that he wasn't seriously injured.

There was another casualty the same day. A camouflage net over a tank caught fire and Tec. 5 Frank Feola grabbed an axe and started to cut it away. The axe hit the tank and slid off inflicting a deep cut into his knee. He was taken to the 35th Evacuation Hospital the same evening.

Lt. Sterne was appointed acting Battery Commander and Lt. Plummer took over as executive the evening of the 30th.

It was here that Battery A helped deal the enemy a devastating blow. Lt. Johnny Forston, one of the battalion F.O.'s, had spotted a field full of enemy tanks and vehicles refueling. He waited until night and then fired the 19th Corps artillery in on them. "A" battery fired 30 rounds as its share, some white phosphorous along with the high explosives, and as a result the sky was red all night from the blazing wrecks of more than a score of German tanks and quite a few other vehicles.

On the 31st of July Pvt. Alexander Ksenick and Pvt. Leo Zemitus were promoted to the grade of Tec. Fifth Grade. The battery crossed the river Senne to new positions near Soundival Les Bois. The attack was still going on and we were in direct support of C.C.B. The battery had several near misses the evening of the 31st and also August 1st



intermittent enemy fire coming in and near our position. Two in particular landed just behind the fourth section tank, narrowly missing Sgt. Earl Tormala and Pvt. Frank "Red" Barrett. Snipers were nearby too, and they fired at us off and on all day. We also had a scare from the P-47's that day. German anti-tank guns and infantry were close on our right flank and the P-47's spotted them and dived right in over our position to strafe and bombed the Germans. It looked for the frightening moment as if they had mistaken us for the enemy but their aim was good and we breathed easier for a little while. Sgt. Irving S. Olson dropped a round on his foot the 31st but after first aid was applied he continued his duties. Pvt. Ellis M. Aplin shot himself in the finger and was evacuated to the 91st Evacuation Hospital.

On the afternoon of August 2nd the battery prepared to move forward again. We started moving late in the afternoon and got in the column. We didn't go far and spent the hours until darkness sitting on the road. After dark the battle raged in earnest, several anti-tank guns and tanks had been holding up our column. Not all had been knocked out however and there were still a lot of Germans in and near Coulouvray-Boisbenatre. We went through anyway, with small arms fire rattling off the sides of the vehicles and shells whizzing over head. The glare of burning vehicles turned night into day and everything was plainly visible. Most of us would have liked the protecting veil of darkness at that time because the column halted while we were in the middle of the town. Some of the men jumped from the vehicles and went out to hunt for Germans who were in all the side streets. There were quite a few less Germans as a result of this. We moved on, small arms fire still bouncing off our vehicles or passing over head. It was about as hot as a town could be but we had run the gauntlet successfully. Outside the town we again halted and the shells once again started to fall in close. Enemy airplanes were overhead too and some of the men took to the ditches on the side of the road. While we were waiting a peep came along the road, and Lt. Plummer and the lead-tank, the Fifth Section, led by Sgt. Olson, saw it was a German amphibous peep with three men in it. They cried "Halt" and the Germans ran — but not very far — as Lt. Plummer, Sgt. Olson, Cpl. Johnny Loisel, Tec. 5 Eugene M. Michl, and Pfc. Joseph Sinsheimer emptied three tommy gun clips and a pistol clip at them. One German was shot to pieces; the others were wounded but managed to escape in the darkness. The peep was per-



forated too but Lt. Sterne decided to take it along as a souvenir. He and Pvt. Fanning got in but it had a tricky switch which was also a light switch. They couldn't get it started and once Fanning made the bad mistake of turning on the lights instead of the switch. Those lights looked awfully bright out there in the darkness with shells going by and enemy planes still over head. He turned them off plenty fast and the peep was taken in tow by a tank. It was here that Pvt. Buddy Osborne accidentally discharged his gun while jumping from a tank and shot himself in the foot. He was evacuated to the 91st Evacuation Hospital. We went into position not far from Villedieu Les Poeles.

It was on this day, August 2nd, that the battery had two more fatal casualties. The Recon Section, led by Lt. Patterson and S/Sgt. Ted Marik, was up with the tankers outside of Coulouvray-Boisbenatre. Pfc. Robert Horton and Pfc. Jean Parenteau were in the Recon peep and got separated from the rest of the section. They got on the wrong road and finally came to a cross roads. The advance elements of the 33rd Armored Regiment were there and Horton and Parenteau pulled in with them for the time being. Shells started to fall in the area and they started a once to dig a foxhole. They hadn't gotten very far when a salvo fell right beside them. Shell fragments pierced the head of Pfc. Horton killing him instantly. Other pieces hit Jean in the head and in the back. He never regained consciousness and died a few minutes later in the ambulance enroute to the hospital. Losing these two men, who had been with us so long, gave us another score to settle with the Hun.

The battery heard of this shortly afterward and Tec. 5 Robert Breymer, Pvt. Roy Brown, and Pfc. Mayer were sent up to bring Horton's body and the peep back. They drove through heavy shell fire and found a piece of shrapnel had punctured a tire on the peep. Shells were coming in all the time and this trio probably set a speed record, changing a tire and getting out of there. Shells seemed to follow them as they returned to the battery position and they had several narrow escapes. For this, the three were awarded a Bronze Star at a later date.

The weather improved and we remained in the same position, near Coulouvray-Boisbenatre August 3rd, 4th, and 5th. The attack was still going on south-east of Villedieu les Pocles and we were in support. The lights on our German peep were disconnected to prevent a recurrence of the incident of the night before. We mastered the switch after a time and learned how to get the gears into reserve.



The white star of the U.S. Army was painted here and there over the peep and an orange aerial identification panel was provided. We spent a lot of time on that peep. Shells were coming in off and on all this time but we didn't fire much. Our part was that of a newspaper and we fired three shells filled with propaganda leaflets on the afternoon of the fourth into enemy positions south-east of Villedieu les Pocles. While here most of the battery renewed acquaintance with Cognac and cider, as a couple of the boys uncovered a hidden keg of Cognac while exploring. Still good stuff, that Cognac.

The morning of the 6th we moved forward 8 miles to a position near Reffuveille and spent the rest of the day awaiting our next move. The attack had moved up and there was plenty of evidence of the terrific fighting of the past week along the roads. Wrecked guns, tanks, and burned out vehicles were in all the fields. There were shell craters and those larger holes where bombs had hit on the edges of the road. Enemy dead were still sprawled and unburied in the ditches where they had died.

On the 7th Lt. Plummer and Sgt. Huizel were awarded the Bronze Stars for gallantry in action on July 11th. Pvt. Brown of the medics was awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action on July 11th. Sgt. Huizel was also awarded the purple heart for wounds received July 28th. The battery moved to a position near Juvigny to support an attack by the First Infantry Division near Mortain.

In this position on August 8th the battery was assigned replacements to make up for the men lost and wounded in action. There were Pvts. Clare E. Crane, William A. Spicer, Leonard L. Morris, and Anselm O. Norman. They came from Service Battery and had the good fortune to make the transatlantic trip to England on the Queen Mary, with 1000 WACs also aboard. It was a lot better than the S. S. Shawnee. Right? The day also saw Cpl. Wetzel promoted to the rank of Sgt., Pvt. Robert J. Heinauer to the rank of Cpl., Pfc's. George Richardson, George Fenn, and Leonard Plasse promoted to Tec. 5's.

The battery fired a total of 620 rounds on the 8th. The enemy had started a counter attack and we were helping repel it.

In the afternoon of the 8th Pvt. Ellis Luman marched into the battery position with his rifle in the back of a thoroughly disconcerted German prisoner. Ellis got a big cheer as he led his prisoner in.

The Germans had a large force near Mortain and were developing



a large scale counter attack. They were well equipped with large amounts of tanks and artillery, the shells from their artillery whizzed in or near our position for the next five days and nights. It was here that the Germans had their strongest air support of the whole French campaign, at least in our sector of the front. For five nights in succession large forces of enemy bombers and fighter bombers came over us. Their flares lit up our position just like daytime and they strafed and bombed every night. Not our own battery position every night but close enough to make us run for our foxholes. The net result for the Luftwaffe was a lot of bombs and ammunition expended but not many casualties in our task force, and none in "A" Battery. They did cause us to lose a lot of sleep and frightened us no little when they would go into their dive and start straffing. The wistle of the bombs falling wasn't exactly a morale booster, either.

Our position was in a wheat field near a large farm house. There was cider in abundance in the barn and one of the Frenchmen there had a large stock of wooden shoes. Quite a few of the boys paid the necessary 75 francs and sent a pair home for a souvenir. Quite a few more made deep inroads into the supply of cider.

By the 9th the counter attack had developed into a counter offensive in an attempt to drive through to Avranches and to the sea, thus cutting our force in Brittany off from the rest of the American Army. They started from east of Mortain. Task Force One and Two of C.C.B. and the 119th Infantry of the 30th Infantry Division were in the path of the counter offensive. The battery was in direct support of these outfits and on the 9th we fired a total of 506 rounds at mortars, infantry, and anti-tank guns.

The battery was having it pretty hot at this time, but nothing compared to that endured by the R.O. and B.C. parties who were up forward with the infantry and tankers. They were near a hill that C.C.B. and the 30th Infantry Division christened "Purple Heart Hill". In this area mortar shells, artillery shells and small arms fire poured in steadily and it wasn't safe for a man to let his head be seen over a hedgerow. Casualties in men and equipment were heavy and a steady stream of replacements was being sent up all the time. Some weren't up long enough to tell about it when they were hit and had to be taken away.

August 10th was this sort of a day and fire was coming in thick



and fast, falling around the R.O. track. One fell every close and a fragment went through the flesh on the upper part of Tec. 5 John W. Manuel's arm. He didn't want to be taken away but the medics insisted and he was taken to the 45th Armd. Med. Bn. for treatment. All throughout this period the R.O. section — Lt. Patterson, S/Sgt. Marik, Pfc. Carroll M. Larson, Pfc. Michael McGrath, Pvt. Charles R. Corbin Jr., Cpl. Robert J. Heinauer — did a very good job and were constantly under heavy fire of all descriptions. Pfc. McGrath and Pvt. Corbin were machine gunners and their accurate and well placed fire helped break up several local penetrations of vehicles and infantry. There were a few funny incidents mixed in with this hell of war. One day Lt. Patterson and S/Sgt. Marik spotted a lone German soldier about 800 yards ahead. He was walking toward a house and they suspected that other Germans were in the house. So Lt. Patterson fired one gun at the lone German. It fell short but close enough so that the German ran for dear life. Others followed, just far enough behind to scare the German into another burst of speed. While this was going on Sgt. Marik was firing at the lone soldier with his rifle, not hitting him because of the long range but coming very close. The retreating Nazi finally reached the house and shortly afterward Lt. Patterson fired the battery at the house and it was demolished, along with whatever Germans happened to be inside.

The B.C. party was having it just as rough. They were with the 2nd Battalion of the 33rd Armored Regiment and the shells fell like hail for days in and around their position. On the morning of the 11th it was particularly bad but Tec. 5 Leo Zemitus wanted to see them fall and wouldn't take cover. A fragment passed through his arm and he was taken to the 91st Evacuation Hospital. Cpl. Thomas J. Lattinville Jr. was hit in the hand by another fragment but was given first aid and remained on duty. The rest of the B.C. party, Lt. Sterne, Tec. 4 Wornell, Pvt. John P. Wood, and Pvt. Truman Fanning, were all up in the thick of it and were given a Bronze Star at a later date for heroic achievement against the enemy. At this point they saw one company of our tanks so depleted by enemy fire that a Corporal was company commander, and out of a total of 17 tanks the company had only two. No wonder it was called Purple Heart Hill.

A battalion of infantry of the 30th Infantry Division was cut off and surrounded nearby but they kept on fighting. Medical supplies



were loaded in artillery shells and fired in to them. On the 11th the battery saw a formation of 18 C-47's fly in at tree top height, headed straight for enemy lines. We knew how heavy the enemy flak barrage was and we hoped they would get through safely but really doubted if they would. Every one watched them with his fingers crossed. They got close to the enemy lines and the flak came up like hail but the enemy was really unprepared and they sailed through it, dropped their supplies to the 10th Battalion, did a sharp turn and came back over us, doors open, static lines hanging out, but still in perfect formation and still at tree top height. We counted them and every man was glad when they were all there. This happened on the 11th, with the same repeated on the 12th, and we sweated them out just as much the second day as the first. They all made it the second day, too.

The back of the counter offensive had been broken by the 12th and we prepared for march order. It had been a bloody battle and the fire of the artillery had played a large part in breaking it up. We were relieved from supporting the 30th Infantry Division and went back in with C.C.B. of the 3rd Armored Division. We were supposed to drive all night and then have a combination rest and maintenance period.

We started out on Saturday evening August 12th about 18:00 hours and waited on the road until dark before moving on.

After the heavy air activity of the past five nights we were all a little apprehensive about our all night drive. The Luftwaffe didn't show up however and we drove south all night, then north-east until 6:30 the morning of the 13th. We pulled in, all tired out, and thought we were going to get a rest and a chance to eat and clean up a bit. Our eyes were red from lack of sleep and driving into the wind all night and we all needed sleep pretty badly. We were not to be lucky enough to get it however because when everyone had breakfast on the fire we heard "March Order". We were to support a new attack which was starting that day. It was an encircling movement that was to take us deep into France and trap the German 7th Army. So we pulled out after swallowing a few bites of a half cooked breakfast. Our eyes were still red and burning and half shut from loss of sleep as we headed straight into the rising sun.

The first large town we came to in daylight on that Sunday morning was Mayenne. Evidence of the battle fought there was all around. The railway yards were pocked marked with bomb craters, and near



the station and bridge were German ack-ack guns which had vainly tried to keep our bombers away. Buildings in the center of the town were a mass of ruins and rubble and the walls of those still standing had gaping holes where shells had ripped through. Countless small holes from machine gun fire had perforated the wall around each window and door where snipers could have been lurking.

We rolled slowly on, halting ever once in a while while the tanks ahead were cleaning out points of resistance. Burned out German vehicles and the dead littered the sides of the road. We came to an intersection and turned north onto a wide road bordered on each side with tall trees. The fields nearby were larger and the country was more level. Here was the France that all of us had heard about and expected to see. The hedgerow country and its dirty, dull people had almost ruined our impression of France but we seemed to be out of it now. We were tired as we moved down the road with the sun burning our eyes and the hot wind hitting us in the face, but after seeing the difference in the country and in the people who lined the roads to wave at us we seemed to be able to tap a hitherto unknown source of energy. They came running across the fields with baskets of eggs, bread buttered thickly with the rich butter of Normandy, bottles of wine and Cognac. It was here that we made our first acquaintance with Calvados. Up to now the cognac had seemed pretty strong but this calvados was like the kick of a mule. The Colonel had given orders not to drink enroute but we all knew that in the Army anything is O.K. as long as you don't get caught. So the net result was that most of the battery allowed the happy French people to force a drink or three on themselves every time we would halt for a few moments. The eggs they gave us were very, very welcome because we had been getting the powdered kind too long.

It was in Junscon that we received our first thunderous welcome. We had passed through other towns but hadn't stopped in any until Junscon. The battery was in the main part of the town when the column halted for a little while. The entire population swarmed over us and our vehicles, trying to shake our hands and kiss us. The fact that too many frenchmen, all in need of a shave, kissed us, thereby preventing all the girls from doing so, irked us no little. Every vehicle was bedecked with flowers and tiny French flags.

Someone started passing out cigarettes and after seeing them the



French became a howling mob who wanted nothing so much as American cigarettes. It was here that Tec. 5 Jensen and Pvt. Spicer gave out 35 cartons of cigarettes. Something that they regretted doing later on when cigarettes became scarce. Wine was flowing also, but mostly down the throats of the men of Battery A. We didn't get to stay long, however, as the column moved on.

We came to an intersection and by it were a couple of German anti-tank guns, but they and their crew lay broken and inert by the road. We pulled into position nearby at 15:00 hours and replenished our almost empty gas tanks. Most of us washed our burning faces and eyes and felt a little better. At 16:30 hours we moved out once again, still traveling N.E. People still lined the road and gave us the same welcome we had received in Junscon. Up ahead of the column we could watch the P-47's circling, diving, strafing, and bombing. We could see the bombs falling and a sheet of flame and a cloud of black smoke arise long before the rumble of the explosion reached us. As different sorts of strong points were met we would stop and different kinds of vehicles would pass us. Sometimes it was the engineers, other times the tank destroyers and sometimes we would pull out to fire on targets that were holding up the advance. It was on this afternoon that we saw units of the French army with equipment and clothes just like ours. Truck after truck, loaded with German prisoners were coming back, and many more lay lifeless around their knocked out guns, tanks, and vehicles.

About dark we came to Ranes, freshly captured with hundreds of German prisoners under guard. Vehicles freshly captured and manned by the F.F.I. were going around to help bring in or kill the Hun. The town was still pretty hot and sections of the road hadn't been cleared of mines as yet. Burning German tanks and vehicles lighted the sky and the rattle of burp guns and small arms fire were heard on each side of the road.

We went a couple of miles from Ranes and into position in a field near the road. By this time it was 22:00 hours and pitch dark. We had been on the road more than 24 hours and had traveled more than 125 miles, deep into enemy territory. All that night the battery fired at enemy installations, anti-tank guns, mortars, and infantry with very telling effect. We found out the morning of the 14th that Germans had been on every side of us the night before, just across the road and everywhere. Quite a few were brought in as prisoners and quite a few



were killed by members of the battery out on scouting missions. Dive bombers kept up their good work and the battle raged on. The battery fired all during the day in direct support of the attack. The night of the 14th we got some counter battery and mortar fire in the position and even though it fell close to the vehicles no damage or casualties resulted. Enemy planes were over us a big portion of the night and dropped flares but no bombs. Mortar fire came in intermittently during the night but the attack moved forward and so did we at 5:30 the morning of the 15th.

Going forward we closely passed the burned out hulks of three M-4 tanks and two halftracks and nearby were scores of German vehicles, guns and tanks, and dead. We went through Pre-en-Pail and into a long field nearby. Nothing happened until the guns had been laid and the vehicles all camouflaged. We didn't know that Germans were in the hedgerow at the end of our field and, in fact, all arounds us, until their machine guns and small arms fire started coming in. We all ducked. A patrol was organized and sent out, and all guns on the vehicles were manned. Element of the 83rd Recon were on our right front and they poured a deadly hail of machine gun fire into the Germans who had fired at us. A lot of it swept our own position so we all stayed low as the bullets whizzed over our heads.

Enemy mortar fire began coming into the position and now things were really hot. None of us had had time to dig holes so there was nothing to do but flatten out, which most of us did off and on. Tec. 5 Walter R. McMahon was hit in the neck by a machine gun bullet at this point, and was evacuated amid all of the fire to an unknown hospital. At this point we got some welcome aid, as well as another fright from 4 P-47's. They roared in and started diving toward us with machine guns chattering. We thought for an instant they had mistaken us for the enemy as links from ammunition belts dropped to our position. To Sgt's. Allen, Everett and Olson, Tec. 5's Breymeyer, Mixson, Green. and Jensen — who were up ahead killing some Germans it seemed even closer. The fire from burp guns and machine guns that had been whizzing inches over their heads was nothing when compared to how they felt when the P-47's cut loose with those eight 50's so near to them. When they saw those big black bombs hurtling down they thought their number was up. The bombers aim was good, however, and they knocked out a Mark 4 tank and shot up countless Germans who were in the



hedges nearby. Mortar fire kept coming in and the grass in the field was being cut by the shrapnel from the exploding shells. After several hours of this, the fire died down and thereafter just a few shells came in — artillery shells — with no more casualties to the battery.

Pvt. Wanciak was taken ill on the 15th and taken to the 45th Armored Medical Battalion.

The afternoon of the 15th was spent firing on enemy concentrations and positions. Late in the afternoon the task force caught up with us and passed through our position. We had been ahead of the tanks and everything that morning. While our forces were passing through our position they had a halt and during the halt we were shelled some more.

The battery fired all night the 15th and the 16th taking part in a terrific pounding of the enemy positions. We moved forward 2½ miles on the 16th, continuing our fire and getting some counter battery fire in our positions. It was mostly high burst and while it was directly over us the bursts were too high and no one was hit. Tec. 5 Jensen was at a farm nearby — officially after water — but searching for eggs and Cognac on the sly, when a shell hit near the pump. So it was a good thing for him that his quest included things other than water. He wasn't hit but it was close. It was here that several Germans were killed by members of the battery while out on scouting missions. The scouting missions were mainly for Cognac and German souvenirs, but if any Germans were encountered that was even better because we got the souvenirs anyway. While out on one of these missions Pfc. Plasse, Pvts. Wood, Michael and "Gravel" Radcliffe found some cognac and had quite a battle with it. A losing battle, to judge by the condition of Michael and Radcliffe when they came back. They had quite a time and fired some rounds from a bezooka at a stump before coming back. We received some counter battery fire in this field but not too much, and the battery fired all night, a total of 428 rounds, in direct support of C.C.B. Our task force was about to meet up with the British and finish the iron ring we had helped forge around the German 7th Army. We fired all day the 18th. The gap was closed near Falaise when British infantry met elements of C.C.B. The German 7th Army, or the remnants of it, were on the inside of the ring and were being steadily reduced by the fighting infantry and supporting artillery fire.

On the 19th Pvt. Persie McConnell was taken ill and removed to

the 45th Armored Medical Battalion. Our battalion fixed up a shower point, and in collaboration with the 486th Artillery Battalion a movie was set up in an old barn and we saw our first show in France. The Red Cross doughnut truck came to our position on the 19th and the battery stood in the rain to get their share. About this time someone in the brains department decided that everyone had to be up from 6:00 to 6:15 hours. The men of "A" Battery, didn't think much of the idea and on several mornings some Major or Colonel would come around and find the entire battery sound sleep except for some weary guards.

A lot of noise and confusion resulted, but mostly on the part of the inspecting Major or Colonel. "A" Battery never did see much sense in that sort of thing. This order gave Lt. Sterne an excuse to make a remark that was to become a classic with the battery. The Lieutenant, seeing Chaplain Elliot after the order came out, asked him if he had mounted his Bible from 6:00 to 6:15 that morning. The Chaplain didn't appreciate it but every one else did.

It was here that Lt. Sterne called the battery together for a talk. Lt. Sterne's talks were well known and appreciated by the men and we had heard and enjoyed them for more than two years. It could be added that his speeches were the only ones ever enjoyed by the battery. The one this day was no exception. He gave us a review of the encircling movement we had taken part in and made some snappy remarks on the being up from 6:00 to 6:15. The subject of drinking was then brought up and he pointed out the evils of drink in combat and especially when out of the battery position. It was a short snappy speech, one of the best he had ever made, and after it was over he made his exit in a peep. The speech took place about 10:30 hours and everything was quiet until about 16:00 hours. At that time the Lieutenant was brought in by the MP's. It seems that he had gone to a town nearby and was holding his own in a frontal attack on some Cognac and Calvados. Some MP's arrived on the scene and, as MP's will, they started asking silly questions. The Lieutenant has never been one to beat around the bush and voiced his own — and ours incidentally — uncomplimentary sentiments about all MP's, and this one in particular. He even brought in the MP's ancestors. All of us know what happens in a case like that, and it did happen.

They brought him in and the Colonel wasn't very pleased over the



whole thing. To the men of the battery, it was very funny because we all appreciate things like that, having been in similiar episodes ourselves. This battery is strictly a bunch of characters but we always have a lot of fun. Even in wartime there are very few dull moments around the battery.

On the 20th we started preparing for our next move and rumors had it that we were going toward Paris. We all hoped we would but somehow we doubted that we would be so lucky. Two girls of the Red Cross brought their show to the position on the afternoon of the 20th and it was pretty good for that kind of a show. We cleaned and went over our equipment and got a little rest but it rained most of the time so there wasn't too much rest at that. Our part of that battle was over but shells could still be heard going over and once in a while small arms fire could be heard. German recon planes were over almost every night but they didn't bomb or strafe us. The Third Armored Division was now with the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions.

Moving orders came and we left our position near Anebeau at 12:15 hours on August 20th. We passed German dead that were still unburied. Their equipment still littered each side of the road. The sun started to shine and we were glad of that. We headed north-east and were soon on a 4 lane highway with large trees on either side. Convoys of trucks were hauling supplies of all sorts and soon we started passing a pipeline that was under construction toward Paris. We passed through scores of small villages but the first and only large city that we passed through was Alençon. It had been badly battered by shells and bombs but it was being cleaned up. The MP's were in control and we didn't rate much from the civilians as we passed through as Americans were an old story to them by now. We turned off the main road and took to secondary roads, passing through a number of small villages. We were getting quite a few eggs, tomatoes, and some wine as we went along, together with cheers from the farmers and villagers.

We rolled onward past farms and villages and the country got a lot better as we went. Prosperous looking too. Along all the roads the enemy had dug deep trenches for men in their convoys to seek shelter in when our bombers came over. These were long all main roads all the way to Germany. We finally stopped at 22:00 hours for overnight in an orchard. No guns were heard all this night and no planes came over.



The first time in quite a while that that had happened. It rained though and spoiled what could have been a good night. We had traveled about 106 miles during the day

Some of the battery had another encounter with the MP's on the 23rd Sgt. Olson, Tec. 5 Manuel, Pvts. Radcliffe, Kelley, and Pfc. Royce M. Applebury rode the water truck into a village called Courville-Sur-Cure and got off at a cafe. They had hardly got settled when a lordly M.P. walked in. He ordered them outside where an even more lordly Lieutenant of MP's told them that all towns were off limits to combat troops. One of the boys added "Yes, as soon as we go through them and make them safe for guys like you". It was to no avail and they had to take either a Courts-Martial later on or pay a \$ 10.00 fine then and there. They paid but it didn't improve our feeling toward all MP's. We prepared to move the afternoon of the 24th, and finally started at 19:00 hours. We again took secondary roads and drove all night, one of the darkest nights we had ever seen, but no accidents occurred. We pulled into a wooded area about 5:00 hours. We got some much needed rest as we had came a long way.

We moved again at 14:00 hours and upon passing the other side of our position in the morning found it to be an exploded German ammunition dump. It was a shambles now after the explosions. There were anti-air-craft emplacements around it but these had been blasted too. We kept moving toward the Seine but at 17:00 hours we caught up with the Germans outside of a little village. We fired some 30 rounds into enemy mortar positions and machine gun nests. Once again we got march order when supper was half cooked and had to leave. We left this position and pulled out on the road where we waited until 21:00 hours. We started out again toward the Seine and this time we crossed it near Tilly at 23:10 hours. We crossed on a pontoon bridge in pitch darkness and went over the roughest road we had ever ridden on. It had been blasted right through the woods for a distance of several miles by the engineers. Crossing the river Pvt. Victor "Shore Patrol" Hill lost his helmet while sleeping. He must have been dreaming he was back along the Susquehanna in Harrisburg. We went parallel with the river after crossing it, heading west for a while but finally pulled into a position at 2:00 hours. Germans were all around us and we could hear their burp guns everywhere. We posted a strong guard, however, to make certain no one broke in. The rest of us



got a few hours sleep. The battery moved into the next field for a better firing position and fired some very successful missions against enemy vehicles and infantry. We pulled out at 10:00 hours once again, parallel to the Seine, passing through villages and at one point going alongside the Seine for several miles. French people were everywhere and in the towns we were greeted like conquering heroes. Everyone was out on the streets, cheering, waving, giving us wine and champagne, apples and other fruits. A lot of pretty girls were there too and we wished we could have stopped. We pulled into a position in some woods near Lesigny and did some very effective firing, knocking out several batteries of German horse artillery as well as enemy vehicles and troop concentrations. At 17:00 we moved out again, going toward Paris all the time, and at 20:30 we pulled into a position near a sign which read — Paris 32 km's. The battery didn't fire during the night but others did, and the Germans sent some back. We could hear them coming and one fell in our position. There were Germans about, so a patrol was sent out consisting of 1st Sgt. Allen, Sgt. Everett, Pfc. Popovich, and Pvt. Radcliffe. They went to the woods but couldn't find any and turned back. During the night the Germans that they had been looking for gave themselves up — 32-to Hq. Battery.

The 27th. of August fell on Sunday and when we pulled out on a wide road at 9:00 hours we couldn't help feeling how nice it would be to go through Paris on such a beautiful Sunday morning. In our minds we could visualize just how the people would welcome us and after all, Paris is Paris, war or no war. Those were the thoughts in our minds as we rolled down the road with Paris getting nearer and nearer with each passing moment.

People were out waving and cheering and we passed a sign that read — Paris 24 km. We kept on going and entered a little village and got to a sign that read Paris 21 km. The column halted at this point and we knew then that we weren't going to be lucky enough to get to Paris. We hadn't really thought we would get there but we had been doing a lot of wishful thinking and hoping. So with a sigh of resignation we turned right onto a narrow road and followed the column. It had split up into smaller elements, each task force being cut in half. As we passed farms and open fields we could see small parties of the F.F.I. armed with German rifles and a couple of potato mashers going out across the fields into the woods to round up the Germans



that our column had by passed. They would wave and give us the old V for victory sign as we passed. Those men of the F.F.I. were certainly a big help. The leading elements met some opposition and we pulled off the road into firing position to be ready, if it was necessary to fire. We stayed here for a while and some farmer came over with some eggs and milk for us. Pvt. Kelley and Pfc. Sinsheimer decided to take a bath in a nearby creek. They were almost finished when a German burp gun cut loose pretty close. The only shelter available was a little ditch with a lot of nettle bushes in it. The nettles would have stopped them under other circumstances but it didn't today. They dived into the nettles minus their clothes but the scratches they received didn't even hurt until the shooting stopped. Out they came, looking somewhat like Mahatma Ghandi dressed in a towel. We all got a big laugh out of that. We didn't have to fire from this position but we restocked with ammunition as we were almost out. We moved on and at 16:00 hours came to the historic Marne River. German planes had been sighted and our attached anti-air-craft tracks — from the 486th AAA. — pulled up by the bridge and down the river to keep them away from the bridge. The permanent bridge had been blasted and a makeshift one had been strenghtened and repaired by our engineers. We crossed it slowly and went on for five miles into a position not far from a village. We fired 24 rounds at enemy vehicles and infantry from this position. The 391st cub landed nearby and all the French people for a couple of miles around ran out to see it. The mayor of the nearby town came out to our position and invited us into the town. We couldn't go, of course, but it showed us how the people thought of us. There was a canal nearby and most of the battery went over to it and took a refreshing bath. It really made us feel good. The level of the canal raised about two feet when Pfc. Perry Coonan dove in and the color of the water was several shades darker when we got finished but we felt good after our bath. We really needed one.

After a good night's sleep we left at 9:00 hours on the morning of August 28th, passed through the village, and received another riotous welcome. Driving northward we came to Meaux, a large city that hadn't been touched by war. The people were all out on the streets and at times they almost stopped the column as they surged out into the streets to shake hands and to greet us. The battery fared very



well on wine, fruit and tomatoes. Without stopping, we swept on. We were passing historic battle fields of World War I at this time and each name held some significance for most of us.

We had heard our fathers and their friends tell of these places and now we were there ourselves, but it was a different sort of war and we swept on through. Every so often we passed burned out German guns and vehicles by the road — together with German dead. We passed not far from Chateau Therri and turned off the road into a tremendously big forest.

It reminded us of some we had seen in Mississippi and Louisiana during our training days. There was no road, only a trail, and the woods were full of Germans. Often the column would halt and we would hear German machine guns, and then the sharp crack of a 37 mm or a 75 mm as our tanks shot it out with them. Moving forward we would soon come to a blazing German half-track or tank with it's ammunition and gas cans exploding at intervals to add to the noise. This was repeated many times during our four hour trip through the woods and scores of German prisoners passed us on their way back, hands clasped overhead in the now familiar position. We finally got out of the forest and went into position in someone's vegetable garden. We fired 18 rounds at enemy vehicles and an anti-tank gun, doing some successful firing. We moved on. The weather cleared somewhat and ahead of us we could see the P-47's in action bombing and strafing enemy positions and vehicles. The clouds of black smoke that we could see rising bore testimony of their good aim. We came to the outskirts of Soissons and it was pretty hot. Germans were everywhere with quite a bit of small arms fire. Our A.A. vehicle with it's four 50 caliber machine guns was called upon and they fired upon some Germans who had been firing at us. Needless to say the Germans didn't fire long. We moved into position about 19:30 hours and there was small arms firing at us. We had come more than 60 miles that day and were all tired but quite a few went out to look for Germans. Prisoners kept coming in, but a lot never got a chance to come in. Sgt. Everett used his B.A.R. to very good effect and added to his score of Germans killed. While out on patrol Lt. Plummer had a scare. He was in some bushes with a couple of F.F.I. men when a half track from "B" Battery opened up on him with a 50 cal. machine gun. Bullets were whizzing all around him, and the F.F.I. men looked like moles getting into the



earth. Even though the Lieutenant turned about 10 shades paler, he kept his head and didn't run. The gunner saw his mistake and ceased fire. It was a rather close call for the Lieutenant but it was an evening of close calls.

Everyone was tired and hungry, and even though we knew that there were Germans all around us and it was almost dark, we all made the mistake of building fires to cook on. About 20:30 hours we had finished eating and were getting ready to dig foxholes when we heard the dull boom of German artillery from the hills in front of us. Shortly after we heard the shells coming in. They had our range and the first salvo landed squarely in the battery position only feet away from the maintenance track and not far from an ammunition track. There were a few foxholes only inches deep but Blimp Coppens and Chow Hound Breymer both got into one and were below the surface. They still don't know how they did it. It was the same with Tec 5 Roberts and Pvt. Andy Rembriez. Three shells straddled their hole and fragments of shrapnel fell in the hole with them. Fragments of these shells hit Tec 5 Stanley Forknall in the stomach, cutting his stomach very badly, and he was evacuated to an unknown hospital. Pvt. Horace Kelley was hit by shrapnel in the left forearm and was taken to the 45th Armored Medical Battalion but returned to duty the same day. They fired salvo after salvo all squarely into our position. Some were high bursts over us while others hit the ground near the vehicles and exploded. Very few had foxholes and there was nothing to do except flatten out and hope they didn't hit near us. While the shelling was at it's height Cpl. Bill Overes, Tec. 5 Jensen, and Pvt. Wratchford had to get into their vehicle and lay wire. They had some shells explode very near them but escaped unhurt. Before the shelling started some French children were in the position, one of them, a pretty little girl only four years old. The men took her into a ditch when it started but one of the fragments pierced her head, killing her instantly. We really felt badly about seeing an innocent child killed right in front of our eyes. The shelling kept up for more than half an hour before it stopped. We moved to an alternate position but before we did so Pvt. Rembriez was called to give first aid to a man from the 33rd. While he was gone the battery moved but he looked like a Jesse Owens coming down the stretch — he was running that fast. Pvt. Radcliffe lost his gun during the confusion but "Gravel" could always be



counted upon to do something like that. That night German artillery continued to shell us but not exactly in our position. A big black Ju. 88 roared over us at tree top height that night but he didn't drop any flares or bombs. He did scare us half to death though.

It rained during the night and there were low hanging clouds the morning of the 29th. The 391st Cub was up over the position when we heard the roar of motors over the clouds. We expected P-47's but when they dove out of the clouds they were F.W. 190's, 36 of them. We were too amazed to move as they were right over us. We expected the worst, knowing how bad it could be after seeing what planes can do to an armored outfit. They came up behind our little Cub and it never even suspected their presence when the leader opened with a short burst from his guns. The Cub was on fire and falling before the sound of the firing reached us. After the shelling of the past night, the killing of the little French girl, and now the killing of Lts. Finney and Golas, we were all fighting mad. The boys of the 486th opened up on them with the full power of their multiple guns. Five were shot down and we heard later that seven more had been shot down farther down the line. They didn't strafe or bomb us and we always wondered why they missed such a good chance.

Soissons was still pretty hot with small arms fire rattling all around. Tracers could be seen flying everywhere. Just about dark Tec. 5 Jenkins and Pvt. Ray Galvin were riding around in a peep when they saw a German automobile with no indentifying insignia to show that it was no longer German. About 8 F.F.I. men jumped into it loaded down with potato mashers and machine pistols and drove their German car right into the town where the firing was going on. It seemed a fool-hardy thing to do and we've often wondered what happened to them.

This same evening Pvt. Galvin and Tec 5 Fanning located a certain house that they thought needed investigation. They got Lt. Sterne, Lt. Patterson, and Lt. Plummer, and this party went and investigated the house. They never made it quite clear what they found there but we all had our own ideas on the subject.

We pulled out of our position at Soissons at 9:00 hours on the 30th. It was raining once again and we went on through Soissons. Quite a few of the houses were shot up with small arms fire. A few wrecked American and many German vehicles lined the streets. One American truck with German camouflage on it was there with the



others. We passed miles of camouflaged German fortifications and barracks — all deserted. We also passed an abandoned mine that the Germans had installed a factory in. It had been fortified too. We went on, stopping quite a few times to fire at enemy infantry and anti-tank guns that the forward elements encountered. We passed through several fair sized towns and villages right on the heels of the retreating Germans. Our welcome from the French people was always the same, that of conquering heroes. We got so many bottles of wine, cognac, and champagne that some vehicles were thinking of throwing some ammunition away to make room for more bottles. At 14:00 hours we pulled into position near Chevreigny. It was upon a rock that looked exactly like the rock on the Prudential Insurance Co. advertisement. The twin spires of a famous cathedral dominated the hill and it was quite a scene. The vehicles had hardly stopped when the people of the village rushed over with baskets full of eggs, tomatoes, wine, and cognac. The men of the battery had a lot of dust in their throats from the long ride so it was all welcome. Quite a few girls were there and Pvt. Spicer found one that just suited him. 1/Sgt. Allen, Tec 5 Jensen, Tec 5 Plasse, Tec 5 Hoffmann, and some of the anti-aircraft boys saw to it that none of the wine was taken back. We were firing on anti-tank guns near Laon all this time and the gun sections and exec. section were missing out on all the attention and the wine.

The R.O. Section was up with the leading elements and was using a house as an O.P. A bomb fell and demolished a house not more than 100 yards from them and they had to leave their beds and go to the air raid shelter. They were frightened and in not such good condition at the time.

We left at 9:00 of the 31st, skirted the base of the rock, and passed what had been an ordnance factory. Our air force had burned it to the ground but row after row of guns were there bearing mute evidence to the power of our bombers. We halted at intervals all during the day, firing at enemy anti-tank guns and infantry. About 14:00 we pulled into a sugar-beet field on the side of the road. Enemy infantry were on a little hill about 1500 yards away. We fired high bursts over them and through the field glass we could see them falling and trying to retreat. Our fire followed them so there was no escape. Our column had knifed through an enemy-held town and had met some fire, but we got through. After we were through and were in the



sugar-beet field the Germans regained the town and there was a big tank battle behind us. The direct fire from the tanks could be plainly heard where we were and the battle raged for several hours. Some P-47's came up and helped the tankers rout the enemy from the town. Before they got there a lone German plane had streaked across the sky giving everyone something to shoot at. He was too high for any damage to be done but we shot a lot of lead nevertheless.

It started to rain when we left at 17:30 hours but it was only a shower and shortly afterward the sun popped out. Soon after the sun popped out we were treated to a sight we had never seen before. Three beautiful rainbows, each inside the other. It was quite a sight. We moved down winding roads to a position near Vigneau Hoquet, arriving there at 21:00 hours. We had fought our way 35 miles forward that day, firing a total of 306 rounds.

We were on the road early the morning of September 1st meeting quite a bit of opposition as we travelled through wooded areas. The P-47's were overhead, bombing and strafing the enemy, but the leading elements still met quite a bit of fire from tanks, anti-tank guns, and infantry in the woods. We fired quite a few missions that day to help get these obstacles out of the way. At 16:00 hours we put into position on a little hill at the outskirts of the town. In the same field was a blazing Mark 5 tank. We fired several rounds, when the whine of a shell came from the woods behind us. Several German tanks were in the woods we had passed and were firing on our tanks upon the hill. Several rounds passed inches above the 4th Section's tank led by Sgt. Earl Tormala and driven by Tec 5 Miner. They hit the corner of a building 30 yards from our position. Machine fire was coming in too, and Pfc. Milton Fischer and Pfc. Leo Pelka had business in the bottom of their tank at this point. The battery turned around at once to answer this fire and this saw the Exec. section at it's best. Tec. 5 George Smith and Pfc. John Tomaselli laid the battery in nothing flat, S/Sgt. Glass and Tec 5 Roy Brown plotted in what Tec 5 James Miles got over the radio from our observer, and Lt. Plummer was firing the battery in what seemed like seconds. We gave them about 30 rounds and departed immediately down a side road. Small arms fire was still on all sides of us and we were in a pretty hot situation once again. We kept moving down the road and at 19:00 pulled through a town full of Germans. Quite a few were dead and wounded on the streets but



others were still in a fighting mood. We met some small arms fire, but not much, and knifed through once again. The column was going down a road when Tec 5 Jensen spotted a German waving a white flag in a house. The vehicles stopped and Tec. 5's Hoffmann, Jensen, Plasse, and Roberts, Pvts. Radcliffe and Allen, and Tec. 5 Birchard hopped off and disarmed the German. They were taken back through the town and turned over to the infantry. We caught up and found the battery in position near Aveane at 21:30 hours. The battery didn't fire that night but there was firing of all sides of us. German planes flew over too but they kept on going. We moved out at 10:00 hours on September 2nd. We weren't far from the Belgian border and there was quite a bit of opposition in wooded areas nearby. We kept on going and had support from P-38's all the time. They blasted away at enemy vehicles, guns and infantry to help open a path through for us. The last French town we passed through was just as enthusiastic as the others had been. In front of the town hall they had a huge American flag hanging from the roof. It was good to see that flag in the sunshine. In this town the F.F.I. followed us along, begging for arms and ammunition of any kind, and we obliged quite a few of them with captured German guns and ammunition. They really were a big help and we knew it.

The border where we crossed was just a narrow road in the woods with a gate like those on a railroad crossing back home. The woods were full of Germans and there was a lot of small firing and a lot of noise from exploding ammunition and burning German vehicles. The tanks and P-38's had caught a German convoy and completely wrecked it. It was at 15:30 hours that we crossed the border, and soon we came to the first houses. Instead of the red white and blue of the French tricolor it was now red, black, and yellow, the colors of Belgium, that were displayed from every house. We rolled on and in the first village there was a house that had Allied and Belgium flags in every window while out in front were several people waving more flags. Suddenly there was the sound of a heavy gun being fired on the left and the Belgians yelled "Boches". In 10 seconds all the flags were down from the house and the people were inside, the fast so we had ever seen them move. We still contend that they were going in and switch the Allied flags for a Swastika in case the Germans came back.

Next time we halted for a little while there was a lady who



spoke English. She told us that there were approximately 40,000 Germans in the Mons area and they were under orders to halt our spearhead at all costs so the rest of the German Army could get back to Germany. We had a lot of halts during the day firing at enemy convoys, infantry, and horse-drawn artillery. After firing we could move on and soon would come upon our targets burning beside the road. Horses were running everywhere, some with half the harness shot off, and dead and wounded Germans were everywhere: The road was littered with all sorts of equipment that the retreating Germans had thrown away.

About 17:00 we started passing through La Capelle. It's a fair sized town not far from Mons. The whole populace was out on the streets giving us the same kind of a welcome we had received all through France. They gave us beer, fresh fruit, flowers, and hung on to the sides of our vehicles as we drove slowly through the town. Every once in a while a member of the Belgian patriot army would come, marching a German prisoner back, and the people would cheer him and hiss the German. Some of them struck at the prisoners with clubs and spat on them. We halted and could hear small arms fire and the heavier sound of direct fire up ahead: the Germans had cut the column at the far end of the town. We waited a little while before running the gauntlet. Snipers were everywhere firing at us and we were firing back, and bullets were ricocheting from the walls of the building. It was really hot and we remembered what the Belgian lady had told us about the 40,000 Germans. The 33rd had a couple of light tanks at one intersection for road blocks but the rest of the intersecting streets were open. Germans were firing on us from houses and side streets, and in the distance we could hear the tankers firing to open up the German hold on the town. At one intersection Sgt. Stone and his anti-air-craft vehicle saw about 35 Germans up a side street: He halted and swung his fifties loose on them. He fired 400 rounds and when he was finished there were no Germans on that street. At least no live ones. We finally started. The freed Belgians were on the streets near each intersection motioning for each vehicle to speed up and for the occupants to get down as much as possible. We could see the tracers going by, and anti-tank shells were bouncing off the houses as we came up to the intersections. We finally got through the town but had to cross a railroad track and make a right turn. There was a



wall and a ditch on the right side of the road and Germans were in the ditch and behind the wall. Lt. Plummer was in the leading vehicle and he kept that machine gun busy, as well as tossing a few hand grenades in the ditches and over the wall. Other men in all the sections were firing away keeping the Germans down and killing them by the dozens. A lot of them were still firing at us from the orchard behind the wall so Sgt. Reiners pulled his tank out into a field to fire some direct fire on them: While turning around Tec 5 Green got his trailer stuck. A lot of Germans came out with their hands up and wanted to surrender. We motioned them on to the rear. Some of the wounded were too far gone but we couldn't stop to do anything for them. There were no casualties to the battery. It was quite the hottest town we had been through up to this time. We got by the wall and passed over a viaduct over a dry canal and pulled in position in a plowed field behind a house. There was a big forest behind us and several fires were blazing in it. The 33rd was in the same field but half a mile ahead of us. They had hundreds of prisoners with more coming in all the time. From the town and surrounding country they came in long columns or in trucks. We were hardly in position when small arms fire cut loose and we all ducked. Later Lt. Plummer, S/Sgt. Albritton, Sgt. Everett, Tec 4 Coppens and Tec 5 Birchard went over to investigate the house. They went up, kicked the door open, and SS. troopers started coming out a few at a time. Sgt. Everett fired a few rounds from his BAR and Tec 5 Green booted a couple of the more reluctant ones and they were more co-operative after that. By that time quite a few of the boys had gotten there and were searching them, getting several P-38 pistols and wrist watches. Lt. Plummer picked a man who had evidently been a loser at cards because the one he searched didn't have a pistol and watch and only about 10 francs. The Lieutenant made poor selection that time. Anyway the battery captured 27 SS. men in the house, cellar, and barn to add to the total. By this time the 36th had established a PW. collecting point behind us and it was filling up rapidly. Firing was still going on everywhere, and blazing houses that the Germans had used as strong points lit up the night. The battery fired a total of 376 rounds that day. We dug in that night but no planes were out. Small arms fire was all that we had to put up with.

On the morning of the 3rd there was still a lot of firing every-



where and the Germans were putting up a lot of resistance. The anti-air-craft track with its 4 fifties pulled up on the viaduct to fire down the canal at Germans in woods nearby. The machine guns of the different vehicles kept up a steady hail of fire into the Germans and several of the boys went out with their rifles and tommy guns to help out. Sgt. Reiner's tank was pulled over to fire direct fire if needed but it wasn't needed. The Germans couldn't hold for long against such a hail of fire and their firing died down after a couple of hours except for an occasional burst that we could hear sing past us. In the afternoon Task Force 2 of CCB. passed by and entered Mons. The B trains followed and brought up our duffle bags. It was the first time we had seen them in over a month and all of us were glad to get handkerchiefs and towels that we had needed for a long time. Some of the boys poking around found a German payroll and divided it. Sgt. Huizel, Pfc. Applebury, Pvt. Brown, and Pfc. J. D. Morris each had more than 500 dollars when H. Q. heard about it and made them turn it in. They weren't any too happy about turning it in but they did.

We took it easy the afternoon of the 3rd watching the prisoners coming in and by this time there were thousands of them. Two fields were completely filled and they outnumbered our task force at least 3 to 1. The night of the 3rd was uneventful except for a few mortars and artillery shells and a few bursts of machine gun fire.

The morning of the 4th we got orders to prepare to move out once again. Our foot infantry had caught up with us and were going to hold and further comb the ground we had fought so hard for Saturday. The Belgians in the city had fought all night Saturday and on Sunday. By Sunday afternoon the German dead were piled so high in the streets that the women and children got hysterical after awhile, and they had to leave them where they fell from then on.

We prepared to move the morning of the 4th and while doing so the battery suffered another fatal casualty. Pfc. Nick Caprinola was cleaning his tommy gun when it went off and he was hit in the abdomen. The bullet severed an interior artery and he was dead almost instantly. It happened so quickly that it stunned all of us. Nick had always been so full of life and was talking and joking only a minute or so before it happened, and now he was dead. It seemed worse somehow to have a man killed by accident than by enemy action.

The column started moving at 14:30 hours on the 4th and we



went back through part of the town we had fought our way through two days before. It seemed peaceful and quiet now in contrast to how noisy it was the other day. We skirted Mons and met the 1st Infantry boys coming in to mop up while we moved onward. The first city we went through we got another wild welcome. In the square they had a raised platform and on it they were cutting off the hair of women who had been friendly with the Germans. The whole city was there. The women were led through the streets, being jeered at all the while, and then they would be taken upon the platform and have all their hair cut off. These Belgians really made a ceremony of it and it was pretty good to see these traitors get what was coming to them.

We passed through a town that we had been forced to shell and it was pretty badly battered but about half way through the town we came onto the back end of a German convoy that we had caught on the road. The artillery and tankers had really shot it up and the broken bodies of the crews lay along the ditches or in the still burning vehicles. The convoy stretched for more than a mile, more than 60 vehicles and guns. Large caliber guns, tanks, self-propelled artillery, half-tracks, and a few ordinary trucks. Quite a few vehicles that would never trouble us anymore.

We rolled on all afternoon to a wooded area and pulled in on the far side of it. There were Germans in the woods but we didn't know how many. A few shots came out and we backed up our old dependable, the anti-air-craft half-track of the 486th, to the edge of the woods. They turned those four fifties loose for about thirty seconds and cut a path through the woods. Shortly after, a couple of German officers and 5 men came marching out with their hands up. They were marched up to the Exec. vehicle for searching and questioning. One of the officers was an arrogant Nazi and wouldn't raise his hands up. 1/Sgt. Moseley told him twice and he still wouldn't do it and Sgt. Moseley gave him a beautiful right on the jaw. He put his hands up then. We moved then and kept on driving even though it was getting dusk. By the time we got to the outskirts of Charleroi it was pitch dark but the whole population was out on the streets to welcome us. There were so many that the convoy column was cut quite a few times by the people. They thought the war was over and the shades in all the stores and houses were up. The lights were shining out making it bright as day. The



people were so happy they were in a frenzy and they hung onto the vehicles as we moved along. Everyone in the battery got kissed hundreds of times and there wasn't a man who didn't want to call a halt to the war and stay over night in a town like that. It was the wildest welcome we had ever received — before or since — and we will always remember our drive through Charleroi. By the time we got through Charleroi and its suburbs, it was after midnight but the people were still out to cheer us.

The convoy was cut for some reason or other and the only thing ahead of "A" Battery was a T-2 and a M-8, and they were lost. We didn't know that, thinking them part of the convoy. We rolled on and about 4 A.M. the M-8 went ahead and went straight into a German bivouac area. He got away and the battery made a fast turn and got out of there. We kept on driving, retracting our course and finally stopped about 6:30 A.M. on the 5th in an orchard near Namur. We were all very tired and very sleepy, having been on the road for about 18 hours with no sleep. We were almost out of gas too because we had come a long way. Namur was a German strongpoint and it had to be cleared so our engineers could build a bridge across the Meuse River. We fired quite a few missions that day at German strongpoints in support of the drive to clear the town. A lot of Belgium civilians were in and out of the position all that day, giving us wine and eggs. An officer of the Free Belgian Army who could talk English came over and told us a few of the facts of the German occupation, and how the Belgians were supplied with arms by the R.A.F.

Down the road the Belgians were trying a couple of women who had been friendly with the Germans. It was quite a trial and the French was really flying. Arms were being waved all over the place as the different witnesses were called. It turned out that they didn't have enough evidence to convict them but some of the Belgians said they were going to see to it that they were punished. It was quite a trial. The rest of the day was spent resting as much as we could but fire missions, cooking and other things kept us pretty busy. Everyone went to bed early except the guards and every man was pretty hard to get up when his turn for guard came around.

All night of the 5th the engineers worked under enemy shell fire building twin pontoon bridges across the Meuse. Parts of the bridges were shot out several times before the Germans were chased out. The



engineers really did a fine job on that and deserved the writing they got in the Stars and Stripes about the bridge.

The morning of the 6th was spent gassing up the vehicles, getting rations and water, and preparing for movement orders. We moved out at 13:00 hours and went down to the river and on across the bridges. Most of Namur was on the far side and all the people were out giving us the usual welcome. After going through the town we got on a road alongside the Meuse. On the other side of the road there were steep granite bluffs and a quarry extending for miles. A few little villages were passed. A few German vehicles and guns were alongside the road as well as bodies of German soldiers. It rained that afternoon and it wasn't very comfortable but we kept going.

Just before dusk we could see the city of Huy up on a high bluff ahead of us. Parts of it had been bombed and a bridge across the Meuse had been hit, but not bad. Dominating the whole city was a huge square stone fort at the very top of the cliff. It had a cable railway to bring supplies up the steep sides of the cliff. It had narrow slits in all the windows and we were hoping that no Germans were inside. We passed through the town. In the middle of it were a lot of wrecked German vehicles and some bodies as well as a few German prisoners. The people were all out on the streets and this town had more pretty girls than any of the rest of them. The boys in the battery got to kiss most of them, too.

Before we hit the town Pfc. Leo Pelka went to sleep on the back deck of his tank. The first few flowers that the people threw on were placed on Leo by Cpl. Frosch, Tec 5 Miner, and Pvts. Barrett, Radcliffe, Fischer. As we drove through the town these same men told the people that Leo was dead and by the time we had gotten through the town he was covered with all sorts of flowers and had the sympathy of the entire town.

We kept on and went into bivouac in an orchard not far from the town at 19:00 hours. It had been another tiring day and the rain had made it worse. Some of us went inside some houses nearby to get warm and to dry out a little bit.

The rain had stopped by morning of the 7th and we had some Belgian people in the battery area, among them a priest who took colored pictures of some of us. Tec 5 Roy Brown — the battery artist — sketched the cathedral that morning and did a very good job too.



We pulled out at 11:30 hours and went through scores of little villages. In one of them we saw a civilian take a shot gun and shoot a woman point blank with it. It killed her instantly but Tec 5 Arthur Brown looked at her. She was another one friendly with the Germans and she was killed for it. All of this area was wooded and we had to shoot our way through quite a few places. German vehicles were shot up and a lot of enemy dead came from all of this.

The Germans started shelling the road and we pulled off into the only position there. Before we were in it they started throwing high bursts right over our position. Pfc. Royce Applebury was laying the battery at the time and when he heard some coming he tried to hide under his aiming circle. He looked funny out there under that aiming circle. Fire kept coming in, all bursting right over us, but Pfc. Krenak was the only man hit and it just cut the skin on his leg.

Lt. Overath was R.O. and was trying to locate the enemy batteries when a Belgian civilian came up and offered to show him the German artillery. He did and Lt. Overath fired our battery as well as "B" Battery on the Germans. They took off and the next salvo set their ammunition dump on fire and we got no more fire that day, for which all of us were very glad.

The R.O. Party led by Lt. Patterson had a very rough time of it up forward that same afternoon. They were straddled with salvo after salvo of artillery fire and only some quick thinking on the part of S/Sgt. Taggart and some fast and fancy driving by Tec 5 Wilbur Lyons saved them from being hit. Tec 5 Harold Hoffmann was hit in the hand by a fragment and was evacuated to an unknown hospital. No one else out of the battery however was hurt. The battery was sorry to hear that Capt. Durham, formerly of this battery, had been killed by mortar fire at this point.

The battery fired a few rounds during the night at enemy concentrations. The following morning they took Sgt. Huizel's section to fire on a tower that was suspected as a German O.P. Cpl. Howard was gunner and Cpl. Fred Billingham was loading. Several direct hits were made on the tower. The Colonel said it was very fine work.

We left this position at 13:00 hours on the 8th and wound our way past another wrecked German convoy, down winding roads into a valley, and then up again. We were going toward Liège. We skirted Liège and went into position near Romsce where we could fire into

the enemy strongpoints around Liège. Belgian civilians came into the position and told us how glad they were to see us. The carried away all the brass shell cases for souvenirs, gave us Belgian coins, and swapped cigarettes. There were Germans all over the place and small arms firing sounded on all sides. About 18:00 hours we could hear air planes and shortly afterwards the sound of straffing. In a few seconds there swept over about 15 Focke-Wulf 190's. The ack-ack of the 486th broke loose as well as the 50's on all the tanks and half-tracks. Some of the guys were firing carabines and rifles and pistols. The air was really thick with all sizes of shells. We know that several of the planes were hit but none fell where we could see them.

Tec 5 Jensen made friends with a young Belgian and gave him his supper, and the kid dug him a deep foxhole. Tec 5 Green and Chaplain Elliot went out to look for Germans but didn't find any.

The battery fired intermittently all night at enemy strongpoints and there were no shells in during the night.

We moved out at 11:00 hours on the 9th going back over the same route as we had come the day before. We turned off, though, when we heard enemy shells up ahead. We pulled off onto the side of the road and fired at German anti-tank guns up ahead. The 33rd Tanks were rolling up a road on the left side of our position as German anti-tank shells came whizzing by to thud into a bank on the other side of the road. The gun knocked out two of the 33rd Tanks before it was knocked out. We moved up the road to a field near the two knocked out tanks. They were burning and looked like a beacon at dusk — with the ammunition exploding all the time. While we were going from one position to another there were several dog-fights overhead. Three German planes were shot down and one American plane, but we saw the parachute of the latter floating down so the pilot was safe.

Just after dark a lone German bomber flew low over us, and seeing the burning tank dropped a bomb. We felt the concussion, and the ground shake, but it was too far away to do us any harm. No more planes flew over and no shells came in that night.

Before dawn Pfc. McBride and Tec 5 Jensen were on an outpost with the 37 mm gun when 7 Germans passed nearby. They were promptly put in custody and marched and disarmed. They didn't have anything of value so the privilege of "first search" didn't amount to much.

After an early breakfast on the 10th, we moved forward at 8:30



hours. By this time the foot infantry of the 1st Infantry Division had caught up with us and they were slogging along as we went up the road. We passed the anti-tank gun responsible for the two knocked-out tanks. It was knocked out and there were other vehicles and guns knocked out all along the road as we moved through the woods. The road was pocket marked with shell holes where we had fired upon the German vehicles the day and night before. We got to Verviers around 9:00 hours and the civilians were wild with joy. They had broken open a cigar factory and were passing out cigars by the case. Every vehicle got their quota and the B.C. track, with Tec 5 Fanning and Tec 5 Jenkins both heavy cigar smokers, got around one thousand cigars. A lot of good smoking on the Germans. We coiled several times before going into position east of Verviers at 15:00 hours. We were getting close to German soil and the vaunted Siegfried Line. There were some promotions on the 10th. S/Sgt. Moseley was promoted to 1/Sgt., Sgt. Olson to S/Sgt., Tec 5 Richardson to Sgt., and Pfc's. Blanchet and Kanipe to Tec 5's. Ex-1/Sgt. Allen was transferred to Service Battery on this date.

We moved east on the 11th and went into position near Eupen. There were burning German vehicles all around so the boys weren't able to get much loot out of them or from a house across the road. We saw a good dog fight here, with a P-47 discarding his belly tank and nailing an Me 109 to the cross. We moved on at 17:00 and went around the edge of a mountain. The Germans had trees sawed nearly in half all along the road with dynamite all placed and wired to blow up. The speed of our advance and the P-47's droning overhead made them change their mind before using them, however, and we went on. Going through Eupen we saw for the first time what we were going to see plenty of in the future. Sullen German civilians who sneered at us from half closed doors and windows. We put on a display of force for them that clearly showed them they were conquered. One instance stands out. A column of tanks were stopped in town and we passed them. While we were passing them a couple of self-propelled 155's from the 991st F.A. came roaring past. That was three columns all on one street. We passed through Eupen and went into position on the eastern side. We were now in range of German soil and Lt. Plummer had Sgt. Tormola elevate his gun to extreme range and put a round on German soil. We were in direct support of Task Force I of CCB. and



the forward elements were bucking the first defenses of the Siegfried Line.

We left our position near Eupen at 15:00 on the 12th and moved into a position near Rotgen, Germany. The forward elements had captured it early on the 12th after a big battle with anti-tank guns and flak batteries. It was the first German town to fall in this war and it fell to our Task Force. The R.O. Section had a tough time here with the tanks in front of them and behind them being knocked out by anti-tank guns. The battery did a lot of firing here, neutralizing and helping knock out the obstacles. The task force moved on and the battery crossed the international boundary line at 16:00 of the 13th and went into a position east of Rotgen at the scene of the big tank battle the day before. A couple of wounded Germans were flushed out of the woods on the fringe of our position. The Siegfried Line was very much in evidence here with dragons teeth, wooded mountainous country, pillboxes, a huge concrete dam. and demolition charges all placed to blow up the roads. It seemed strange that it wasn't more heavily defended but then we had shot up and captured 5 divisions in Mons on September 2nd who were supposed to man the defenses here. The battery fired a total of 581 rounds on the 13th. We moved out on the 14th and went into two positions with a couple of hours firing from each one. The advance had slowed up considerably from our record pace of the past two weeks. We ended up in a field southwest of Breinig and fired a total of 254 rounds in support of the leading elements who were advancing toward Mausbach. We stayed in this position until 13:00 of the 15th when we moved to an alternate position east of Breinig. Going to this position we were rolling down the road when we came to an intersection which was guarded by an enemy pillbox disguised as a house. There were enemy snipers still inside and they started firing at us. Pfc. Popovich was manning the 50 calibre M.G. in Sgt. Olson's tank and standing up in the ring mount. One of the rounds hit him, going through his chest and lungs. Lt. Plummer pulled Sgt. Carawan's and Sgt. Everett's tanks and the 37 mm ack-ack track off for a little direct fire at the pillbox. They fired about 10 rounds of heat at the pillboxes at a range of less than 100 yards, together with about 50 rounds from the 37 and hundreds of rounds from the 50 calibre guns. That pillbox and a nearby factory were really softened up as a result and no more sniper fire was heard. Lt. Sterne and "Ramblin



Sam" Galvin were up front in a peep with Lt. Sterne firing his pistol and "Sam" pumping away with a Kraut rifle. Everyone was out of the vehicles watching the fireworks. Some 1st Division Infantry boys got a terrific kick out of the M-7's firing direct fire at the pill-boxes. Popovich was badly hurt and was given first aid by Arthur Brown. He was evacuated but died a couple of days later. "Pop" was a good guy and it made everyone a little sick when they saw him get hit so badly. While they were working on him an old German ran out and wanted the medics to patch up a wounded German in a house nearby. Galvin told him to go to hell and that the only way he would patch him up would be with his pistol.

We went into position behind a house and started firing. "Lightfoot" Wornell went into a house after some wine and saw a German of military age. He questioned him and found out he was a German soldier on furlough. He was taken into custody and "Lightfoot" got his wine as well as a prisoner.

A few shells started coming in and the battery moved back into its old position N.E. of Breinig. The forward elements were meeting plenty of opposition and the battery fired 482 rounds on the 15th to help neutralize it.

## SWEATIN OUT THE SIEGFRIED

The whole battalion was fairly close together here and the enemy started shelling the battalion, on the morning of the 16th. A four-gun battery of 105's was doing the shelling and they landed all around our battery, but none were too close and we got accustomed to their coming in. In the afternoon we could see them adjust their fire. It had been landing up in front of us and the next salvo was about 200 left. We started ducking then because we knew it was observed fire. The next ones were right in there and everyone was crawling under vehicles. They landed all around us, in front and behind all of the vehicles, and it seemed strange that no vehicle was hit. Sgt. Huizel was especially lucky with half a dozen near misses. Sgt. Huizel was hit in the ear, Pfc. Coonan in his fat back side, Pfc. Charlie Weiss in the leg by shrapnel. Tec 4 Coppens had his shoe cut and a slight bruise on his foot by shrapnel. Enough to get him a Purple Heart and enough to cause him to limp whenever he passed a medic. That Coppens is an actor, all right. We knew it was only a question of time until they would massacre us with an observer on hand. So Lt. Sterne and Lt. Plummer decided to move. Trailers were left in the rush and we moved out in a hurry with fire coming in fast and furiously. Tec 5 Podrosky backed his track without looking at full speed through the woods and didn't hit a tree. The fire followed us out and even after we disappeared into the woods it still came. Then stopped all of a sudden. We later heard that a man from the 703rd T.D.'s had seen a suspicious radio car, and when all the fire came in he slapped a couple of rounds of 90 mm into it and the fire stopped. We moved again, this time behind a large house and barn. Any shells would have to clear the 3 story buildings in front of us. The place was the property of one Signor Eugen Bolignini and was to be our home for a couple of months. The place was thoroughly searched and the civilians were thoroughly frightened by all of it. The B.C. Section moved into the house and had a nice thing with some one to cook our meals and clean up the house.



The forward elements were part way through Mossbach and the opposition was getting tougher all the time with dug in "Tiger" tanks, pillboxes, dug - in infantry and heavy concentrations of artillery ranging in size from 88 to 170 mm. Attack after attack was broken up and the 36th Infantry and the 33rd Armored Regiment suffered tremendous losses. The Germans had observation and as much artillery as we did. The R.O. Section was with what was left of Co. F, 36th Infantry, supported by Co. I, 16th Infantry Regiment. They made an attack on the 17th and the Germans sucked them in. They advanced about 300 yards and the Germans pinched them off. Lt. Patterson and Cpl. Heinauer were up with them and were captured along with most of the two companies of Infantry. Just how, we have never found out. They just vanished and the serenade of German artillery kept our forces from finding out much of anything. The rest of the section with S/Sgt. Taggart in command was with the track, and too busy dodging shells to accomplish much. There was nothing to do but hang on which they did, under terrifically heavy enemy shell fire. The next day Lt. Fehl went up as "A" Battery R.O. with a new crew, and the old crew was relieved and came back in. All were pretty badly shaken up from the pounding they had taken. Lt. Fehl went up to do some firing with a reel of wire and a telephone. After several fire missions he wasn't heard from anymore and when the section went up to see about him he wasn't there. We found out months later that he had been captured. The R.O. peep had been driven into town by Lattinville a couple of days before and in a shelling had been slightly hit and damaged. He abandoned it and escaped on foot. Captain Hawley asked for volunteers to go after it and Cpl. Davis and Tec 5 Mniece volunteered. They had to go through a wood and across an open field all under heavy shell fire to get it but they did. It would only go very slowly but they brought it out. The battery was running out of officers and the R.O. crew was sent back the same day. The Germans had finally stopped us, aided by our far overextended supply lines, ammunition shortage, and bad weather. We still were doing a lot of firing on static enemy positions and at enemy traffic on roads in the area. The weather had turned very bad with rain every day. Our position was a sea of soft, oozy mud and we were all glad when galoshes were issued.

There were promotions in this period with Cpl. Howard making



Sgt., Pfc. Billingham making Cpl., and Pfc. Daley making Tex 5. Pvts. Barrett, Bochetich, Kilgroe, Ksenek, Morris and Pelka made Pfc's. Tec 5 Manuel had some trouble with his wound which hadn't fully healed and was evacuated to the 128th Evacuation Hospital. Tec 4 Lattinville suffered severe burns while building a gasoline fire and was taken to an unknown hospital.

We got a new Battery Commander on the 22nd of September. He was Captain Paul Nelms, of Philadelphia, formerly of the 28th Division. The Captain had landed on D-day as an observer for naval gun fire. Lt. Sterne went back to his old love, Battery Exec., and Lt. Plummer became R.O. Pvts. Hollar and McGlannery were assigned to the battery.

The battery was firing an average of 250 rounds a day from this position. Our advance was halted. We had to give our equipment a thorough going over and we were going to be issued some winter clothing. The Division Commander, General Rose, was in the battalion area the afternoon of the 24th to give out decorations. Sgt. Wetzel and Tec 5's Brown and Breymeyer were given the Bronze Star. The General stood in the rain and gave a short talk on what was in store for the division. The kitchen crew came up on the 25th and started cooking our 10 in 1's; a little later we were to get B rations. It was good not to have to cook our own food anymore after all that time. Quite a few men joined the battery as replacements and we were getting up to normal strength again. Among them were 1st Lt. Joe Gafford from Alabama, Pvts. Bert Miller, Bert Cook, William Newmann, William Whitten, Leonard O'Kray, and Alfonso Pedraza. Mike Mize thought he had the mumps and was taken away to the 45th Medics. Pvt. Aplin accidentally shot himself in the finger (again). Sgt. Carawan was evacuated on the 30th for an operation, Cpl. Dennehy was made Sgt. and Pfc. Sinsheimer was promoted to Corporal on October 1st. The battery was firing all the time, not heavy concentrations, but enough to keep the gun crews from getting too much rest. The enemy launched several counter attacks during this period, but all were broken up by artillery fire. The B.C. party went up to Task Force Lovelady on the 1st of October, acting as liason party, and returned to the battery on the 3rd.

Tec 5 Fanning was burned about the face while building a gasoline fire. He took first aid treatment only after the medics promised not to evacuate him. The barn and garage was transformed into a day room by moving some automobiles and farm equipment out, breaking



down a few walls, and putting straw on the floor. A lighting system was hooked up from the half tracks after the windows had been blacked out. It was a good place to have, as the weather was terrible and the days were getting shorter all the time. The battalion movie was set up in a church and there were movies every morning and afternoon. "A" Battery had first choice on seats, as we were closest to the church.

The attack on Aachen was in full swing now, and although we weren't in on it we had a good view of the bombing being done by the P-47s. They certainly gave it a good going over for several days running. Enemy planes were common place over our position every night, and a large number of anti-personal bombs were dropped just about every evening. None landed in our position. They did keep us from being too much at ease tho. Lone enemy planes flew over every day and gave the ack-ack boys a lot of target practice. One day a P-47 dropped his belly tank right into our position, almost on Tec 5 Stein's pup tent. The gas sprayed everywhere; its surprising no fires were started.

Things weren't very dull as the battery was still firing several hundred rounds a day at enemy mortars and gun emplacements.

We moved forward to a position near Bushback on the 12th. We were sent there because there was an acute shortage of 155 mm ammunition; our supply being pretty good we took over in their place. At 10 o'clock that night enemy planes dropped some bombs fairly close but not close enough to do much damage.

The battery fired a total of 528 rounds at enemy gun emplacements. Cpl. Frankel was hit by the recoil of his gun; he was pretty badly battered, looking like a prizefighter who had just come out of a losing, hard fight. He hobbled around the battery for a few days, refusing to be evacuated. Pfc. Althouse was promoted to Tec 5 on the same day.

On the 18th of October the battery, after a week in the Bushback position, moved forward for its turn in laying down harrassing fire. Counter-battery fire was heavy during the night. Aided by "Bed Check Charley", it seemed that we were the ones up there to be harrassed. It was just before dawn when we were firing a mission that the whining sound of a large shell was heard coming in our direction. Before anyone could do anything, it landed, directly in front of Sgt. Wetzel's tank. It must have been at least a 170 mm for the hole it dug



could hold a peep. Pfc's. Yates and Kilgroe were both injured; Kilgroe was evacuated with wounds in the shoulder, and Yates remained on duty.

When we were relieved from this forward position, we were all glad to get back to our house at Breinig, away from the front — 5000 yards away. The German air force soon learned the location of this position and each night "Jerry" would come over and drop anti-personnel bombs. But as usual his aim was in our favor. It was also during this time that we began to observe the Germans' "Buzz-Bomb" quite frequently. They were most numerous about dusk each evening, and were a wierd sight as their yellow flames streaked across the sky, many times directly over our heads, and not so very high, either. Their roaring putt-putt sound was the subject of much comment, too, — freight cars, we used to call them.

We settled down to the rotation system of going forward every two days and firing for the FO's, then returning to enjoy the movie house that was installed in the barn, and a hot shower — 5 miles away. Ewen the Red Cross girls came with doughnuts, and the Special Service sent some girls to entertain us, but the air show our own P-47's put on always looked best. About the first of November, the battery decided to remain at the forward position in the hills, so each section made themselves a small hut or underground home to get in out of the cold and rain. Stoves were "borrowed" from here and there and life made as comfortable as possible.

This was a slow, dragging, time however. Our army was still in the process of "building-up" before attempting a final crack through the Siegfried Line. In other areas of the front there was some offensive action going on, but here our orders were to hold only. So we held, just like our enemy was doing on the other side of what was becoming a no man's land. Patrols constituted the only action on our front now. The BC. and RO. parties regularly took their turns with the others of the battalion in manning OP's and maintaining liaison with the task forces. And the gun crews likewise in the harrassing fire that was handed out. Other than this, we all continued to go to the movies at our own "rear echelon", take showers, get doughnuts and coffee at an occassional Red Cross Clubmobile, and — well, write letters.

The morning of the 16th of November was the day for the big attack to take Weisweiler, Hastenrath, Schirpenseell, Werth, and other towns, and push on through "the line" if possible. At 10:00 hours



the sky was filled with our bombers, bombing directly in front of us, and again we watched a beautiful air show. Some made the mistake of bombing in back of us, causing casualties in Headquarters Battery. When the air attack finished we started in with a heavy barrage of 1200 rounds. The boys on the guns really worked hard and fast for a couple hours. With all this preparation the leading elements jumped off, but still met heavy opposition. The following day we fired 800 rounds to stop a counterattack. Things seemed to move slowly up front, although the fighting was bitter, so the battery continued to content itself with movies, washing clothing on sunny days, etc., in the intervals between firing.

On December 2nd a stripped battery moved forward to Hamach in general support of the 1st Division Artillery to support an attack they were making. It was here that Lt. Sterne got a bit tee-ed off at the "lousy" position the battalion had chosen for the battery. There really wasn't much to be done about it, however, for there wasn't any choice. Every where was mud; we just couldn't get away from it.

About this time the battery had a little shakeup in the kitchen and Harold Hoffmann, who had just returned to the battery, was reassigned as a slum burner. The weather was beginning to get very mean, with rain and snow continually, and when rumors came that we were going to go out of action for awhile and into houses every one was very pleased. December 7th we moved into Stolberg where the men first enjoyed the comforts of a German home, and of the Fraulines.

It was not a total rest period however, for we continued to send a stripped battery forward to Hamach occasionally for harrassing fire on the new front. We had pushed some more of the way through "the line" by now, but still had the last of it to conquer. Most of us will remember this position, the muddy field with the dead horses and shell torn barn, and the fact that the ammunition had to be carried from the road to the guns because of the soft ground.

Things were just like garrison life while in Stolberg — show-down inspections, cleaning of weapons, and all the uninteresting things that make garrison duty so dull. But while here the battery again went hard to work to support the final and last drive through "the line", the push from Langerwehe to the Roer River.

This drive started on the 10th, and the battery fired for it from

its same, now - familiar position at Hamach. As with the drive on Werth and Hastenrath, the going was tough and the fighting bitter. Names of towns like Geich and Obergeich, Esch, and then the Roer River was reached on the 12th, and the battery fired many rounds as its share of support for this battle.

Then, on the 13th, the final drive through the Siegfried Line completed, we moved back to Stolberg for some more garrison life.



## BATTLE OF THE BULGE

We awakened the morning of December 17th to find that the rumors we had heard of the German breakthrough into Belgium were true. The enemy planes that were over our area the night of the 16th were supporting the German drive. Several bombs had landed fairly close to our area and the ack-ack had replied vigorously. The morning of the 17th was cloudy but there were a few breaks in the clouds. The drone of motors could be heard but it was only occasionally that we could see the planes. About 10 o'clock we heard machine gun fire above the clouds and a few seconds later saw an Me. 109 plunge out of the clouds with a P-47 close in pursuit. The P-47 fired another burst and the Me. 109 started to smoke. The pilot bailed out and there was one less plane in Görings Luftwaffe. It is always a thrill to see an enemy plane shot down.

Tec 5 Leo Zemitus reported for duty on the 17th after a four months absence.

The clouds closed in shortly afterwards and although we could hear planes we didn't see anymore that day. The rain started coming down and almost everyone stayed inside as much as possible. Enemy planes were over our area early that night and bombs were again dropped but none in our immediate area. They did harrass us and interrupted our sleep but not too badly. The next morning a German paratrooper was found under a bridge not over five hundred yards from our billets but he was anxious to surrender and did not put up a fight. German planes, several Me. 109's, were sighted the next morning and ack-ack of all caliber filled the sky. We knew that some were hit but not seriously enough for them to go down. The firing became contagious and when a flight of British Tempists flew over a little later they met the same reception. All of the ack-ack with the exception of Sgt. Scott and his two crews opened up as well the 50 calibers on all the M-7's and some of the half tracks. Pvt. "Missouri" Morris

even opened up on them with his rifle, but Lt. Col. Garton and Captain Nelms put a stop to his firing in short order. Tec 5 Stein was keeping Sgt. Dennehy and Cpl. Sinsheimer busy loading his 50 calibre gun and when some P-47's flew over a little later he fired two more belts at them. It was the same old story, like the phoney gas alarm back in Normandy. Everyone heard the firing and became excited and started firing themselves. Incendiary bullets were dropping everywhere and exploding around our feet as well as pieces of shrapnel from the 40 and 90 mm guns which were also firing. Luckily none of "A" Battery happened to be hit but there were four casualties. one fatal, in each of the 391st and the 486th AAA. Battalions due to falling ack-ack and shrapnel. No planes were shot down but one can imagine how our pilots felt when all of that fire met them. It was really an exciting time even if it was all a mistake.

The rest of the day was taken up with inspection of fire control equipment, further maintenance of equipment, and resting.

The afternoon of the 19th Captain Nelms called a formation and told us the news that we had been expecting ever since the breakthrough. We were going in support of C.C.B. to halt the Germans and push them back. Most of us thought it would be similar to our drives across France and we were pretty happy over the whole thing. Most of us were hoping we could get near Liège or some other large town. We were very much fooled on all accounts. We packed all of our equipment up and had it on the vehicles by 15:00 hours. A small part of the battery, including 1st Sgt. Mosley, Sgt. Richardson, Tec 5 Plasse, and Pfc's. McBride, Carnathan and Kennedy were left behind for the present. Lt. Gafford went to the hospital for a check up the morning of the 19th and found that his blood pressure was too high so he didn't make the trip. We left Stolberg at 15:45 hours and a little later were on one of Hitlers Super Highways. It led us through Aachen and we were glad to see a large German city so completely ruined. As we drove through we could see that nothing but shells of buildings remained. Hollow shells, with four walls and a pile of rubble for the inside. We drove on past the Belgium frontier and into little villages filled with cheering Belgians. On we drove, through Verviers and part of Liège, with flying bombs going over at regular intervals and exploding not very far away. On we went until we could hear the sound of guns. We pulled into a wooded area not far from La Ried at



20:00 hours. A house was found for the kitchen and a hot meal was served shortly after we arrived.

At 22:00 hours a call came over the radio for the R.O. Section to report to Captain Hawley. We were just ready to crawl in our bedrolls, and had spent quite a bit of time getting everything set for a good nights sleep. Lt. Plummer, who had taken Lt. Gafford's place as R.O. came over and away we went, knowing that we couldn't get much sleep that night. We met Captain Hawley and found we had to get to the task force headquarters nearby and be prepared to leave for an attack the next morning. Lt. Plummer got all the information and we found a school house to sleep in. All the windows were out of it and it seemed colder inside than out. None of us slept very well or very long that night because of the cold and Lt. Plummer and Tec 5 Mniece spent a lot of time working on the maps. Then too, the sky was full of robot bombs all night and some of them were falling fairly close.

The morning of the 20th was very cloudy with visibility not over twenty yards. A good morning for a surprise attack but not for artillery observers. The task force pulled out about 9:00 hours and pulled up through the front lines, held by units of the 30th Infantry Division. The lead tank hit a mine field but didn't encounter any other resistance. It was enough to halt the column until the engineers could remove it. Lt. Plummer went up with Cpl. Corbin and S/Sgt. Taggart to see if they could do anything with artillery. Visibility was too poor however to observe fire. About this time Lt. Yell and his light tank came up to releave us. A light tank is better than a half track when a observer is only a few yards from the leading tank.

We left the front at 10:00 hours and found the battery eating dinner. The fog was even worse at the latter position and one gun was scarcely visible from another. A battery of self propelled 155's was in the next field from the battery and every once in a while would fire a round or two. Everyone had a fire as the fog was a cold one and penetrated a persons clothing and got down into his bones.

Radio reception was very poor so the R.O. Section was sent out as a relay station between the front and the firing battery. We went through the resort town of Spa and into a forest filled with hundreds of thousands of cans of gas. The enemy was only 7000 yards from the gas dump and there were hundreds of trucks there to haul it away to a safe place. The R.O. half track got mixed in with a task force moving



up and when the colored soldiers who were loading the gas saw the Third Armored triangle we heard them say "there goes that Spearhead Division; we don't have to be afraid of our gas now with them up there". We moved on through, trying to find a house to set up in but no such luck. The half track slid off into a ditch and we had to winch it out, holding up a one star general who was in a hurry. We finally got out and found a house in a village near Spa. The people said we could sleep there and we pulled the half track alongside. Tec 5 Fanning, Pfc. Larson, and the author started out on recon mission and found a family who could speak English. Also a quart of cognac which we polished off in a hurry. We went back for supper and found Cpl. Corbin doing very nicely with a little Belgian girl. All of us took our turn on the radio and relayed all of the fire missions that came in. The battery fired a total of 298 rounds at enemy infantry and mortars, as well as tanks on the 21st.

The R.O. Section left the relay station and returned to the battery on the 21st and got new orders to go to Col. Lovelady's task force and contact Captain Peters for our new assignment. Our maps were no good and as we went through a deep forest Tec 5 Fanning blazed a new trail through the woods. He moved trees and rocks using the side of the half track for a lever, and forded streams. We started for Steumont, not certain that it was in our hands as yet. It's a good thing that we didn't find it because it was in German hands; and still was a week or more later. We had a rough crew but hardly rough enough to capture a town with one vehicle. After getting lost and going through the forest and gas dump a few times we finally found Captain Peters and task force headquarters. They were at a cross road with a big 90 mm AA gun out in front for an anti-tank gun. Lt. Plummer got his orders and came out with an officer who was going to lead us part of the way in a peep. It was almost dusk when we started down a road, headed for Parfondray. The Germans held the other side of the ridge and had observation on the road. The peep led us through the woods until he got where the Germans could see us and the officer told us we were on our own then. Lt. Plummer told us to man the guns and stay low, and he told Fanning to drive that truck like it was a racing car. Fanning did just that and we ran the gauntlet until we got behind a house. Lt. Plummer went ahead on foot and we went into the house and found it full of wounded civilians. We tried to patch



them up but later were sorry because some of them were friendly with the Germans. Lt. Plummer walked past burning houses with his 45 pistol and a feeling that anything could happen. He reached Parfondray and found it blazing with the task force still in their tanks. Fire was coming in and nobody was sure how far the Germans were from there. He called for us to come on up and we did and found a house that wasn't hurt too much. We moved in, built a fire, and blacked out the windows and rigged up a light. The commander of "D" Company, 33rd, Lt. Edmark, come in and told us the situation. We had nine tanks, a platoon of mortars, a section of engineers and a few infantrymen in the town. Germans were on the other side of the hill and on three sides of us and we had one road open. It was under German observation too. The situation didn't look any too good but we were sitting tight, knowing that someone had to halt the Germans. It was too late to adjust the battery so we went to bed early that night. Shells come in all night and about 2:00 hours we heard a flying bomb awfully close. Everyone woke up and started sweating, and when the engine cut off we really did sweat. We didn't have long to sweat, however, as it exploded just on the other side of the ridge not more than five hundred yards away. It lifted us out of the bed, it shook the house, and sounded a lot closer than it really was. Another one did the same thing at 6:00 hours but it was either a dud or it glided a long way after the engine cut out. On the 22nd, the battery fired 653 rounds at enemy targets of varying nature. The battery had to fight, too, that night. They were told that there was only a thin line of infantry on one flank and when the sound of small arms fire grew louder and louder on that flank they were preparing to shoot some direct fire and limber up the machine guns. It was only a patrol however and the fire died down a little later. The next morning we looked around Parfondray and saw that almost every house had a tale of horror to tell. Old couples were on the floor with their throats cut from ear to ear and blood piled up around them. One house had seven children in one room with their heads smashed in. Another one had a raped woman, shot between the eyes, a baby in a crib, dead, and a woman on the floor, also dead. We had heard of S.S. brutality before but this was the first time we had seen it with our own eyes. There were 78 civilians murdered in that one small village, one of the worst acts of German cruelty yet discovered.

There were several German tanks on the other side of the hill and Lt. Plummer flushed one out with artillery fire. It started down a road and he kept shooting at it, but artillery isn't the answer for a moving tank. It was a Mark 5 and looked awfully big over there, about 600 yards away. Another observer was shooting at it from the other end and it started backing up to get behind the house again. Shells were dropping all around it but shrapnel is nothing to a Mark 5. While the artillery fire was going on an M 4 was getting into position to shoot at the Mark 5. When he shot his aim was good, and if the 75 mm gun had been as good as his aim there would have been no more Mark 5. We saw three rounds bounce off the side of the German and three red flashes of fire but they didn't even slow it up and he disappeared behind the house again. We were all saying that night that it was a shame for the U.S., with all of its resources and industrial brains, to send a tank like the M 4 with its 75 mm pea shooter into action against a tank like the Mark 5 or 6.

Lt. Plummer fired at a German observer and saw him jump into a hole at least 15 feet away in one long jump. He didn't get him but the German was pretty scared. One of our engineers was frightened as badly when a round of smoke fell short and hit behind our house only a few feet from the engineer. We fired intermittently all day long. In the afternoon we could see a German column going down the road about two miles away. It was so hazy, however, that we couldn't adjust and couldn't even see the rounds hitting, so we had to leave them go.

Towards evening the Germans started shelling us with direct fire and some of our own artillery was falling short, so shells were coming in very often and very close. Enough to make us hit the floor every few minutes. That evening we heard that the Germans had cut the road that we came in on and that we were strictly on our own. We had to hold the town and about all of it we held was the house we lived in. The infantry we had had been pulled out so we had no outer defense line. Just that house we were in and some tanks. We mounted machine guns in all of the windows so we could repel an infantry attack if it came and all of us were determined not to give an inch. We didn't sleep much that night but nothing happened except a lot of suspense.

The next morning, the 23rd, turned out to be a better day as far as visibility was concerned. Lt. Plummer and Lt. Edmark decided to



zero a tank gun in on a cross road some 3000 yards away so if any more German movements were seen we could fire on them. They pulled a tank with a 76 mm gun on it behind a wall and Lt. Plummer got up on the turret to observe fire. Cpl. Corbin was upstairs in a house just behind the tank, helping observe. Tec 5 Fanning was beside the tank and S/Sgt. Taggart, Pfc. Larson, and Pvt. Whitten were on the radios. After the third round one of the German tanks started shooting back. Our tank fired one more shot and German shot right back. They were shooting at Lt. Plummer and on the house behind him. They missed him but it didn't take him long to make himself scarce. Fanning had already made a run for it. The shell hit the house where Cpl. Corbin was observing, just on the opposite side of the wall. It knocked a large hole in the wall, and larger pieces broke one of his hands and three fingers on the other hand. Pieces hit one of the engineers in the side in the same room. Corbin walked to the house where the medics were, unaided, and told Pfc. Larson that he was all right. The medics gave him first aid. He told Lt. Plummer and S/Sgt. Taggart that he had brought two bottles of cognac back from Paris for the boys for Christmas. Corbin was a game little soldier and had been in the forward elements every time our R.O. had been up since "D" day plus twenty. We hated to see him hit and really sweated the ambulance out because the Germans had observation on them and could have halted them if they had wanted to.

The fire that hit Corbin was only the beginning of a hail of mortar, artillery, and direct fire that was to last for several hours. They hit all around us but none hit our house. A mortar hit a tree outside the house and a piece of shrapnel passed through two doors in a room to pierce the leg of a tanker who was in our room. Later on a man out of a mortar platoon was hit in the leg by a piece of shrapnel. In the afternoon we heard our first rockets come in. They sounded like a score of sirens and they scared everyone out of a months growth. They hit up on a hill behind us and threw enough sparks to make a miniature Fourth of July. We started calling them "Covey of Rockets" that night and that name has stuck ever since. We were very glad to see a platoon of infantrymen come in about dark. There weren't many but they were really welcome. We felt releived but we didn't relax our vigilance any because they were there. We got our evening shelling from friendly artillery for about thirty minutes at 18:00 hours;

we had to contact them by radio and get it lifted. It was here that we found that the radios in the tanks couldn't reach anyone and that the radio in our half track was our only communication with the outside. If it went out we would not only be cut off but would be out of communications with the outside. The battery fired some seven hundred rounds at enemy tank, mortars and infantry, some in our sector and others for other task forces.

The night of the 23rd the Germans sent some men up to a railroad bank only about 300 yards from us. We could hear them digging in on the other side of the bank but the bank protected them. We peppered the area with artillery and mortars all night; maybe we didn't kill any but they didn't sleep very much that night.

A company of infantry started an attack to break through the German lines. They had to attack across an open field. The Germans were dug in with machine guns supported by automatic 20 mm flak wagons and mortars. Our infantry was mowed down like grain and the Germans shot the aid men and the litter bearers who were trying to evacuate them. The attack, although supported heavily by artillery fire from us and the 30th Division, was a failure, and less than half of the attacking company got back. They had to leave their wounded there. It was bitter cold and we shuddered to think of them, wounded and freezing out there until dark. The infantry were bringing their wounded in and some of them were frozen from being out in the cold all day. It was a horrible thing and the fact that it was Christmas Eve made it worse. Taggart finally got to the cellar and so did Fanning and Mniece, and we sat there in the darkness and laughed about how close they had come. Morale was high in that cellar Christmas Eve even if the Germans had thrown every thing at us that they had. The Chief christened the author "Mauldin" there and it was really a case of "Up front with Mauldin". We had a good time for awhile and friendships were formed that will take a long time to forget. Also hidden qualities were brought out and most of us were glad we were with the boys we were with. A good bunch down in that cellar. Lt. Edmark came in with the news that we were being relieved that night. A bunch of tanks were forcing their way in and were expected shortly. Our whole task force was being pulled out and we were to meet them out on the road. When we heard that we all made a run for the beer keg and it went down quite a bit. The relieving force got there and



took up position about 20:30 hours. We were all packed up and even though we were sweating the ride out we were happy to leave and say good-bye to Parfondray. We left, a few vehicles at a time because the sound of tanks draws artillery fire. That half track of ours seemed awfully thin but we were riding it none the less. Sure enough the shells started coming in, and while they were close they weren't dangerously close so we didn't worry too much. Several buildings were on fire and the moon was out so it was light as day. Soon we were out of the danger zone and on the main highway with the rest of the task force. We stopped, gas and water trucks came along to gas us up, and everyone got out of their vehicles. We stopped on a long hill with hardly any grade. The tank behind our half track had a long barreled 76 on it. It started easing forward and the authors back was toward it. Whitten had his head down on his knees trying to sleep. Suddenly the author felt the muzzle of the 76 in the general region of the seat of his pants and still coming. He bailed over the side in nothing flat and "Hungry" looked up to see the barrel in his face. He ducked and they got the tank stopped just before the tank hit the track. A rough nite. We saw some stupid guy let loose a burst of 50 calibre at a buzz bomb. Luckily he missed, but they looked close. We finally got into a bivouac area out in the woods not far from Soy about midnite. It was a cold night and the ground wasn't very smooth but we slept nicely until about 10:00 hours.

The firing battery had moved to a position near Beucaup on the 23rd and fired a total of 725 rounds in direct support of C.C.B. during the day of the 24th.

Christmas Day was bright, clear, and cold; our sleeping bags were frozen to the ground. We moved at 12:00 hours to Oppange and found a house to sleep in. We had a "K" ration for dinner but had the promise of a turkey supper from the 33rd. We got settled in the house and got our turkey supper and it was a swell one.

The battery moved from its old position to a new one nearby. It was here that Lt. Col. Garton fought a losing battle with cognac in a dual celebration, his birthday and Christmas. He was very happy and had a kind word for everyone. He even demonstrated how to drive a wire truck to Tec 4 Overes and Pfc. Wratchford. He made a mistake however when he ran into Col. Brown. That was bad. The battery fired all day and didn't have turkey. It didn't arrive in time and they

had to substitute ham. The German offensive had stopped our mail and we hadn't had any for over a week. It wasn't a good Christmas as far as mail was concerned.

The R.O. section drank Charlie Corbin's cognac on Christmas nite like he wanted us to and we all hoped that he was all right and wasn't having it too badly. The next day our task force moved into a town not far from Soy. We hadn't stopped when 3 P-51's came over at tree top height and those bombs really looked big. We got our panels out, and fast too. The Belgians were glad to see us and made us feel at home. Fanning wired the house onto our battery and made the lights burn. After that we were strictly "in". They had a piano in the house; Mniece had been looking for a piano to play for a long time. We had Lt. Edmark and a couple of his officers and crews as well as the old mortar Sgt. from Parfondray there, and we all had a lot of fun.

The night passed and the battery fired all night in support of C.C.B. and the 75th Infantry Division.

We came back to find that three boys who had been wounded in France had returned. Sgt. Huizel, Pfc. Wronko, and Pvt. Osborne were all back and it was like a homecoming for everyone. Lt. Gafford had been evacuated to the 128th Evacuation Hospital and Pvt. Pedigo had been taken to an unknown evacuation hospital for an injury to his hand.

The battery fired a total of 200 rounds on the 27th in support of C.C.B. and the 75th Division, including 5 propaganda shells.

It was here that "Hungry" Whitten found a baby bed with high sides to sleep in. He overflowed it but it must have suited him because it took two officers and the rest of the section half an hour to get him out of it in the morning.

The boys played a little poker and did a lot of fooling around for a couple of days here. The battery was set up around a large house and barn. It's sole occupants were a very old gentlemen and his daughter, who was of middle age. They really were glad we were there and the boys in the battery saw to it that they had plenty of good hot American food and plenty of good coffee.

The battery fired a lot of defensive fire at German infantry and tanks during this period. The Germans were still in an attacking mood, but on the 28th we were glad to hear that they had run into the 2nd Armored Division at the farthest point of advance and were driven back five miles. That was the farthest point of their advance.



There was an alarm on the night of the 28th. The Germans sent out a strong patrol that nite and the green 75th Division thought it was a counter attack and called for fire. The 391st fired about 1500 rounds that night and "A" Battery was in on it. The B.C. party in Soy had shells drop in around them and saw officers and men out of the 75th Division act like no officer and men of the 3rd Armored had ever acted.

The R.O. section had to report to Captain Hawley at Soy the morning of the 29th and we heard that we were going out on armed reconaissance. Five tanks and our half track were to go past the front lines and into enemy territory until we drew fire, and stay there until we found out what was shooting and what all the enemy had there. None of us relished the idea but we had to go. Four tanks and a peep in front of us, and a tank and peep behind us made up our force. We knew the tanks would draw fire and that we would be in on it. A half track seems thin when up with M 4 tanks. We went on past the dug-in tanks and anti-tank guns and stopped between them and the outpost infantry for awhile. At this point someone was bringing back an enemy prisoner. We wished we could shoot him. We were all sitting in the half track with our heads sticking up while Pvt. Horace Kelley was standing up in back of the track when the tanker behind us accidentally pressed the trigger on his machine gun. The bullet passed right by Kelley's neck and Mniece's arm, hitting one of the boxes of ammunition and exploding several rounds.

We went on past the front. The peeps stopped in a wood and Lt. Plummer stopped the track a little farther on. We were expecting anti-tank fire so he went ahead on foot with the tanks. We could hear some tankers talking to each other over the radio and we heard them talking about Lt. Plummer. He was behind them and they thought he was a German. He would have been shot if their turret would have swung around far enough. Tec 5 Mniece would have, too, because he was taking a map up to the Chief along about then. They received fire from anti-tank guns but kept on going until they could see German infantry dug in. They also drew a lot of artillery fire but Lt. Plummer was up on foot sending it back. Visibility was poor however, and that was all that saved them from being trapped and cut off.

An 88 mm gun got the range however, and when an armor piercing shell tore a deep gash in the top of the 75 mm gun at its base right by

Lt. Plummer they decided that was enough and started to come back. The Germans knew that there was only one road through the woods and we would have to use it to get out, so they gave it and the woods a very heavy and concentrated shelling for about half an hour. They landed all around us and shrapnel bounced off the track, but none of us got hit. A couple of infantrymen were hit by shells and one was killed. The shells followed the sound of the tanks through the woods and some landed dangerously close. So they sent the half track ahead for a mile or so, so that the sound of the tankers wouldn't draw fire on us or the peeps. That did the trick and we had no more fire that morning. Coming back we saw a B-24, that had been hit by an enemy fighter, coming down. All the men bailed out and the plane circled and seemed to be coming straight for us. Fanning stopped the track but the plane went into another circle before it exploded in mid air and fell flaming to the ground. There were 7 more of our big bombers shot down that day and it always hurt to see one shot down. Some of the men in them parachuted down close to the battery position. Several of the boys went over to see them.

We got back to Soy and reported to Captain Hawley. There was another recon mission for us but they furnished a tank for us this time. There was only room for two artillerymen so Lt. Plummer and S/Sgt. Taggart went. The rest of us stayed at Captain Hawleys C.P. to sweat them out. They went in a different direction and into a road in a narrow valley. They hadn't gotten very far before the Germans started throwing rockets, high explosive, and white phosphorous at them. It was too hot and they soon found that the Germans had too much of everything in that valley to use it as a route of attack. They were gone a long time and we really sweated them out. We went back to the battery, worn to a frazzle, and thought we were in for a good night's sleep. About 21:00 Hq. called for Lt. Plummer and we knew we would soon be on our way again. He came back and told us that it wouldn't be hard this time. We were all beat to a nub and he knew it, but so was he. He told us that he would just take Fanning and Taggart along this time. We all would have given a fortune to stay in but all of us said that if one went we all would go. It makes a person realize that he is in a pretty good section when they turn down an opportunity like that. We went up to a Chateau to act as liason party with the 330th Infantry of the 83rd Division. It was a nice setup and we had



a good nights sleep. We were relieved the morning of the 30th and once again we went back to the battery.

The battery was firing quite a bit all the time through this period. The front was fluid at this time in this sector and the enemy was moving quite a few tanks in behind the lines. The infantry were dug in but they sent out strong patrols every night. The battery, being in direct support of C.C.B., had to help break this up and the charred hulls of enemy tanks and the broken bodies of German infantry in this area bore mute testimony as to the effect of our fire here, 388 rounds on the 30th.

The battery was sweating out a turkey dinner — our Christmas turkey — all week. It arrived on the 30th and S/Sgt. Kermit Clark said that when the whole battery got there he would serve it. So we were waiting for the B.C. section to come in from 75th Division Hq. so we could eat turkey again.

We were preparing for a march order, too, back to the rear for a short regrouping and maintenance period. The B.C. party got back just as the turkey was being served at 12:00 hours on the 31st and ate as if they were starved. We found out later that they had eaten another turkey dinner only a few hours before with the 75th Division. Tec 5 Wilbur Lyons and S/Sgt. Taggart however, always were "Chowhounds" and the rest of their crew weren't far behind. It was a nice meal and everyone had that comfortably full feeling after eating it.

We pulled out on the road at 13:30 hours. The snow that had fallen the past few days had turned to ice and the narrow, winding roads were like a skating rink. There was a lot of slipping and sliding on the roads that day and although we saw other vehicles overturned and in ditches by the side of the road the battery was lucky and none of our vehicles met with any mishaps. The column did get cut, and with Sgt. Earl Tormola's tank, with Tec 5 Miner at the controls, in the lead about one third of the column went about 5 miles too far down the road. We were halted in time, just as we had decided to go to Paris or someplace almost as good. We kept on, getting on narrower roads all the time and slipping almost as far sideward as forward. At 17:00 we got to the village of St. Avins, in Belgium, and found our billets. The battery was billeted in a large Chateau and in its barns and hay-lofts. It turned out to be a pretty good setup for everyone.

New Years Day the battery received alert orders to be prepared

to move out the following morning at 8:30. We moved all day on ice covered secondary roads jammed with traffic from other units which were attempting to reach the front lines by the shortest and quickest route. We arrived at Grande Hoursinne in the late hours of the morning with only a few tanks and vehicles. The maintenance half track and two tanks had slid off the road and gotten stuck in the deep snow. It was not until the following day that the battery organized again in time for the attack at 8:30.

Task force Lovelady attacked and advanced against stubborn resistance from dug in infantry, mortar, and small arms fire. Bad roads and thick woods slowed our advance. As usual Battery "A" displaced as advance guard and when the infantry and tankers ran into heavy resistance we went into position on the crest of a hill at Tri La Cheslaing.

We immediately fired one mission, and then enemy mortars began landing in our position forcing us to withdraw to an alternate position. No sooner displaced than a heavy concentration of mortar fire covered our previous position. We had gotten away just in time. We fired close support for the task force the remainder of the day and by night-fall our first objective, the town of Malempre, was secured, and out-post lines established south of the town. The following day we were forced to remain in our position while our doughboys cleared out an enemy mine field which was holding up our advance. Progress in clearing the mine field was slow due to anti-tank, mortar, and artillery fire placed on the field by the enemy. We also received some artillery and rocket fire, but fortunately for us most of the rounds were landing on our left flank. The weather was very hazy, but we could hear the steady droan of hundreds of buzz bombs as they flew very close over our heads, some landing a mile or so back of us. On January 6th the 83rd Division moved into our position and we pushed on up to give closer support to the advance elements at Houmart.

Lt. Plummer and Tec 5 Fanning were with the leading company of infantry directing artillery fire when a large shell exploded nearby, killing Tec 5 Fanning. Lt. Plummer miraculously escaped without a scratch. Tec 5 Fanning was one of the original members of the battery and his happy-go-lucky manner made him very popular with the men.

On the evening of January 6th we broke out of the woods near



Fraiture and continued to advance rapidly until we met dug in enemy tanks. The task force commander deployed his tanks around the flanks as we laid down a heavy barrage, thus knocking out the tanks. With this resistance eliminated we pushed forward. Here the enemy had chopped trees so they fell across the roads, but our tank dozers quickly shoved them to one side and pushed onward. The following days we continued to advance despite the intense cold and snow. Our gun tubes were beginning to show the hard wear they had received and it was doubtful if we could last much longer without renewing our tubes. It was very dangerous to fire the guns in this condition, but the men did not hesitate for they knew that every round fired brought us nearer our objective. Our advance gained momentum, as the Germans realized their attempted breakthrough was a failure and began withdrawing their troops across the border. We cut the St. Vith highway and advanced on Houffalize, meeting the Third Army advancing from the South and thus completing our mission in the Bulge. It was a happy bunch of men that left that snow covered hill of Belgium to go into a short rest period before returning to Germany. For as we all remember, it was the toughest campaign of the entire war.

## TIME OUT FOR AWHILE

The battery got everything ready for our next move, which was to take us out of the snow and ice and into houses for a while. We were ready for such a move as it had been very cold and miserable for most of the battle of the bulge.

March order came at 13:30 hours on the 21st of January and we went back through the snow covered trees of the Ardennes, the recapture of which had cost the 3rd Armored so much. The cost was very much in evidence, too, as we threaded our way over winding roads. The burned out hulls of scores of tanks littered the roads and fields. Some German tanks were there too, but they were all too few in comparison. The roads were still slippery but no vehicles fell out or met with mishap. We arrived at our destination, Durbuy, Belgium, after a march of 30 miles. Our living quarters were rather nice. We were in a four story building, which gave everyone plenty of room, and the kitchen was set up in a factory in the back. The mess hall was fixed up where we could sit at tables and eat inside. It seemed very nice indeed after the hardships and snow of the past month.

Durbuy was a sleepy little village in a valley, with mountains on all sides. Civilians were friendly, and the men polished up their French and spent many an hour visiting with the civilians. It was a happy period for the battery, with nothing but maintenance work on the guns and vehicles to keep us occupied. Everyone stayed up as long as he wanted at night and slept as late as he wanted in the morning. There were quite a few passes given, including some to Paris, which Lt. Plummer, Tec 5's Mniece, Althouse, and Boles, and Sgt. Howard were lucky enough to get. Quite a few others got passes to Verviers and Captain Nelms gave 24 hour passes to nearby Belgium towns to every one who asked for them. There was a shower in Durbuy, as well as a theater; and in nearby Barvaux was a shower point where most of the boys got clean clothes. The weather moderated quite a bit around the



25th of January and soon all of the snow and ice was gone. The maintenance was completed in a week and the boys went hunting, fishing, and did a lot of small arms firing practice. There were also searching expeditions for cognac and beer almost every day, with Pfc. "Skinny" Myers, Cpl. George Smith, and S/Sgt. Irving Olson generally the most successful. We received a lot of new personal equipment here and everything became in tip top shape.

There were quite a few promotions during this period, including Sgt. Huizel to S/Sgt., Tec 5 Miles to Tec 4, Pfc. Larson to Tec 5, and Tec 5 Mniece to Corporal. The following were made Pfc's: Pvt's Leo Zemitus, Thomas "Fat" Bottjen, Bert Cook, Clare Crane, Robert Durie, Abe Eisenhart, Willie Gentry, Oscar Hall, William Hamacher, Leroy "Major" Henderson, Ellis Luman, Persie McConnell, Charles Miller, Solomon Miller, "Skinny" Myers, Paul Novak, Leonard O'Kray, "Gravel" Radcliffe, William Neumann, Leonard Morris, Anselm Norman, and Walter Reagan. There were other changes made in this interval. S/Sgt. Athol Glass received an honorable discharge to accept a 2nd Lieutenant's commission. Sgt. Reagan was reduced to Pvt. because of an overage in sergeants in the battery. And Tec 4 "Lightfoot" Wornell fought a good campaign against several bottles of cognac but had to surrender unconditionally when it got him down. As a result he was out over night. Captain Nelms wasn't favorably impressed, so the next day found "Lightfoot" a private.

Tec 5 Frank Kanipe got the first rotation furlough to the States from the battery, but he deserved it, having been in Iceland more than a year before joining the 391st in England. Pfc. Johnny Kilgroe returned to duty after a three months absence due to wounds received near Brening, Germany. Sgt. Walter Everett was transferred to Headquarters Battery, and we got a new officer at Durbuy, too. He was 2nd Lieutenant Murry Root, formerly of Mass., Texas, and St. Louis, Missouri, but later of the 13th Armored Division.

Time went by pretty fast with most everyone happy about the whole thing. At this time the Russians were in the middle of a very successful winter offensive which was netting them about thirty miles a day. We were all glued to the radios and sweating them out because at that time it looked like they weren't even going to stop at Berlin. They did, however, and we knew that the linkup near the Rhine that we had anticipated had been wishful thinking on our part.

The boys played a lot of poker, drank a lot of beer and cognac, and spent a lot of time sleeping. Cpl. Smith, Tec 5 "Skinner" Miner, and Pfc. "Red" Barrett found a good deal some place but wouldn't say too much about it. We can't blame them for hoarding a good thing however.

The Red Cross Clubmobile made several stops around our area. That is always an event. And we saw an army movie. "Your Job In The Army" showing how the German Nation had fooled everyone between wars.

General Rose came down to give out the battalion decorations. Pfc. Marshall McBride was awarded the Bronze Star for gallantry in action back in France and Cpl. Sam Frankel was given the Purple Heart for being shaken up very badly when hit by the recoil of his gun.

Rumors began to be heard of the new move that the Division was going to make soon, the rumors had us going all the way from England to Germany. We knew that it would be Germany, however, and were glad to hear we were going back to Stolberg. We had been there before and we knew that the housing situation was good. There was a good theater, shower points, and other advantages there. We spent most of February 6th getting ready for the move and at 5:30 hours on February 7th we left Durbuy. The roads were in good shape and the march was made in very good time and without incident. We got to Stolberg at 11:30 hours and were happy to pull into the same area. It was the same street we had had before but not the same apartments. These were better, if anything, with more room. Seemed almost like a home coming because we had learned the town pretty well while fighting for it and during our first stay there.

We were disappointed however, when we heard that Marlene Dietrich had been to the Jackpot Theater in person the day before we got there.

The vehicles and guns had to be cleaned after the road march, and there was some maintenance work involved, but it didn't take more than a couple of days. Houses had to be fixed up a little bit to suit the individual tasks of the occupants, but that too was finished in a day or so. It was another nice period for the battery with not much to do, and the weather turned warm and sunny.

There was a beer hall down town operated by the 9th Infantry Division with excellent beer as well as a G.I. band, and the boys spent



a lot of time there, especially "Skinner" Miner, Royce Appelbury, "Oley" Olson, "Flabby" Lorson, "Gravel" Radcliffe, Oscar Hall and Leo Zemitus. They would come up the street when it closed at four with a decided list to port, with Miner generally putting on a review for the benefit of the soldiers and civilians alike.

The details didn't amount to much so we got a lot of rest and sleep. There was one detail, however, that got under everyone's skin. We had to send a large detail every day for about a week to work on the drainage ditches of secondary roads in the area, and since that smelled definitely of work none of us were too happy when we saw we were on it. It didn't last long, however, and everyone promptly forgot about it.

The orders on non-fraternization were the same as before, but boys will be boys when there are girls around. There were ways and means of evading the issue and there was much climbing in and out of windows. One window in particular, but that would be telling and it is better if none of the details are ever printed. There were some choice morsels.

There had been several cases of venereal disease pop up in the battalion and General Rose shut off all passes for the 391st. That was a body blow, too, because at that time other units in the division were getting quite a few passes to Paris and Brussels. Action was taken to prevent any man getting out of his house; and there were 6 p. m. curfews, bed checks, and a lot of other regimentations and everything. The windows were still around however, and there wasn't much let up in the climbing in and out of them. "Gravel" Radcliffe got caught out of his building one night and was placed under arrest in quarters. The same night "Missouri" Morris was frying up a batch of chicken gizzards in the orderly room after curfew. He was supposed to be in his building at the time. When he was almost finished frying them the officers walked in and he too, was placed under arrest. What happened to the fried chicken gizzards has never been officially known but the author knows of a certain R.O. in the battery who ate a few that night. That added insult to injury and hurt "Missouri's" pride no end.

Time passed swiftly, with everyone having a good time and plenty to eat and sleep. Rations and P.X, rations came in regularly, and that is always a big help. Besides the beer hall, there was a brewery where we could buy five gallon cans of beer, and most sections had several full

cans of it around all of the time. There was a piano in the R.O. section's flat and with "Rolly" Mniece there to play it we had the joint jumping most of the night. Tec 5 Plasse brought his violin down, and with "PeeWee" Hoffmann and "Teddy" Fanelli on the drums and Carlis Boles on the guitar we had quite a good band. A lot of good bull sessions took place around there.

Everyone got all cleaned up and got their equipment straightened out. At this point we were issued the army's new "Batman" raincoats, which make a better shelter half than they do a raincoat.

We had found out what our next mission would be and it was drawing close when the Germans opened the flood gates of the dams controlling the Roer River and flooded everything out. It postponed our re-entering into combat for around a week and we were sort of glad to get the reprieve. It is always hard to leave a nice rest area for combat.

Tec 4 "Tommy" Lattinville returned to the battery after a five months absence due to burns received in September near Brenig.

On the night of the 23rd of February the artillery preparation for the crossing of the Roer began and we knew it wouldn't be long before we shoved off. We spent the 24th getting everything set to move and were supposed to move out the next morning. At the last moment however it was decided to make a night march to reach the assembly area instead of a day march, so we hung around all day Sunday February 25th.

The Captain had given us a briefing on what we were going to do, who we were going to support, and the whole picture. Our fun was over for a while. The period of what the army calls rest and maintenance had been a very good one for the men of Battery "A" and we were off to the wars again. We all hoped this would be the last push of the war, but it wasn't to be that way.



## PUSH TO THE RHINE

We left Stolberg at 21:30 hours on the night of February 25th. The R.O. section was with "F" Company, 36th Armored Infantry Regiment and the battery as well as the rest of the 391st was with Colonel Welburns' task force. The division was on the left flank of the 1st Army and we were to protect the right flank of the 9th Army. There were a lot of woods in our path and an aerial photo of the enemy defenses showed plenty of artillery and anti-tank guns.

We drove through Eschweiler and other towns and got on the Autobahn for awhile and followed it almost to the Roer River. We turned out onto dirt roads and went through piles of rubble that had once been villages. Finally we reached the Roer and were surprised to see how narrow it was. We could see evidences of the terrible price its crossing exacted from both our forces and those of the enemy. We crossed near Düren and went down shell packed roads toward our assembly area near Ellen. The whole task force assembled there and the battery arrived around midnight. The enemy were thought to be in a forest not over 600 yards away but we all slept as if they were miles away.

The task force jumped off at 6:00 hours with Lt. Plummer, Sgt. Carawan, Pfc. Mac Bride, and Pfc. Whitten with the infantry on foot. The expected opposition didn't materialize and the task force went right through the woods with the only trouble coming from muddy roads. On this attack the artillery was kept up well to the front and the battery got march order at 11:00 hours, moving forward about 5 miles to a position near Merschenich. The position was on a huge flat field surrounded by forests. The sky was heavily overcast and when at 14:30 hours the sound of airplane motors was heard, the battery didn't think much of it. But when the sound of bombs falling became audible every one dived under the vehicles. It was battery A's area. Bombs straddled several of the vehicles but the M-7 of Sgt. Dennehy,

driven by Tec 5 Stein got the closest call of all. Four medium bombs straddled the tank and none were more than 20 feet away. The concussion shook the tank like it was a toy and the men who were under it thought their end was at hand. But luckily no one in that section were hurt. Other bombs fell close to the tanks of Sgt. Tormola, Sgt. Olson, and several others. Also, bombs fell near the kitchen truck and the ammunition trains. It seemed impossible that with so many bombs falling no vehicles were hit. Four men were wounded by the bombing. Pfc. Leonard Morris just suffered a concussion of the right thigh and remained on duty after first aid was administered. Tec 5 Mixon was hit in the back with a large piece of shrapnel and seemed to be seriously wounded. He was evacuated to the 44th Evacuation Hospital on the 26th of February. Pfc. Bernard Kennedy was hit by shrapnel in the shoulder and probably had the most serious injury of the three. Pfc. Ronda Hollar was thrown against a tree by the concussion of a bomb hitting nearby while crawling under his peep, and at the time it was thought he had a critical wound. It turned out for the best however and none were in as bad shape as they appeared to be at the time. It was a very lucky break for the battery to be bombed by at least 30 bombs right in the area and not have a vehicle knocked out and only 4 casualties who had to be evacuated. It was a very trying experience and it's strange just how flat a man can get when something like that is going on.

At the time, Sgt. Carawan and Pfc's. Mac Bride and Whitten were stuck in the mud with their peep in a column of tanks that were also stuck. When the bombs started falling they tried to crawl into a light tank that had about 6 in it already. Unsuccessful in this they tried to get under the tank and peep but they were in the mud too deeply for that. The R.O. track was in the woods trying to pass another track that was stuck when the bombs started falling. The author was in the back of the track and by the time he climbed out "Flabby" Larson and "Square" Kelley had their helmets under their arms and were taking off for distant parts on foot, and fast too. "Squares" short legs were really pumping away with "Flabby" a close second. It wasn't funny then, but it was one of the funniest things that ever happened, when we pictured them later running down the muddy road.

Everyone was badly shaken up at the time and it was several days before everyone recovered from the concussion effect. There was a lot



of discussion as to whose planes did the bombing. The overcast was so thick that we couldn't see them. The general opinion was that they were a flight of our medium bombers who bombed us by mistake. They flew like our planes, sounded like them, and the pattern of bombs were like ours.

The task force had taken Etzweiler without much of a fight and moved on toward Elsdorf. Still not much opposition and not much firing by the battery. The battery moved into a new position near Etzweiler at 10:30 hours on the 26th. The leading elements of the task force entered Elsdorf on the same day. We didn't have much of the town and the Germans had an anti-tank gun a few hundred yards from the town. The enemy shelled a road constantly but it was mostly harassing fire and didn't do much damage.

The infantry jumped off at 7:00 the morning of the 27th to clear out a factory and a Mark 6 tank nearby as well as dug in machine gun nests that commanded parts of the town. Lt. Plummer had a narrow escape this day. He and the platoon leader of "F" Company were leading an attack out in the middle of an open field when they were pinned down with machine gun fire. The bullets were flying everywhere and they decided to run for it. They did, and just made it with bullets kicking up dust around their heels. A man finds out how fast he really is under circumstances like those and those two guys were fast. The same thing happened to Lt. Plummer in the afternoon of the same day but he called F.O. tank 10 on his radio and Sgt. Jones fired a couple of rounds of 75 H.E. into a Kraut machine gun nest. It gave them no more trouble that day.

The battery was firing at the anti-tank guns and machine gun nests holding up our occupation of Elsdorf and the fire finally neutralized their effect and the infantry got them. The battery fired 203 rounds that day. In the factory was a lot of sugar and since we were short Lt. Plummer sent for the 3/4 ton and they got about a thousand pounds of sugar for the battery. We also got an automobile there and used it for a day or two to run around town in.

In this phase of the battle all civilians were rounded up in one area and held prisoners until the rear elements came up and interrogated them. By that time the fighting was miles ahead.

The morning of the 28th found the town pretty well in our hands, with the last mopping up going on. Looting was pretty good and the

Chief, Rolly, and Hungry got ahead of the infantry at times searching houses and shops. The battery moved to a place near Elsdorf at 14:30 hours on the 28th and went into a surveyed position. Nearby was one of the 88 anti-tank guns that had been causing us a lot of trouble a day or two before. Tec 5 Mixson, Green, S/Sgt. Olson, Pfc. Zemitus, and others went out and found ducks, geese, chickens, eggs, and hams in sufficient quantity to feed the battery several days.

On the first of March the battalion switched over to Colonel Hogan's task force of C.C.R., and the R.O. section was to work with Co. I. 36th Armored Infantry Regiment. The task force jumped off at 16:30 hours of the 1st to cross the Erft Canal and the battery laid down a heavy barrage to cover the attack and crossing of the canal. The crossing was made and bridges put in but they were knocked out by enemy shelling, and the 3 companies of infantry had a hard time holding onto their bridgehead. The artillery of the 391st and the 83rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion put down a devastating barrage and knocked out most of an enemy concentration of tanks all ready to counter attack. The battery fired a total of 203 rounds that day.

The city of Elsdorf was bombed by German planes the night of the 1st but "A" Battery was just far enough out of the city not to catch any of the bombs. The house that the R.O. section had slept in for two nights had a direct hit and several infantrymen were killed.

The attack jumped off at 2:00 hours from Gluch on the morning of the second. It was across flat open country studded with ditches, anti-tank guns, enemy infantry, self propelled guns, and a few tanks. Just a few very small villages dotted the landscape.

The battery moved out of its position near Elsdorf at 7:00 hours the 2nd and crossed the Erft Canal near Pfaffendorf, going into position there. There were plenty of anti-tank guns to be fired upon the battery did a lot of firing that day. Lt. Plummer, up with the infantry, tried his best to knock out a Mark 5 tank with artillery. It was holding up the advance, and the tankers wouldn't get out in the open enough to shoot at it. It was shooting into a house, the only shelter nearby, and slowly knocking it down. Lt. Plummer, firing Battery "A", scored direct hits with H.E. and W.P. on the enemy tank but it was too rugged a tank to hurt with indirect fire. The tank pulled out, however, as it was getting pretty hot around there, even for a Mark 5 tank.



1st Sgt. Chester Mosley, Tec 5 Wilbur Lyons, "Gravel" Radcliffe, Leo Zemitus, and Ellis Aplin went into a nearby scrub forest looking for snipers. They hadn't got in too far when the familiar chatter of a kraut "Burp" gun greeted them. They had stumbled onto a German mortar platoon which had been bypassed by the leading elements of the task force. They were fortunate in having trenches and foxholes all over the place for cover, and they lost no time in getting in them. They kept low and took stock of their arms and ammunition. Sgt. Mosley had a 45 pistol with 7 rounds of ammunition. Lyons had a tommy gun with 30 rounds in the clip, and Zemitus had his "grease" gun, also with 30 rounds. Radcliffe and Aplin didn't have their weapons with them. It wasn't an impressive array of firepower to cope with that many enemy troops. They used their ammunition sparingly, keeping low all the time, and it was a lucky thing that the Germans didn't charge. After several hours it was decided to send for help. It was the only way out. Radcliffe said he would go if the others opened fire to cover his exit. He crawled out of his hole and then ran for all he was worth for the battery position, not too far away. A platoon of light tanks was called for, to go to the aid of the men pinned down. There were reinforcements from the battery as well and it was a sizeable little force. The light tanks charged up to where the Krauts were, fired a few rounds of 37 mm H.E. into their position to shake them up a little bit. Then they sprayed the area with their machine guns and called for the Krauts to come out. They had had enough and out they came. They kept on coming until there were 42 of them. It was quite a haul for the battery but it was also an experience that none of the men involved would want repeated.

The task force was having its troubles with anti-tank guns. In an area of one hundred square yards there were 7 of our tanks knocked out. It was an ideal country for anti-tank fire and it was very hard for the observers to pick up. Just outside of Wiedinfeld the tanks were edging forward with the infantry riding them. Lt. Plummer. Sgt. Carawan and Pfc. Whitten were on the 4th tank in column when the first tank was knocked out. Seconds later the second tank was knocked out, and by the time an A.P. shell knocked a doughboys head completely off on the tank ahead of them they were off the 4th tank and running for a stone wall several hundred yards up the road. Overshoes slow the average man down but evidently "Hungry" is not an average man.

They made the stone wall and then picked up the A.T. gun and placed artillery fire on it. It's crew took off to parts unknown.

A section of the task force captured Busdorf in a night attack, and the morning of the 3rd the other part was to go through them and captured Flusteden. They ran into 7 Tiger tanks before they got it, and had to dig in and hold. About this time the 391st had to switch task forces again, this time to go to Colonel Lovelady's task force. He was going to bypass the strong point of Flusteden and go into Stommeln, cutting off strong enemy forces in the area. The battery moved to a position near Busdorf, still the advance guard battery as it had been all through this attack.

The attack made good progress and soon Stommeln was cleared. The battery moved near Stommeln in very bad weather, and continued firing at the only opposition the Germans seemed to have west of the Rhine, A.T. some guns and a little bit of infantry. Everyone was getting wet and cold and was in a bad frame of mind, even if we were closing in on the Rhine.

Esch was captured and the attack went on. Close to the Rhine and at 11:28 hours of the 4th, the battery fired the first round of the battalion across the Rhine River. The attack switched south, toward Cologne. All the 3rd Armored Artillery was now firing into Cologne, that part on the west side of the river. Plans had been changed and C.C.A. was helping to capture Cologne also, along with the 8th and 104th Infantry Divisions

Cologne was pretty well liberated by the afternoon of the 6th so the battery got march order and moved into a position on a Luftwaffe base just outside of Longerich, which was a suburb of Cologne. We did some firing into that part of Cologne on the east bank of the Rhine. The R.O. section and Lt. Root set up an O.P. in a church steeple in Cologne where we could observe enemy movements across the River. We had to have men there 24 hours a day but we did it in shifts so it was a pretty good deal. Going back and forth from it to Longerich gave us the opportunity to take a lot of pictures of what had once been a city. The firing the battery did during this period was at suspected enemy O.P.'s, road junctions, and mortar positions the enemy had close to the river.

The battalion set up a theater not far away, and there was a division shower point in a silk factory near Cologne. The battery was



having it pretty nice all through this period with pretty nice weather, not much to do, and plenty to drink and eat. Every couple of days there would be a chicken gathering detail and Tec 4 Bill Overes would take it over. He was always successful and the battery had chicken often. Lt. Sterne got a pass to Paris at this time and Lt. Plummer took over as Exec. Paul Novak got the first furlough to England from the battery, and left March 11th.

Col. Garton was having his share of the drinks these days, too, but one day he was in a bad mood and happened to encounter Skinny Myers, who had been having more than his share of the drinks. The Colonel had given orders several days before, not to wear any kraut hats of any kind, but Skinny was high enough to ride right up in front of Hq. with a German cap on. Colonel Garton saw him and told him to remove it. Skinny had reached the stage where he didn't care about anything so he didn't do it. The Colonel had driven on but when he came by later and saw Skinny with the cap still on, he went sky high. He promptly ordered the grinning and laughing Skinny to dismount and walk in front of his peep to the battery area. The Colonel pulled his gun out and held it on Skinny, who was sobering up fast under the muzzle of the 45. The Colonel marched him over to the battery and wanted the officer in charge. "Skinner" Miner added insult to injury when he yelled out, "Hey, Chief. The Hawk wants you!" The Colonel wasn't duly impressed by that remark and proceeded to tell Lt. Plummer to discipline Miner for his familiarity, as well as to put poor old Skinny under arrest. The Colonel was on a high horse all night and to make matters worse, just as he was driving away he met Captain Nelms riding a German motorcycle, something else he had given orders not to do. Captain Nelms had to report to him later and Captain Nelms said that when he reported the Colonel didn't exactly invite him to have a drink with him. As a result all German bikes and motor cycles were broken up. Colonel Garton was going to throw the book at Skinny, but after an eloquent plea by Lt. Plummer he decided not to court martial Skinny but to give him a week of hard labor. Skinny spent the next week digging useless holes.

We were pulled out of Cologne for a period, while everything was getting set for us to cross the Rhine into the Remagen bridgehead of the First Army. We moved at 7:00 hours on the morning of March 17th to a factory south of Bottenbroich, also a suburb of Cologne. It

wasn't a tactical position, so the guns and vehicles were camouflaged in the woods and the battery lived in tents and houses. The weather was very good and a lot of baseball was played. We had a good setup for the kitchen and for eating. The factory had a very nice shower system. Also, a building we used as a theater.

On the 18th there was a division ceremony at the Cologne Sports Stadium outside of Cologne, at which General Rose presented several hundred decorations to members of the division. "A" Battery had five awards, all Bronze Stars for heroic achievements in action against the enemy. They were given to S/Sgt. Michael Taggart, Tec 4 Tommy Lattinville, Cpl. Roland Mniece, Pfc. John P. Wood, and Pfc. William Whitten. It was an impressive ceremony in a nice setting.

There was a loud cheer on March 18th when "Square" Kelley was promoted to Pfc. On the 18th, also, 1st/Sgt. Mosely left the battery for the 103rd Evacuation Hospital the same day because of an injury received. On the 20th, Cpl. Al Davis rejoined the battery after a 4 months absence for an operation. Another furlough to England came up about this time and when the names were drawn another "A" train man, Pfc. Russell, was the lucky one and he left for England on March 21st.

The battery started the army education and orientation program while at this position. It was under Lt. Root and he was just getting it organized when rumor told us we were getting ready to move out across the Rhine. Before we left however a few men from the battery went to Cologne to enjoy a concert by Lily Pons and Andre Kostelantz and his orchestra.

We spent most of the 22nd getting ready to move, and at 7:15 on the 23rd the battery pulled out of its position and headed south for the bridgehead. The R.O. section was assigned to Co. F. 36th Infantry, and left with them. It was a nice day. We went south through Bonn and Bad Godesberg and crossed the Rhine just south of Bad Godesberg. We climbed out of the valley upon hilly country, and stopped in Ittenbach and waited for the jump off. The Rhine was rather wide at this point, probably 500 yards, and it was the widest European river by far that we had seen up to this time. The day was sunny and the water was blue, with the white smoke from the smoke pots blowing rapidly down stream in the brisk wind. We all felt that this would really be the last campaign of the war for us. We could see that



something big was brewing and that the fairly static warfare of the past week or so in the bridgehead would soon be over. From just on the western side of the Rhine, where battery after battery of 240 howitzers lurked in forests and under camouflage nets, all the way up to the jumping off point the whole area was packed with artillery of all calibres. Just like it was in the hedgerows in Normandy before the break through at Marigny.

The Germans were throwing a few heavy caliber shells at the Autobahn and we saw one hit right where a speeding 6x6 seemed to be. We all thought that the 6x6 and its colored driver were blown sky high, but in a second the 6x6 came speeding out of the smoke at least 20 miles an hour faster and the driver several shades lighter.

The battery fired no rounds on the 23rd or 24th as the attack wasn't starting until 5:00 of the 25th. The First Infantry Division had to take some high ground past the village of Sand, and the 3rd Armored Division was going through them, and drive straight east, with Altenkirchen the first objective and a definite breakthrough the real purpose of the attack. So the battery spent the 23rd and 24th getting things all ready for the attack. On the 24th S/Sgt. Taggart left for a rotation furlough to the United States.

## THE ROSE POCKET

The task force moved out at 4:00 hours on the 25th, and battery followed to the assembly area near Sand, Germany. Everything moved from there but the attack was delayed until 7:00 because of very heavy fog.

When the jump off came it rolled for several miles with no opposition encountered, but suddenly a mine field was hit and enemy anti-tank guns opened up. The enemy had good observation in the flat country and they had plenty of mortars, self propelled guns, and machine guns. As a result, the battery had plenty of firing to do at a variety of targets and they certainly laid it in there on the Germans. From here on to the end of the war the artillery was to play an even more prominent part in the history making advances of the 3rd Armored. Each village was a strong point for the Krauts. But when too much fire was met the 391st would fire a T.O.T. on the town, mixing in a little white phosphorous to get the rats from their holes. Then the infantry would go in and clean them out. The Germans were well dug in, however, and in some of the towns it was necessary to dig them out one by one. The battery was right up there behind the leading elements, never far enough away to fire more than charge four or five. They move three times on the 25th, and in each and every position they were shelled. None of it very light stuff either, and some of it was that teeth jarring 150 or 170 mm stuff. Luckily no casualties were suffered and no vehicles were hit. It was rough country for fox-holes and mechanized warfare. The earth was very spongy and didn't have any bottom. Even on the side of a hill a vehicle was apt to bog down out of sight. The turf would give away and there was no bottom to the mud. Many were stuck that way. Water seeped in all foxholes more than a foot deep and made them untenable, so most of the guys forgot about them. It's hard to forget about the shells, however, especially when they come in at regular intervals.



In the meantime, the R.O. section was having a few bad breaks. Lt. Plummer, Rolly, Hungry, and Mac were up with the infantry in the peep. They met a lot of fire, the peep being close behind F.O. 9's tank. An anti-tank gun opened up and the tank backed up. As a result our peep looked like a pancake. Rolly tried to back it out but didn't have time so the R.O. section wrote off another peep. A little later some mortars came in close and everyone dove under the tanks. Hungry didn't get his legs in fast enough and got splinters of shrapnel in both of them. Nothing serious, but the Chief sent him back to the aid station and told him to stay with the track.

Even as the heavy opposition was encountered we were grinding forward with quite a bit of aid from the P-47's. A lot of stuff was bypassed on the way, including several self-propelled guns which fired with annoying regularity. While going down a road to go into position near Jugerot, a boy out of the 33rd told Lt. Sterne that the road was under observation and that the enemy had a self propelled 88 on the flank, firing on the road. It was there all right because it had been firing at us off and on all afternoon. Lt. Sterne said "To hell with him, we'll go in anyhow", and in they went. It's stuff like that that wins wars and turns a slow and costly campaign into a break through to hasten the enemy's defeat. It was a good move, because no one was hit and the gun was bypassed by the whole task force. When the Germans shot up all their ammunition they blew up their gun also and quit. The battery fired all night of the 25th, and in turn received some counter battery fire.

The leading elements jumped off again at 5:00 on the 26th and ran into some more heavy fire. A number of tanks were lost, and the fire was getting heavier all the time. Lt. Plummer ordered a smoke screen fired to screen our position, and then helped lead an infantry charge into the town and flush out the Krauts from the houses. In doing this he was closely followed by Rolly Mniece and Mac. Mac had a gruesome experience here at this village not far from Altenkirchen. He was in the cellar of a house with some boys from the 36th. Shells were coming in regularly, but it was a good cellar. The only opening was a very small window at ground level. One of those thousand to one shots happened at this point and a shell come right through the window and exploded in an infantryman's face, killing him instantly, but not harming Mac.

The Germans still had a lot of artillery and a lot of ammunition, and just about every position was getting shelled regularly. Luckily, no one in the battery was hit. The attack progressed favorably, with one village after another falling. The civilians in these villages were shell shocked from the going-over they had gotten from the artillery and the P-47's. We were grinding through two of Germany's best Panzer divisions, and we knew if they couldn't hold us we would soon be on our way because all the prisoners captured said, they were out of gas. We were pleased to hear that Colonel Lovelady's Task Force had captured Altenkirchen on the night of the 26th. It was really our objective and we had hit strong opposition but they were ahead of schedule so they went in and captured it.

The battery moved into a position near Altenkirchen and fired at enemy concentrations past Altenkirchen. When the task forces jumped off the morning of the 27th they met with a little artillery and rocket fire at road junctions, at first, but as they went farther no opposition at all was encountered. We had broken the German lines in a definite breakthrough, and the task force commanders received their plans and gave the word to go as far as possible. We started to pass villages with white flags flying from every house and with no damage at all to them. How different from the villages of the previous two days which had taken such a pounding, and how different from Altenkirchen. It had been flattened by our air force a few days before because it housed a German Army Headquarter.

We were definitely on our way, heading straight east, and we knew that the 3rd Armored had done it again. It was the belief of every man that if they couldn't hold us in the narrow confines of the bridgehead they couldn't hold us anywhere. We drove on and on in very rugged country that was admirably suited for defense, but evidently the Germans just didn't have it. We went through one forest which contained one of the largest ammunition dumps we had ever seen. We were glad that it would never be fired at us. Mile after mile of forests, hills, and a few green fields passed by, as well as village after village full of white flags. It was this day that we saw our first liberated prisoners of war. Long lines of them were on the roads, Russians, Poles, French and Belgians. Some in uniform, some in tattered clothing of all sorts, but all very happy and heading for allied territory. It made us happy too, knowing it was us who had



freed them. We drove all afternoon of the 27th. In a general mixup the R.O. section got orders to, and did, change task forces three different times, and finally at 15:00 ended up with Colonel Wellburn's, the one we had started out with. We had supper at 21:00, got march order after we had finished. None of us minded the night march even if we hadn't slept much for two days. We drove through mile after mile of forest with the only sign of opposition being five burned out half tracks, evidently from Colonel Hogan's task force. They were ahead of us at this particular phase. The woods along the road were lined with tanks, self propelled guns, and trucks of all sorts, hundreds of them. All of them were camouflaged, with nothing apparently wrong with them. They were just out of gas, and it made us all thank the tireless efforts of our air force in knocking out the German gas industry. We drove until 1:30 hours and bivouaced for the night near Rushizen, or what remained of it. We were going to jump off again at 7:00.

The only things out of the ordinary that had happened on our long drive were Pfc. Rudy Haiden's having a finger broken by a low hanging limb while riding Sgt. Dennehy's tank — he was taken to the 51st Field Hospital —, Tec 5 Russel Parhkurst's being accidentally shot by an unknown person firing at a deer. He was hit in the heel, not seriously, and evacuated to an unknown hospital.

We jumped off at 7:00 on the 28th and shortly after passed Colonel Hogan's Task Force in a town they had captured the night before. We went right through them and headed toward the rising sun. It was much the same as the day before, no opposition, a very rugged country composed of hills and forests, and a few red tiled villages in the valleys. All the villages had white flags waving, civilians were out waving at us, and there were still the hundreds of enemy vehicles in the woods by the sides of the roads. There were more and more liberated prisoners as we went along, and in some villages they outnumbered the Germans. We drove most of the day under sunny skies with large formations of our bombers flying high above us, heading farther east to deliver death blows to a tottering Reich. We halted near Romeshosen in mid-afternoon and waited for orders. Chow was served, gas brought in, maps flown in by the cub. This last was a good thing as we were off our other maps. Some boys started a big baseball game while others went out and looted cigars

and Schnapps. Several prisoners were flushed out of the woods, duly searched, and taken away.

We were parallel to Marburg, which other elements of the division had captured that same day. The B.C. section with Captain Nelms and Lt. Root was there, and sent Cpl. Davis down to the battery after a truck to haul a 50 qt. case of cognac and white lightning they had found, back to the battery. They were in a castle in Marburg and looting was evidently pretty good there. General Boudinot come around and called a meeting to divulge the plans for the next move. We were to move straight north for more than 100 miles and complete the encirclement of the Ruhr by hooking up with the Second Armored Division of the 9th Army at Paderborn. The 83rd Recon. Battalion was to keep six miles ahead of the main task forces, to reconnoiter and take care of any light opposition encountered. C.C.A., C.C.B. and C.C.R. were to go down parallel roads with the first one reaching Paderborn taking it.

This was something really big and we knew it. It was one of the tough jobs of the war and one that held promise of being one of the most important factors in ending it quickly. It was really spearheading and all of us were very much aware of our division's reputation, that we got the hard jobs, the tough ones. And now with our old friends, the 2nd Armored, we were going to put the squeeze on the Krauts where it would hurt the most. A lot of us were disappointed because we didn't continue going straight east. We were almost 100 miles east of the Rhine at Marburg and many wanted to go right on to Berlin and meet the Russians.

The battery moved out at 7:00 on the 29th, being the lead battery behind one company of tanks and a company of infantry. We rolled north and north, passing through tremendous forests on the way. It was still rugged country, and not much opposition was encountered. What little there was, was taken care of by the 83rd Recon., and they had a bunch of prisoners in every little town. Along the roads we could see vehicles that the 83rd had shot up. The Krauts didn't know we were coming, or just how far away we were, and many of their vehicles were caught on the road and shot up. One such incident and scene will forever be remembered by every one in the task force. About 40 miles north of Marburg we were coming down winding roads around the edge of a hill. It was a sharp curve and when we got



halfway around we could see a German peep stopped on the opposite side of the road. In the front seat were two German officers. The only trouble was that they didn't have any heads. Their heads were cut off very neatly, just even with their shoulders, and the blood was still gushing up out of the several arteries. Their heads, or parts of their heads, were nowhere to be seen. There wasn't a shrapnel hole in the peep so there was a lot of discussion as to just how it happened. The only logical explanation is that they and a recon car of the 83rd came up on opposite sides of the blind curve and met head on, and the recon car fired a couple of rounds of 37 A.P. at them at point blank range, tearing off their heads. It wasn't a pleasant sight but war is war. Down the road were other Germans all shot up, but we soon passed this small pocket of what had been some resistance.

Some of the villages had been the scene of opposition, but they were set on fire and the enemy soon fled. General Rose was with our task force that day and rode up and down the column all day long. He gave orders that all abandoned enemy vehicles were to be set on fire as soon as we found them. Soon there were lots of fires going everywhere.

We had to halt several times to let the 83rd get their allotted six miles ahead of us. At first it was thought that we could reach the objective that night, but when it was almost dusk the 83rd said they were meeting opposition and the General decided to halt at Mengerhausen for the night. The R.O. section got a house and it just happened that General Rose picked the second house past ours for his C.P. Our half track was blocking the way and before we could move we had been called to task by Colonel Brown, a Lt.Colonel, and a Pfc. or two. General Rose himself was very nice about it and didn't seem worried at all but the underlings were evidently trying to make a few points. "Square" had gotten drunk that day and hadn't shown up that night. Other things had happened and Lt. Plummer was in a bad mood. So on the morning of the 30th he told us all off and sent the half track back to the battery. He didn't know it then but he was doing us a favor.

The task force jumped off at 7:30 on the 30th with "A" Battery still up there with one company of tanks and one of infantry. We rolled north, but at a slower pace, because the Germans had figured our plans out and were massing men and material to keep us from closing the gap. More and more bazooka teams were met and quite a few



snipers. As we went along a lot of fanatic S.S. were putting up a death struggle against us. The artillery all pulled out of the column to fire on the dug-in enemy. They had good positions, dug-in, and were hard to dig out. The cub spotted a dozen or so Mark 6 tanks in the vicinity of Rhoden, south of Paderborn. The P-47's were called out and they bombed several of them but visibility closed down and they had to go back home without finishing the job. The artillery fired on a lot of them, and that knocked several more out. Resistance kept getting tougher and tougher until finally the column came to a town, cleaned enough of it out to knife the column through, and bypassed the rest. In doing so they had to come out and use a different road from the one they had originally intended to. It turned out to be a costly error.

The column was hurried through the town, and the battery went into position on a high hill overlooking Rhoden at 19:00 hours. Sgt. Olson's M-7 was sent out to one end of the battery position as a road block because it was known to everyone that German tanks were around. Olson paced off the exact distance between his tank and the turn in the road where any German tanks would have to come from. He set his sight off for that distance and was exactly zeroed in. A German tank would have had a hard time coming around that curve, but it wasn't a job to be relished because an M-7 with its thin armor and 600 mil traverse is no match for any kind of a tank, let alone a Mark 6.

In the meantime Lt. Plummer, Cpl. Mniece, Pfc. Whitten, and Pfc. Mac Bride were up with the leading elements. The task force was going down a road about 5 miles south of Paderborn. It was wooded on one side of the road, while the other side was flat and level for several hundred yards before it ended in a patch of woods. Nothing seemed to be wrong when all of a sudden about a dozen Mark 6 tanks came charging out of the woods and over the flat ground to the road. They cut the column by knocking out a Medic halftrack on one end and an M-4 on the other. They then drove up and down the road shooting up the helpless half tracks and tanks. The word helpless is used because a Mark 6 is impervious to the 75's that most of our tanks carry. Men were in the ditches on either side of the road, and the German tanks drove up and down with machine guns and 88's blazing away. Whitten was in a ditch near the peep when an 88 hit the tank in front of the peep and a fragment hit his side. A medic



patched him up a little but he couldn't be evacuated just then. Lt. Plummer was standing by the peep trying to get communications with the battalion to bring some fire down on himself and the Germans. Before he could, however, an 88 H.E. shell hit the peep, demolishing it and setting it on fire, and fragments ripped into Lt. Plummer's leg in about six places. Mniece and Mac Bride got a medic and he was patched up, and Mac went out to look for an ambulance. All this time the Germans were shooting flares and it was light as day as they tried desperately to get the men in the ditches, but their machine guns couldn't be depressed far enough. Mac couldn't find the ambulance and came back. Hungry was working his way down the ditch as best he could but he had to cross the road. He went down far enough to get a bank for cover and crawled across the road and tried to edge his way to the woods. Flaming vehicles lit the night and the Germans were out their tanks yelling like a bunch of drunken Indians. General Rose was up at the front of the column trying to find a solution so he could get the force through, when a German tank popped up only yards away with an 88 and machine guns pointed at him.. The tank commander opened the hatch and covered the General with a burp gun. The General held his hands above his head and told them he was willing to surrender. As he was explaining this he reached down to throw his pistol away in evidence of good faith. The German tank commander started firing and emptied the clip of his burp gun into the General's face. He was killed instantly, of course, by the S.S. tanker. General Rose was one of the army's best, and in our opinion the best armored force commander of them all. Besides that he was a soldier. One had only to see him to know that his appearance commanded immediate respect, and he had that respect. His death was keenly felt by every member of this division.

It was getting later all the time and the situation wasn't improving any so Lt. Plummer knew they should be trying to get out, if they were going to. So even though he was under the influence of morphine he kept his senses enough to lead Mniece and Pfc. Horton (from Hq. battery) in short crawls down the ditch for several hundred yards before they could turn off and crawl for the woods. Rests were frequent because of Lt. Plummer's wound but they made the woods and went in far enough that they couldn't be seen. They spent a cold and shivering night there with no bedding and no jackets. They could see the



12 burning half tracks and the 8 tanks that had been knocked out, and could see and hear the Germans celebrating like crazy men.

"Hungry" had reached another patch of woods and decided to try to work his way through them and reach the battalion. He could hear the guns firing and knew them to be ours. He was a little afraid that maybe the outposts would not recognize him as an American and would shoot first and ask questions later, in view of the situation. He decided to risk it, though, and started working his way through the woods toward the battalion. He made it, around midnite, and was given treatment by Captain Cobb and taken in to Lt.Colonel Garner to tell him the situation.

"Mac" had gotten in with some of the infantry and they took to the woods, alternately sleeping and standing guard, and advancing toward a town they knew was in our hands. They spent most of their time on guard, however, because they only had one machine gun plus their individual weapons. Mac stayed with this outfit for several days before they were finally relieved, and when he got back he plainly showed the strain he had been under.

Lt. Plummer, Mniece, and Tec 5 Horton were in the woods, and after a sleepless night they decided to try to get out. Mniece and Horton made a litter from poles and a beat up overcoat they found and rolled the Chief onto it. They carried him several hundred yards in short hauls until they got to the edge of the woods.

By now our forces had sent doughboys up to clean things out and Mniece was very happy when he saw the first one. An ambulance was sent for and Lt. Plummer was evacuated. He was hit harder than he at first thought, as he told the author that day that it was flesh wounds and he expected to be back in a few weeks. He was a swell guy and everyone thought the "Little Chief" was strictly all right. He had had many close calls before and always escaped, but the law of averages caught up with him. His luck played out just as anyone's will if they are kept up there long enough.

The enemy tanks, having done their damage, fled through the woods to other woods where they could repeat their sneak raids on our columns. The task force moved on, and the battery moved at 16:00 on the 31st to a position on the side of a hill half a mile from where the attack had taken place the night before. The battery started firing at once on enemy tanks and mortar nests near Paderborn. At



18:00 hours we could see a lot of light tanks coming over the hill in front of us, heading for the rear. They were making time, and about that time a couple of armor piercing shells thudded into the side of the hill above us. It was a counter attack by half a dozen Mark 6 tanks. One didn't get over the crest of the hill before the 90 mm of a T-26 nailed him, and we could see him burning on the top of the distant hill. Some of our vehicles wanted to take off but the voice of Lt.Colonel Garton came firmly over the radio. "I'll court martial the first one who moves. Stay where you are and we will give them some artillery, by God". That quieted everyones nerves. The battery started pouring artillery on them, and we were backed up by 155's behind us. The tankers up front were firing direct and it was only a matter of minutes before 5 of 6 enemy tanks were on fire and the 6th one turned around and retreated. A panic was averted, and the attack fizzled out as quickly as it had begun. It was an exciting few moments, just as counter attacks always are.

The battery fired a few more rounds, after the counter attack fizzled, at observed targets on the other side of Paderborn but after the hectic affairs of the last couple of days it seemed tame.

April 1st was Easter Sunday but the weather was rotten, with very cold weather and constant rain, and we spent a lot of time shivering. The large tents were pitched so some degree of warmth and comfort was attained. The battery did a lot of firing on the 1st. The forward elements had met units of the 2nd Armored Division near Lippstadt, north and west of Paderborn, and the Germans were making concentrated attacks trying to smash the slender ring of steel we had forged around the Ruhr. We fired several hundred rounds helping to break up these attacks.

There was some excitement on the morning of the 3rd. Just after breakfast a couple of M.E. 109's flew over our position at tree top height. They were on us before the ack-ack men could swing their guns around. Our hillside position prevented them strafing us but they did strafe the road leading away from our position. There were only a couple of peeps on the road however and only one man was slightly injured. The planes were gone in a few seconds.

We had been sweating "Queenie", the battery dog that we had picked up in Normandy, for a long time. Her time came on the morning of the 4th. She gave birth to three wiggly little puppies. Two

were brown and the other one was brown and white, just like "Queenie". They were cute little devils and we were all glad to see "Queenie" have an easy time of it.

In this position the B.C. section and Lt. Root came back a couple of times, loaded down with loot in the form of pistols, shotguns, and cameras of all makes and descriptions. It was on this and other expedition to follow that earned Lt. Root the nickname of Lt. "Loot".



## ON TO THE ELBE . . . AND VICTORY

The battery received march order at 14:00 on April 4th, when we moved several miles to a position east of Paderborn. The cub registered us in on a cross road but that was all the firing that we did that day. At that time we thought it was to be a two day maintenance and regrouping period, so the generator was set up, the house wired, and everyone plugged their radio in. Dice and poker games broke out all over the place and quite a few of the boys were drinking some pretty questionable stuff.

The maintenance period didn't materialize, however, and we had to take off at 10:00 on the 5th in direct support of the leading elements, who were heading directly eastward for the Weser River. The weather was still bad and every one was wet and not very happy over the whole thing. We went into a position near Iggershausen and the guns were registered at once. A few rounds were fired from this position at enemy anti-tank guns, but they were soon cleared up and the battery moved again at 20:00 hours on an overnight march. This was one of the darkest nights ever encountered and the march was more or less of a nightmare for everyone involved. The whole column got lost several times and had to turn around, and it was cut other times with groups of vehicles or individual vehicles getting on the wrong road. We were until 3:00 hours making 15 miles as the crow flies but we had traveled more than 35 miles by road. Visibility was very poor and the battery was lucky not to have any vehicles seriously damaged. The R.O. track ran into the tube of the 76 mm gun that "C" Battery had but it didn't hurt the track enough to interfere with its efficient operation.

It was in this position that the author walked into a house in search of eggs and chickens and was greeted by an old German who had a truly beautiful Bronx dialect. It was one of the biggest surprises of the war and it turned out that the old man had spent

30 years in the Bronx. He talked just like Overes and Reiners, and for a Kraut that is something.

We moved again at 11:00 hours to a very muddy position on top of a hill east of Frokenhausen, and fired on enemy self propelled guns and anti-tank guns that were holding up the advance. It rained again this afternoon and no one had any cover. There was small arms fire on three sides of us, and on the surface it looked like a pretty hot position. The battalion got march order at 18:00 hours but Battery "A" was to stay in its position until the other batteries were in a new position and ready to fire. Some of the M-7's got through, but most of the half tracks and all the wheeled vehicles got stuck in a swamp-like mud hole where they received a very heavy shelling from a battery of German self propelled guns. So we got orders to hold fast for the night in our present position. We were there all by ourselves and had to post a double guard because there were a lot of Germans and a lot of small arms fire in the area. Nothing happened, however, and we moved out at 10:00 hours on the 7th to positions east of Haarbruck, from where we fired on enemy position east of the Weser River. The enemy had a fairly strong force on the east side of the Weser, even if they were surrounded by troops of the 104th Infantry Division who had crossed the Weser near Kassel. The battery fired about 1500 rounds on the 7th at enemy vehicles, strong points, and snipers. Enemy shells whistled by fairly often but none fell in the battery area.

We lost several men due to illness at this position, Pvt. Jack Lipschitz, Pfc. James Carnathan, and Pfc. Milton Fischer were evacuated to unknown evacuation hospitals. The battery was very much under strength at this point, with every section having at least one or two men out. Novak got back from England but the next day orders come down to send a man home on rotation furlough. After the night of March 30th there was only one man who could be sent, and he was Cpl. Rolly Mniece, who saved Lt. Plummer's life and earned a Silver Star doing it. "Rolly" was certainly happy; we were all happy to see him get a break. He was gone 15 minutes after he first heard about it. The weather had improved on the 7th, and the 8th was the first warm and sunny day that we had seen in April.

The First Infantry Division elements who were relieving us got there on the 8th, and we were told to prepare for march order at



6:00 hours. It was a sleepy bunch who got up at 4:30 on the 9th and moved out at 6:00. We headed south as the advance guard battery, and rode roughly parallel to the Weser for a distance of some 20 miles. We crossed a pontoon bridge north of Kassel and went over hills, through forests, and through a few villages, in a northeasterly direction. This area had been cleared by the Timberwolves of the 104th Division, and their signs were everywhere. Racing toward the assembly area saw some of the fastest and wildest driving of the whole war. At times the whole convoy was doing 45 or 50 down some of the hills, and only a couple fell out. One of these was the R.O. track, driven into a ditch by a certain alleged half track driver.

We found the assembly area and in it a breakfast, consisting of fresh eggs and all the other necessities that a good breakfast should have, prepared by S/Sgt. Clark and his hard working crew. That was one highly appreciated meal, and there was coffee enough for some medics and 414th doughs who were waiting to take of.

When the battery hopped off there was a mixup on orders. We went into position, got called back to our original area, and before we could get there were told to wait for the rest of the battalion. So back we went into the same position as before. As Lt. Sterne said, "Hell, if we go into this position a couple more times it will be just like Indiantown Gap". The battalion come along before long and we moved on, going into position several times during the day to fire on enemy infantry and anti-tank guns.

We moved into a position near Hettingen in time to register the guns the evening of the 9th. The forward elements had run up against opposition while crossing a creek and a road block beyond it, and some of our infantry were trying to swim across in icy water under heavy fire. It looked like a bad situation for a while but the artillery pulled it out of the fire for them. Captain Crafts, acting as artillery liason officer, called for a concentration on the road block and the mortar positions and it was dead on the target. Enemy fire ceased at once and the task force moved on with no more opposition that night.

The battery moved out at 8:00 in a heavy fog and joined the task force. We passed through a town and saw Captain Nelms and the B.C. section for the first time in days. They were still with Colonel Lovelady's task force. The sun came out and spirits began to



rise. We were spearheading again and that always makes the boys feel good. We drove on under bright sunshine and then halted in a little village where we got some cold beer, a lot of eggs, and several pictures of a shot up M.E. 109 that was just on the outside of town. We rolled on and on, not having to fire, over fields, down good roads, down trails, through scores of villages with a white flag from each and every house. We were going south east now and the country was alternately rugged and wooded. We ran into the 2nd Infantry Division in one town but kept on going. We ran into a little opposition in the afternoon and "C" Battery did a little direct fire that all of us were able to observe. It was always easy to tell when opposition was near. When passing through a village where none of the people were visible we knew the enemy was close at hand.

At 17:30 we moved into a position near the edge of a town and started firing on a couple of villages. These villages were full of S.S. troops and they were putting up a determined resistance. So the best way to shake them out was with artillery. The battery fired a lot of W.P. and H.E. into the villages and the Krauts commenced to come out by the hundreds. At the same time a dozen P-47's were working two more towns over, farther east. There were enemy columns in these towns and it was a beautiful sight to see the 47's diving, strafing, and bombing from three directions. Huge clouds of smoke were coming up from the vehicles and the villages which were on fire. The S.S. had assembled some fairly good sized garrisons in these villages. They guarded the approaches to Nordhausen, which would be quite a prize. The defenses were ready-made in and around almost every village. All they needed was a garrison to man them. Colonel Garton had given orders that if a shot were fired from any of the towns the artillery would work it over. It was very much the same story all through this campaign. When fire was met the leading elements would halt, or even pull back a little, while the artillery had a field day. H.E. and W.P. was used and what wasn't burned had large holes in it from the H.E. shells.

The R.O. section was ordered to report to Captain Crafts at the task force C.P., and we got up in time to see a lot of beautifully placed artillery fire by "A" battery and other batteries of the 391st. The fire was too much for the S.S. and they come out in large numbers, all that were able, and soon the hillside was full of them. There were



quite a few German dead around and a lot of the boys were getting first search on them.

The whole task force moved out at dusk on the 10th and headed toward Nordhausen. For the first few miles it was easy going because the flames from the burning villages and vehicles turned night into day. Once we passed the villages, however, the night was as black a night as we had ever encountered. We went cross country most of the way, and at a snails pace, with frequent halts. The country was soft and boggy with plenty of ditches and little creeks. During the drive we could see and hear a very heavy air raid in progress in the distance. Our friends, the R.A.F., were at it again and the bomb flashes and explosions lasted a long time. No one slept very much during the night. The ride was so rough, the night was so cold, that most of us spent a sleepless night. We finally halted at about 4 A.M. near Weschungen. The battery fired at targets in and around Nordhausen for the leading elements who were at this time enveloping the town. Everyone got march order again at 13:00 to move up to Nordhausen. The battery moved into position just at the western fringe of Nordhausen while the rest of task force occupied the town. Not only our task force, but also that of Colonel Lovelady. We drove completely through the town to its eastern most fringe and found some very nice houses, which we promptly moved into. Lt. Root found a case of assorted liquors and wines as well as some other things. "Light-foot" Wornell found and demolished a life sized bust of Hitler in a museum.

Colonel Lovelady's force had entered the town and had come across a prison camp so hideous and vile that it would be would famous in a few days. Congressmen and other government officials as well as publishers were flown over from home to see it. Some of us got to see it while it was still fresh in all of its horrors. Captain Nelms took some of his section through — Al Davis, Mike McGrath, and J. P. Woods. Others went through on their own. It presented the same picture to all of us. A picture of horror, cruelty, murder, starvation, filth, and just about everything else that the Nazis stand for. Thousands of poor wretches who had once been men were starved until their shrunk skeltons looked as if they were going to punch holes through their parchment skin. Thousands of dead ones were in the same quarters with the live ones the latter too weak to move.



themselves. Some were so hungry they were eating the flesh of the dead ones within reach. Truly Nazi horror at its worst.

The battery wasn't firing much and the boys were doing a little running around and drinking. Alphonse "Pete" Pedraza stayed out all night and was put down for A.W.O.L. "Skinny" Myers slept out and was demoted from being a peep driver for a day or two.

When we had arrived in Nordhausen we were under the impression we would be there for a day or two but the next morning, the 12th, we were on our way, heading deeper and deeper into Germany. We went through the main part of the city and we have never seen such complete devastation. One whole part of the city, the main part, so completely flattened in one raid by the R.A.F. that not even a wall was left standing.

We went on and on past foreign refugees by the hundreds, past wreckage of airplanes, on and on. In a little while we were to and through Sangerhausen and on our way again. Not much opposition was met for miles but the boys amused themselves by shooting at deer while going by. Some very rotten shooting too, by the way.

About all the Germans had in through here were a few batteries of 88 flak guns which they were using as anti-tank guns. They would fire a couple of rounds at the first tanks and then would be picked up by an observer. Then the artillery would start pouring in and their gun crews would either be dead or on the run. When they fired they were sealing the fate of the town because the artillery didn't stop until the town was smoking and ruined.

The battery stopped on the 12th at Beyernaumburg, right by a battery of 88's they had knocked out. The forward elements were two villages ahead and no firing was done during the night. We got new maps but most of all we got a good nights sleep, and it was very welcome.

We started out on the morning of the 13th at 7:00 but didn't get far as the Germans had set up a road block not far out of town. It was a strange day, with long halts, a lot of furious firing by the battery, not much opposition, but enough to keep us from moving very fast or steadily. When we did move it was fast, and at times the speedometers showed 45 as we raced through towns, never knowing for sure which cross roads the column took. We got some needed help on that from the liberated English prisoners, who lined the roads and



streets. Several towns were fired, but after a terrific barrage Colonel Gargon was heard to say to 15, "If you started only two fires in that town you will have to do better next time". The Colonel must have been hitting the bottle that day because he was on the radio constantly and some of his stuff was pretty sharp. One remark was, "If they fire one round, knock the Hell out of them. Get the big boys (155's) on them. That will jar their teeth loose."

The leading elements were up to the Saale River by mid-afternoon when corps engineers and our own 23rd Engineers come up to build a bridge across. A company of infantry went across to clear out a pocket from where small arms fire was coming. The battery fired a lot during the night while the engineers worked on the bridge. The leading elements waited in the vehicles all night and finally got the order to move at 6:00 hours. The battery followed an hour later and we assembled on the other side. The whole combat command went across before we started moving east again.

The column moved out at 9:00 on the 14th, going a little south but mainly east. It was largely flat, gently rolling country with a few factories, and studded with small villages. Large numbers of the foreign slaves were set free and some of them started whooping it up. Not much opposition was met and the task force made good time. There were large scale German demolitions in this area and on all sides of us we could see columns of black smoke rising as they set oil, air parts, vehicles, and military stores on fire. A few prisoners were captured and sent back but on the whole it was a pretty easy advance.

The forward elements entered the edge of a large forest near Tonneau and encountered a little sniper and bazooka fire, not enough but what the tankers could handle it, and the battery stayed in column. The pace was slower now and around 1200 there were warnings over the radio of enemy planes in the area. The forward elements were deep in the woods and had fairly good concealment against the planes, but the other units were not so lucky. The battery was included in the latter. It was caught on the road with flat fields on either side. An armored column is most vulnerable to air attack while on the march and we had seen what our own P-47's and Typhoons could do to a German armored column on the march. The German planes were there very soon, 12 of them, M.E. 109's. They made a pass down the

column, 20 mm cannon chattering as they straffed. The column kept moving but one of the 486th A.A.A. vehicles stopped so they could fire better and that held the battery up, or at least part of it. Men were bailing over the sides and trying to get under still moving vehicles. Tec 5 Birchard was driving the tank of Sgt. Olson and he jumped out of the driver's seat and over the side while the tank was still moving so Sgt. Olson took over and drove into a field. Pfc. McConnell bailed out and sprained or broke his ankle doing so. The shells were rattling all over the place as plane followed plane. Most of the 50's in the battery were firing but they didn't shoot any planes down. Pfc. Wratchford was hit in the back with shrapnel from a 20 mm H.E. bullet and was evacuated to the 104th Clearing Co., as was Pfc. McConnell. Pfc. Emil Krenik was hit in the face by small shrapnel, but very lightly. Tec 4 Bill Overes was also hit slightly by shrapnel, but both were able to carry on after first aid. The planes moved on after what seemed like an hour of straffing. No vehicle was hit but four men in the battery were hurt, two not badly enough to be evacuated. It was a very poor job of straffing, judged by what we had seen our P-47's do in the past. Most of the battery was thankful that it had not been twelve P-47's or Typhoons at work on them in place of the German planes.

The forward elements had come out on the Reichsautobahn at a point where a sign read "Berlin — 81 Kilometers", and started advancing. They didn't get far when quite a bit of opposition from A.T. guns, bazookas, and small arms fire was met. The artillery went into positions and did a lot of firing at these obstacles although observation was difficult in the thick woods. The Germans were thoroughly dug in and our task force was out in front of any other task force, all the way from 8 to 14 thousand yards.

The orders were to keep on pushing and try to cross the Mulde River and capture the city of Dessau. Not much advance was made in the afternoon, and since our task force was so far ahead of the others our flanks were open. So Co. F., 36th Armored Infantry, a couple of T.D.'s from the 703 T.D. Bn., two platoons of light tanks, and the R.O. section and F.O. 9 in a M-4 tank were sent off to the left to clean out a forest and capture a small town on the edge of the woods. In that way the flank of the main task force would be secured.

We started out at 18:30 on our mission, going slowly because the



woods were very thick. The infantry and Lt. Root were on foot. Not much opposition was encountered at first. There were a few Volkstormers with bazookas and even a middle aged man and woman in civilian clothes come out with their hands up. The farther we went into the woods the more opposition we met and it was getting very dark. So Major Stallings decided to stop for the night where we were. The vehicles were strung out in a loose oval on one side of the road, with the T.D.'s on either end as road blocks. Nothing happened that night but at 5:30 on the 15th we were awakened by the clatter of machine gun fire. Enemy troops were in the woods on the other side of the road. In fact they were on all sides of us. Too close to us for us to put artillery fire on them, but observation was very bad anyhow. A lot of sniping went on and was answered by machine gun fire from all the vehicles. Sgt. Carawan, Lightfoot, and Lt. Root fired more than ten thousand rounds of 30 and 50 caliber ammunition. We had the firepower, but we didn't have the men for outposts to keep them far enough away for us to get a start out of there. They knew we were there and pretty soon mortar shells began to come in. We were in a small area, and they could hardly miss when they sent in a 5 round volley from half a dozen mortars. Everyone sat tight and didn't get into holes as some would have done. Two self propelled guns started firing at us, too, and kept it up for hours. They had our deflection perfect but the range was from 25 to 75 yards over and they whistled just over our track all morning. A volley of mortars would come in every fifteen minutes or so and there were some casualties. Luckily, the Germans between us and the main task force let the ambulance through with no shots fired at it. Lt. Root fired several times at positions he picked from the map as the most likely spots for the mortars to be fired from. They would halt for a while but as there was a temporary ammunition shortage at the battalion he couldn't get enough fire to keep them from firing or to knock them out. We sat and sweated, with nothing to do but hope that the shells which were falling all around us didn't hit anyone. So many were falling so closely that it was only a matter of time until the law of averages put one on our laps. We knew that. Soon it came, a volley of mortars, with no whistle, no warning. The first one hit the battery box of our track and went off with a terrific bang, and the smell of powder burned our nostrils. A cloud of black smoke obscured every-



thing for minutes. Other mortars were hitting all around us but we were scarcely aware of that. Lt. Root was sitting inside the track on the side that was hit. Flabby was in the middle front seat, and Light-foot was on the drivers side. Carawan and Hungry were in the back of the track, while the author was setting under the track on the side opposite from where the shell hit. We all sat tight for a moment and when they stopped coming in Lt. Root stood up to take a little stock. No one had a scratch. The shell had hit the battery box, knocking box and battery all to pieces, the explosion having gone down from that and hitting the ground under the track. The cross member of the frame was twisted and torn as if it had been paper. Several fragments tore large holes in the floor just under Flabby's seat, and the fact that he was sitting on three folded blankets saved him from a painful wound. The fragments nipped through half a dozen thicknesses of blankets and stung him severely but it didn't cut through. Lt. Root called for a T-2 to see if they could get through to pull us out. In the meantime, a peep had gotten up the road by sheer speed and gotten onto the road opposite us when a volley of mortars and a heavy concentration of small arms fire swept our position. The sixty miles an hour that he was doing went down to zero as he set his brakes to the floor. The last we saw of the peep it was being backed down the road at the maximum possible speed. He wasn't going to lose any time turning around. We never found out who it was or what he wanted but whoever it was made a very quick decision and decided that was no place for him. It was a funny sight to see the speeding peep, the sudden stop, and then the burst of speed in reverse.

After several hours of waiting, during which the shelling continued on a regular basis — all very close — but with only a few casualties, the T-2 roared into view. It was driven by Tec 5 Bradney and commanded by Tec 4 "Atlas" Coppens. They had been fired on by bazookas as they came up but luckily were missed. Coppens hooked the cable onto the track in record time, but as he was doing so a volley from the self propelled guns came in. These were close too, but not close enough to hit us.

Bradney pulled us out on the road and got the old T-2 going. When a T-2 pulling a half track gets up a speed of 30 miles an hour its really going but it seemed slow to us. The krauts fired two bazookas at us as we went by and while they were close enough so we felt the



concussion in our ears, we were going too fast and they missed us. Seconds later we were through, and fairly safe from anything except artillery. It was a very good driving job, as Bradney can really put it over the road. We got back to the battery area, and later on to the "B" train, where Captain White and the ordinance officer decided the track couldn't be fixed. It was to be junked and we would get a new one.

In the meantime Lt. Root, Carawan, and Lightfoot were digging a large foxhole and fixing it up as comfortable as they could because they knew they were going to have to spend a lot of time in there. The heavy enemy fire kept up, causing occasional casualties. Not enough to put the force out, but weakening it enough so that all vehicles were very much under manned. The three had so many close misses they couldn't count them, and even though Lt. Root fired at their suspected positions intermittently all that day and the next it didn't seem to stop much of the incoming mail. On the 17th Lt. Root received orders from Captain Crafts to report to the T.F.C.P., if he could get out. So the three got all their stuff in a peep and warmed the engine, amid a hail of fire. When they pulled out, with Sgt. Carawan at the controls, the tanks and tracks laid down a fire to cover their moving out. Once on the road they moved so fast they were fairly safe and they made it to the C.P. Shortly after getting there a shell come in and a fragment nicked Lt. Root just enough to draw a drop of blood.

The battery was firing on enemy mortar and gun positions across the Mulde. A company of infantry crawled across on the remains of a bridge, but they couldn't advance far without tanks, and no tanks could cross without a bridge. The opposition was very tough here and the woods were full of by passed snipers and bazooka men who sneaked around at night and fired on men and vehicles.

The whole picture didn't look any too bright for the division. Our supply lines were over extended by many miles. Ammunition and gasoline had to be hauled 175 miles. Infantry divisions supposed to be mopping up behind us were called elsewhere, and no troops were closer than 50 miles behind us. We were up there all by ourselves, one armored division plus a battalion of infantry from the 10th Division. There were elements of six German divisions on three sides of us and probably quite a few by passed ones behind us. Its



the old story, plenty of fire power but not enough men to hold a position long, especially after a 150 mile drive in 6 days. We were on a limb and knew it but the Third Armored is the Third Armored, and knowing that made us feel a lot better.

Captain Nelms and his B.C. party were with Colonel Lovelady's task force on our right. The Task Force had taken Thurland in the afternoon of the 17th and had ordered all arms and equipment piled in the square. There was a large pile of bazookas and different weapons. The main task force moved on, but the Hq. group stayed in the town. Captain Nelms, Cpl. Davis, and Pfc. J. P. Wood went with the forward elements while Tec 5 Lyons, and Pfc's. "Trigger" Mc Grath and "Curly" Wronko stayed in Thurland with the track. Things went well until midnight, when the sound of a bazooka filled the night. What could have happened many times along the line had finally happened. About 200 Germans had infiltrated the town and were firing the piled up bazookas at all the vehicles and into houses.

It was a terror filled night for everybody there. The Germans were everywhere and no one could get to their vehicles to use the machine guns on them. Lyons, Wronko, and McGrath were in a house where German civilians were being held prisoner. Things were pretty hot but the Krauts weren't strong enough to take the buildings, while the Americans didn't have enough fire power to blast their way out. At dawn Lyons, Wronko, and McGrath went into a barn filled with sugar beets and hay to wait until some sort of a break came. In the meantime, plans for a relief attack had been made and from dawn on artillery had been shooting time fire over the city. No impact was used as our men held the buildings. The relief attack pushed off at 8:00 and consisted of a company of infantry and a platoon of tanks. They attacked one end of the town and captured it but were slowed up a lot by not knowing just where our own men were. They had to be careful where they shot. About 15:00 hours Lyons, McGrath, and Wronko, together with a couple of men from the 83rd F.A., saw an opening and decided to crawl for safety. They had to cross 300 yards of flat open field with no cover at all before they were out from under observation by the enemy. They met sniper fire and the going was heavy and slow but they kept on. They all had pistols, which are no match for a rifle, however, so they didn't fire any.

The bullets were kicking up all around them and finally one of



the recon boys, who had a rifle, fired back and nailed one of the snipers to the cross. That eased the pressure somewhat, but there were other snipers still firing. One of their rounds hit Lyons in the leg, inflicting a fairly nasty wound, but it didn't seem to interfere with his crawling. They made shelter and from there on in it was comparatively easy. Lyons was evacuated to the 44th Evacuation Hospital. When the town was cleared the next day they went back after their half track and found it unharmed, except that such items as cigarettes and loot were missing. As J. P. Woods put it, "A man is a dirty so-and-so to steal another mans' loot".

The battery was still firing an average of 250 rounds a day on German strong points across the Mulde. Lt. Root, Sgt. Carawan, and "Lightfoot" Wornell were over there with the infantry and they directed artillery fire on several strong German counter attacks, breaking all of them up. The Germans had quite a bit of artillery and were dropping in a lot of harrassing fire, not close but close enough to make everyone duck when they heard them coming in. The woods surrounding the battery were still full of Germans, even though they had been flushed out several times. Machine gun outposts were set up several hundred yards out on the flank and manned from dusk to dawn. This came as a result of a German bazooka man sneaking up to the edge of the woods and firing several rounds at Sgt. Tormolas' tank. The German synchonized his fire with that of our guns and as a result he couldn't be picked up. A prisoner came in the next morning, a former "dog robber" from the Luftwaffe, who took about four days to decide he would be better off as an American prisoner than a member of the German infantry. He was a good K.P. and washed everyone's mess kit for him, but he soon had to be turned over to the P.W. cage.

We had been following the Russian drive with keen interest and every mile that they advanced was one mile closer to us and the end of the war. We were still waiting for supporting infantry to come up but none did, and it looked as if the 3rd Armored was going to limit their offensive to the capture and holding of Dessau. The attack jumped off at 5:00 on the 21st and the battery fired several hundred rounds in support of the attack, which went very well. These were happy days for the battery. The Russians were getting very close, and we knew we were going to be pulled out of combat very soon,



which would write finis to the war for us. Then too, a ration detail, usually consisting of S/Sgt's. Olson and Albritton, Sgt. Overes, Pfc's. Radcliffe and Osborne, and Tec 5 Miner were going back every day to a village several miles back.

The liberated prisoners of war had taken the town over and the detail would bring back a freshly dressed hog or beef that the liberated ones had killed and prepared for us every day. Also sacks of potatoes and hundreds of chickens. All of this, supplemented by our issued rations, made us the best fed battery in the army. Nothing but chicken, steak, and roast pork, with hot cakes or fresh eggs every morning. We were getting fat and loving it. Radios came in by the truckload from "liberated" houses, and every section tried them until everyone had a good one. The generator was working and everyone had news and music all the time.

On the 22nd the names of S/Sgt. Clark and Pfc. Yates were the lucky ones to be drawn out of the hat to go to the French Riviera for a furlough. It was a good time to leave, with the war sure to be over before long. Then, too, the weather was cold and windy and Southern France is always sunny and warm.

At 12:00 the division mixed a little official ceremony in with the business of knocking the Germans out of the war. All of the artillery in the division fired a 21 round salute in honor of the advancing Russians. It was fired into German positions in Mildensee a suburb of Dessau. The battery was after a record for fast firing on this and Sgt. Reiner's section, with Cpl. Frankel gunning and Pfc. Radcliffe loading, got their's out first. Twenty-one rounds in 75 seconds by the section, with the other sections only a few seconds slower. That is firing by anyones book and the battery was pretty proud of it.

We were to be pulled out on the 22nd but the division which was to take over our sector, our old friends the 9th Infantry Division, hadn't gotten set up by then so we stayed on.

In an expedition into Dessau, Pfc. Krenk found the battery another puppy. A cute little white one; we called her "Dessie" from Dessau. The battery fired all day the 23rd and part of the 24th at German artillery positions and suspected enemy out-posts. Lt.Colonel Garton was doing a lot of the firing and from some of his comments and commands over the radio he must have been celebrating the end of the war for us with liquid refreshment. The battery fired its last



round at the enemy at approximately 14:00 hours on the 24th. Our grand total of rounds fired was between 59,000 and 60,000 while that of the battalion was 170,100. That is a lot of death to deal out to anyone.

It can be safely said that the battery and the whole 391st played a very major part in the success of the operations of C.C.B., and of the division as a whole. The war was over for us, we had fired our last round in combat, and every man was proud of his outfit and its record. Not many had done as much; very few, if any, had done more to end the war. The war had been a lot of fun as well as hell for us. The spearheading, the long drives, being the first ones there, had been especially nice and we had had our share of that — from the Bocage in Normandy to the Mulde, 700 miles away. It was back to garrison for us and while we all were glad to get out of combat and away from the shells, the garrison idea had its drawbacks and we all were aware of it — from the lowest yard bird up to Captain Nelms and even Colonel Garton. The Colonel is just like the guys, rough and ready, a very good artilleryman, a good combat man, a two fisted drinker, profane and picturesque but, he gets the job done. He has a god outfit and he helped make it good, and we have a good commander in him. But a lot better — all of us think — for combat, than for the vigorous discipline of garrison life. It isn't an easy thing to get back into, and we all knew it.

As the sun faded below the horizon on April 24, 1945, we received our final "March Order" out of combat and back to the things we had dreamed about so many times, leaving behind us a short life of Happiness, Fear, Death, Excitement, and an affection for our comrades that will live in our memories forever. Some will remain with the battalion and carry it's name to greater fame. Many, with their hard earned points, will have the privilege of going home. Others, who have made the supreme sacrifice, will always be remembered by us, "The fighting men of the Third Armored (Spearhead) Division".

U. S. Army. 391<sup>st</sup> armed field artillery battalion  
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