

THE 557 FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

The history of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion quite properly begins with a brief history of its basic weapon, the 155mm self-propelled gun, for the entire career of a field artillery battalion; or any combat unit, whether it be infantry, tank destroyer group, or anti-aircraft unit, is determined largely by the type of gun it uses. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that a field artillery battalion, or similar combat unit, exists for the sake of its gun – a demanding and sometimes cruel master. The fate of officers and men alike hang upon the part, which their gun may play in battle, and its success or failure is determined to a great extent by its mechanical characteristics. The calibre of the gun, its range, its maneuverability, its elevation and traverse, the type of shell fired – all are involved in determining the position of the gun in the field of combat, the type of target against which it will be directed, and hence, the duties of the men firing it. Upon these factors depend to a large extent, the relation of the whole battalion to the rest of the Army. Thus, the 557th Field Artillery Battalion occupied an unusual position in the Army of the United States due to the unusual features of its gun, which must be considered before going further.

With the enormous stress placed upon: ease and speed of mobility in this war, it became necessary to revise and remodel some of the weapons of the heavy artillery, in which group the 155mm self-propelled gun is correctly placed. The time required to move the gun into position became a more vital consideration than ever before, for the whole line of battle could shift in a matter of minutes. To the challenge of swift-moving warfare, heavy artillery's answer was the 155mm self-propelled gun, in military circles referred to as the M-12.

The gun, mounted on the chassis of a medium tank, formerly known as the General Sherman tank, is the GPF model of French design, first constructed in 1918. Mounted on a swiftly moving and easily maneuvered tank, it more than adequately met the demands of modern warfare. To transport the ammunition for the M-12, a gun carriage also built on the chassis of the General Sherman tank, provided a tracked-vehicle of equal speed and maneuverability to supply the requirements of the gun. The carrier was often referred to as the M-30.

There have never been authenticated published reports indicating that this weapon was ever used in combat during the present war, though a few reliable and popular magazines published brief stories concerning the success of the weapon in the final advance on Bizerte in the spring of 1943. However, proof of these statements has never been verified.

To man this new type of weapon, two field artillery battalions were ordered to be organized by a War Department order of 29 March 1943 – the 558th to be stationed at Camp Roberts, California, and the 557th to be stationed at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. At the time of activation, the 557th was assigned to the Third Army with headquarters at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, but since it was to be a special sort of field artillery unit it was attached to no division, coming at first under the 8th Headquarters of the Third Army for administration purposes and, for a brief period of time, attached to the 202d Field Artillery Group for training purposes. From the beginning then, the Battalion had a special position in the army family in that it was virtually an experimental unit. Later, when the Battalion was passed from group to group, many of the officers wished that this special position was more like that of a spoiled child and less like that of an orphan in the Army of the United States.

Lt. Col. Charles E. Keegan, of New York City, was the first commander of the Battalion. For many years he was active and held a commission in the New York State National Guard, and prior to assuming command of the 557th, he commanded the 105th Field Artillery Battalion stationed in the Hawaiian Islands. With him, Major Edward T. Whiting and Captain Martin L. Schueller, both then

at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, were assigned to the new Battalion. Gradually the full complement of twenty-six officers and two warrant officers were chosen and began to assemble at Camp Gruber. This staff of officers represented almost every section of the United States, but curiously enough, the one section of the country which sent no officers to the Battalion, New England, provided over ninety percent of its enlisted personnel.

The camp where the 557th was to train was an appropriate choice for a field artillery battalion. Camp Gruber, one of the camps established during World War II, was named for General Gruber, the author of "Caisson Song", which became the field artillery's own song. Before becoming a military reservation, this territory was the unhappy hunting ground of the Cherokee Indians after they had been exiled from their own lands farther East. These people named the camp's major stream Tearful Waters, a designation which their white successors change to the less depressing and less memorable Greenleaf Creek. Migration of white settlers into this enforced home of the Indian, intent on selfish gains, created a lawless and corrupt citizenry. Attempts of the army to bring order, just prior to and following the Civil War, resulted in the organization and rise of many bands of outlaws who found that few sheriffs were tough enough, mentally or physically, to pursue them for long in this wild and arid country. Even but few years prior to the establishment of Camp Gruber, and well within the memory of its personnel, a few of the country's notorious criminals found temporary refuge in the hills of Oklahoma.

As the personnel of the 557th Battalion found out in their turn, the climate is a succession of extremes – cold, hot, wet, and dry. The vegetation that managed to survive had to be of an unusually hardy nature, and the same might well be said of the human beings. The natural characteristics of the Camp, which disheartened the Cherokees and delighted the bandits, were to be prime agents in the process of training green recruits. Nothing remained green- in Camp Gruber!

By May 16, the officers had all reported, as well- as the cadre of non-commissioned officers, most of whom came from the 168th Field Artillery Battalion, a former Colorado National Guard unit stationed in California. That unit had been sent to the west coast, where they spent several months in training and expectation of being shipped overseas, but no, they found themselves bound for Oklahoma. The fact that these non-coms had trained as group, and knew each other well before arriving at Camp Gruber, was one of the Battalion's strokes of luck. From the point of view of the Private, disposition and mental attitude of the non-coms was fully as crucial a factor as the disposition and attitude of the officers in making life as pleasant or unpleasant as is possible in the army. The friendliness and cooperative spirit of this cadre did much to create an atmosphere singularly free of the petty hatreds and resentments so frequent among newly enlisted men. Both officers and cadre won the liking of the recruits in the first days after their arrival.

Before the trainees could be received at Camp, much had to be done, and, in making preparations, the officers and cadre suddenly found themselves combating tremendous odds. No sooner had they arrived, than they were beset by a flood, the effects of which lasted for two weeks. They were not only unable to leave Camp, but they could not even get messages out. Some mail was flown in by plane, and this was the extent of their communication with the outside world. For some time there was no electricity and, worse yet, there was no drinking water except that provided by the engineers—a concoction that was strictly hygienic and tasted so.

It was just after this crisis that the guns arrived. To the officers who went down to the railroad siding on May 28, the new M12's and M30's (the cargo carriers) were a thrilling, but also a distressing sight, for they, too, had suffered badly from the weather and needed complete overhauling. The motor personnel under Lt. George A. Floyd tackled the job. There was very little information

available about such new weapons, no circulars, or training manuals, consequently the men were tremendously hindered in their work by having to learn everything concerning the mechanical features of the weapon for themselves as they went along.

The first social event in the Battalion was the marriage of Lt. Frank P. Yellman to Miss Mildred June Kelly. In Chapel 9, Col. Keegan gave the bride away; Lt. James E. Russell performed the time-honored services of best man, and Mrs. Wilks, wife of Lt. Wilks, was the matron of honor. After the ceremony performed by Father Kennedy, the couple was driven through Camp on one of the newly remodeled M12s. Thus the first mission of this grim vehicle was oddly festive and unwarlike.

There was more work to be done when the whole Battalion was shifted from its original location on C Street near Service Club 2, to 24th Street and D Place. This location had not been occupied for a considerable period of time and required many days of hard labor to put it in condition. The moving was done on June 8, and the new men were expected any day. On Lt. Bringham, the Battalion S-4, and on his assistant, Mr. Neeld, WO, the burden was especially heavy and was made still heavier by the fact that all the trucks for moving supplies had to be borrowed from other units. In a rapidly growing army, equipment for new units arrived with exasperating slowness. In the meantime, the cadre not only worked on the buildings and grounds in anticipation of the arrival of new recruits, but also attended many required classes to further prepare them for their instructional duties. On June 24, the tempo of work was further accelerated by the news that the men were going to arrive Sunday, June 27. Food had to be requisitioned, mess halls put in working order for each battery, bedding to obtain, and other myriad preparations to complete. To the credit of all concerned, the task was accomplished. When the trainload of 366 men arrived at 7:30, Sunday morning, June 27, there were borrowed trucks to transport them, "Medics" to inspect them, clean barracks to house them and nourishing chow to feed them.

Here, then, were the last pieces to fit in the picture. In the days and weeks previous, they had been assembling at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, each unaware, of course, that he belonged to the same picture as the others, most of whom he may never have seen during the hectic process of initiation into the army. The Privates of the Battalion-to-be were first gathered together at the Boston and Maine railroad siding at Fort Devens on the afternoon of June 24. After a hot wait in the broiling sun (here they learned the true meaning of "hurry up and wait," a familiar army saying), the soldiers-to-be were herded into a line of coaches, which, to their eyes, would have looked best in a museum. For thirty hours these pre-pre-war coaches were the quarters and training ground for the new soldiers. At the end of thirty hours, they emerged in the Chicago stockyards, as grimy as colliers (though considerably less well paid), and wise in the ways of troop movements. For these men, the best things that army life had provided thus far, were the Pullmans lined up ready for the men to board. So great was the popularity of such luxury as wash rooms, that the entire supply of water for washing or drinking became exhausted in a few short hours. From Chicago on, speculation about the destination of the group became one of the favorite discussions of the men. After all, it did pass the time and, too, unlike experienced soldiers, it did make a difference where they might be going! Would they head south to Alabama? West to Colorado or west and south to Texas? Or perhaps as far as California (though rumor had it that there was not enough food on board to go that far)? Some even suggested that in the interests of secrecy and military security, the army might have brought the troops out to Chicago, only to send them back to the Atlantic, but this was more a hope than an accredited theory. As the train went through Iowa the next day, the betting on Colorado or Texas began to look like safe betting. Few, if any, of the men thought of Oklahoma, To a good many of these New Englanders, Oklahoma might have been at the antipodes for all they had ever heard about it; most of them might have located and described Guadalcanal more accurately.

From June 28 until July 12, the officers and cadre began the preliminary training of men, following a filler schedule, while they worked on the difficult problem of sorting the men out and assigning them to the jobs for which they seemed better suited. The previous experience of the men included an extraordinary variety of occupations; bank teller, meat cutter, lens maker, accountant, Diesel-shovel operator, horticulturist, teacher, masseur, to give only the beginning of a long list. It was the responsibility of the cadre and officers in charge to see what function in a field artillery battalion each of the newly arrived men could best perform. At the end of two weeks, a number of men were transferred from one battery to another and, with the personnel of each battery established, it was possible to definitely assign most of the men to various sections, each headed by one of the non-coms. Later still, a particular job within the section was given to each man according to the aptitude shown. On Monday, July 12, basic training officially began.

On the Saturday afternoon previous to this, July 10, the Battalion's first official ceremony took place on the Battalion parade ground—the blessing and dedication of the colors, and the award of Good Conduct ribbons to the men who had already served more than one year in the army. For the new men this was the first test of the maneuvers they had been learning to execute during the periods of dismounted drill. Like all new soldiers, they found out how much easier and how much more exciting it was to march to music than to the “huts” and “heps” of a sergeant. The entire ceremony, including a review of the troops, was completed with surprising smoothness considering the short period of time the men had drilled. Three chaplains took part in the dedication and blessing of the colors; Chaplain (Major) John E. Kinney (Episcopalian), Chaplain (Captain) Clarence J. Yeager (Catholic), and Chaplain (2nd Lt.) Fernando A. Laxamanna (Filipino Community Church). The simplicity of what they said and their manifest sincerity, combined to make this baptism of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion truly impressive.

A few changes in the personnel took place in July. Lt. Bryson, Headquarters Battery, and Lt. Merritt, Battery C, left with orders transferring them to Liaison Pilot training, while Lt. Joseph V. McKee, Jr., of New York City, arrived and was assigned as Battery Officer in Headquarters Battery. On July 20, Lt. Russell, the commander of Battery C, discarded the gold bars of 2d Lt. for the silver ones of 1st Lt.

On the last day of the month, the Battalion baseball team mustered sufficient courage to play its first game, meeting the 933d Field Artillery Battalion at the Muskogee Ball Park. The 557th lost by a score of 9 to 2, despite a home run by Cpl. Warren “Ed” Lutz of Battery A, the most spectacular event of the game.

During the last weeks in July, the men started rifle practice. A fairly large percentage of them were starting from scratch, many never having had a rifle in hand, and for days they experienced an overwhelming sense of awkwardness in their attempts to assume the four required positions. With exercises in triangulation, they gradually accustomed themselves to the process of sighting on the target, and, at the cost of a few bruised elbows, learned to fall from the position of attention to the prone position. Next came actual shooting on the range with .22 calibre rifles in the first scorching week of August. The batteries took turns at the range perforce, as there was not sufficient room for more than two batteries at a time, and the lucky batteries were the ones whose duty it was to shoot at dawn. Indeed it was worth getting up in the middle of the night to be able to shoot in the coolness and subdued light of early morning. The afternoons at the range that week were a nicely calculated torture, with the sun broiling and parching the riflemen, at the same time throwing a blinding glare on the targets. The final touch was the wind, which continually blew dust over everything, and, at intervals, blew the targets from their stands. In good and bad conditions, then, the men trained in marksmanship, and on Thursday, August 5, they fired for record. It was somewhat of an anti-climax

when Headquarters Battery lost these hard-worked-for records and had to shoot all over again.

On Friday, August 6, the Battalion made its first dismounted march to the held, with Col. Keegan, setting the pace. Starting out in the afternoon, with the temperature at 106 in the shade, the men arrived at the bivouac area about three o'clock in the afternoon and from then until five-thirty, were under camouflage discipline while they set up installations. Chaplin (1st Lt.) Conlon, of St. Mary's parish in the Bronx, New York City, said mass in the field, a new and interesting experience for those who attended. After "chow," the return march of 2.6 miles began and was completed in thirty-five minutes.

The heat wave, which had continued unabated from the first of July, finally broke on the 17th of August. That evening, after a great preliminary gust of wind, it began to rain in earnest, and the Easterners, used to having it rain every few days during the summer, realized that during their six weeks at Camp Gruber, it had not rained more than twenty minutes, all told, until then. Typical of the extremes of the Oklahoma climate, the temperature dropped to a record low, and from barracks windows and doors, mess halls, and day rooms, came lusty cheers of gratification—it had rained at last and living was now tolerable. To the men of the 557th, this was the most popular event of the summer season. The next day, after the first really good night's sleep, they felt almost equal to facing the continued curious demands of the non-corns with regard to scrubbing, sweeping, drilling and marching.

On Thursday, August 19, Headquarters Battery undertook its first Command Post Exercise, while the firing batteries made their first RSOP. In exercises of this sort the men began to see the practical application of dozens of lessons which, until then, had seemed like so many disconnected names, numbers, and facts; the tensile strength of W110-B wire, the weight of the M101 shell. It was indeed satisfying to the recruits from New England to see these fragments taking the shape of a coherent picture of an actual military problem, where the tensile strength of the wire had, after all, a great deal to do with the firing of a 95-pound shell.

As each week passed, the men reviewed on problems of the previous week and, too, added new experiences to their military career. One was the gas chamber. First, the novices plunged into the tear gas with masks on. Again, the value of lessons well learned was most apparent. The second phase of training at the gas chamber was to enter without masks. The most notable feature of this drill was the speed, almost unheard of speed, suddenly acquired by everyone in putting on a mask, and the even greater speed with which everyone left the chamber at the given signal. Never was the command, "On the double!" obeyed so willingly!

Another new experience of the week - was the Obstacle course: new, even, for some of the officers. There were very few victims of the fiendishly contrived obstacles, and some of the men proved themselves to be almost professional in climbing awkwardly tilted ladders, grabbing elusively swinging ropes to carry them over ditches, jumping fences, crawling under barbed wire, and finally scaling the high wall at the end of the course. Here is not the time to fear high and precarious perches!

At eight o'clock on August 25, Headquarters Battery fell out and fell in at Service Club 2 for a dance given from the proceeds of the Coca Cola machine in its day room. The girls were imported from Muskogee, as usual for such an occasion and were considered a great success, to judge from the post-mortems on the dance. The main problem of the party, however, was to avoid the importation of several hundred "stags" from other units, notably the famous 42d Infantry Division. It was the glorious distinction of Private Quigley to have spent most of the evening chasing "Rainbows," and

very successfully! One was intercepted in an upstairs window, from which he was unceremoniously tossed, while another was stopped in his tracks when the window through which he had just put his head, suddenly closed on his neck like the blade of a guillotine. All is fair in love and war; Headquarters Battery's dance combined a little of both.

September 1 was an important point in the history of the Battalion, for on this day Battery B had the first service practice with the 155mm guns. Three months before, when the guns had arrived sadly weather-beaten, their mechanism was a puzzling novelty even to the experts who repaired them; the men who were to fire them had not yet been inducted into the army. Since then, by means of the still more puzzling mechanisms of the draft, induction, classification, and assignment, three firing batteries had been assembled, and, in less than two months of basic training, had been trained to fire the new weapons. No amount of training, however, could have eliminated the tense excitement of the Battery B cannoneers when the moment for firing arrived. A lanyard, fifty feet long had been improvised for the occasion from telephone wire, since no other suitable material of sufficient length was available. Everyone agreed that fifty yards was not too much for the first round! When the shell had been shoved home and the breech locked, Lt. Ricketts pulled the lanyard! There was a terrific report! The hats of a number of unwary soldiers blew off. But except for this diminutive type of mishap, nothing untoward happened. The M-12 had been successfully fired for the first time by its own crew!

Battery B non-coms noticed an interesting psychological change in their men after the firing. It was as if this experience had completed the transformation of rookies into trained soldiers. They talked and acted with a new assurance—a new sense of belonging. They lost the manner of men who had strayed into camp by mistake and were looking for the quickest way out. In a similar manner, this same week, the men of the two other firing batteries became intimates in the job for which they had been chosen. Examinations were soon to show that the entire Battalion had made the most of its early training.

While the firing batteries were having this new experience, Headquarters Battery repeated a previous experience with one or two variations. On September 2, their convoy of trucks took off after lunch and, after a long circuitous drive (part of the hardening process and what could be more hardening than a long ride in a GI truck?), landed at a familiar area not over a half-mile from the motor park. Here a Command Post was set up and preparations made for overnight occupation. No sooner were all the wires in place and other installations completed, than it was time for "chow." There were to be no chow lines, however, and no large groups of conversationally minded diners, for camouflage discipline required that the men go for food singly, or by twos, and eat at least fifteen feet from the next man, concentrating wholeheartedly on the food in a manner familiar to "chow hounds." In the evening quiet reigned and the sound of the grasshoppers seemed almost deafening. Such peace and quiet was to be short-lived however. At 2100, this peace was rudely interrupted by march orders and any thoughts of comfort or continued sleep were quickly dispelled. In the dark, the wires were hastily pulled in, spliced (without the aid of flashlights), and put back on the reels. Trucks were loaded and the battery was off again, driving very slowly this time, under blackout restrictions. After what seemed a long time, again the convoy stopped at an apparently unfamiliar spot, though in the light of the next day, it turned out to be the site of the Battalions first supper in the field. Setting up the Command Post again in the pitch-blackness was a tough problem. By midnight the wires had finally been laid again with comparatively few mistakes in procedure, other installations completed, and a tired wire section, following the example set an hour or so before by the rest of the Battery, unrolled its blankets and fell instantly asleep.

Friday, September 10, the Battalion laced the much-feared 8th Week Test in its individual training

program. Since August 8 at midnight, the Battalion had been a part of the Tenth Army Corps and was no longer under supervision of 8th Headquarters Special Troops. Hence it was Col. Gard and a team of inspecting officers of the Tenth Corps Artillery section who came from Sherman, Texas, to administer the examinations. During the previous weeks there had been feverish activity in every battery as the men attempted to review in a few hours that which they had been taught over a period of two months. They also added one or two new skills to their repertoire, notably the art of formal tent pitching. In the two days before the examination there was scarcely a moment when some battery was not pitching or striking tents along laboriously straightened lines. These hectic preparations were not in vain. On Friday morning, September 10 the Battalion passed its tests with flying colors, undeterred by a drizzling rain. Headquarters Battery was singled out for special distinction in dismounted drill; the honors in tent-pitching went to Batteries A and B; Battery C was adjudged the best in the “service of the piece.”

During this same week of September 6 to 12, the men spent a great many hours on the range, practicing with .30 calibre rifles. Two batteries went out together so that one might mark targets while the other fired. At the end of the week they were to fire for record, and consequently another worry was added to the first days of the week—could they qualify! The results of this test were not so satisfying as the results of the Tenth Corps examinations for over half the men failed to qualify on their first attempt. However disappointing this failure may have been, it was not so surprising if one remembered that practice with this rifle had been limited to one nerve-wracking week and that the .30 calibre is a very different proposition from the .22 rifle. Such thoughts, at any rate, crossed the minds of the unhappy majority as they girded themselves for more practice.

A number of changes in personnel occurred in the early part of the month. Special Orders, dated September 6, confirmed the assignment of eight new officers to the 557th Field Artillery Battalion: 2nd Lts. Harry O. Sivess, Olin R. Howie John J. Canning, Peter P. Chichilo, William J. Cooper, Joseph N. Petrone, Lawrence W. Cable, and Eugene E. Lovejoy. On September 11, Lt. Schipper of the Medical Detachment was promoted to Captain.

An air show on Sunday, September 19, drew every unit in camp to the main parade ground of the camp. The demonstration was intended primarily as training in aircraft identification, concentrating on pursuit planes, and light and medium bombers. Contrary to persistent rumors that there were Focke-Wolfs and Stukas at the airfield, the only planes represented were American; the P-40, P-47, P-51, B-25, B-26, and A-20A. In sequence these planes flew low—very low—over the field, while an announcer pointed out the characteristics by which they could be identified. As a climax to the show there was to have been a simulated dogfight, but one of the bombers had motor trouble which forced it to land in Muskogee, and the last act was called off.

Rumors that Col. Keegan was about to leave the 557th circulated vigorously in September, and on Saturday, September 18, they received public confirmation from the Colonel himself. At noon in the mess halls of each battery, he made a short farewell speech. He expressed regret to part company with the Battalion, which had made such remarkable progress during the summer, but he confessed he was, above all glad to be going to his new assignment, the Military Government Special Officers' Course, since that would lead directly to overseas duty. On Monday, September 20, he left for the PMG School at Fort Custer, Michigan. The feelings of the Battalion could be stated by reversing the order of the Colonel's remarks. The men were glad to see their commander sent to an assignment he had long wished for, but, above all, it was a hard blow to lose him, for he had much respect and interest in the men of his command. Conversely, his men too had that same respect and admiration for their commander.

The day that Colonel Keegan left, Major Whiting assumed command of the Battalion. At the same time, Captain William T. Kiepura was assigned as Executive, and Lt. Joseph V. McKee, Jr., as S-2.

On Tuesday, September 22, the Battalion went out on another overnight problem, similar in nature to the CPX and RSOP of the first of the month. In many respects the simulation of actual combat conditions was more complete this time. Everyone was required to dig himself in as quickly as possible, camouflage discipline was enforced, and, to top it all, there was a gas attack in the evening, perpetrated by the Major himself, who drove from battery to battery setting off the canisters of tear gas and smoke. No gas casualties were reported, and unquestionably, more injury to personnel resulted from digging in the hard and rocky Oklahoma soil.

On Friday, September 24, it was announced that basic training for the Battalion had been extended to 17 weeks instead of the 13 originally planned. Needless to say, this was not the most popular announcement of the season. In spite of what seemed a mere prolongation of the primary training, however, the Battalion actually progressed during the following weeks to much more specialized work—work ordinarily done in Unit Training. There was less foot drill, less calisthenics, but more practice on the part of each section on the particular jobs assigned to it. Also, as was painfully obvious to all concerned, the toughening process continued with longer and longer hikes taken in shorter and shorter time.

During the month of October, several names were added to an ever-increasing officer roster of the Battalion. 2d Lts. Harold D. Rea from the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center. Joseph L. Preiss and Wendell J. Kreamer from the 88th Infantry Division, Port Sam Houston, Texas, 2d Lt. Golbert S. Parker, also from the 88th Infantry Division, and 2d Lts. James E. Langton and Harry Mike arrived at this station from the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center. 2d Lt. Robert F. Ladd was also a newcomer to this Battalion during October. Battery A added to its officer strength with the arrival of 2d Lt. Francis P. Cael and John P. Batson from the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center during the early part of October. 2d Lt. Linton B. Smith also arrived from the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center at this time to assume duties of his new assignment as battery officer with B Battery. The officer strength of Battery C was increased with the addition of two officers to its officer roster, Harold D. Wallis, 2d Lt., having reported from the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center, and 2d Lt. Bruce E. McDonald from the 88th Infantry Division, each assuming the duties of battery officers of that Battery. Such a sudden increase in officer personnel indeed created a problem for the thoughtful members of the Battalion anxious to learn the names of their new friends and leaders.

On October 18, 2d Lt. William J. Cooper was relieved of his assignment with this Battalion and was assigned to the Department of Air Training, Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

October was a month to be remembered for several of the officers who received promotions. Lt. William Ballou, Battery Commander of Headquarters Battery received his promotion from 2d Lt. to 1st Lt. 2d Lt. Chester M. Grunsten of Battery A likewise found pleasure in replacing gold bars for the silver of 1st Lt. Joseph V. McKee, Jr., also found just satisfaction in replacing his gold bars for the well-earned silver. 2d Lt. Raymond J. Kemble, Jr., too received the congratulations of fellow officers when he displayed a new insigne denoting his promotion from 2d to 1st Lt. The personnel of Battery A commanded by 1st Lt. Thomas Coston realized on an October day that they were to be guided, not by Lt. Coston, but by Captain Coston, the first of the Battery commanders to wear the double silver bars of that grade. Capt. Schueller, for his sincere endeavors to provide the men of the Battalion with an adequate and efficient training program that they might be competent under any circumstances, was rewarded for his faithful duties and service when he received notification of his

promotion to Major on October 18. Among the enlisted men, several clerks, mechanics and machine gunners were sent to school, while others made their applications for the Army Specialized Training Program. Too, this was the period in which the first tender blooms of non-commissioned ratings began to appear on the sleeves of the rookies from Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Time had marched on!

Monday, October 11, Headquarters Battery practiced for the first time loading all its equipment and personnel into the vehicles assigned to the Battery. Throughout the morning, the peaceful routine of Battalion headquarters was completely disrupted by the construction of boxes and the amassing (largely on the floor) of large bundles of papers to be packed in the boxes. In the afternoon the great experiment was finally made. Most of the equipment was put in trailers, the rest, perforce, in the vehicles themselves, and somehow or ether everyone got into a vehicle; but it was not pleasant to think what it would be like when each man was encumbered with a full pack and a bed roll. Of course there was the possibility of being issued the remaining vehicles which the Battery was supposed to have, but that possibility was generally considered as remote as Shangri-La.

Wednesday, October 13, two generals visiting the post, spent a large portion of their day with the 557th. They were Lt. Gen. Hodges, commander of the Third Army (later to command of 1st Army in France and Germany), and Maj. Gen. Anderson, Commander of the Tenth Corps. They were accompanied by two generals, stationed at Camp Gruber, Maj. General Collins, commander the 42nd Infantry Division, and Brig. General Hickey, commander of the Tenth Corps Artillery. The four generals observed the firing of the 155's and gave the young Battalion a few gratifying pats on the back.

The following day, Headquarters Battery managed to erase the unsatisfactory mark it had made on the First Aid section of the 8th Week Tests. The Tenth Corps examiners came again and found that Headquarters had finally mastered intricacies of the fireman's carry, artificial respiration, and traction splints.

During the week of October 17 to 23, the Batteries worked on overnight field problems, staying out longer than on previous occasions. Headquarters and B Batteries went out together Monday morning and returned Tuesday evening; A and C Batteries went Thursday morning and returned Friday evening. In the field there were classes in addition to the usual exercises, but, of course, the chief exercise was digging. To encourage everyone to dig foxholes sufficiently deep, Major Whiting staged a terrifying little demonstration in which one of our own tanks ran over three carefully prepared holes. The tank crashed through the brush realistically, and raced across the field where the foxholes were, turning just as it came over each hole. Two of the holes were almost filled with earth when the tank passed, and the fate of anyone who might have been inside was easy to imagine. One hole remained intact—the model foxhole—circular, only two feet in diameter, and over four feet deep.

Inspired perhaps by this spectacle, Pvt. Minter returned to the field message center and began a project which kept him and three assistant diggers busy for the entire day. It was necessary to make a dugout large enough to contain, in addition to the message center personnel and a radio operator, the great field desk which he had designed and built to hold foodstuffs and other necessary message center equipment. Before dark, the dugout was finished and camouflaged with the desk safely inside. It was not thought wise to attempt driving a tank across; there was too great a chance that the tank would tumble in.

Monday night there was a great deal of activity around the CP. A group of officers formed the

nucleus of a commander unit, headed by Battery Commander Lt. Ballou. Aided eagerly by a few restless enlisted men, these commissioned adventurers assailed most of the installations in the CP, concentrating on the machine gun emplacements where they wrestled fearlessly with guards and gunners. Certain strategic positions, notably the radio station and message center, were surrounded at dusk by a formidable obstacle of branches, trip-wires, and barbed wire coils. At ten o'clock, Lt. Ballou called off his guerrillas and comparative peace settled on Area 9, disturbed only by owls and the distant roar of the 155's.

On November 1, all the men in the Battalion who had not previously qualified with the .30 calibre rifle went out on the range for a second try. The first order, comprising men from Headquarters Battery, had all the luck in respect to weather. Up to the time they finished firing, it was a cool, clear, windless morning, but by the time Battery A began firing, clouds were gathering, and in the midst of this order, the storm broke with a violence characteristic of the local climate. A scene of unspeakable confusion followed, as men rushed to and from trucks with soaking equipment; some started to take down the tents that had been put up for mess, but then as the storm abated, put them up again. Rifles were hastily put undercover in trucks when it seemed impossible to continue. However, when all was completely covered, it was decided to finish out the order, after all! Thus, from a huge mass of rifles, each man searched for his own, and when finally extricated and dried off as well as possible, firing continued. The rest of the day was damp with intermittent showers and the riflemen were forced at times to lie down in young rivers to do their firing. The wind, too, was troublesome for at least a part of the day. But in spite of these obstacles, the rest of the Battalion completed firing. The scores were highly gratifying—almost bewilderingly so—as very few men failed to qualify, and some who had failed badly before found themselves sharpshooters or experts at the end of the day. Never was the smile of Fate so brilliant and inscrutable.

With nine trucks of various sizes and descriptions, packed with equipment necessary for their travel and duty, sixty-four men and one officer from the Battalion left Camp Gruber, November 12, 1943, their destination, the Indianola Firing Range at Port Lavaca, Texas.

On Friday, November 12, the entire Battalion ventured rather timorously to the mental conditioning course. Here the officers and men demonstrated their ability to crawl from trenches through a barbed wire and simulated shell crater area of fifty feet as machine gun fire whistled overhead.

The entire Battalion went to the field Saturday morning, November 13, for the purpose of examination by the Tenth Corps Artillery. The primary objective of the test was to demonstrate ability of men in antiaircraft defense and AGL communication. During the test an L-5 plane flew overhead simulating strafing of men and bombing. No extensive installations were ordered with the exception of mess and radio equipment.

Monday evening, November 16, the entire Battalion again went to the mental conditioning course to gain further experience and confidence in facing "enemy" fire during the night hours, with the added difficulties of proceeding through the ever-threatening barbed wire entanglements, shell craters, brush etc., during the night time.

The Battalion's historian, Pfc. Eugene Waith left for his new assignment at the Military Intelligence Training Center, Camp Ritchie, Maryland, November 16.

On Monday, November 16, Service Battery was activated. 1st Lt. Ray N. Bringhurst was placed on command of the new Battery and T/4 Clyde Dunlap, Battalion clerk, was promoted to 1st Sergeant and assigned in that capacity to the newly activated battery.

Shortly after noon-day mess, Wednesday, November 18, all clerks at Battalion Headquarters were called to their work early to prepare the clerical and processing details incident to the transfer and assignment of approximately 250 men from the 188th Field Artillery Group, comprising the 188th, 183d, 957th and 951st Field Artillery Battalions. Of this number approximately 150 reported for duty; the remainder, patients at the Station Hospital, absent and sick, on convalescent furloughs and in a few instances, AWOL.

Those who had gone to the Indianola firing range on November 12 returned to their station November 23.

On November 17, 1943, 23 officers and enlisted men of the first three grades fired the prescribed record course with the .45 calibre pistol, and were qualified as sharpshooters with scores ranging from the highest score of 83, made by 2d Lt. Hudson, to a score of 75.

In November, Initial Training Period was completed. Unquestionably as the average enlisted man reflected upon his training of the past months he could only be grateful for certain benefits denied the civilian: Physical development lasting friendships, the necessity of making and accepting mental and physical adjustments in a completely regimented life, and, too, a cheerful willingness to accept a situation not of his own making with little sincere grumbling or complaint. Thus the personnel of the Battalion embarked upon their first week of UTP training.

Four of the officers of the Battalion received their promotions from 2d Lts. to 1st Lt. They were Hamilton F. Glover of Battery B, Lt. Ralph M. Daily, the assistant S-2, Lt. Clarence L. Nickelson of C Battery, and Lt. Gayle O. Wilks of Headquarters Battery.

Alter the arrival of the men from the 188th Field Artillery Group, the administrative details and problems confronting the Adjutant and Personnel Officer, Mr. Woodward, and the clerks became extensively greater. The problem of transferring many of the men, locating many from confused and incomplete records submitted to this organization, proved a Herculean task.

The results of an air-ground training test given members of the Battalion, and, they, selected indiscriminately by roster by the Tenth Corps headquarters, were highly gratifying and, as a result, the Battalion received a rating by that Headquarters of "Very Satisfactory."

On Thanksgiving Day, 2d Lt. Robert D. Sanger reported to duty with the 557th.

Thirty men returned from the firing range, December 3, having successfully completed firing the .30 calibre machine gun and each declared qualified as "expert" with a score of 183. Twelve of the men qualified as 1st Class Machine Gunners and the remaining 17 qualified as 2d Class Machine Gunners.

Friday and Saturday, Dec. 10 and 11, was moving day for the entire Battalion when the equipment of each battery and that of its officers moved to a cantonment area in the vicinity of C and 20th Street, site of the Battalion's first home, prior to the arrival of the enlisted men. With some thought of reluctance and regret in leaving their first "home" in military life, the men soon found the new location one of greater convenience and nearer the center of camp activities, such as the popular Service Club, the theatre, numerous Post Exchanges and the Post Office. As a result, undoubtedly many of the men found such conveniences somewhat more detrimental to any habit of financial saving previously acquired.

On December 14, members of the Battalion went to the Seminole Range to fire 10 rounds each from

the recently issued carbine rifle. To use this new weapon, light in weight and easily operated with little recoil was indeed a pleasant change from the more cumbersome Springfield, originally issued members of the Battalion. All seemed unanimous in their praise of this effective little gun.

Close combat firing, Carbine Transition, and Combat in Cities firing was completed during the month of December, each providing a further training in the use of the carbine, and simulated combat of various types.

The evening of December 30, the five batteries left the Battalion area to complete a scheduled 15-mile foot march with full field equipment. All not on furlough or otherwise engaged on special detail successfully returned, though admittedly a number with the usual blisters and unusually weary feet. Too, such a march would have been quite incomplete without the customary self-styled songsters, who yet in another breath either expressed their lack of foresight in failing to join the Navy, or questioned the misinterpreted thought that the artillery always ride, and only the infantry walk. A few of the members of this marching group, upon encouragement from the Battalion Commander, continued their hike to the Seminole Range instead of returning immediately to the Battalion Area, to make a total distance estimated by Major Whiting to be 25 miles.

Major Alan W. Clark, from the Tenth Corps Artillery, Camp Maxey, Texas, reached Camp Gruber and assumed the duties of his new assignment as Executive Officer for the 557th Field Artillery Battalion. His interest and determination to share in the developing of the Battalion into an effective and efficient combat unit commanded the respect of all personnel in the Battalion.

In the early part of December, Lt. Bringham, Commander of Service Battery and the Battalion S-4, received his well-earned promotion from 1st Lt. to Captain.

The Courts-Martial Board met on five occasions during December to try by Special Court-Martial, four enlisted men of the Battalion for violation of the 61st Article of War, and one enlisted member for violation of the 96th Article of War. Those tried for violation of the 61st Article were found guilty and received sentences varying from 30 days to 6 months' confinement in the Camp Stockade, with fines ranging from \$18 to \$25 for a like period. There was one acquittal, that soldier appearing before the Board accused of violation of the 96th Article of War.

2nd Lts. Harry Sivess, Jr., Harold Wallis, Lyle Lundquist, Olin Howie, Jr., and Roger Cerioni were placed on detached service at the Provisional Replacement Casual Center Camp Polk, Louisiana, during December. Christmas season brought several holidays for the majority of the officers attached to this Battalion. For the enlisted man it was, in the majority of cases, his first Christmas away from home, and thousands of miles it was too! But there appeared few, if any, disheartened or homesick members. All agreed that no finer Christmas dinner could be had at any table, even though such luxuries as table linen, decorative centerpieces or that after-dinner lounge chair could only be thoughts of another, and far removed, mode of living.

On the third of January 1944, 2nd Lt. Harold N Ashley reported to this Battalion from the 173d Field Artillery Group, and was assigned as Liaison Pilot, a greatly appreciated addition to the Battalion Staff. The arrival of 1st Lt. Edward Brown and 3d Lt. Cloyd O. Abercrombie, also Liaison Pilots assigned to this Battalion January 10 and 6 respectively, was a further boon to the proper function of coordinating air-ground observation and firing problems. Though the Battalion was able to count two liaison planes among its equipment, as the T/ E called for for several months, there had been no personnel to function and operate them. Hence the Cub ships were quite useless in the training of the Battalion. Lt. Brown was assigned as Battalion Air Officer.

On January 5, those enlisted men who had not previously qualified with the .30 calibre, M1903 rifle again ventured to the range determined this time to make the grade. When firing was completed, it was found that two had qualified as experts, nine as sharpshooters, and forty-seven as marksmen.

On January 18, a group of 18 officers and enlisted men of the first three grades again went to the firing range and successfully completed firing the prescribed record course with the .45 calibre pistol. Of this group, all qualified as marksmen with the highest score, 73.

On January 5, 1944, three officers of the Battalion were the recipients of well-earned promotions. Lt. Yellman of Battery A and Lt. Fehnel of Battery C received their promotions to 1st Lt. Lt. Ricketts, Battery Commander of B Battery, became the second battery commander to have the honor of wearing captain's bars.

The Battalion, for many months assigned to the Tenth Corps, Third Army, was relieved from that assignment on January 6 and was assigned to the XVI Corps, 2d Army, with headquarters at Fort Riley, Kansas. Thus members of the Battalion removed the blue and white Tenth Corps patch from their shirts and waited with interest the arrival of new patches of a different design to place on their clothing. At the time of the assignment, Lieutenant General Fredendall commanded the 2d Army and Major General Anderson commanded the XVI Corps.

On January 7 and 8, three batteries of the 557th were called upon to provide personnel and material for the UTP tests of the 8th Observation Battalion. Battery A and Battery B each provided one gun with gun crews and the necessary radio and telephone personnel. Headquarters Battery provided a complete fire direction center for these two-day tests.

January 18 an armorers' school was announced for personnel of this Battalion to be attended by a non-commissioned officer and private of each battery to become proficient in making minor repairs to the several types of small arms and weapons in use by the Battalion.

During the month, two of the officers of the Battalion, Lieutenant Olin Howie and Lieutenant Billy D. Hudson was relieved of their assignment with the 557th and transferred to Liaison Pilot training.

On January 17-18, the Battalion was given battalion firing tests by the Army Ground Forces.

The efforts of the entire Battalion personnel in its training program during the past six months, June 1943, to January 1944, and the effectiveness of that training for officers and enlisted men, were put to a real test by the usually severe Army Ground Force examinations on January 29, 30, and 31. These examinations included participation by virtually every man in the Battalion, and it was with some degree of comfort on the part of all personnel when they completely them hopefully, a thing of the past. The primary purpose of Test I, given January 28, was to measure the speed with which positions could be occupied and the massing of fires by the Battalion. The problem was completed at one-twenty p.m., and the rest of the day was spent in cleaning of materiel. On January 29, the Battalion left the area at quarter-to-five in the morning for its second day of testing by the AGF. The survey section ran a quick photomap survey from which fires were delivered on both observed and unobserved targets. During the firing of the air mission, a brush fire was started, occupying the entire Battalion as a fire-fighting unit for the remainder of the afternoon after the tests were over. During the tests an unexpected and surprising gust of upwind tipped "Expectant," the Battalion's liaison plane, on its nose, resulting in damage only to its propeller, fortunately no harm to its pilot

Test III was given on January 30 and 31 as the survey section spent the day completing a grid sheet survey. Positions were occupied after dark, and fires delivered during the night, followed by a center

of impact adjustment at daylight. The fires of the entire Battalion were massed on the final target of opportunity to conclude Test III and the AGF tests. The results of the tests showed several shortcomings, which the correction of became the object of intensified training.

During the months of December and January, three officers of the Battalion were married. Lt. Ballou married Bernice L. Briggs on December 21 in Chapel 5, with Chaplain Bentley performing the ceremony. Following the ceremony the bride and groom, in the proverbial manner of newly-weds of the 557th, rode on the top of an M-12 tank to the Battalion Officers Club for a pleasant reception given by fellow officers. Ruth McIntosh married Captain Ricketts December 31 at Tulsa, Oklahoma. Lieutenant Ladd traveled a greater distance to marry Ruby May Chambers in Texas on January 2. During January, 2d Lieutenant Theodore Braumann, Battery Officer of Service Battery, was relieved of that assignment and assigned Battalion Motor Officer to replace Lieutenant George A. Floyd transferred to Fort Sill.

On February 3, important changes in the Battalion were announced. Captain Ricketts, commanding officer of Battery B, was assigned as commanding officer of Battery A to replace Captain Thomas L. Coston. The latter had received orders to report to FAS pending assignment to the 761st FA Bn. upon activation of that unit. To fill the vacancy caused by Capt. Ricketts' transfer to Battery A, Lieutenant Hamilton F. Glover, Executive Officer of Battery B became the commanding officer of Battery B, and Lieutenant Lawrence Cable became the new Executive Officer of that Battery.

The first of the month (February), thoughts toward preparation for maneuvers became paramount. When word was received that maneuvers would take place during the early part of the month, preparations for the move began in earnest. The myriad administrative details, transportation and supply of all personnel, and equipment prior to actual movement to the Louisiana maneuver area, required long hours of diligent application. On February 8, definite orders were received from higher headquarters pertaining to the movement of the Battalion. Orders stated that this movement was a temporary change of station and the unit would not return to Camp Gruber. Transportation to the area would be accomplished by rail and truck convoy. The rail elements to proceed to Camp Polk, Louisiana; the motor elements to Leesville, and the planes likewise to Leesville. Upon arrival at Louisiana, the unit was relieved from assignment to XVI Corps and Second Army, and assigned to XVIII Corps. Fourth Army. Thus, another change of assignment for the Battalion

On Sunday, February 13, 1944, cold dreary day, the advance liaison party commanded by Lt. Joseph V. McKee, Jr., and consisting of Lieutenants Kemble, Parker and Sanger, with 7 enlisted men, left by motor to arrange for the arrival of the Battalion several days later.

Monday, February 14, was a day of unusual activity for commanding officers, battalion clerks and men of each and every section, all preparing in one way or another the actual movement. Boxes of equipment had to be carefully packed and marked—all properly stacked or stored in their appointed place. Radio equipment, and survey equipment, fire direction instruments, communication equipment and supplies motor equipment and spare parts, kitchen supplies and foodstuffs—all to have their particular type of packing and storage and marking to assure efficient handling and safe arrival. The comfort of the men enroute was just another important factor to be considered.

On Tuesday, February 15, a motor convoy of 22 officers and 270 enlisted men with Major Alan W. Clark in command, departed from Camp Gruber, Oklahoma for the Louisiana Maneuver Area. The first day's travel terminated at Camp Maxey, Texas, a distance of 212 miles from Camp Gruber. Refreshed after a restful nights sleep in the barracks at Camp Maxey, the convoy again set out for the second day of their journey, a rainy, disagreeable day. At Barksdale Field, the men again had the

pleasure of warm and comfortable barracks, good food, invigorating showers and restful sleep in anticipation of the following days journey.

The third and final day's travel, a distance of 137 miles from Barksdale Field, brought the convoy to Leesville, Louisiana, and the first bivouac area of the many to follow in the weeks to come. Thursday, February 17, found the men who had traveled by convoy well established in their first bivouac area, enjoying the warmth and sunshine of Louisiana. At Gruber, those to travel by rail, made final preparations incident to their departure from that station; barracks to clean, areas to police, packing and crating, and personal effects to arrange for comfortable travel.

**ROUTE TRAVELED FROM CAMP GRUBER, OKLAHOMA
to
LOUISIANA MANEUVER AREA, LA.
(Motor Convoy)**

FIRST DAY	TOTAL DISTANCE	TIME ARRIVED
Camp Gruber, Oklahoma		6:45 AM.
Muskogee	25	8:09
Checotah	49	9:11
Eufala	62	9:39
Crowder	75	10:16
McAlester	90	10:48
Savana	99	11:07
Kiowa	107	11:24
noon halt		12:00 P.M.
Stringtown	127	12:52
Atoka	134	1:07
Antlers	166	2:25
Hugo	193	3:23
Camp Maxey, Texas	212	4:17
SECOND DAY		
Camp Maxey, Texas		7:45 A.M.
Paris, Texas	9	8:27
Depaort	26	9:04
Bogata	33	9:29
Talco	43	9:51
Mt. Pleasant	61	10:31
Daingerfield	79	11:21
Hughes Springs	85	11:34
Avinger	94	11:54
noon halt		12:28
Jefferson	110	1:15
Smithland	123	1:42
Oil City, Louisiana	141	2:29
Moorings Port	145	2:38
Bossier City	167	3:28
Barksdale Field	171	3:39
THIRD DAY		
Barksdale Field		745 A.M.
Atkins, Louisiana	17	8:36

Coushatta	42	9:40
Camp	59	10:17
Natchitoches	74	11:09
Robeline	88	11:54
noon meal		12:00
Many	103	1:40
Hornbeck	121	2:50
Anacoco	128	3:15
Leesville	137	4:00

At noon, Thursday, February 17, 16 officers and 224 enlisted men in command of Major Edward T. Whiting, the Battalion Commander, left Camp. The trip was made in coaches not unlike those of the early 1900's, and, too, it was a vivid reminder to the New England boys of their journey from Fort Devens, Massachusetts, to Camp Gruber; their first troop train experience, nine months previous.

At one p.m. the following day, February 18, the train pulled into Camp Polk, La., and was met there by trucks from the organization. The men, somewhat weary, joined their friends at the first bivouac area. The entire Battalion was once again together as a unit, as members of the Blue Forces, and ready for the serious business of simulated war in the forests, swamps and pastures of Louisiana.

Units participating in these maneuvers, at this time, were the following: 92nd Infantry Division, 75th infantry Division, 44th Infantry Division, 8th Armored Division, the 738th Field Artillery Battalion, and the 191st Field Artillery Battalion.

In the early part of February, Captain Irving S. Schipper, the Battalion Surgeon, was assigned to the 109th Evacuation Hospital, and Captain Edward C. Savage, was assigned as Battalion Surgeon from the 8th Armored Division, Camp Campbell, Kentucky. Captain Ricketts assumed the position of Battalion Motor Officer and the command of Able Battery was taken over by Lieutenant Chester M. Grunsten,

After six weeks of maneuvering in the Louisiana Area, the Battalion on April 4, prepared for movement to its new temporary station, Camp, McCain, Mississippi. The transfer of the 31 officers and 450 enlisted men was completed by a convoy of 64 vehicles. At approximately eight a.m., the convoy, with Major Clark in command, left the final area to travel through an unfamiliar but interesting country, interesting and unfamiliar to the New England boys at least. Passing through Louisiana towns such as Natchitoches, Ruston, Monroe, Delhi, and Tallulah with the populace pausing in their daily tasks to wave friendly greetings from shop doorways, office and factory windows, schoolyard playgrounds and front porches, and finally crossing of the Mississippi River into historic Vicksburg, did much to make the trip interesting and enjoyable.

At dusk, the Battalion reached the National Military and Memorial Park and in this area bivouacked for the night. On the site of this park the siege of Vicksburg took place during the Civil War between the states. The following day, meeting with the same reception it had received the day previous as it passed through the various towns of Mississippi, the Battalion's convoy traveled 175 miles to reach Camp McCain, Mississippi, the Battalion's new, yet temporary home. And so unlike its first home!! Few painted buildings, few substantial or permanent appearing structures! Some likened its appearance to a freight yard, void of tracks, with the soft coal smoke issuing from the myriad little stacks atop the low, one story, tar paper-covered barracks. There appeared little to remind or convince one of a particularly cheerful atmosphere.

**ROUTE TRAVELLED FROM LOUISIANA MANEUVER AREA TO
CAMP McCAIN, MISSISSIPI**

FIRST DAY	TOTAL DISTANCE	TIME ARRIVAL
Final Problem Area		6:00 AM.
Kisatchie, Louisiana	10	8:30
Hagewood	31	8:00
Natchitoches	39	8:50
Clarence	47	9:10
Winnfield	72	10:30
Dodson	84	11:00
Jonesboro	96	11:25
noon halt		11:40
Ruston	119	1:05 P.M.
Choudrant	127	1:25
West Monroe	153	2:55
Monroe	154	3:00
Rayville	176	3:55
Delhi	192	4:45
Tallulah	211	5:35
Vicksburg, Miss.	235	
Bivouac Area		6:45
SECOND DAY		
Bivouac Area		8:00 A.M.
Vicksburg, Mississippi		
Valley Park	22	9:00
Rolling Fork	45	10:10
Hollindale	67	11:00
Indianola	101	12:40 P.M.
noon halt		12:50
Greenwood	129	2:40
Camp McCain	178	5:05

Distance Traveled First Day: Kisatchie, La., to Vicksburg 235 miles

Distance Traveled Second Day: Vicksburg, Mississippi to McCain 178 miles

Total distance 413 miles

Thursday, April 6, the day following the arrival of the Battalion in Camp McCain, work began in earnest overhauling motor equipment, equipping barracks, arranging and equipping supply rooms and mess halls.

On April 10, after the personnel of the Battalion had more or less settled in their new home and become accustomed to their new surroundings, they commenced an intensive training program of ten days to last until the 20th of the month. The schedule for this training provided for review classes in many of the subjects undertaken in earlier phases of training at Camp Gruber, such as First Aid, fire direction team practice, destruction of materiel, cannoneers instruction, code practice, survey computation, gas mask drill, etc. Such a program too, would be quite incomplete without the seemingly heartless and inconsiderate commands of the higher non-corns, as they directed their charges in drudgery of calisthenics and dismounted drill one hour each morning. Indeed, so the men now thought, such seemingly obsequious training would follow them all the days of their army

career!! Yet, the physical alertness of the men as well as their mental alertness must be maintained at all times as the Battalion made final preparations for overseas duty.

To prepare a unit for its primary mission, in addition to the more obvious and necessary training, the less apparent yet essential administrative details required long hours of work on the part of the Battalion staff and clerical personnel. The service record of each enlisted man became the object of close scrutiny to ascertain its correctness in every respect; errors, if any to correct, additional entries to be made where omissions were found to exist, all required many hours of painstaking thought.

Did G. I. Joe complete the day infiltration course six months ago at Camp Gruber? Was that information correctly entered on the various charts, forms and other vital records? A search, time consuming, revealed the answer. How about those fifteen men now on furlough, how many of them, and who of them failed to participate in the gas chamber exercise last August, nearly ten months ago? Three of those on furlough must complete that training—names and duties, dates and hours not to be forgotten by those responsible for the necessary training. How about those courses, Combat in Cities, Transition, Grenade Throwing, etc? Arrangements must be made for the use of those ranges with many, many other units; likewise seeking appointments for their use. Those to participate, were they notified, were details of transportation arranged? How about the ammunition to be acquired and the necessary written information prepared for the guidance of the participants concerning their department or clothing as they prepared to go through this uncompleted phase of training? How about that dental appointment for G. I. Joe, made several days previous? Was it kept; what was the result of the visit? Did the Medical Detachment receive the necessary information so that their records might agree at all times with those maintained by the Staff, the various batteries, and the personnel section? Such were the questions that dinned the ears of officers and non-coms alike at Battalion—indeed pandemonium and hubbub reigned steadily for a period of weeks from eight in the morning to the early morning hours—no longer could clerks be justly referred to as Battalion Goldbricks.

Yet in each and every section, work of a routine nature must continue in addition to incomplete training and refresher classes in many subjects. Equipment had to be carefully packed and crated and properly marked according to stringent army transportation regulations. One erroneous marking, one carelessly packed instrument, might mean the life of a soldier. Long and tiresome were the hours in various Rec. Halls, while every item of clothing and equipment in the possession of each man was inspected and re-inspected, checked and examined for serviceability in future overseas theatres of operation. New clothing had to be requisitioned and issued for shortages which were found to exist. The Herculean task confronting those of the various supply sections was certainly most obvious to any thinking and thoughtful soldier. Shoes must fit, undergarments correct in size to assure comfort, outer clothing likewise must fit to insure comfort, a neat and soldierly appearance. Each item also must have its proper identifying marks to reduce the risk of loss to the owner—no, not marked as personal whim might direct, but each identifying mark in accordance with stipulated requirements of Services of Supply.

April 18, Major General Milburn, Commanding General of the XXI Corps visited Battalion Headquarters to discuss with Mayor Whiting, the success and progress of the 557th in its preparation for overseas movement and to inspect the area and living quarters of the men.

Thus after three weeks of a conscientious spirit on the part of all officers and enlisted men alike an intensive training program and preparation for overseas movement was complete. Anxiously, and with just impatience, all awaited the order to transport men and equipment to POE (Port of Embarkation), wherever a might be.

On April 28, the rumors commenced to fly. Was it true that orders postponing movement had been received? Could it be that the Battalion had failed to pass successfully the rigid requirements for overseas movement? Or was such the lot of every well-prepared organization—postponement because of security measures, or psychological measures? Whatever the reasons, postponement of orders had been received and a few lucky fellows from New England and other points were permitted to visit home, if not the grimmer, more serious visit to POE.

In April, after nearly a full year as Commander of Headquarters Battery, Lieutenant William Ballou, following an illness acquired on maneuvers, was transferred to the 213th Field Artillery Group, at Camp Joseph T. Robinson. Lieutenant Wilks assumed command of the Battery, and 1st Lieutenant Robert D. Sanger was assigned as Executive Officer for the Battery. During the month, nearly all unassigned officers in the Battalion were transferred to various units in the XXI Corps.

It will be recalled that the 557th Field Artillery Battalion was activated on May 15, 1943, and to commemorate the founding or activation of the Battalion, and the development within a year of the organization into a trained combat team, the Battalion Commander proclaimed Monday, 15 May 1944, to be known as Activation Day. In observance of this day, competitive events were arranged to demonstrate the abilities of the various batteries, and attest through public showing, the results of one year's training.

From eight to nine in the morning inspections of men in barracks, barracks, weapons, orderly and supply rooms, and other installations were held. On the basis of combined results of inspections, the Honor Battery was chosen. General Orders No. 6, dated May 15, 1944, stated that Battery C, with a grade of 85.91% had achieved top honors, and Battery A, with a grade a 85.12%, second place. The blue streamer emblematic of first place and honorable distinction was presented to Battery C.

Following inspections between the hours of nine-thirty and ten-thirty, a dismounted drill competition was conducted, in which a non-commissioned officer of each battery had his entire battery execute certain proscribed movements, difficult or extra fancy movements each ordered at the discretion of the drill master. The results of this competition showed that first place award should be given to Battery C with a score of 87.7%, and second place honors to Headquarters Battery with a grade of 86.65%. Thus the red streamer emblematic of Battery C's success as the best-drilled Battery was awarded at the proper time.

Presentation of awards was made at the Activation Day parade, conducted and handled entirely by the non-commissioned officers of the Battalion. The role of reviewing officer was assumed by Master Sergeant Glenn F. Melton, Sergeant Major; his staff, Technical Sergeants George Meyer and Donald Stout. The part of Commander of Troops was played by Master Sergeant Rudolph Benson with his staff. The adjutant of the parade, Staff Sergeant Otto Berg, and Battery Commanders were represented by 1st Sergeants of each Battery.

The hours of the afternoon were devoted to baseball. The officers' team of the 557th versus the officers of the 191st FA Bn. were the first teams to occupy the diamond. Enthusiastic enlisted men of the Battalion generously applauded, cheered, jeered the umpire and raucously encouraged their officers to a victory of 9 to 3 with little harm, or even discouragement to the officer umpires of the 738th FA Bn.

In May, Captain McKee designed a crest for the Battalion which was enthusiastically received by all members of the unit. Neatly in the form of a shield, the primary colors were blue and red. In the upper third, appeared a flash of lightning against a field of blue, symbolical of a weapon. Dividing

the upper third and field of blue from the lower portion, with a field of red, appears a horizontal bar of gold, the field of red, likewise was divided diagonally by another bar of gold. Appearing in the upper triangle, formed by the diagonal of gold, appeared a lobster in gold. The lobster was chosen as a symbol of New England, in honor of the enlisted personnel of the Battalion who came largely from that section of the country. In the lower triangle, formed by the diagonal bar of gold, appeared the pick and Columbine, which were taken from the state shield of Colorado. This was chosen to honor the cadre, who, for the most part, were residents of that state. The Latin motto, *Tonitrus, Celeritasque, Mobilitasque*, translated means, Thunder, Speed and Movement, which is in reference to the qualities of the Battalion's basic weapon—the M-12, self-propelled gun. Following adoption of the crest, the unit fittingly acquired a Battalion flag.

For the remainder of the month, Battalion training consisted primarily of review classes in many of the subjects previously studied during basic and unit training periods. Unusual and hitherto untried training in the form of river crossings was experienced by all members of the Battalion. Pulling one's body upside down along a rope tied securely on each side of the river was not quite as easy as it appeared, yet many successfully completed the test. Those who failed found some comfort in the cooling effect of their tumble.

May 28 proved an unhappy day for all members of the Battalion when Pfc. James ID. Barber received serious injury while swimming with a supervised group from the Battalion at Martin's Lake, Calhoun City, Mississippi. The following day, May 29, the death of the young soldier was announced and preparation for a full military service was completed. Services were attended by the officers and members of the cadre. Following the impressive military services, the cadre and Battery B escorted the flag-draped casket to the Post gate. There, lining each side of the roadway, the entire Battalion paid their final respect to a soldier friend. Thus the first tragedy found its way into the ranks of the Battalion.

“There is a group, in fact a tremendously large group, in the army whose lapels are not weighted with brass and whose sleeves are not clustered with stripes, whose habitat embraces, more often than not, the confines of the mess halls, latrines and coal piles, and yet upon whose ability and spirit directly depends the combat efficiency of any Army or subordinate organization. To these too-often unsung heroes of garrison and field, the Battalion Commander proclaimed that Thursday, 8 June 1944, be turned over to these men and known as GI Day.”

The ceremonies, conducted entirely by Privates and Privates First Class, commenced in the morning with inspection of all privates in the Battalion by Staff Officers. From nine-thirty to ten-thirty a. m., a platoon and fancy drill squad composed of thirty-six Privates from each battery drilled by a Private, competed for honors—a yellow streamer emblematic of proficiency, to be attached to the battery guidon. Then followed competition to determine the best-drilled soldier among the Privates of the Battalion; the award, a gold figure of a soldier attractively mounted. The morning exercises culminated in a Battalion parade, again conducted by GI's only. The afternoon program was devoted to softball games; Headquarters Battery meeting Battery B as a result of previous playoffs, and the Private All-Stars playing the Battalion Officers. General orders No. 7 stated that Battery B had justly earned the highest score in personal inspection, platoon, individual and fancy drill. Battalion Commander Pfc. Jeremiah Farrell, Medical Detachment, attached the yellow streamer emblematic of that distinction. The order further proclaimed that Pvt. Frank Mazzone, Battery B, won an alertness and O'Grady drill, should be awarded the gold trophy emblematic of that distinction. Pfc. Jeremiah Farrell, acting in the capacity of Battalion Commander, made the award to Private Mazzone.

Following the ball games in the afternoon, all were convinced it was B Battery's day, for that battery

claimed the Battalion championship, defeating Headquarters Battery by a score of 6 to 1. The winning pitcher was Rogalski, and the losing pitcher, Brundrette. The Private All-Stars defeated the Battalion Officers by a score of 5 to 0. The Winning pitcher was Lopez of Battery C and the losing pitcher, Lieutenant Brown. It was truly GI's Day for on that day, and the day previous, the first three grades of non-commissioned officers gracefully took their turns at details normally undertaken by the privates; latrine and KP duty were none too menial for them on such a day!

The month of May was a month of promotions for four of the officers of the Battalion. Sunday, May 22, Lieutenant Glover received the good news of his promotion to Captaincy. The following day, Lieutenant Joseph V. McKee, Jr., Battalion S-2, received his well-earned captaincy and 2d Lieutenants. Robert D. Sanger and Lawrence Cable, on the same day, removed their gold bars for those of the 1st Lieutenant.

In the Division Artillery Chapel on Saturday, June 3, Miss Genevieve Day and 1st Lieutenant Ralph M. Dailey were united in marriage by Chaplain Nouray. Miss Renna May Hughes of Vincennes, Indiana, attended the bride and Captain Joseph V. McKee, Jr., was the best man. Following the ceremony and proverbial ride on top of an M-12, the bride and groom went to the Post Officers' Club for a reception in their honor.

Activity in the unit during the greater part of June was concentrated on additional and further preparation for its movement to an overseas destination.

At last, the very important day for which so much feverish activity and energy had been expended arrived, and on June 22, 1944, at two-twenty p.m., the personnel boarded the 17-car train which was to take them to Camp Shanks, New York, the designated staging area for the New York Port of Embarkation. The spirit was high as the Easterners left the South and traveled into a more familiar and homelike territory. For after all, the East was home to them. Those from the more western sections of the country, many of whom had never traveled to areas east of the Mississippi, likewise evinced interest and pleasant anticipation in visiting that part of the country so frequently and highly praised by a large percentage of the Battalion. Had not the beauty of New England, its weather, the presence of large cities in the East, and the seeming advantage thus accruing to all, been told and retold emphatically to those from Colorado or California and other western states? Yes, quite as frequently as the cadre had enthusiastically referred to the 168th Field Artillery Battalion! Ah! That quintessence of all military organizations!

Late in the afternoon Saturday, June 24, after three days of travel, the Battalion reached Camp Shanks, located in Orangeburg, New York. Situated approximately 30 miles from New York City, quite naturally thoughts of nightly passes were paramount in the minds of many, but the personnel, officers and men alike, soon learned they were virtual prisoners in this new camp with little opportunity or any hope of visiting family or friends. However heartless it seemed, such a restriction was necessary to complete final preparations for the long overseas voyage, and ultimately combat with hostile forces. Such details were referred to as the "processing" of troops, which required physical examinations, inoculations for prevention of disease, classes of instruction in the correct use of the modern and new gas mask issued at this New York Camp, and further instructions in the regulations pertaining to censorship and conduct of troops while stationed in that area, and in theatres of combat overseas. There were necessary and additional explanations of the various allotments available to men of the armed forces, and the details of arranging for new and additional forms of protection and comfort for those to be left behind. In addition to the aforementioned classes and lectures conducted by the Commanding General of the Port of New York, a regular Battalion training schedule, arranged under the supervision of the Port Commander, was an order of the day,

during the stay at Camp Shanks. At this station, too, the men were getting accustomed to referring to their unit simply by number. Unit No. 6850-F was to be the shipping number of the Battalion. For many days thereafter, it was as though the number 557 had suddenly passed into complete oblivion, as if no such organization as the 557th Field Artillery Battalion had ever existed insofar as being known by that particular designation. Here, too, for the first time, impersonal but close scrutiny by the unit censor of all correspondence leaving the organization brought questions by wives and sweet-hearts, by the absence of meticulously clipped words and phrases. "What did they cut out of there? I wonder what that word was there? If only they hadn't cut out that word I would know," were thoughts of many undoubtedly, on the home front as letters from Camp Shanks were delivered to their doors.

On each of the three evenings the Battalion was stationed at Camp Shanks, passes were issued the first two, permitting the personnel to visit New York City, which meant for a few, reunion with family and friends. But those ever-hopeful soldiers and friends who made arrangements to meet on what proved to be the last evening, were the victims of sad disappointment. The following morning, Saturday, July 1, the entire Battalion strapped full field equipment to their backs and boarded the train at nine-thirty for Manhattan and Pier No. 86. Secure at her berth, the "Dominion Monarch" awaited the loading of the 6850-F and thousands of others who were to make it their home for nearly two weeks.

The "Dominion Monarch" was a large modern ship of 27,000 tons of British registry, built in 1939. Designed for combined cargo and passenger transportation, she was manned by a complement of 300 crewmembers, with accommodations for 350 passengers. She was owned and operated by the Furness-Withy Lines, and skippered by Sir Henry Godfrey, who had successfully navigated one of the first convoys into Malta during its siege and bombardment.

Early Sunday morning, July 2, the "Dominion Monarch" was free of restraining hawsers, and she slipped quietly out of New York harbor to meet other ships to be a part of the large convoy destined for overseas.

Though the ship was designed to carry but 350 passengers, it was estimated that approximately 3,000 soldiers, plus much war materiel, found a place somewhere in the hold or on the deck. Accommodations for such a great number of men was indeed much to be desired, and many expressed the opinion that truly the United States government had let them down, and now on their way to foreign soil, cared little of the treatment they, the soldiers, received or might receive in the future. However, logical thinking could not entertain such thoughts for long. A war was being fought, and man and materiel must reach out across three thousand miles of ocean. Available means of transportation was limited, and every section of a ship, large or small, must be utilized. That the ship had not been as satisfactorily converted to troop Carrier as some, was simply the ill-luck of the 6850-F.

One group of men of the unit were assigned to the forward section below decks, formerly quarters for the crew, and those not so assigned were directed to the "Lounge" for their initial quarter. Below decks it was dark with little fresh air, yet hammocks were provided for sleeping, and some rest and sleep was quite possible. Those assigned to the "Lounge" fared poorly with only the deck (within the Lounge) to call their bed. Even the deck might have been looked upon with less disfavor had the victims been able to lie properly in the conventional prone position, and not be forced to double arms and legs and entire body to permit the several hundred men in the room to enter, say nothing of sleeping. The officers, too, were somewhat cramped and crowded, though fortunate in having space in there staterooms to sleep without fear of bashing another's head, or having one's own skull

crushed at every movement of an arm or a leg. That all enlisted men should be treated equally and fairly with respect to sleeping facilities (sleeping misnomer, possibly expressed more correctly by saying, herding facilities), those who were on the lower deck for one night, exchanged places with those in the “Lounge” (quite another misnomer), every 12 hours, giving all an opportunity to practice the art of jujitsu in the resulting confusion of moving from one deck to the other burdened with complete equipment, and additional items, too, picked up along the way. The food provided much comment, but hardly much more! Many, however, failed to take cognizance of the details incident to providing and preparing food for such a number of men. Again, utilization of space necessarily had to be largely devoted to war materiel and the personnel incident to its function. The period of time involved in transporting perishable foods was yet another factor, and equally important, the facilities at hand to prepare the food, was still another — all contributed in a measure to the unappetizing food placed before the men.

Sunday, July 2, the first day at sea, was a day of rest with a bright sun overhead and a calm, quiet sea. Interest of the men, this first day, quite naturally concentrated in watching other ships of the large convoy, the identification of the many types of planes as they flew overhead, watching the course of the dirigibles as they slowly, yet gracefully, in spite of their size and shape, passed over the ship and into the distance. Monday, July 3, the second day on the Atlantic, was a repetition of the first pleasant day. July 4, the third day (ironically celebrated on a British ship), was cause for little jubilation by many who found that heavier seas brought noticeable instability to step, and even greater instability to stomach. Those who had any interest in living at all found recreation and excitement in the boxing matches arranged as a program of diversion for the holiday, July 4. The following day, the troops received their first instructions in boat drill. “General Quarters,” or “Muster Station,” as it was referred to on British ships, was sounded at eleven o’clock in the morning, and few will ever forget the tiresome duty of standing at their appointed station for an hour and a half as the Troop Commander made his daily inspection of the living quarters of all military personnel. Following boat drill, each unit returned to their respective commands, and until four-thirty in the afternoon, all were expected to attend classes in orientation—orientation in the broadest meaning of the word. The classes in orientation were designed to acquaint the men with the habits and customs in those countries where duty might likely place him. They accomplished that, and much more, for seldom did the class hours pass without a free and animated discussion concerning the economic, political, social and military phases, seemingly of the entire world. However wide in scope the discussions tended, undoubtedly, the men were better prepared to meet and make friends with those of France and England. Few, if any, will ever forget the solid hour of calisthenics each day as they attempted to balance on toe or hand, while the big ship gently rolled and pitched in the broad Atlantic. Those responsible for such an hour unquestionably had forgotten all about a law of “diminishing returns.” However large a ship, it must be looked upon to have something of the limits of a jail, for it truly encompasses little space, and after several days duration, permits limited means of activity and recreation. Dice, more frequently referred to as “craps,” inevitable where men of the army gather, became the source of amusement (and income, too, to those who were lucky) for player as well as onlooker. Bingo likewise became quite as popular to pass the hours and the days. Watches and ships clocks were advanced one-half hour each day to compensate for the natural change in time, in addition to the English double wartime. It seemed incredible when the destination was reached, that it still remained light until eleven o’clock at night! All, at one time or another, shared quite voluntarily, perhaps quite unconsciously, the responsibility of watching for submarines, but fortunately none were ever sighted; only the peaceful schools of Dolphin and Porpoise, who, in friendly fashion, gracefully dipped and rose to and from the water’s surface, much to the pleasure and interest of all.

On the sixth day, the men of the Battalion were the recipients of a gift-package from the American Red Cross, containing useful and recreational material; a carton of cigarettes, soap container with soap, a popular book, playing cards, toothpaste, lifesavers, a package of razor blades, and a small utility bag for such articles as the individual soldier wished to carry or store.

On Tuesday, July 11, the tenth day of the sea voyage, the ships of the large convoy changed the positions which they had maintained with incredible precision for ten days. Now, two long, single lines of ships, for as far as the eye could see, indicated a long sea voyage was nearing an end. Late in the day, through the usual horizon mist, the outline of land became visible, though no one of the passenger list could be quite sure whether the shores of England or Ireland lay to the starboard. Yes, it was land, and that was the important thing in the minds of all. Another day, and the question would be answered!

Through the early morning mist of the following day, the men of the Battalion were greeted by high, luxuriant green hills and mountains, rising from the water's edge of the calm and peaceful Firth of Clyde. As the early morning sun penetrated the low-lying clouds, the Highlands of Scotland were bathed in deep and ever varying shades of purple, green and gray, and even those with a less profound aesthetic feeling, sensed the kaleidoscopic beauty of it all. Thus the scenic reward for eleven days of patient travel across three thousand miles of ocean. At approximately nine o'clock, the heavy anchor of the "Dominion Monarch" touched the ocean floor in the busy harbor of Greenock, Scotland. On the opposite shore lay the less active little town of Kilereggan, Scotland.

The anchor made secure on the ocean bottom, feverish activity commenced about the side of the ship with the arrival of scores of small boats, each carrying military or government officials, there to arrange for debarkation of men and equipment. Barges, containing supplies and other necessities for the maintenance of the ship, were constant visitors during the two-and-a-half days at anchor in Greenock Harbor. Such harbor traffic provided constant interest for the troops who were forced to make the ship their home until Friday, July 14. To while away the time, the "crap" and bingo games continued, and those less inclined to games of chance, found mild excitement in tossing confectionery, gum, and the much-desired American cigarettes, to crewmembers of the visiting barges and boats. One cigarette tossed to a deck below was sufficient cause for much friendly argument between would-be recipients, scrambling and scurrying to retrieve that thrown from above.

At last, on Friday, July 14, sufficient transportation had been found to transport the troops to various designated points in the United Kingdom, and during the day tons of materiel and equipment were taken from the hold of the ship. The 6850-F disembarked at four p.m., the last of the troops to leave the ship. Across the harbor to a pier at Greenock, the men disembarked from their ferry to board a London, Midlands and Scottish railway train for a then-unknown destination. At the Greenock station, again the American Red Cross came to the front with hot coffee, doughnuts and pleasant smiles—all three a cause for renewed spirit and improved morale. Undeniably, life aboard the "Dominion Monarch" for a period of two weeks had a wearing effect on attitudes and dispositions. But all was well now — stimulating sustenance, pleasant greetings, the novelty of English coaches and trains, a countryside quite different and equally as lovely as ever seen before, and a quick glimpse of large cities and small towns as the train shrilly whistled along its way. This, sufficient reason for much curiosity and interest. From Glasgow to Edinburgh to Newcastle, and down the coast to Bristol, thence across the country to the town of Stafford in Staffordshire. The unit arrived at that pleasant English town at approximately nine o'clock the following morning, Saturday, July 15.

Met by members of the advance party, Captain Bringham, Mr. Woodward, and Corporal Pizzoferato, who preceded the unit overseas by nearly two months, the 6850-F Battalion marched a

short distance to the County College of Technology building, which was to be the quarters for the unit for a short but indefinite period of time.

The exterior of the building of brick construction, three floors in height, appeared most prepossessing to the eyes of the soldiers just arrived—certainly (however high regarded an American unit in the estimation of the English) no such building could be their temporary home! Just such a building could be their home! Yes, it was true, yet alas, what a rude awakening!!



Quick examination of the actual living quarters depicted a partially completed structure. Within, walls unplastered, floors uneven and crude without their final coverings. Stairways were of rough wood, incomplete and uneven of step, yet to say the least, permitting access to the floors above. What light and ventilation, which might normally come to the interior by windows or skylights, was made impossible by blackened and boarded windows, necessary to meet blackout restrictions. The result—dark and almost eerie passageways and corridors. Sanitary facilities seemed hardly adequate. Dormitory rooms were, however, light and airy in every sense of the word, and apparently, best of all (they faced a busy thoroughfare), permitted the men to exercise artful, if not always dignified, ways of attracting the attention of the fairer members of society.

Days at Stafford were occupied in preparing the unit for movement to the Continent, which required long hours of diligent employment on the part of all. Last shortages of equipment, including guns, tools, vehicles, maintenance and administrative supplies—an infinitesimal amount of equipment of every description to be acquired, required many hours of concentrated effort to assure efficient use and proper function of every item in the field of combat. Long and tedious trips to various depots in southern England were required many times, by officers and enlisted men, to completely equip the unit. Final training, too, during this period was another added detail not to be neglected. However, in spite of the almost inestimable amount of employment required to properly prepare the unit, the men had opportunity, at one time or another, to acquaint themselves somewhat with English speech; habits and customs, visit the pub and enjoy the resultant privileges of merely being stationed in an urban area.

On Friday, August 4, orders were received which instructed the Battalion to move from Stafford, Staffordshire, England, to Sennybridge, South Wales. Saturday night, August 5, all vehicles were completely loaded and on Sunday morning, August 6, the completely equipped Battalion lumbered away from the entrance of the College Tech buildings on its way to a new temporary station, Camp Sennybridge, Sennybridge, and South Wales. Traveling via Wolverhampton, Kidderminster, Worcester, Leominster and Brecon, the convoy reached the camp at approximately four-thirty in the afternoon with the exception of the tanks. Of necessity, they were forced to travel at slower speeds throughout the journey, particularly through narrow streets and byways of English towns. Too, such a trip was particularly wearing for the personnel who rode the tracked vehicles, for the black-surfaced roads threw bits of asphalt with penetrating force, to completely cover them, to lodge in eyes, nose and throats, resulting in extreme discomfort and temporary injury.

The following morning, Monday, August 7, the firing batteries and necessary personnel from Headquarters Battery, went to the calibration range to calibrate the guns of the Battalion. Calibration was completed with 72 rounds fired, which determined that but 90 yards distance existed between the long and short gun. During the afternoon, 87 rounds were expended in service practice, and during the early evening 37 rounds were fired on direct fire.

With the calibration of the guns completed, the Battalion awaited orders to bring it just another step in the direction of the “far shore”—France. Monday, August 8, orders instructing the unit to proceed the following day to the Marshalling Area at Southampton, England, were received. At eight o’clock in the morning, Tuesday, August 9, the vehicles of the 557th, loaded and packed, began the day’s journey to Southampton, traveling via Brecon, Cucklade, Marlborough, Andover, and Stockbridge to Southampton, arriving there at approximately eight-thirty in the evening (August 9).

Food of excellent quality and generous proportions, hot showers and cots, meant much to the tired troops after a long, though pleasant day on the road, Tank drivers and personnel who rode them, could not agree, however, with such a statement for not unlike a few days previous, road conditions

again resulted in a painful coating of asphalt bits over face and hands.

Before leaving the peaceful marshalling area in Southampton Common, Thursday morning, August the 10th, each man was issued K rations and small items which included emergency heating tablets, lifesavers (the variety to be downed, not donned), cigarettes and delousing power, not to forget a heavy paper bag to be used in that worse than tortuous death experience, seasickness. During the early morning hours, Battery C unfortunately lost an M-12 tank of the 3d Section when it caught fire during refueling, fortunately without injury to any of the personnel.

Battery B was the first of the unit to reach the pier and load on the Liberty Ship, "Charles M. Hall," on Thursday, August 10. At noon, Headquarters Battery, A and Service, together with the Medical Detachment arrived at Pier No. 107 to prepare for loading and embarking on the Liberty Ship, "J. E. B. Stuart," which was to transport the men and equipment to the far shore—France. Provisions for feeding the unit a hot meal of fresh meat and vegetables on the pier (little was it realized, the last such dinner for several weeks to come) were indeed adequate and completely satisfactory. During the afternoon, as a detachment from the quartermaster unit took charge of loading the equipment, most members found it pleasant to rest and sleep, or merely to sit on the wharf and watch the process of loading the "J. E. B. Stuart" for the short sea voyage to France. Battery C remained at the marshalling area waiting for replacement of the tank burned during the early morning hours.

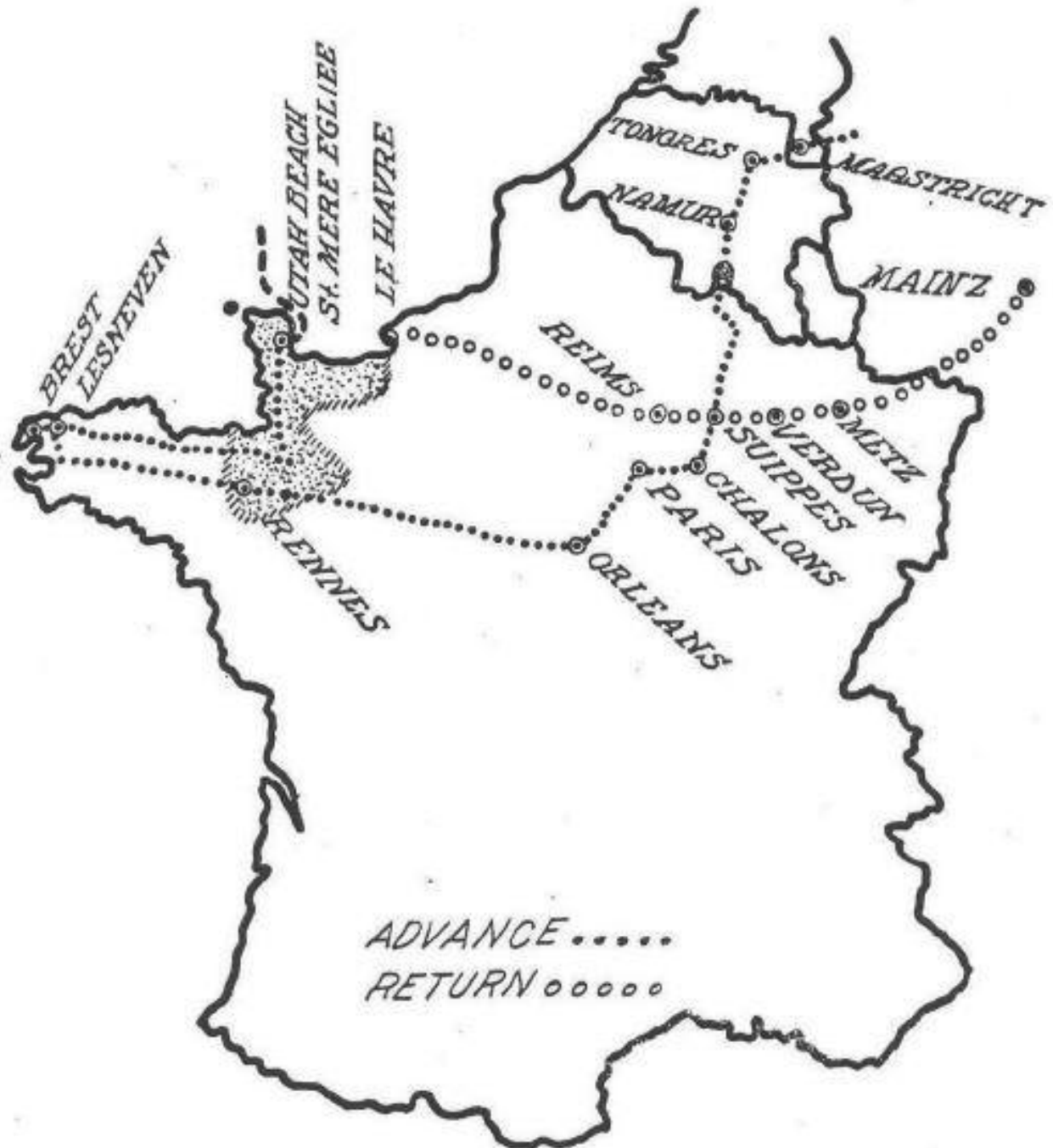
That night approximately at nine-thirty p.m., with all equipment safely secured below and above decks, the men climbed on board, were assigned to their bunks, and there slumbered quite unconcerned of the days to follow.

Friday morning, the 11th of August, hawsers were cast ashore and the "J. E. B. Stuart" and the "Charles M. Hall" headed down the harbor channel, through the Solent, passed the Isle of Wight on the starboard, and dropped anchor off the Needles to await formation of the convoy of which they were to be a part. Thus, Friday, August 11th, was passed at anchor off the Isle of Wight, and the monotonous diet of C rations had commenced. But fortitude must be the part of every soldier, whether it be Charley rations or enemy fire!!

While the "J. E. B. Stuart" and the "Charles M. Hall" rode their anchors, Friday, August 11, Battery C at Southampton, minus one tank destroyed by fire, loaded its equipment and personnel to Landing Ship Tanks No. 57, to head for the Cherbourg Beachhead.

Saturday, August 12, was a clear, bright, and warm day as the scores of ships weighed anchor for the day's journey to a land of little peace, quiet or happiness; a land of bombed and ruined cities, towns and rural communities; a land of disturbed, agitated, mentally and physically persecuted people; a macabre picture painted by the hands of Invader and Liberator.

In the late afternoon, August 12, the shores of France and the Cherbourg Peninsula were sighted and to the surprise and interest of all, the report of heavy gunfire proved to be the H.M.S. Rodney, clearly visible a few miles to the starboard, reported to be firing upon the Alderney Islands. At approximately seven-thirty in the evening, the "J. E. B. Stuart" and the "Charles M. Hall" dropped anchor off Utah Beachhead and the unloading of equipment commenced. Darkness, however, interrupted the discharge of cargo proceedings, and consequently the first barge load of equipment from both ships did not reach the beach until the following morning. In the meantime, C Battery had arrived directly on Utah Beachhead, during the early hours of Sunday, August 13, and bivouacked temporarily in a designated area, later moving to Transit Area B-25, where others of the unit were to bivouac.



*ROUTE THROUGH FRANCE
BELGIUM AND HOLLAND*

All day, August 13, the task of discharging the ships of their war materiel and military personnel to barges alongside, and thence to the beach, continued, and by nightfall all materiel and personnel, with the exception of Captain Glover, Lieutenant Rea, Lieutenant Preiss and a few others from Battery B had disembarked, they unable to leave the "Charles M. Hall" because of rough seas. Those on shore were comfortably situated in Transit Area B-25, a pleasant pastureland area surrounded by the familiar hedgerow, characteristic of the country. Here the unit remained for three days, Monday, August 14, though Wednesday, August 16, waiting for the order to send the unit out of the

Communication Zone to, or at least nearer, the zone of combat.

For three days there was little military activity other than the usual fatigue duty and maintenance of equipment. However, throughout the area men wandered from one section to another almost continuously seeking crocus cloth, jeweler's rouge, hammer and file, or an English coin, for without such equipment, finger rings never could be made.

Seated by their tents, under the shade of hedgerows, squatted Indian fashion, many of the men and officers tapped the thin edge of a Crown to broader proportions. Others, not painstakingly tapping away, patiently pushed a file back and forth through what was once the flat or center surface of the coin. Still others passed from group to group, diligently rubbing or polishing a nearly completed ring to a bright finish, at the same time passing encouraging comments and helpful suggestions to those less advanced on their product. Indeed a peaceful unwarlike pastime! Admittedly, little excitement was attached to this quiet diversion of ring making, but the first Battalion vehicle which entered the area one afternoon, loaded with cases of canned foods, brought complete cessation of activity among the "silversmiths."

"Where did you get it? How much did you get? Get me some!" Generous displays of canned turkey, chicken, fruit juices, and fruits brought forth those very natural questions from men whose diet for days had consisted entirely of C rations. In a short period of time, each section sent a vehicle and personnel to the depot on Utah Beachhead, from whence all these appetizing canned foods came. With extraordinary success, a glib and fluent member of each group exercised his powers of inveiglement upon supply sergeants — in fact so successful was this high degree of "bumming" that several trips were made to the Utah Beachhead depot. Never were C rations, K rations or even the more varied in assortment and appetizing of taste, the 10 in 1 rations, more greatly disdained and ignored. Yet, little wonder: Consider the most lowly of military food, a C or "Charley" ration.

Packed in twelve-ounce cans, four food combinations were to be had, each in a separate can, namely, meat and beans, meat and vegetable stew, meat and vegetable hash, meat and spaghetti. If circumstances required, this load might be eaten cold, though whenever possible it was heated, adding somewhat to its questionable palatability.

K rations were packed in individual cardboard boxes, each box containing one of three meals, breakfast, dinner and supper. A breakfast unit consisted of a can of minced egg yolk and pork which might be eaten hot or cold (though circumstances usually permitted only the latter), a package of five crackers, a small packet of soluble coffee, four cigarettes, one stick of chewing gum and a fig bar. A dinner unit consisted of the same with some exceptions. Cheese substituted the canned meat and egg yolks packed in the breakfast unit, and the fig bar was substituted by caramels or other form of candy. Likewise a supper unit was the same as the breakfast and dinner units, except that the canned product was a spread-like paste of meat and pork, with a small chocolate bar to replace the fruit bar or caramels. Bouillon replaced the soluble coffee found in the breakfast and dinner units. An elaboration of the K ration was the 10 in 1 ration, the most desired of military emergency rations. -

Packed in two heavy waterproof cartons were rations for ten men, a breakfast, dinner, and supper unit for each man. One carton contained individual rations, similar to the K ration, namely individually packed crackers, small cans of pork and egg yolk for breakfast, cheese for dinner, and meat and pork loaf for supper. In addition to those individual items in one carton, the other carton contained larger cans and boxes of food to be divided among a group of 10 men. A breakfast menu found in the second box consisted of a large box of dry cereal, a can of jam, condensed milk and soluble coffee and sugar. Some menus contained a large can of bacon in place of the cereal. A

supper unit contained a large can of such food as corned beef or other meat product. In this type of ration, the allotment of cigarettes was 10 for each man. Included also were Halazone tablets for the purification of drinking water.

Wednesday evening, August 18, Captain Glover and his small group of men who had been detained by rough seas, joined the unit, which completed the personnel of the unit now under alert for movement to more active areas.

Punctually at ten-forty am. Thursday, August 17, forming a long convoy, the Battalion moved out of Transit Area B-25 and proceeded via Carentan, Periers. Coutances le Mesnil, Armand, Gavray, Folligny, la Haye-Pesnel, les Chambres, Chavoy, Avranches, Pontaubault, Ducy, St. Hillaire due Harcouet to Landivy. At Landivy, the unit proceeded to a point approximately two miles from the little town, to close into a bivouac area.

The trip to Landivy brought the personnel much closer to the awe-inspiring realities of war, for seldom a town or city, even the smallest hamlet visited enroute, had escaped the ravages of bomb and shellfire. Such scenes of devastation and plunder could only be accentuated by the tragic, war-weary drawn faces of poverty-stricken men and women as they paused in their steps to look upon a once familiar landmark, now rubble and debris. Others poorly clad and idle of employment, formed little groups on narrow sidewalks, very possibly to discuss a plan for a certain comfort and security, a hope for a little peace and quiet. Thus an introduction to battle-torn France.

As patiently as possible, the staff and personnel awaited in the proximity of Landivy for combat assignment which arrived on Saturday, August 19, together with other orders attaching the unit to the VIII Corps of Lt. General George S. Patton's Third United States Army. VIII Corps was then commanded by Major General Troy Middleton. Now accustomed to the loading of each truck, trailer, or command car; thoroughly familiar with every detail of loading, the Battalion was ready to roll along the highway in little less than one hour upon receipt of movement orders. At three-thirty p.m., Saturday, August 19, the Battalion was on its way. Traveling via Louvigne, Melle, Georges, St. James, Pontorson, Sains, and Bager Pican, the Battalion bivouacked in an area approximately one mile from Dol.

The following morning, Sunday, August 20, the unit again removed installations made the night before, packed equipment and at seven-fifteen a.m. left the area near Dol. Traveling via Dinan, Jugon, Noval, Lamballe, St. Brieue, Chatelaudren, Cuingamp, Belleisle, Pluoigneau, to Morlaix. Outside the city limits of Morlaix, the vehicles again left the highway, made their familiar circuitous trip about hedge-bordered field and prepared their installations for the night. Hardly had equipment been taken from trucks and trailers, camouflage and other security measures completed, than orders were received from the Commanding Officer to proceed immediately to an area approximately two miles from Lesneven. He, prior to reaching Morlaix, had preceded the column to reconnoiter for future positions. At approximately quarter to nine that Sunday evening, August 20, the troops reached their designated area near Lesneven, somewhat weary from their travels, hopeful however, that their present position might permit sound sleep and rest. Their wishes were completely realized, and the following day, August 21, as the advance party reconnoitered for a position area, the men patiently rested in preparation for another move to come later in the day. At three o'clock that afternoon, the Battalion received its orders to move forward -to a position area to engage the enemy, its first primary objective. Prior to movement, the personnel were briefed and the situation and probable immediate future operations were explained to them. At this prior-to-combat briefing, the personnel learned that their unit was thenceforth attached for an indefinite period to the 333rd Field Artillery Group in turn attached to the VIII Corps, and that the unit would be used in general support

of the 29th Infantry Division, moving to reduce the fortifications of Brest, France. Due to the characteristics of the gun, its ease of maneuverability and striking power, it was further learned that the guns of the firing batteries might possibly be assigned to various missions in the destruction of concrete pillboxes and gun emplacements of the enemy. At approximately two p.m., August 21, the unit left for its new position, traveling via Baug-Blanc, to reach an area approximately seven miles from the town of le Goadec, and a mile or two from the little settlement of Coate-Meal. At this area, installations were set up and preparations made for firing the first combat mission. Tuesday, August 22, was a day spent in further preparation for the mission to come and occupation of the area. Enemy fire in neighboring areas undeniably inspired far greater interest in digging foxholes to greater depths, assuring greater security from possible fire of 88's or other enemy shells. Bulldozers dug deep to afford greater protection and added camouflage for tanks and personnel manning them; the Fire Direction Center and Command Post likewise completed installations several feet below the normal ground level to enhance the security of its personnel; guns and other equipment checked for correct mechanical function; observation posts selected to be manned for 24 hours each day; situation maps prepared and posted— all, in readiness for this first combat mission of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion.

Interesting details concerning the Brest situation at the time the 557th entered the field of combat, to share in the reduction of the Brittany area and Brest fortifications, should be properly considered at this point.

First, what of the enemy? What were the type of forces, who so tenaciously occupied the heavily fortified area? How diversified and varied were the branches of service represented? Who commanded, as it so proved, the unyielding forces of the Hun in his highly tenable, well-equipped pillboxes, forth and other installations?

The opposing forces in the Brest area were commanded by 56-year old Lt. General Hermann Bernard Ramcke. This professional soldier was in command of all paratroopers, and was largely responsible for the training and combat efficiency of all parachute divisions throughout the German army. Chief of Staff was Major General Von Mosel, Admiral Kohler, second in command, with Colonels Kroh and Rausch, other members of Ramcke's staff. Upon their shoulders rested the responsibility of an obvious futile defense of Brest with the consequent death of thousands and irreparable damage to things material.

It was estimated by Corps Intelligence that General Ramcke commanded approximately 35,000 to 40,000 troops—all employed in defending Brest and the area surrounding that heavily fortified city. These troops represented largely paratroopers, a group of fearless fanatical and ruthless youth, the very manifestation of true Nazism and all that such a faith embodied. In addition to this youthful group of military fanatics, the Boche numbered among their ranks, Marines of the German Navy, Infantry Regiments, and Artillery Battalions. Even those ordinarily considered non-combatant, special service battalions, were numbered among the defenders. In support to those of the regular armed forces, were others of enslaved labor battalions, "recruited" from the Nazi-occupied countries. This varied assortment of troops were in the main, located on the Brest Peninsula. A few scattered forces held positions on the Crozon and Daculas Peninsulas. Throughout the area, as the Allied forces were soon to learn from actual combat experience, and not alone from G-2 estimation reports, the enemy was firmly established in nearly impregnable fortifications in the form of steel and steel-reinforced concrete pillboxes, with thickness of walls oft-times to the extent of 12 feet. Each housed machine guns or guns of greater size, very often the famed 88mm, high velocity gun. They maintained cement and stone forts with a labyrinth of tunnels far below the ground surface, which provided adequate security and escape from damaging results of shell fire and bombs. The Brest area

was indeed a formidable military objective.

Three American Infantry Divisions, the 8th, the 29th and 2nd, were employed in the Campaign of the Brest Peninsula. The 8th Infantry Division, in addition to its regular units, was further supported by the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 709th Tank Battalion, 445th Anti-aircraft Battalion and Cos. B and D of the 86th Camouflage Battalion. The main effort of this Division, and its supporting units, was concentrated on the right flank of the force attempting to capture Brest.

The 29th Infantry Division, supported by the 621st Tank Destroyer Battalion, Co. A of the 709th Tank Battalion, Co. A of the 86th Camouflage Battalion, and Co. A of the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were to make the main effort on the left, with primary objective to capture Recouvrance.

The 2nd Infantry Division, and its attached troops, namely the 612th Destroyer Battalion, the 687th Field Artillery Battalion, Co. A, 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Co. D, 709th Tank Battalion, and Co. C. 86th Camouflage Battalion. These units were to clear the southwest portion of the Brittany Peninsula.

Just where in this picture did the 557th Field Artillery Battalion fit? The 557th Field Artillery Battalion was at all times to be prepared to fire counter-battery missions with Corps Artillery with particular attention to the advance of the 8th infantry Division. In no case, however, were they to be called upon to support Corps, but instead were to provide general support to the attack of the 29th Infantry Division in its endeavor to reach its objective, the Recouvrance area.

In the vicinity of the little Brittany settlement known as Coat-Méal, the Battalion set up its Command Post. Likewise in this locality, the battalion guns were dug in, directed towards Bohars and Guilers.

The first combat registration was fired at nine-fifty a.m. on August 23, 1944, providing a singular event in the history of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion. Captain McKee furnished the data from the liaison plane above, as Battery B, gun section No. 1 fired this first combat registration at Questel, a point approximately 2 1/2 miles northwest of Brest. But that inconstant, changeable, and nearly unpredictable director of all military movements and activity—weather—proved no ally of the 557th. Low-hung clouds and ground haze, in addition to enemy anti-aircraft fire, forced abandonment of this mission, after only five rounds had been fired. To Sergeant Lutes and his crew consisting of T/4 Ellis, Corporals Sullivan and McDonald, T/5 Segal, Pvts. Rogalski, Comeau, Linhares, Cavoto, Mazzone, Walsh and Kelliher, under the supervision of battery Executive Officer, Lt. Cable, must go the distinction of firing these first combat rounds.

Thirteen months and twenty-seven days previously, the men of the Battalion, each a rookie, had wearily detrained at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. They were quite unaware that in the days to follow, however diligent and faithful in their training, their first combat round would whistle its way across the hedgerows of Brittany, France.

Though poor visibility and enemy anti-aircraft action prevented registration the first day, the following day, Thursday, August 24, provided clearer observing weather and at approximately 11 a.m., registration was completed. During the day, men of the Battalion witnessed for the first time in their military career, a daylight air attack on Brest and other strongly held enemy positions. Nearly one hundred British Lancasters took part in this attack on Brest, and many expressed a feeling of satisfaction and security to realize that the invading force overhead bombed mercilessly to enhance the advancement of the Allied forces.

The following day, Friday, August 25, tragedy found its sudden way into the ranks of the Battalion with the death of T/5 William Hope, Battery B, of Lowell, Massachusetts, and the wounding of 1st Lt. Joseph Preiss by enemy action. At approximately 7:15 in the morning Lieutenant Preiss, riding in his jeep with driver, Pfc. Maxwell Nutting and radio operator Hope proceeded slowly along a narrow unimproved road towards Begaie, Brittany, France. The Lieutenant's mission was to establish an observation post for the conduct of artillery fire. The haze had just begun to lift from the characteristic hedgerows of the country, which paralleled the small road. Lieutenant Preiss had his driver stop the vehicle at a bend in the road, while he started to step out to reconnoiter the terrain on foot. This act was prompted by the fact that the enemy had, until the evening before, held the high ground upon which Begaie was situated. Realizing this, he wanted to make certain no enemy lingering patrols or snipers would bar their advance. Suddenly shots were heard from the hedgerows. The first went through the windshield, instantly killing T/5 Hope in the rear seat of the jeep. As Lieutenant Preiss hit the ground with a bullet in his shoulder, he yelled to Pfc. Nutting to get out of the area with his vehicle. Nutting exhibited extreme coolness and excellent judgment under fire, zigzagged his vehicle backwards, continually under fire. Three bullets, nevertheless, pierced his jeep. Another shot, in the meantime, struck Lieutenant Preiss in the hip. Pfc. Nutting, noting this, drove his vehicle forward at great personal risk, under continual small arms fire, stopped his jeep, succeeded in getting Lieutenant Preiss into the vehicle, and again swiftly backed out of reach of the enemy fire. Thus on August 24, the Battalion recorded with deep regret, the first fatal battle casualty, T/5 William Hope, and the wounding of Lieutenant Preiss, yet quite cognizant of the meritorious act and distinguishing intrepidity of Pfc. Maxwell Nutting.

On a high rocky promontory, as one would enter Brest Harbor through the Goulet de Brest, lay Fort du Portzic. There was a heavily fortified position, extensively armed with guns ranging from the smallest caliber to the more powerful, all-purpose 88mm. Characteristic of German military construction were the heavy reinforced concrete walls and bunkers of the fort area. These strong points were interconnected with tunnels and passageways deep in the solid rock, providing adequate security for many days from constant pounding by artillery and bombers. Such a fortification was to hold out as the bitterly contested key to the inner defenses of Brest.

Fort du Portzic was the target of a Battalion volley during the morning of August 25, as a prelude to an all-out offensive on Brest. Throughout the day Charlie Battery continued the harassing and interdiction fire. When the order "cease firing" came, two hundred and fourteen rounds had been expended by the battalion as its share in the destruction of this key area. On the following day, Saturday, August 26, bombers again flew over the target area, and in support, our gun batteries fired battalion concentrations, interdiction fires, and counter-flak missions. Ranges during the day extended from 10,000 yards to approximately 16,000 yards.

Later that same day, Battery A was attached to the 9th Combat Team of the 2d Infantry Division. Under cover of darkness it moved to a new rendezvous area for a direct-lay firing position. Sgt. Spitzner's special mission was the reduction of six concrete pillboxes, for which type of target, the M-12 seemed particularly adapted. By nine-thirty a.m. enemy fire on this section became unusually heavy. For nearly an hour, Major Clark, Lieutenant Grunsten, Lieutenant Canning and the entire section experienced an unusual and terrifying mortar and artillery bombardment. The intense concentration forced all to seek what security they might in nearby foxholes and behind the ever-present hedgerows. In addition to the bombardment from enemy batteries, snipers continually harassed the gun crew and the observers as they desperately attempted to knock out the formidable enemy position. In spite of this disconcerting fire, the cannoneers fired 12 bore-sighted rounds point-blank at the pillboxes. At one-thirty p.m. the section again tackled its objective with direct fire. At six p.m. when cease firing orders were received, one pillbox had been completely demolished. It was

indeed an experience all members of this gun section will long remember—one not to be eagerly anticipated in the future. Fortunately, and remarkably, too, no casualties were suffered.

The next three days found all firing batteries actively engaged in counter-battery missions. In recognition of excellent results achieved in firing against German rocket positions on Wednesday, August 30, Batteries B and C received an official acknowledgement for the Battalion from higher Headquarters, VIII Corps.

The first four days of September were active days for the firing batteries. Many requests for special missions were received and accepted. All were successfully completed. Battery C was newly located in the vicinity of Loc-Maria Plouzane and here, in spite of repeated enemy counter-battery fire, engaged hostile coastal weapons emplaced on the Crozon Peninsula. Determination and accurate fire eliminated that artillery threat. Meanwhile, on September 3, from a dangerous direct lay fire mission southwest of Ploumoguier, Battery B, fourth gun section (Sergeant Duff section chief and Captain Hamilton F. Glover observing), was the target for extremely heavy and devastating shellfire of German 88mm guns. The enemy had quickly located the flash of the gun. Immediately the Germans began to range their 88mm fire on our position.

Fragments from these enemy shells pierced the tank attesting to the accuracy of the German fire. It was indeed a trying, difficult mission, Yet Sergeant Duff completely disregarding his own personal safety, drove his men to added efforts and succeeded in keeping the destruction fire of his gun point-blank on the enemy fort. Gunner Corporal De Mario, at his gunner's position on top of the tank hull, was also under direct observation and the fire of the enemy. Yet he precisely laid his sights on the enemy target. Through the efforts of these two men, accurate fire at the enemy fort was continued until 45 rounds had been expended.

However successful the mission, however great the demonstration of courage and bravery of the personnel involved, the Battalion could think only in this encounter with the enemy of its real loss; the death of Captain Hamilton F. Glover, commander of Battery B. Disregarding entirely his own personal safety, stimulating his men to keep up the effective destruction fire against the enemy, he had courageously remained at his observing position beside the gun until instantly killed by an 88mm shell fragment. For this action it was recommended that Captain Glover be awarded posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross with a citation which read in part, "The Distinguished Service Cross is awarded posthumously to Captain Hamilton F. Glover, who, at Kerderve, Brittany, France, on 3 September 1944, disregarding his own personal safety and exhibiting a tenacity of purpose and unusual leadership in battle, distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against armed enemies of the United States."

On September 5, the Battalion, less Battery C, moved from positions near Coatmeal to a position near Tresequer, northeast of St. Rennan and due west of Milizac. Captain Walter J. Ricketts, Battalion motor officer was placed in command of Battery B.

The following day, Wednesday, September 6, the battalion commander Major Whiting, received notification of his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel as of July 11, 1944. Tardiness of mail and frequent movement of the Battalion from one station to another resulted in the long delay of this good news. The miles across the sea, the position of the 557th, most times distant from the army post offices during its repeated shifts from area to area, often combined to delay those long looked-for cheerful letters from home. Yet when they arrived, despite mud and rain, C rations and the shellfire of the day, it was always a happy occasion.

Battery C meanwhile, maintained continual observation of the Crozon Peninsula targets. One precision adjustment by Captain Russell on enemy heavy gun emplacements was conducted with excellent results.

Thursday, September 7, was a relatively quiet day for the firing batteries of the Battalion. One gun of Battery B, however, fired 50 rounds into a surrounded coastal fort on the west tip of the Brest Peninsula. Thirty of these rounds were recorded as direct hits, bringing the number of direct hits on this fortification to over 200 rounds. Indeed a commendable record! And in retrospect, how many readers will recall that quite familiar confidence, “Oh, this Battalion will never go overseas?”

The Lochrist coastal guns were well known in the Brittany Peninsula for their size, range and maneuverability. Hurling a 280mm shell at long range, these guns were designed for coastal protection only. Upon occupation by the German forces, their ingenuity and determination to defend Brest resulted in reconstruction of the French gun emplacement to permit a 360° traverse. Thus, these huge guns not only reached possible targets on the sea but, as well, targets of opportunity to the interior. On September 8, one gun, Battery B, with Lieutenant Cable as executive officer and Captain Ricketts manning the observation post, fired 60 rounds at one of these tremendously heavy 280mm Lochrist defense guns. A direct hit started a fire in the emplacement of the gun, and 30 more rounds put it out of action. This gun had been the target of an all-out air-ground assault for nearly a week previous.

The following day, Saturday, September 9, Battery C, No. 1 gun scored with effective results on a group of enemy cement pillboxes. With unusual alacrity, this section delivered six rounds in one minute and thirty- three seconds (timed from the first round to the last round on the way). At the Battalion command post notification was received of the death of Sergeant Gilbert S. Walcher, Denver, Colorado. Sergeant Walcher’s death came as a result of wounds received in action of September 3 near Kerderve, France, as he faithfully and courageously assisted his ill-fated battery commander, Captain Hamilton F. Glover. For his faithful and constant mechanical attention in insuring the continual fire of the weapon, and for a complete disregard for his own personal safety, it was recommended that Sergeant Walcher be awarded posthumously the Silver Star. Purple Heart awards were made to Corporal Richard T. Kiesling of Methuen, Massachusetts and Sergeant James A. Duff of Denver, Colorado, for injuries they received in action on that fateful day, September 3. And to Lieutenant Preiss, the Purple Heart was awarded for injury received as a result of a sniper’s small arms fire, August 25.

Corporal Everett Chase of Battery A was seriously burned on September 11 when he attempted to remove a burning camouflage net from his ammunition carrier. The carrier was loaded with a full complement of ammunition, high explosive shells for the 155mm gun. If the fire had been permitted to spread to the ammunition, the resulting explosions would have destroyed not only valuable pieces of vital equipment, but also, and more important, would have endangered the lives of the remainder of the men of the section. Instead, Corporal Chase saved all, but suffered serious third degree burns on and about his face, hands and legs. For this demonstration of coolness and display of bearing in an emergency, and for this act of heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy, it was recommended that he receive the Soldiers’ Medal.

A proper record of events of the Battalion would indeed be incomplete without mention of those who so frequently provided the lighter, the less serious moments of combat days—battalion pets, pets of almost every size, shape, description and given name. Dogs, always faithful friends, predominated throughout the unit. Among their number was “ETOUSA (European Theatre of Operations) der Whermacht Schmidt” whom Major Clark had purchased from a Frenchman for a package of Chelsa cigarettes. Soon appeared “NUSA” (Ninth United States Army), representing

Sergeant Eastwood of Headquarters Battery; then “Snooks” who rode in the Colonel’s vehicle; “George” belonging to Mr. Woodward and the personnel section; “Mickey,” “Kaupt,” “Rags,” “Charley,” “Rags” again of Battery A; “Bobby,” “Susie” and so on, too numerous to mention by name and owner. Though dogs were usually the chosen pet, ducks, roosters, chickens, guinea pigs, kittens, and rabbits at one time or another, found their way into the ranks of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion. These pets provided pleasure and enjoyment and prompted many laughs and pleasurable hours of companionship.

Working in close conjunction with a Ranger Battalion, Battery B, 1st gun section, with Sergeant Lutes in charge, on September 10, fired 30 rounds of armor-piercing shell into a coastal fort, which had been their target for several days. At a specified time, fire was lifted and the fort assaulted by the Rangers whose presence soon effected a surrender and the capture of nearly 100 prisoners. The concrete of the fortification, as viewed after the surrender, had been demolished from the week’s firing, but the tungsten steel machine gun blisters on which direct hits were also obtained, had not been pierced.

The following day, Battery A moved to a new position in the vicinity of Loc-Maria Plouzane. On a three-day special mission for the 29th Infantry Division, Battery A fired various missions at targets of opportunity on the Crozon Peninsula. Batteries B and C, in the meantime, continued normal battalion harassing and interdiction fire. On the 13th, the latter had fired 203 rounds, most of them fired after dark on 33 harassing points in a confined enemy zone. Such is evidence that the life of a gunner corporal and his crew during combat was a strenuous, tiring, nerve-wracking day and night task. During this period of time, the effective results of the Battalion firing, coupled with the diligently prepared reports by Major Clark, provided tactical commanders with valuable combat information concerning the employment of the 155mm gun using the new types of concrete-piercing ammunition. These combined efforts brought commendation from Brigadier General McMahan, the Corps Artillery commander, a commendation which meant gratifying satisfaction to the men of the unit. The commendation read: “The report submitted by you and the reports from the Commanding Officer of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion covering the above subject (Report of Employment of 155mm Gun, M1918 (SP), with T-105 Fuse), were excellent and furnished excellent information. Lieutenant Colonel Whiting and those concerned are to be commended for the conduct of the tests and the results obtained. All concerned will be acquainted with this commendation.”

On September 18, at approximately eleven a.m., the fortifications of Brest surrendered to the Allied forces after 26 days of combat duty for the Battalion. Just prior to this date, the following correspondence passed between the Commanding General, VIII Corps and the commander of Brest. The following letter was sent to the German Headquarters on September 13: “Sir: There comes a time in war when the situation reaches a point where a commander is no longer justified in expending the lives and destroying the health of the men who have bravely carried out his orders in combat.

I have discussed with your officers and men, who have served you well and are now prisoners of war, the situation confronting the German garrison at Brest. These men are of the belief that the situation is hopeless and that there is nothing to be gained by prolonging the struggle. I therefore, feel that the German garrison at Brest and on the Crozon Peninsula no longer has justifiable reason for continuing to fight.

Your men have fought well. Approximately 16,000 of them from this area are now prisoners of war. Your command has suffered casualties. You have lost much of the necessary implements of war and your men are encircled in a small congested area. Therefore it is the consensus of all that you and

your command have fulfilled your obligation to your country.

In consideration of the preceding, I am calling upon you, as a professional soldier to another, to cease the struggle now in progress.

In accepting the surrender of Brest, I desire that your men lay down their arms and be assembled in proper military formation and marched under command of appropriate commanders to locations agreed upon by you and by my representative who has handed you this communication. At the designated point, transport will convey the officers and men to the prisoner of war assembly point. For you and such members of your staff as you may designate, proper transportation will call at such place as you may select.

I am sure that you realize the futility of continuing the battle. I am also of the opinion that you would prefer to surrender to the Americans who have opposed you in this siege. And that by so doing, at this time, save the remnants of your command who have served you so well. Furthermore, you must realize that the Port of Brest has lost its significance since so many ports are now in Allied hands.

I trust, as a professional soldier who has served well and who has already fulfilled his obligation, you will give this request your favorable consideration.”

To which the German curtly replied: “General: I must decline your proposal’

Yet five days later the Germans did surrender. The long and bitterly contested struggle ended by German surrender, the hopes of 35,752 German soldiers for Nazi world domination. In the Brest and Recouvance area, 9,375 Germans gave up their tenacious fighting; in the Crozon area 3,300 found further fighting useless, as had those 23,077 who, previously during the campaign, surrendered quite willingly or by force in the face of American superiority. The actual surrender ceremony took place at Woodrow Wilson Place in the almost demolished city. The actual surrender by Colonel Erick Pietzonka represented General Ramcke. General Ramcke, when later meeting with General Middleton of the Allied forces, was dressed in a camouflage cap and jacket, field-green paratrooper trousers and black parachute boots. Around his neck hung the Knights Cross, his only decoration. He posed for official photographers, with General Ramcke retorting that posing was little enough for him (Ramcke) to do since his military job was finished. The American General countered that his own work was not yet finished.

“What have you done?” Ramcke asked, leaving himself open for the obvious answer.

“Besides effecting this surrender,” continued Middleton, “I have served 34 years in the United States Army.”

“I’ve got you beat,” replied Ramcke. “I’ve served 39 ½.”

General Middleton smiled wryly and stated patiently that this was his last war.

“I don’t believe it,” retorted Ramcke emphatically.

General Ramcke asserted during the interview that when he arrived at Brest the situation was in a complete muddle and he was compelled to reorganize the defenses. He spoke disparagingly of the fighting ability of all non-paratroop personnel which he had at his disposal. He termed them as soft, spoiled, tired old men, hardly worthy of the term soldier.

Thus the battle of Brest was over, its ferocity well expressed by an excerpt from the article entitled

“Brassiere Boys” in THE YANK, Army Weekly, which in part read: “The siege of Brest, largest of the three Brittany garrisons, will not receive the worldwide recognition it rightly deserves. Worse than Cassino, tougher than Caen, it was said to be one of the hardest battles fought by the American Infantry in Europe since 1918. But while it was being fought, other armed columns were thrusting with the same violence through Northern France, Belgium and Luxembourg and over the borders of Germany.”

The Battalion’s first combat mission was successfully completed. On Tuesday, September 19, it moved to a temporary area approximately three miles from St. Rennan, to await further orders and new assignments. On this day, three of the Battalions First Lieutenants received their promotions to Captaincy; Lieut. Gayle O. Wilks, Commanding Officer of Headquarters Battery, Lieutenant Raymond J. Kemble Jr., Assistant. S-3, and Lieutenant Chester M. Grunsten, Commanding Officer of Able Battery.

Later that day Major Clark returned from a VIII Corps meeting near Lasneven. He brought with him orders and instructions for the next move to take place on the following day, Wednesday, September 20. The Battalion was ordered to a rest area which was approximately four miles east of Lesneven. Here CP and FDC tents were set up in order to conduct normal administrative duties. During this 10-day rest period, September 20 to September 30, passes permitted the men daily visits to the town of Lesneven; added entertainment was provided by a USO show which visited the area on September 23, and another unit which visited nearby Group Headquarters. Too, the faithful, ever-gracious canteen workers of the American Red Cross Clubmobile Service visited the battalion area to provide everyone generous numbers of real American doughnuts and unlimited cups of hot, stimulating coffee.

On several occasions during the rest period, the Battalion arranged transportation and an officer guide for daylight trips to Brest and other areas, recently held by the Germans, so that the men might examine at close hand the various installations and fortifications fired upon by the Battalion during the successful campaign. And so for this period of ten days, the men truly relaxed and rested.

Movement Order No. 77, received from the Commanding General VIII Corps, directed that the Battalion move on September 30 to the vicinity of Camp Coetquidan, to be attached upon arrival at this destination to the 34th Field Artillery Brigade and the 196th Field Artillery Group.

At six a.m., a cold, rainy morning, the Battalion left the rest area position near Lesneven and traveling via Landiviau, Commana, Ia Feuillee, Huelgoat, Poullaouen, Carhaix, Rostrenen, Sifiac, Pontivy, Josselin, Ploermel, and Campeneac, reached a flew bivouac area approximately 15 miles west of Rennes, France.

With the installations established in apple orchards within the new area (approximately 2 miles north of the French village of Monterfil), the personnel of the Battalion entered a reviewer training period as prescribed by Brigade. In order to meet the requirements of higher headquarters, as the unit waited orders for further assignment and movement, section classes were conducted throughout the morning hours with frequent conditioning hikes and calisthenics a daily requisite. Everyone was quite audible in their displeasure at such a schedule, convinced of their ability after having faithfully and diligently trained for 13 months in preparation for combat mission; after having shared in the reduction of Brest fortifications, and had a part in driving the Germans from Brittany Peninsula. However, as the days passed they quite willingly admitted that the schedule as such, was not arduous but in fact, beneficial. What might well have proved a tiresome, lengthy period, undeniably training did much to pass the time. The Battalion Commander permitted daily passes to Rennes, a typically

French City of some size and many shops, taverns and cafes. In addition, sightseeing trips were conducted for everyone to the world-famous Mont St. Michel, a Mecca for the people of France and for tourists from all over the world.

On the 10th of the month, under the command of Captain Kemble, fifteen vehicles and trailers of the Battalion with personnel to man them, joined a convoy made up of several other units, and proceeded to Maastricht, Holland, conveying equipment of the Ninth United States Army Headquarters. This week long trip afforded a small group of the Battalion personnel a preview, as it were, of areas of France, sections of Belgium and Holland which all were soon to see.

On Oct. 12 the Battalion was transferred from attachment to its group and passed to the control of the 6th TD Group. But the Battalion remained pleasantly situated in this apple-orchard area for a total of 20 days. Though prescribed courses of instruction were adhered to, the limited number of classes required of all, indeed permitted one to refer to the period as another unofficial rest period.

This rest period came to a termination on Saturday, October 21, for many of those in the firing batteries when they loaded and secured their tanks to railroad flat cars at Rennes. This was the start of the long trek from Brest, France, through Holland to Tongres, Belgium. The personnel rode quite inelegantly and void of normal rail comforts, for a French boxcar offered little toward luxurious travel. Yet dry straw, a covering overhead, warm clothing, a Coleman burner to heat emergency rations, did much for comfort and morale of the enlisted man as he faithfully, unquestioningly performed the duty asked of him.

Early Monday, October 23, the remainder of the Battalion departed its pleasant bivouac area 15 miles north of Rennes. Traveling in two serials via Cottequidan, Rennes, Vitre, Laval, the unit closed in a bivouac area near Le Mans, France, at approximately three-thirty p.m., the first stop on the vehicular movement to Tongres, Belgium. The following day, Tuesday, October 24, the men rolled up their tents in the darkness and cold of the morning hours for the second day's journey to Paris, traveling via Fontaine, Orleans, Artenay, and Toury. Circumstances denied the possibility of an evening of pleasurable sightseeing and recreation in a rejuvenated Paris. Yet the men rode through sections of the great city and saw in the distance through the afternoon mist, the famed Eiffel Tower. They were quite correct and justified in writing home of their visit to the metropolis of France.

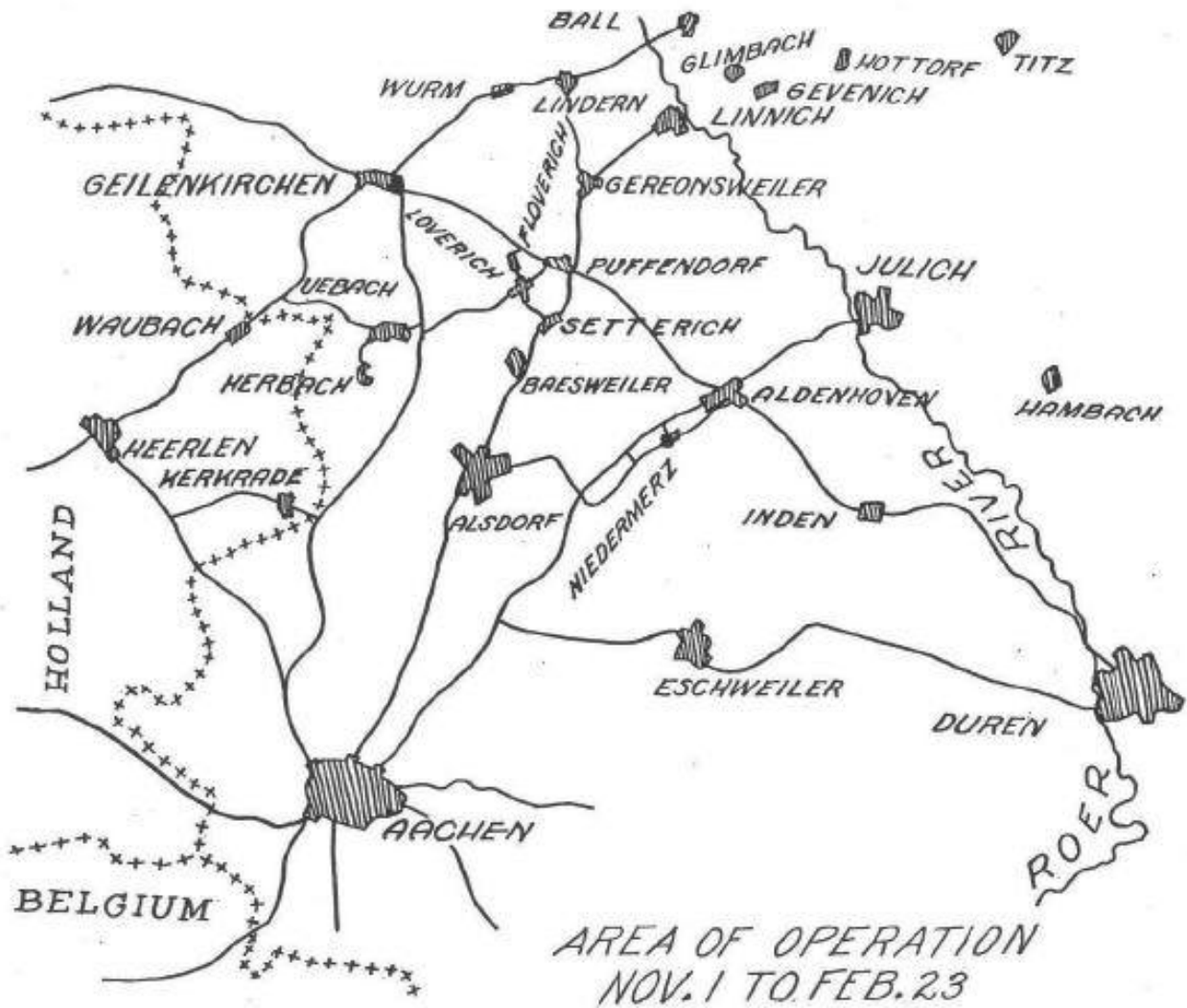
Cold weather and chilling winds persisted as members of the Battalion embarked upon the journey the third day which took them through the towns or cities of Meaux, Montmirail, Chalons and finally to a bivouac area in the vicinity of Suippes.

The "bugle was blown" early on the morning of October 26 and at six a.m., the convoy was on the highway headed towards its destination, Tongres, Belgium. On this final leg it traveled via Mezagran, Rethel, Rocroi, Givet, Dinant, Namur, Marheron, reaching the bivouac area outside Tongres. There it was greeted by the advance party which had preceded the convoy by 48 hours. This ended the longest journey the Battalion had traveled in convoy, a distance of 584 miles.

Only the occasional putter of the jet-propelled flying bomb, better known as the "buzz bomb" awakened the men as they slept in their orchard bivouac area. Yet all anxiously awaited orders for further movement to the combat area.

The following day, October 27, while the men rested from the discomfort of their long journey, a reconnaissance party left the Tongres area to inspect positions in the Siegfried Line, occupied at that time by the 258th Field Artillery Battalion, which needed time to perform necessary repairs and maintenance. This party included Lieutenant Colonel Whiting, Major Schueller, battery

commanders, wire personnel and drivers. Major Schueller remained at this position while the remainder of the reconnaissance party returned to the battalion area. As of this date the unit became attached to XIX Corps and the 2nd Armored Division.



On Monday, October 30, the Battalion again pulled onto the highway and, traveling via Maastricht, Heerlen, Waubach and Palenberg, Holland, closed into positions in and near the German village of Herbach, approximately one-and-a-half miles south of Ubach, Germany. At last the 557th had reached German soil. With other American forces it was quite prepared and determined in future missions to bring the real meaning of war before the German military leaders; as well as to a people who had so willingly followed this leadership in years of brutal practices and wholesale destruction. Barbaric persecution, torture, and coercion were their instruments of warfare. Death, poverty, hunger and malnutrition could only result. Destruction of public and private property was of little concern to the German nation as its army blitz-krieged its way across Europe. In the late 30's and early 40's a self-styled "master race" was determined to control all people and Hitler was to be the cruel ruler of the entire world. Now like an effectively thrown boomerang, the war and all its destruction returned to strike down its creator, The German Master Race.

Orders of the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, declared any property within Germany, whether real or personal, might be used by the allied forces, provided such use be of a strictly military nature.

Located in the rich coal mining section of Germany, the shell and bomb-damaged homes in the little village of Herbach and Ubach offered some comfort and security for the men of the 557th. It made little difference how damaged the home; roofs could be patched, windows could be boarded. The debris and rubble, not salvageable, were quickly disposed of in a most convincing and determined manner. From huge piles of wreckage, stoves were rescued, and though the success of roof patching might be questioned, the men were grateful for the protection against the unpredictable and cheerless weather of Germany in November. The duties of gun sections precluded such seeming luxury of a house, however extensive the damaged condition, so they (to be constantly near their guns) dug their foxholes deep and fitted them as elaborately as conditions permitted.

Straw provided the foundation for beds, and salvaged stoves and pipes garnered from unimaginable sources meant warmth. Whether billeted in foxholes, shell-damaged houses or barns, some of the batteries were able to install lights for their personnel. Such a luxury in the life of a combat soldier seemed incredible.

While working in conjunction with XIX Corps and the 2nd Armored Division, the distinction of firing the first round across the Boer River went to the 2nd gun section of Battery B, on October 31, 1944. The crew manning this gun was, chief of section, Staff Sergeant Clifford E. Halmrast, Sergeant Arthur R. Pelletier, Corporal Andre D. Gay, T/4 Leon R. Adams, Pfc. James J. McCann, Pfc. Salvatore Lovasco, Pvt. Bard Craig, Pfc. Colon H. Marshall, Pvt. Wendell A. Currie, Pvt. Joe Mayse, and T/5 Arthur B. Mondun.

November 8, the Battalion was attached to the 258th Field Artillery Group. Colonel Jones, its commanding officer, was a recognized authority on the use of the M-12 gun. Prior to active duty, Colonel Jones had been an instructor in the Colorado National Guard, and on frequent visits to the area, he renewed the acquaintance of members of the cadre who had come under his tutelage. The order of battle for Colonel Jones' Group then, comprised four artillery battalions, the 211th, the 258th, the 959th and 557th.

Fire missions assigned the Battalion during the period of time at Herbach and Ubach were varied. They included some harassing and interdiction fires, besides the direct and indirect attacks of enemy batteries and other hostile installations.

On the 10th, Colonel Whiting received notification of his award of the Bronze Star Medal in recognition of his "initiative, knowledge and courage," and "the aggressive and cooperative assistance given the assault infantry commander by use of the Battalion's 155mm gun, SP, in special missions of destruction." Thus, Colonel Whiting became the first officer of the Battalion to, receive this award of meritorious service and heroism.

November 16 was set as D-day for an all-out assault to reach the Rhine River. The Roer River was to be an intermediate objective. Little did all realize how optimistic expectations of a rapid advance to the Roer proved to be. H-Hour was at twelve forty-five p.m. and in support of the attack, the Battalion fired 298 rounds. Flares and bombs were directed at the various battalion areas on the night of November 28, resulting in minor injuries from anti-personnel bombs to Pvt. Cavoto of Battery B and to Sergeant Beck, Corporal Yaitanes and T/5 Browne of Battery C. For their injuries they were justly awarded the Purple Heart. Battery C bore the brunt of the attack of the lone raider that night when a flare ignited a net of the 1st gun section, and fragments damaged the gun sight. On subsequent nights during the occupation of Herbach and Ubach, lone German raiders continued to harass the personnel of the Battalion with flares and anti-personnel bombs. Their after-dark attacks were hardly successful.

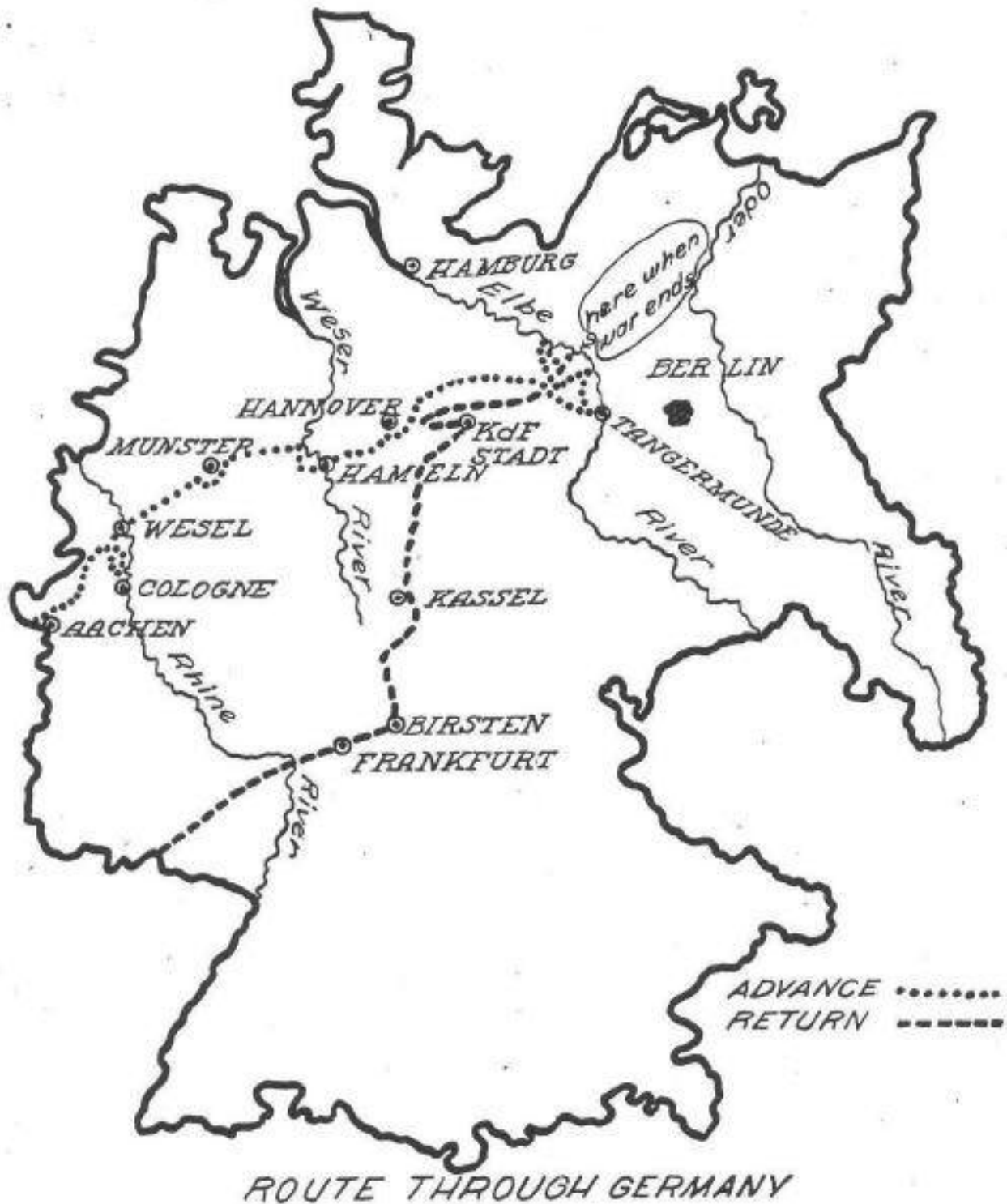
Ostensibly in search of an appropriate flying strip, Sergeant Durward Kirby and Pfc. Maurice Chaput drove “up close” in their jeep, to return with a passenger not planned for—the Battalion’s first German prisoner. What success they had in their search for a suitable airfield was never officially reported.

Tuesday, November 21, the Battalion moved from its first positions in Germany to Loverich, traveling via Ubach Setterich, Baesweiler, and Beggendorf, a distance of approximately eight miles. Headquarters, A and B Batteries established positions in and around the town, while Battery C was dispatched to the town of Floverich, two miles distant from Loverich. Service Battery made its first move across the border into Germany, going from Waubach, Holland, to billets vacated by the Battalion in Ubach, Germany.

Thanksgiving Day meant the customary generous, well-cooked turkey dinner, so characteristic of the army. Even though troops occupied forward areas, the occasion was celebrated in hearty American style. Also, on this Thanksgiving Day, the Battalion was visited by the ever-welcome Red Cross Clubmobile with its staff of “real” American girls, laughing, smiling, and attractive purveyors of hot coffee and doughnuts!

The primary tasks of the Battalion during the remaining days of November were the long-remembered destructive missions which concentrated on the church towers allegedly in use by the Germans as observation posts. Linnich, Puffendorf, Welz and Rordorf were familiar names and localities as the various firing batteries supported attacks of the 102d Infantry Division and the 8th Infantry Division. In the month of November, Lt. Canning of Battery A received his promotion to 1st Lieutenant and Lt. Colonel Whiting received the congratulations of members of his command upon his receipt of the well-earned Bronze Star Medal for “heroic achievement, initiative, leadership and cooperation” in connection with military operations against the enemy from August 21, 1944, to September 17, 1944.

During December the firepower of the Battalion was frequently called upon to support the attacking forces of the 102d Infantry Division. Here a formidable pillbox pinned the infantry down; there, a church steeple provided an efficient observation post to enable the enemy artillery fire to thwart the advance of the “doughs.” In another sector German tanks, by their fire, denied further advance to the infantry. So to positions in the vicinity of Prummern, Gereonsweiler and Ederen, the various firing batteries proceeded. There, our capable and courageous cannoneers, fearless of counter-fire, neutralized or demolished the enemy strong-points barring the advance of the infantry.



On one of these missions (the memorable date was December 4), T/5 Joseph Jones of Westbrook, Maine, while engaged on a wire detail under heavy enemy artillery fire, received fatal injuries from 88mm shell fragments. With fitting military services, T/5 Jones was buried at Margraten, Holland.

On December 11, personnel of Battery B sought the protection of foxholes when two heavy calibre shells of HE and a round of smoke dropped into the vicinity of their kitchen area and the nearby No. 1 gun. How unusual!! ('Nough said!)

On 12 December, Lieutenant Yellman, executive officer of Battery A, assumed command of that Battery, relieving Captain Grunsten who on that date returned to England for surgical treatment.

The following day, all troubles for the Medical Detachment seemingly came to an end—the generator from an unknown cause caught fire, making further use of the plant impossible. It was Captain Savage, Corporal Mize and his “medics” who acquired this German plant and had operated it since the days of Brest.

December 18 the 10,000th combat round was loaded into the gun of the 1st section, Battery A and under Lieutenant Hiddle’s supervision, the shell, suitably inscribed, whistled toward pillbox No. 18, located in the Siegfried Line. The crew was composed of Sergeant O’Connor, chief of section, Corporal Jones, gunner corporal, Corporal Bernier, ammunition corporal; Cannoneers Heald, J. P. Silvia, Goldstein, Lilke and MacNeil.

The consistently demonstrated knowledge, efficiency and enthusiasm of Staff Sergeant Wendell Anderson, Battery B, earned for him the Battalion’s first battlefield officer appointment. On December 23, Sergeant Anderson took the oath of office and was commissioned the rank of 2d lieutenant. His new assignment sent him to Battery C as motor officer. Lieutenant Harold D. Rea, reconnaissance officer, Battery B, received the well-earned silver bar of 1st lieutenant on December 20, date of rank being the 16th of that month.

Since enemy air activity over Loverich proved as bothersome as during the stay of the Battalion in Herbach, it became not uncommon for those manning the machine gun posts to seek and find long-awaited targets. Fortunately whatever damage was inflicted was one-sided, for the German planes were generally driven from the area by a barrage of light and heavy anti-aircraft fire.

By Christmas Day, the activity of enemy forces farther south was proving highly success as their counter-attack in the Ardennes developed into a major offensive. The Battle of the Bulge, or the Ardennes, necessitated removal of many troops from the area north of Loverich, with the result that 557th Field Artillery and other elements of the XIII Corps shifted and shuffled areas so as to present a formidable front on a thinly-held line. XIII Corps now took responsibility for an area starting south of Julich, continuing up the River Roer, around Linnich and back to the junction with our British allies.

Movement orders came at noon on Christmas day. Into the vehicles were hastily thrown cherished packages from home, “liberated” mattresses, bed springs, and stoves, none called for in the T/O & E. Thoughts of that turkey, about to be gluttonously “worked upon” when CSMO became the cry, were not completely dismissed as the convoy slowly crossed the cold, wind-swept plains west of the Roer. Traveling via Setterich, Baesweiler, Hongen, and Schleiden, the Battalion reached the vicinity of Aldenhoven. The frosty-coated, shell-pitted field of Aldenhoven foretold too clearly of the uncomfortable weeks ahead. Combat in winter weather seemed none too conducive to a very Merry Christmas. But the mess personnel had wasted little time enroute. By flashlight and lantern in subterranean dugouts, with a pack or a bedroll for a chair, an ammunition box or the cold frozen ground for a table, the men partook of their Christmas dinner.

Throughout the Battalion and adjoining areas extensive preparations were made in anticipation of a counter offensive by the enemy. A smashing drive was expected. Observation indicated great activity and preparation by the enemy. Such a contemplated strategy seemed logical in view of our extremely thin holding line. The doughfoots were lucky enough to be within shouting distance of each other. Complete alternate installations were reconstructed and prepared in Kerkade, Holland, in

the event that such an attack materialized. Thursday, December 28, at midnight, all were suddenly awakened for a 30-minute alert to move! Trucks were hurriedly loaded, personal equipment, military equipment—yes, of course, the pets, too, were packed for the forced move to the rear defensive positions. Yet in spite of such preparations, the attack failed to materialize and the Battalion remained in position. This threat was constantly imminent! It was expected every day, imagined every night! It never came!

New Years Day proved a field day for Battalion machine gunners and neighboring anti-aircraft units as a force of German planes, seemingly coming from nowhere, flew at strafing height over the area. Hardly greater than 100 yards from the Battalion CP one ME 109 crashed in flames. Across the surrounding countryside, huge black billowy clouds of burning oil and gasoline blighted the horizon to indicate other hostile aircraft had met a similar fate. At Alsdorf, the position of Service Battery, machine gun personnel likewise fired upon low-flying hostile planes as they attempted to strafe and harass that area. The success of the Boche flyer in this sector proved only slightly more successful. Injured, he successfully parachuted to waiting allied soldiers.

Through the month of January, the forward elements of the Battalion remained in positions at Aldenhoven with Service Battery at Aisdorf. Attached to XIII Corps Artillery, the Battalion in addition to normal harassing and interdiction fire was called upon almost daily to support attacks and feints of the 102d and 29th Infantry divisions. The nemesis for strongly fortified pillboxes and artillery observation towers was the accurate target for the guns of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion.

Twenty-eight hits out of a possible 32 was the score of Battery C upon an observation tower on January 5. Fifty-three rounds fired by Battery A on January 13 resulted in 21 direct hits, and January 17, ten direct hits out of a possible 18 were achieved in the destruction of a 100-foot brick observation tower. Two concrete pillboxes were the targets for Battery C on January 18, when they fired 57 rounds, 53 of which were “targets.” The ability of gun crews of the 557th was now well established and not to be questioned.

With an efficient and capable air liaison section and competent air observing flying in spite of flak, the elements of nature and hostile action, targets were readily defined and destroyed. Day after day, Lieutenant Brown and Lieutenant Abercrombie, with their observer, Lieutenant Sanger, Captain McKee, Captain Ricketts, or Lieutenant Hiddle, went aloft to observe or locate targets of opportunity.

January 8 Captain Grunsten, Captain Russell, and Captain Ricketts were awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service in leading their respective batteries in combat on the continent. Other awards of commendation were also presented during the month to Sergeant Bernard P. McCreesh, T/5 Walter M. Dick, Sergeant William B. O’Connor, T/4 Robert V. Hays, T/4 Francis A. McGowan, Corporal John M. Concannon, Pfc. Harold Echtman, Pfc. Anthony D. Martino of Battery A and S/Sgt. Tom A. Spangler of Battery B. These men were the recipients of the Battalion Certificate of Merit. And for his meritorious service in combat, Staff Sergeant Glen Sherwood of Battery B was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

Colonel Charles E. Keegan, Battalion Commander at the time of the unit’s activation, 15 May 1943, made his first visit to the unit on 20 January. His duties in the Allied Military Government had previously denied him this opportunity. The Colonel arrived to tell the Battalion of the glowing reports he had received about the Battalion from General Shugg, XIII Corps Artillery commander. Colonel Keegan spent a short evening reminiscing, recounting experiences, and discussing the

problems of Germany, and the military situation of the day.

During the course of the evening, he visited Fire Direction Center, picked a target, then proceeded to Battery B No. 2 gun to pull the lanyard. "It was the greatest thrill I've ever had." he said.

The following morning, Colonel Keegan dutifully visited each Battery within the Battalion. Quite characteristically, he made it a point to personally meet as many of the enlisted personnel as possible. It was with regret that pressing problems hastened his departure.

Late in January the major offensive by the Germans in the Ardennes salient had been stemmed. Retreating Germans from that area became the target of the Battalion as it poured shells into the disorganizing retrograde movement.

January 26, members of the unit were again saddened by the death of another of its members, Pfc. Victor Kalander from Connecticut and assigned to Fire Direction Center. While on duty, a malady later diagnosed as hemorrhagic diatheses suddenly overcame him and without regaining consciousness, he passed away the following day. With appropriate military services, Pfc. Kalander was buried in the United States Military Cemetery at Margraten, Holland.

During the month Lt. Cross discarded his silver bar and justly exchanged it for the bars denoting his captaincy.

February 4, the Battalion again received movement orders and traveling via Durboslar and Puffendorf, it established positions once again in Floverich and Loverich. On that date, Sergeant Major Hagmaier and 1st Sergeant Rogers of Battery B left for the first United Kingdom passes issued to members of the Battalion.

Members of the unit fighting in the Brest campaign and the Battle of Germany for nearly six months had now experienced most of the discomforts, dangers and trying conditions of war. Mud, soaking rain, piercing cold, blustery snow, and biting wind were a part of their lives. Home seemed far away. Yet, after Vic Jones of the Boston Globe and Gordon Gammick of the Des Moines Register had talked with some of them, home didn't seem quite so far away. The large percentage of the men in the Battalion from New England necessitated three visits to the Battalion area by Vic Jones. He dubbed the unit the "Yankee Battalion" and the nickname stayed. In addition to these individual newspaper correspondents, Associated Press sent Bob Eunson, its correspondent, to the Battalion to report on the various missions of the 155mm gun which already had received much favorable and interesting comment from higher headquarters. Home was soon to hear about our achievements!

Fire missions up to February 22 consisted chiefly of harassing and interdiction fire on targets across the Roer River. Crossing the Roer became a major objective for the 557th Field Artillery Battalion and units of the XIII Corps.

Controlling the flow of the small River Roer, were dams farther north, which had been seized and held by the enemy. To hinder, if not prevent the crossing of the River, the Germans effectively blew the dams to overrun its banks. A small river, normally 25-30 yards in width, had grown to widths of 300 to 2000 yards. After several weeks of waiting and preparation the engineers finally decided that the rapid current and the flooded banks could be bridged. The assault, so long ago begun, and sadly postponed during the winter counter attack was now to be renewed.

February 23 was D-Day for the crossing and in support of that crossing by infantry forward elements, a total of 692 rounds were fired by the Battalion between two forty-five a.m. and eight

a.m. During this firing, the 15,000th round was expended and the 10,000th round since entering Germany. Those whose duty permitted freedom from their quarters, will long remember the colorful display of firepower from almost every type of weapon along the banks of the Roer. The belching guns brilliantly lighted the entire countryside. The following day, February 24, D plus 1, the Battalion continued its heavy firing, expending 723 rounds upon enemy gun positions and communication centers across the Roer. During one of the many unsuccessful counter attacks by the Germans that day, the Battalion fired 120 rounds in eight minutes. On D plus 2, February 25, the Battalion forward observation party personnel, climbed into their "Weasels" and crossed the Roer to establish their first OP at Gevenich. The party in charge of reconnaissance led by officer Lieutenant Fehnel consisted of radio operator T/4 Thomas Conboy, Corporal Wesley A. Wallenius, Corporal Albert A. Bausch, Pfc. Elmer Tynan of the survey section and driver Pfc. Nicholas Lata, all of Battery C.

The Battalion meanwhile moved from its position in Floverich and Loverich on 26 February. Traveling via Puffendorl, Freidenhoven, Edern and Welz. Headquarters Battery established position in Rordorf, and the firing batteries occupied positions in the vicinity of Welz. Here the Batteries of the Battalion continued heavy destruction fire and awaited orders for movement across the Roer. Enemy air action was ever present in this area due to the heavy concentration of troops and vitally important bridge targets, but their frequent attempts to bomb the bridge and strafe the Personnel were successful against an unmerciful curtain of accurate ack-ack fire.

At eleven-thirty a.m., February 26, the Battalion closed station and proceeded to cross the Roer River at Linnich. Traveling via Linnich, Gevenich and Glimbach, the unit reached Kofferen to establish installations in that town at two p.m. The distance was but five miles and adequately attests to the slow movement necessitated when hundreds of tanks, halftracks, guns and military equipment of every imaginable type undertake a major advance. At Kofferen the Battalion became attached to the 5th Armored Division. From Kofferen, Private Max Burger of Headquarters Battery departed for the States, the first man of the Battalion privileged to leave on the rotation furlough plan.

The following day, February 27, an advance Fire Direction Team and Headquarters Battery wire section left the Kofferen position at approximately nine a.m. Followed by the firing batteries they prepared installations at Bellinghoven. Later in the day, remaining elements of the unit proceeded to Bellinghoven to reach there at approximately five p.m. The stay at Bellinghoven was brief, however. At six, the entire Battalion again closed station and traveled by way of Erkelenz to new position areas in Rath. Members of the unit, already weary and tired, were soon to learn that there could be little rest while attached to an armored division; objectives must be reached. Sleep hot food, comfortable quarters, or dry clothing were to be matters of secondary thought as the 5th Armored, and its attached units, followed close on the heels of crumbling and disorganized enemy resistance.

At ten-thirty, the following morning, February 28, vehicles were again loaded and the 557th, traveling over jammed roads, reached Broich at six p.m. via Rheindahlen. During the day the Battalion fired 133 rounds in support of the swiftly-striking advance. Kuckleheide, north of Rasseln, was the destination of the Battalion the following day. Leaving Broich at twelve-thirty a.m., and traveling via Koch, Herdt, Quhlendorf and Rasseln, the unit reached the town of Kuckleheide after dark.

The 5th Armored mercilessly pushed on, and the next day, March 2, the Battalion, traveling via Bachert, Hoser, Vierson, Am Bokel, Vennheide and Eschert, established positions at Anrath. From this position the first shell from any Corps unit to be fired across the Rhine River into the rich Ruhr Valley region, whistled on its way from Battery C number one gun. The crew of this gun was

composed of Sergeant Beck, chief of section, Corporals Powel and Johnson, T/4 Rhodes, Pfc. Deciantis, Pfc. Terravechia, Pfc. Matano, Pvt. Amesbury, Pvt. LaRoche, Pvt. Bruns, Pvt. Murphy and T/5 Youngblood.

Everyone was pleased when orders reached Lt. Batson that he had received his promotion to First Lieutenant during the Month of February.

Because of the rapid advance of the Allied forces, the Battalion hardly placed their guns in any position but what satisfactory enemy targets were out of range. Constant movement was necessary to keep within range of the rapidly disintegrating and retreating hostile forces. So again, the following day at six p.m., March 13, the Battalion formed its tactical convoy and traveled via Vorst, Schlitzheide Stiegerheide to St. Peter. At St. Peter preparations were made to set up installations, but before tanks could be correctly placed in firing position, and before firing charts and equipment could be unloaded, orders were received to close station and continue on the route of advance. Traveling via Kempen, Untermeiden to Huls, the column halted and prepared to fire. But again, the advance of the 5th Armored was amazingly rapid, and before a round could be fired, orders instructed the Battalion to continue its advance again.

On to Orbach and Tonisberg and Vluynheide, the Battalion rolled throughout the night. Would the halt at Vluynheide give the men any opportunity to sleep? Oh, just anywhere, on the floor, on a table top, or possibly in a comfortable chair, even for just an hour? And dry clothes? Perhaps another day a warm sun would dry one set of OD's and socks; one day's halt might mean three meals, hot meals—if only the Kraut knew enough to give up!

For three days the Battalion remained at Vluynheide, clothes were dried, hot meals were served, and between fire missions and normal guard details, the personnel rested. Here the Medical Detachment acquired a captured German fire truck, exceptionally well suited for an ambulance. The personnel of the attached 387th Anti-Aircraft Battalion from their outpost positions frequently brought in prisoners of war to the Battalion CP for examination and inspection prior to a journey to the cages. During these three days, the Battalion personnel had a chance to examine an ammunition train and a warehouse filled with German clothing and equipment. This led to some interesting “scrounging” and additions to personal equipment. The first phase of the rapid advance to reach the Rhine had passed and firing now primarily consisted of harassing and interdiction fires to seal off a remaining pocket at Orsay, where the Krauts sought to flee across the Rhine by ferry.

On the 7th the Battalion moved to new positions in the vicinity of Sandforth some 3000 yards from the River Rhine. While here the Battalion reverted to attachment of the 202nd F. A. Group (Lockman) pending another all-out attack across the Rhine. On the 9th, during the evening mess, hostile planes strafed the areas causing slight injuries to Sgt. Short, of Headquarters Battery. The following day he and Cpl. John Sullivan of Battery A received the Purple Heart award from Colonel Whiting.

In preparation for the Battalion's move to Krefeld-Bockum on March 11, several of the personnel were sent to that city to occupy and hold buildings for use by the Battalion. Traveling via Mors, Betten and Klieed, installations were established as scheduled at Krefeld-Bockum on Sunday, March 11, 1945.

At Krefeld, missions of the Battalion continued to be of harassing nature with a special mission assigned to Battery B on the 15th. Captain Ricketts acted as observer. Sixty-nine rounds were expended on two brick church towers in Kaiserwerth-sur-Rhein. Using air observation methods, 44

hits were achieved in the complete destruction of the two observation towers. The performance of the gun section, supervised by Staff Sergeant Halmrast, was exceedingly meritorious.

At Krefeld, personnel of the Battalion witnessed the unusual evacuation of thousands of civilians from the town of Urdingen. Cars, wheelbarrows, bicycles, perambulators, scooters, wagons, an occasional truck, motorcycles—every conceivable method of transportation and conveyance was resorted to. Beds, mattresses, foods, pets, the infirm and the infants, musical instruments, clothes, household utensils and gadgets, all found a place upon the chosen method of conveyance. For three days the procession of evacuees passed by. Their destination was unknown and of little concern to those who witnessed the spectacle.

From Krefeld, Joseph Brunke of Battery B was accorded the privilege of returning to the States on the rotation furlough plan, the second member of the unit to receive this furlough of 45 days.

Movement orders again reached the Battalion Headquarters, and at seven-thirty p.m., March 19th, the Battalion commenced its night march to Straberg. Traveling via Krefeld, Osterath, Kaarst, Buttgen, Grefrath, Loveling, Holzheim and Gohr to Uckerath and Straberg, The firing batteries were located in the vicinity of Uckerath, Service Battery in Jagerhoff, and Headquarters in Straberg.

Again the Battalion entered upon a period of waiting—waiting this time for the jump across the Rhine. The selection of the word waiting unquestionably implies inactivity, yet during this period in Straberg and Ukerath the Battalion fired normal missions of a harassing and interdiction nature, with the “Quaker Oats” factory in Dusseldorf the main target. On March 28 the gunners fired the 10,677th combat round in the ETO.

The long awaited orders to move across the Rhine and farther into the heart of Germany were received on March 30 and traveling via Uckerath, Gohr, Wehl, Speck, Holzheim, Graefrath, Kaarst, Osterath, the Battalion established positions at Hoterheide. This was the first non-firing position the Battalion had established since the regrouping period at Tonges, Belgium, in October. Hoterheide was merely the first stop on the journey to the Rhine, and the following day, March 31, again tanks and trucks rolled toward their objective, traveling via Osterath, Willich, St. Tennis, Kempen, Aldenkirk, Issum, Alpen and the demolished and still burning city of Wesel. Here at approximately six p.m. the Battalion crossed the Rhine and continued on the route of advance via Brunen, Raesfeld, Erle, Rhade, Lembeck, Wessendorf. Reken, Lette, Rorup to positions north of Buldern. Though the Battalion as a unit crossed the Rhine at approximately six p.m. on March 31, the distinction of first crossing of the Rhine must go to Major Schueller, Sergeant Hagmaier, Corporal George Bausch and battery reconnaissance parties who crossed the pontoon bridge at noon as members of an advance party.

Members of the unit had professional knowledge of the fast-moving, spearheading tactics of armored divisions by this time. Now as members of a field artillery unit attached to an armored division, they were to experience the rapid, relentless, spearheading movements of armor in the attack. This Battalion was the heavy, long-range artillery of the 5th Armored Division which was spearheading the 13th Corps attack into the heart of Germany.

From their positions north of Buldern, established on March 31, the Battalion, the following day, displaced forward; traveling via Applehulsen and Sendenhorst. East of Sendenhorst, approximately 400 yards from the Dortmund-Ems Canal, the column halted and there bivouacked the remainder of the night along the road. Darkness, rains and snows were never a barrier to the advance of the 5th Armored and its attached units. Yet the enemy had successfully blown the bridge across the canal

just prior to the arrival of the column. The halt being the only alternative, the resulting few hours rest were most welcome. Tired, aching bodies, unshaven faces, were again aroused from sleep early the following morning, April 2. Everyone climbed back into their tanks and trucks. A bridge was now in place. The advance must continue. Through Venne and Amelsburen the battalion traveled to positions in the vicinity of Rinkerode. Here it became necessary for the Battalion to accomplish a rapid occupation of position in order to fire upon an enemy stronghold holding up the armored advance. The Division Artillery Commander gave Colonel Whiting the situation, and thirty minutes to place his guns in position. This was the test the Battalion had long trained and waited for, and speculation was great around Division Headquarters. In nineteen minutes the first round was on its way and landed among the German infantry and self-propelled guns that were causing the delay. A village where the Germans chose to assemble was also leveled at this time by the 557th.

The following day, April 3, the Battalion again was on its way. Traveling via Albersloh, Sendenhorst, Everswinkel, Warendorf, Sassenberg, Greffen, Harstewinkel, Kolkebeck, Halle and Werther, it reached new positions northeast of Herford. Here the unit remained in position for one day, firing seven normal harassing and interdiction missions in the vicinity of Minden where considerable resistance was found at the Weser River. From these positions, Charley Battery number two gun fired the 20,000th combat round. Those in the gun section were Staff Sergeant Wyburn L. Frank, T/4 Antone Gonsalves, Corporal George C. Ruden, Pfc.s Walter H. Fowler, Jr., John Terravechia, Valentine S. Scibek, Joseph J. Sullivan, Edwin I. Wegiel, Bernard Weiner and Alexander Verdelotti. Four miles from this position north of Herford, the Battalion moved on April 4 to Lobe, where positions were maintained until April 8. On that day the objective was Vardegotzen. Traveling via Asendorg, Almena, Bosingfeld, Grupenhagen, Hamelen (Pied Piper's Town), a bivouac position was selected in the vicinity of Hachmuhlen. In the dark and dampness of early morning the following day, weary soldiers freed mired tanks and trucks and continued the advance to Vardegotzen via Springe and Gestorf.

The new position in Vardegotzen was established about nine a.m. and from here cannoneers fired 67 rounds on enemy targets. Low-flying hostile planes soon located a gun battery position. Determined, fearless, willing to make any personal sacrifice, Nazi flyers strafed and bombed. But such attempts to knock out the effective fire of the 155's proved fatal. One delayed action bomb struck between two guns of Able Battery, bounced over another, and following a series bounces, finally exploded in a nearby barn. Service Battery personnel occupied adjacent buildings and several had sought refuge there. As a result Sergeant James Allen, T/5 Leslie Hall, Pfc. Herbert S. Lawton and Pvt. Ernest F. Duplaise received slight wounds.

The positions at Vardegotzen were occupied but a few hours and the Battalion moved to a new location on the east edge of the city of Pattensen, about eight miles directly south of the industrial city of Hannover. Pattensen had been by-passed by the armor, and the advance party experienced exciting moments on finding themselves to be the first American troops to enter the city. While in this position, the Battalion was credited with the destruction of two German "88's" which had caused considerable trouble for a sister battalion caught on the road.

The following day, April 10, the unit again received "march order" and traveling via Rethen, Gleidingen, Algermissen, Stedum, Peine, Meerdorf and Wanse, established new positions in Diddereese. During the route of advance, machine gunners directed their attention to a lone ME109 which suddenly materialized to strafe the column. Again the advance part was the center of interest but the Colonel's left rear tire was the only casualty and Lady Luck was still riding with the 557th. Possibilities of that plane ever strafing again were quickly determined.

From Didderse on the 11th of April the Battalion proceeded to Karritz, traveling via Rethen, Melue, Failerstatten, Jambke, Kroya, Germenay, Klotze, Bruchau, Kakerbeck, Calbe and Neuendorf. A short field and trees proved the nemesis for Lieutenant Abercrombie in an attempt to move with the Battalion. Though his plane was damaged beyond repair, fortunately Lieutenant Abercrombie and his observer, Lieutenant Rea, escaped unharmed. Corporal Moski and Private Bain were left to guard the damaged plane. During their stay of several days in and about the area, Corporal Moski in search of food found admittedly greater success in the capture of 37 German soldiers. Successful as his mission proved from a purely military point, it is questionable if he failed completely in the search for food.

The next day, Thursday, April 12, the unit reached Elversdorf, traveling through Poritz, Bismarck, Kladen, Badingen, Vinzelberge, Luderitz, Huselitz, and Bellingen. For the third continuous day, machine gunners fired upon determined enemy aircraft.

At least for one day the Battalion remained in a selected position, but the day to follow, April 13, found the column again on its way to positions in the vicinity of Rengerslage traveling via Borstel, Schwecten, Erxleben, Osterburg, Stendal and Meseberg. Here at Rengerslage, Battalion Headquarters was established in a mansion owned by Herr Goebbels.

Tragedy befell the Battalion on April 16 in its move from Rengerslage to Klotze by the way of Meseberg, Sturbeck, Brunau, Cheinitz and Bruchau, Suddenly over the column appeared four planes! Into a long swift dive they plunged, their firepower directed at vehicles within the column! Suddenly flame and black smoke burst from a Baker Battery ammunition carrier! In a few minutes exploding ammunition had completely demolished the carrier. With complete disregard for his own personal safety, driver Arthur Mondun sought safety for his crew. All had escaped save two, Pfc. Mackey and Pfc. Marshall. With tenacity of purpose and courage, Mondun carried them from the blazing inferno away from further harm. The following day word was sorrowfully received that Mackey and Marshall had passed away.

The Battalion remained overnight in its positions at Klotze, and the following day, April 17, moved to Hanun, traveling through the villages of Jeeben, Beetzendorf, Rohrberg, Stockheim and Jubar. From Hanun, battery guns fired 52 rounds, and the following day, April 18, again displaced positions in Hanun, traveling to Puggen, via Jubar, Stockheim and Rohrberg. On April 16 Lieutenant Yeliman received his well-deserved promotion to Captain.

Friday, April 20, the Battalion left its positions at Puggen and passing through Leetz and Wallstaw reached a new position area at Ellenburg. From Ellenburg, the following day, April 21, the Battalion moved to Hennigen, yet for only a few hours. Orders demanded a move to Gistenbeek with the objective of clearing the enemy from the South and West side of the Elbe River.

Sunday, April 22, proved to be another busy day. Closing station at Gistenbeek and traveling via Klenze, Priesseck. Waddenwitz, the 557th established temporary positions at Fliessau. During the afternoon, the Battalion cannoneers fired many rounds upon enemy strong points across the Elbe. Missions accomplished from that area, the Battalion was again on the road to positions southeast of Metzingen. Here the Battalion remained for three days continuing fire upon the enemy across the Elbe.

Traveling via Prissier, Grabow, Luchow, Woltersdorf and Trebel, the travel-weary men established positions in Laasche. Nine registration rounds were fired, rounds which later proved to be the last combat rounds for the 557th in the ETO.

For its notable assistance given Combat Command A of the 5th Armored Division, the following commendation from Brig. General Regnier was received by the Battalion:

“I wish to express to you and to the officers and men of your command my sincere appreciation for the gallant support given to Combat Command “A” during its operations between 11-4 April and 21-25 April, 1945. Your aggressiveness and the speed with which you executed all missions materially assisted our rapid advance to the Elbe River on these two occasions.

Again when the 34th Tank Battalion task force met stiff resistance in the vicinity of Arneburg, following your movement to the north on another mission, your assistance, we feel, saved much time and loss of life. It would be appreciated if you would express to the Officers and men of your battalion our gratitude and best wishes.”

The Russians were fast approaching the Elbe. The long awaited uniting of forces was felt near at hand. There were few targets which might be safely engaged. The German Army now offered little effective resistance. It hardly seemed possible that the remnants of a German force could or would continue the fight.

The soldiers of the 557th were relegated thus to a period of rest and expectation—waiting for the meeting of American and Russian forces and ultimate surrender. As if to break the monotony of waiting and inactivity, Battalion personnel were awakened to the cry of “fire,” in the early morning. Clothes quickly donned, the men rushed forth from their quarters! The building in which the radio section of Headquarters Battery lived was a mass of flames! All were safe, nothing to do or say but possibly, “Alles Kaput!”

On May 2nd, Lieutenant Abercrombie and Lieutenant Rae crossed the Elbe River, and by the following day, many of the men also had crossed the river or gone to its banks to witness the frantic exodus of Germans from their side of the river to ours. The Boche was determined to escape capture by the Russian forces. Something in the Russian makeup terrified the beaten Germans.

Personal booty of war was the reward for a hike to the Elbe—watches, cameras, pistols, knives, and other such souvenirs quickly became the property of the “medics” and others from the Battalion. Indeed pandemonium reigned as the German military, and civilian followers, sought safety in our lines from the rapidly advancing Red Army!

At six a.m. on May 5, cessation of hostilities in Northwestern Germany was announced by the Allied Supreme Commander. Battalion guns were withdrawn from the firing line—was it a fantastic hope that combat days for the 557th in the European Theater of Operation were a thing of the past? Hardly, for on all fronts Allied Forces overran the last remnants of a once powerful blitzkriegering German Army. Complete surrender seemed but a few days away.

May 6, the Battalion left Laasche and traveling via Gartow, Trebel, Woltersdorf, Luchow, Salzwedel, Brome, Ehra and Gifhorn, set up non-firing positions in Uetze, a distance of approximately nineteen miles east from the devastated city of Hannover. With the war virtually over, what now would be the role of the Battalion? Shortly after arrival into this town, controlled by the 35th Infantry Division, it was learned that the Battalion would function in the temporary role of Military Government. In that connection, control and care of over 5,000 prisoners of war became the responsibility of the Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Whiting assumed the duties of Military Government Officer. The welfare and jurisdiction of the PW’s became the direct responsibility of Captain Grunsten who had recently returned to his unit after approximately four months absence. Guarding these war-weary thousands became the duty of the enlisted personnel.

At one-forty-one a.m., May 7, 1945, unconditional surrender was accepted by the Big Three Allied Powers, United States, Great Britain and Russia. As a result of this surrender, all action and operations were to cease as of twelve midnight; May 9, 1945. Thus millions the world over gave thanks that another brutal force had been destroyed. Now, questioning thoughts turned to possible operations in the future. What role would be selected for the 557th? Occupation? Disbandment? Direct to the Pacific or to the Pacific via the United States? Time only could tell! For some, the question was already answered. The long-awaited numerical ratings controlling the destiny of thousands was announced by the Army. Men were to receive one point for every month of service, an additional point for each month overseas, twelve points for each dependent child not to exceed three, and five points for each battle star and decoration. For discharge, a total of eighty-five points were required. In addition, those of forty-two years of age were likewise eligible for separation. Instead of the usual greeting when meeting another, it was, "How many points do you have?" On May 12, the Battalion relinquished its duties at Uetze and, traveling via Hardsesse, Gifhorn, Warmenau and Wolfsburg, established positions in KdF Stadt, Hesslingen and Wolfsburg. As before in Uetze, Colonel Whiting performed his duties as Military Governor. Major Clark again served as Military Government Officer, ably assisted by Lieutenant Sanger, Major Schueller and Captain McKee. Personnel were housed in comfortable hotels, guesthouses and a castle, which property had been constructed and was now maintained by the KdF Volkswagen works located nearby.

Celebration of the Second Anniversary of the activation of the Battalion was appropriately celebrated May 15. Competitive inspections of personnel, materiel, living quarters, and areas maintained by the Battalion were conducted. As a result of the competition, Pfc. James Kelliher of Baker Battery won first prize as the Most Military, and Pfc. Donald K. Elliott of Headquarters Battery was awarded second honors. First prize in motor maintenance was awarded to Staff Sergeant Edward Henry of Able Battery and second place award was presented to Staff Sergeant Benson of Baker Battery and Staff Sergeant Spomer of Charlie Battery. The final results of inspections and athletic field events disclosed that Battery C had won the distinction of Activation Day Honor Battery with 1065 points. Service Battery scored 1007 points for second place honors, and Headquarters Battery was third place winner with 997 points. On this occasion Major Wendell P. Knowles was introduced to the Battalion and it was announced that he would succeed Major Clark as Executive Officer. Effective this date, Major Clark became Assistant G-3 with the 13th Corps Artillery. Lieutenant Sanger succeeded Major Clark as Military Government Officer.

From 15 May to 1 June, the Battalion remained, efficiently performing, as usual, normal fatigue and guard duty and quite impatiently awaiting the further duties and disposition of the unit.

Discussions among the personnel concerning points for discharge continued to be the topic of the day. Returning from a furlough in England, First Sergeant Longley, adding a few personal belongings to his unpacked bag, departed for the United States eligible or discharge under the point system. Corporal Levy likewise headed for the States having reached "retirement" age. Corporal Miller was next to be fortunate to commence the long trip home.

On 2 June the 557th departed from their comfortable quarters and traveling via Morse, Lehre, Volkmarode, Braunschweig, Seesen, Notherm, Gottingen, Grebenhain, Volzberg, arrived at Fischborn and Berstein which is approximately twenty-five miles northeast of Frankfurt on Main. Upon arrival here 2 June, the unit was detached from the XII Corps, Ninth United States Army and attached to the XIX Corps, United States Seventh Army. Here the personnel impatiently awaited further orders which might deploy the Battalion direct to the Pacific, or transfer it to ultimate action in that theatre via the United States. On the other hand, they might be held in Germany for occupational purposes. Few could hope for complete disbandment, for the combat success of the 557

was too well known in military circles to permit complete curtailment of its military activities.

During the interim, an unused public swimming pool in the vicinity of Baker Battery was cleaned and filled with clean water. Volleyball courts were laid out. A baseball diamond built. An excellent recreational center was the result of the guidance of Captain Gruensten and the men who worked with him. Those who sought less-organized recreation, frequently with rifles and shotguns met with real success in their quest for deer. The personnel were not without music either! From Hesslingen the Battalion had conveyed a group of ten displaced persons—those who had so successfully performed many hours of KP and lighter happier duties as musicians for officers' parties. So at Berstien they continued their faithful performance of duties to the benefit of the GI's. During the day acting in the capacity as kitchen helpers, in the evening, ably performing with their instruments for the pleasure of all.

On 6 June, the tanks and guns which had been transported by rail from Hesslingen reached Bad Soden and were driven over the highway, some 60 miles to the Battalion area.

At last on June 9 the all important question in the minds of all was answered—the unit had been placed in Category II indicating that the 557th would proceed to the United States for training in Pacific warfare! Well it was hardly a surprise! The important thing, regardless of future combat possibilities, was that all would see home and families before continuing the distasteful duties of combat. With the notice of classification also came orders placing the unit on a 72-hour alert for the assembly area! Equipment was checked and packed, vehicles prepared for the road march to an area in the vicinity of Suippes, France. Personnel records were examined and inspected by an inspection team from the 70th Infantry Division—soon all was in readiness for the movement towards home.

June 18 was again moving day and traveling via Gilnhausen, Hanau, Frankfurt, Mainz, Kaiserlauten, Homberg, Saarbrucken the unit reached Metz. At the Fortress City, the Battalion was quartered in the buildings of a former French Fort with thousands of other GI's who were likewise enroute to their respective assembly areas. At seven o'clock the following morning, the 557th again assembled on the highway and proceeded via Mors, Verdun Clarmont and arrived at Camp Brooklyn, the designated assembly area some twenty-five miles from Rheims. Camp Brooklyn was situated on the site of many hard-won battles of World War I. Throughout the entire area many such camps, each named for a large American city had been established for the deployment of troops to the Pacific or United States. Here troops were quartered in pyramidal tents.

At Camp Brooklyn further preparations were completed for movement to the staging area on July 7, 1945. Personnel records were again thoroughly checked in the presence of each individual. TAT equipment was packed for shipment to the United States. The shipping number 10106-G was assigned to the unit and on June 26, the advance detachment consisting of Major Schueller, Lieutenant Sanger, Chief Warrant Officer Neeld, Technical Sergeant Stout, Technical Sergeant Fonagy, T/5 T. Johnson, T/5 Brancalone and T/5 J. White proceeded to Camp Home Run at the Port of Le Havre, France. The advance party had left; surely the unit would follow soon! By coincidence, the advance party left the Continent exactly one year after the date on which the Battalion departed the States for Europe. At last the day for departure arrived. July 7! At Couperly, France, TAT equipment and personal baggage was loaded upon rickety German cars. At: four thirty-five p.m. with personnel in their allotted places the uncertain, hesitating train got underway. The following morning, July 8, the decrepit train successfully reached Valley en Caus. Baggage was loaded upon waiting vehicles and unencumbered personnel hiked approximately four miles to Camp Lucky Strike. (In the Rheims area the many assembly camps bore the names of cities within the United States. The staging camps bore the names of popular brands of cigarettes, such as Lucky

Strike, Twenty Grand, Home Run, etc.)

At Lucky Strike, the final preparations for overseas shipment were earnestly undertaken. Clothing was inspected, custom declarations were made and embarking rosters completed.

Here, the men gazed upon the destruction of war for the last time. Impatiently, they looked upon the many ships that berthed at damaged piers and anchored in the harbor. Anxious were all to catch a glimpse of the ship which would take them to the shores of America. Interested groups gathered about Lieutenant Brown, who had been in charge of the advance baggage detachment to the Port. It was he, who pointed out the S.S. Mariposa, as she lay at anchor in the harbor. That was the ship! It would take the Battalion to Boston, the home of so many men within the unit. With unusual dispatch, LCT 2442 hit a nearby beach, and all eagerly climbed the ramp. In a few minutes (sufficient time, however, to permit transfer of affectionate pets from protective arms to duffle bags), the LCT bumped the side of the S.S. Mariposa. With personnel and their faithful dogs (the latter surreptitiously stowed) safely on board, the former luxury liner weighed anchor at twelve fifteen p.m. enroute to Cherbourg.

At Cherbourg the following days, July 13, 1098 Casualties and 993 other military persons were added to the passenger list to make a total of 2091 for the crossing.

Time did not weigh heavily on the minds of the 557th Field Artillery Battalion personnel, for during each day or night every member of the organization had some duty to perform. Men lent assistance in the gallery, in the storeroom and supply stations, while others barbered or were kept busy with clerical assignments. Many more spent time as guards or M.P.'s.

The passage was uneventful, and for the most part, smooth seas enhanced the pleasure of travel. Two days prior to docking, a heavy fog set in to materially slow the passage. But as the big ship reached the outer harbor, the fog parted as a curtain before a great stage. There was the United States; Boston bathed in warm New England sunshine! Slowly through the harbor, the big ship proceeded, greeted by the whistles and horns of the official welcoming boat. At eight forty-five a.m., the ship was made secure at her berth, Commonwealth Pier. By noon, all were enroute by train to Camp Myles Standish near Taunton Massachusetts. Here, further expressions of greetings were extended. Khaki clothing was issued, and on the following day, all would be transported to various reception stations from Maine to California.

From reception stations throughout the country, that long awaited 30-day furlough was granted—30 days of rest, relaxation and recreation. Camp Cooke, California, the next station, was quickly dismissed from recurring thoughts of future combat operations. Nothing could mar the joy of home, families, friends, and familiar surroundings! Then came that startling, unexpected, joyful, hopeful news!!

Japan had surrendered!

Probably no news could bring greater mental comfort, peace of mind and hilarious joy to a veteran of four major campaigns in Europe! Happiness to his family? Undeniably, though lonesome, trying, discouraging days of dangerous, day-to-day living had been forever stamped upon his mind. He indeed knew the meaning of peace!!

Thirty days passed rapidly. With a thousand questions crowding his mind, he returned to duty at Camp Cooke, California. How long must he stay in the Army? Would they drop the retirement age? Would the points for discharge be lowered? Would the unit be used as occupational forces in Japan?

Would the unit be disbanded?

You the reader have the answer to those questions!!