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*A History*  
*of the*

**531ST ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY  
AUTOMATIC WEAPONS BATTALION**





The Battalion Insignia or Coat of Arms means "We Speak With Fire" and had its origin in a contest held during the early training days at Fort Bliss, Texas. Its final approval is pending as this book is published since it will remain on file with the Quartermaster General until hostilities cease.



*A History  
of the*

**531ST ANTIAIRCRAFT ARTILLERY  
AUTOMATIC WEAPONS BATTALION**



**PUBLISHED FOR THE OFFICERS AND  
MEN OF THE 531ST ANTIAIRCRAFT  
ARTILLERY AUTOMATIC WEAPONS  
BATTALION**



**1 9 4 5**

# Dedication



This is a simple book. It wasn't written by literary genius. It was written by the hearts and hands and minds and courage of one group of Americans who helped fight a World War for those ideals which they deemed sacred.

Blood has been spilled on the pages of this book. It is the lifeblood of those young men—from city and farm—who came to this battalion to do a job. And, in the doing of that job they made the supreme sacrifice—for home and for country.

There is nothing else to say. These are the men. These are our comrades in battle. The humble thanks of a grateful nation are theirs. God rest them.

1st Lt. Thaddeus E. Thomas, 2nd Lt. Walter J. Czarnecki, 2nd Lt. Joseph M. Flannigan, Sgt. Philip B. Gilienberg, Sgt. James L. Shikles, Cpl. Lester S. Riedel, T/Sgt. Ervin A. Westendorf, Cpl. Arnold H. Meyer, Pfc. Albert Heller, Pfc. Alfred C. Houk, Pfc. Adolph N. Pederson, Pfc. Norman Redthunder, Pfc. Paul F. Frauenfelder, Pvt. Dan Carlson, Pvt. Albert J. Jaeger, Pvt. Walter D. Ireland, Pvt. Elmer O. Jordan, Pvt. John B. Wright.

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# Foreword



The contents of this book represents the experiences which the 531st Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion has encountered since its activation. It begins at Fort Bliss, Texas, where the battalion was activated, and gives space to the extensive training which the organization saw at Bliss, in the American desert, and at Richmond Army Air Base and Fort Devens, in preparation for eventual combat. It goes along with the AA gunners to England and then to Omaha Beach in Normandy where we began, in combat, to practice those lessons we had previously been taught. It carries through the Siegfried defenses into Germany and on to Victory.

Our data for this story has come from the men who were on the spot, and the actions are described as they were seen through their eyes.

Those who have given their time to the publication of this book have realized quite fully the important part this battalion has played in the historic events of World War II and have felt that the story it tells would be a cherished reminder of days gone by for the men of this unit. The pages which follow are presented with the sincere hope that they will recall for you the experiences you have had, both in and out of combat, and serve as a medium of contact between you and others who have traveled the same road.



LT. COLONEL RECTOR T. MACE

# From the C. O.



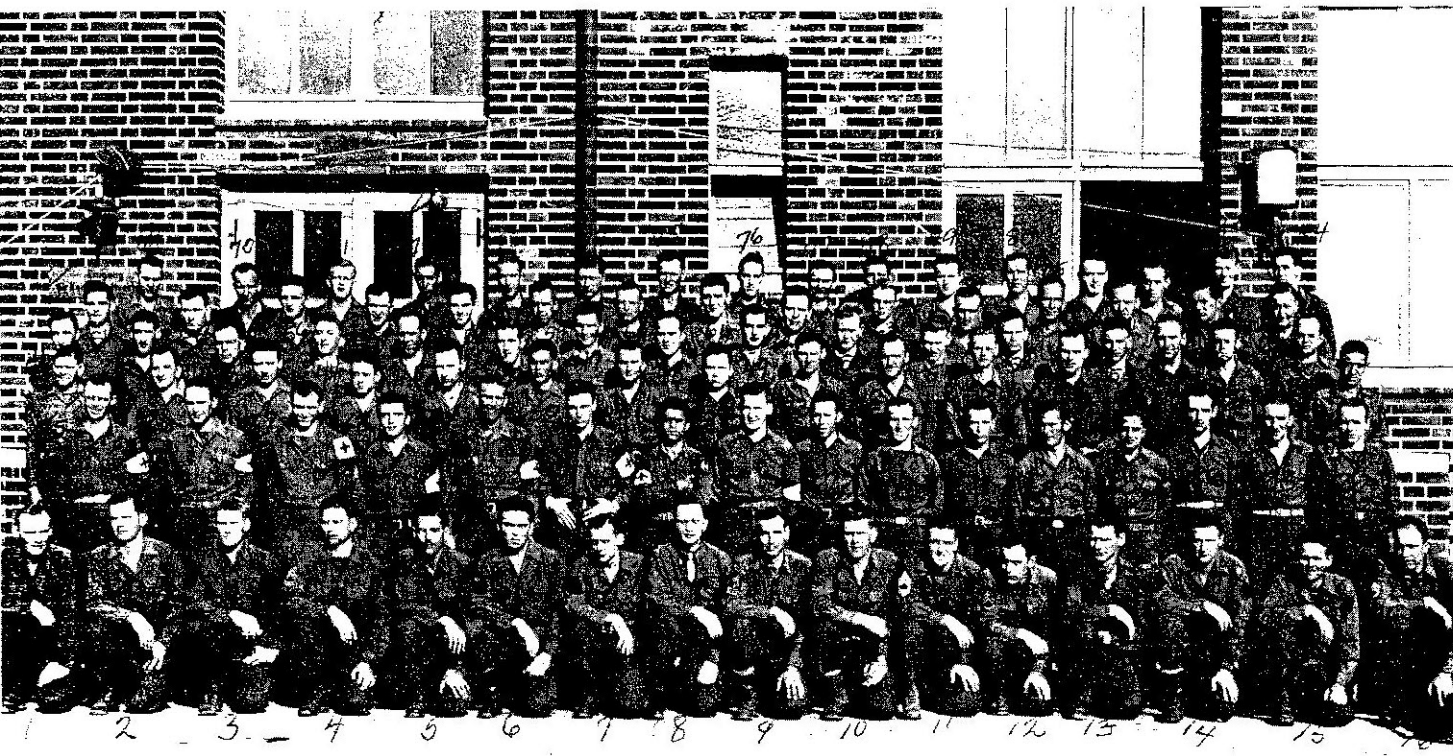
Beneath the exultation and pride of a task well done lie the sombre realizations of the heavy price we have been forced to pay to complete that task. From the day of activation through the extended, exacting period of training with its attendant difficulties and hardships to that memorable day on Omaha Beach on the coast of France—each Officer and man of this Battalion fully realized how tortuous, how dangerous, and how full of the unknown was the job ahead of him. Despite the rains and mud of Normandy—the lengthening days of Belgium and Holland—the long, cold, dangerous nights of the Ardennes—the fast, perilous advance into Germany—each man fought these campaigns with his face set to the front, with no complaint, and with less regard for his own personal comfort and safety than for those units he was directed to protect from hostile aircraft. To those who have fallen and to those who have been disabled, we proudly and reverently dedicate this history. They knew as we knew that the task had to be done and the price had to be paid.

*Rector T. Mace.*

RECTOR T. MACE  
*Lieutenant Colonel, 531st A.A.A. Auto W'pus. Bn. (M)*  
*Commanding*



THE STAFF



HEADQUARTERS BATTERY



HEADQUARTERS SECTION

# BATTERY A



FIRST PLATOON

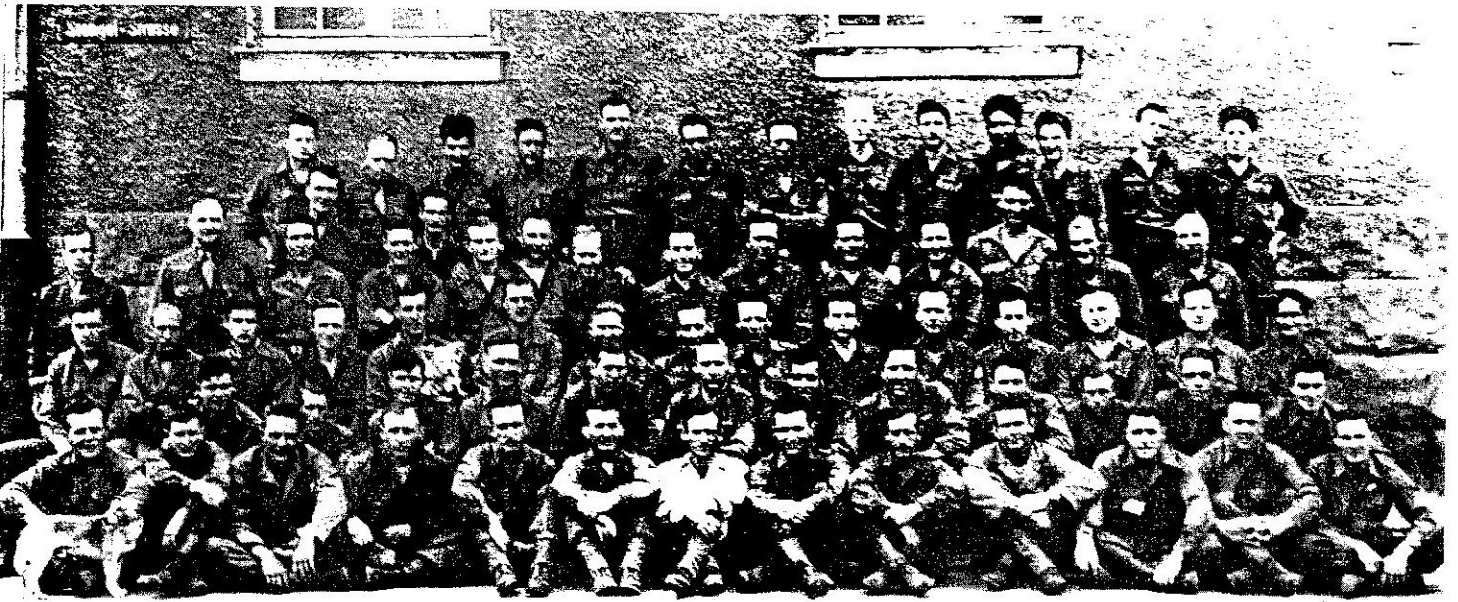


SECOND PLATOON

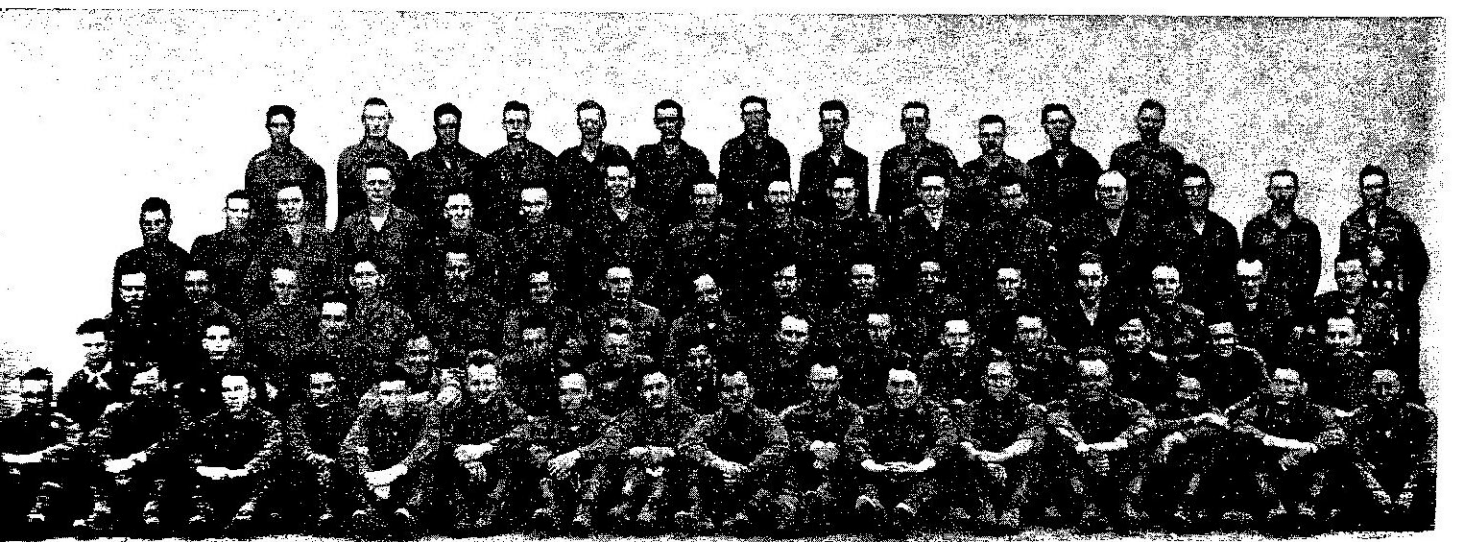
# BATTERY B



HEADQUARTERS SECTION



FIRST PLATOON



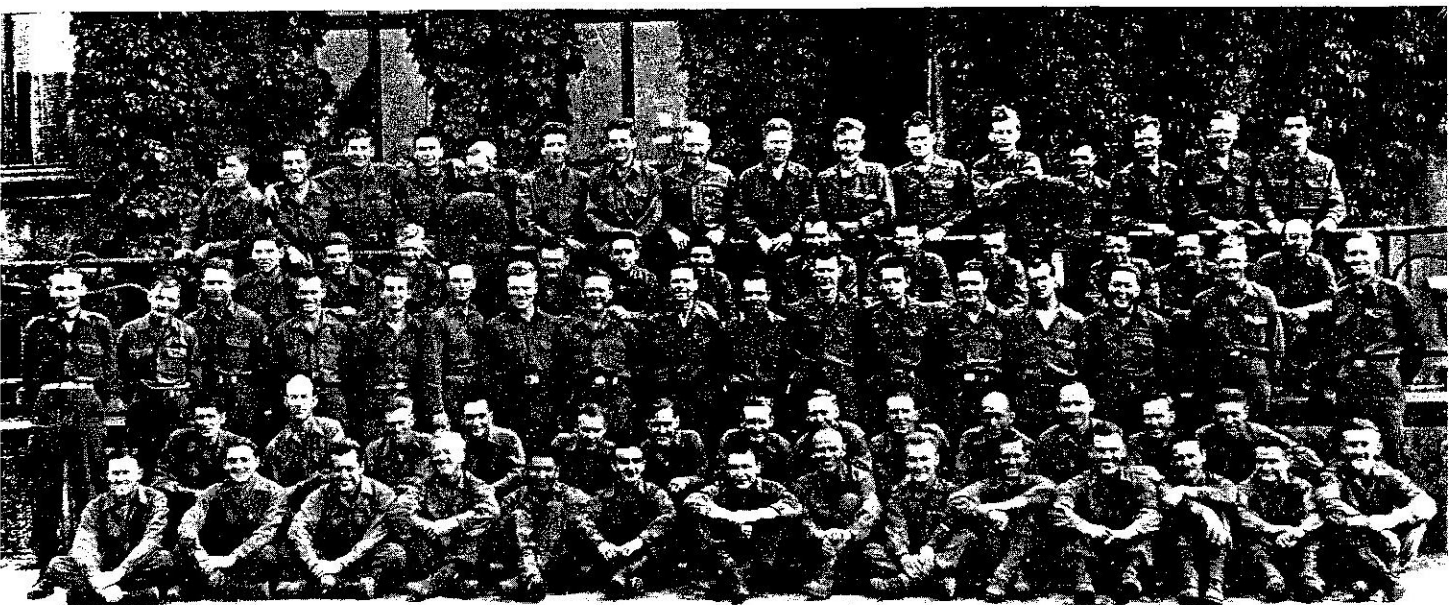
SECOND PLATOON



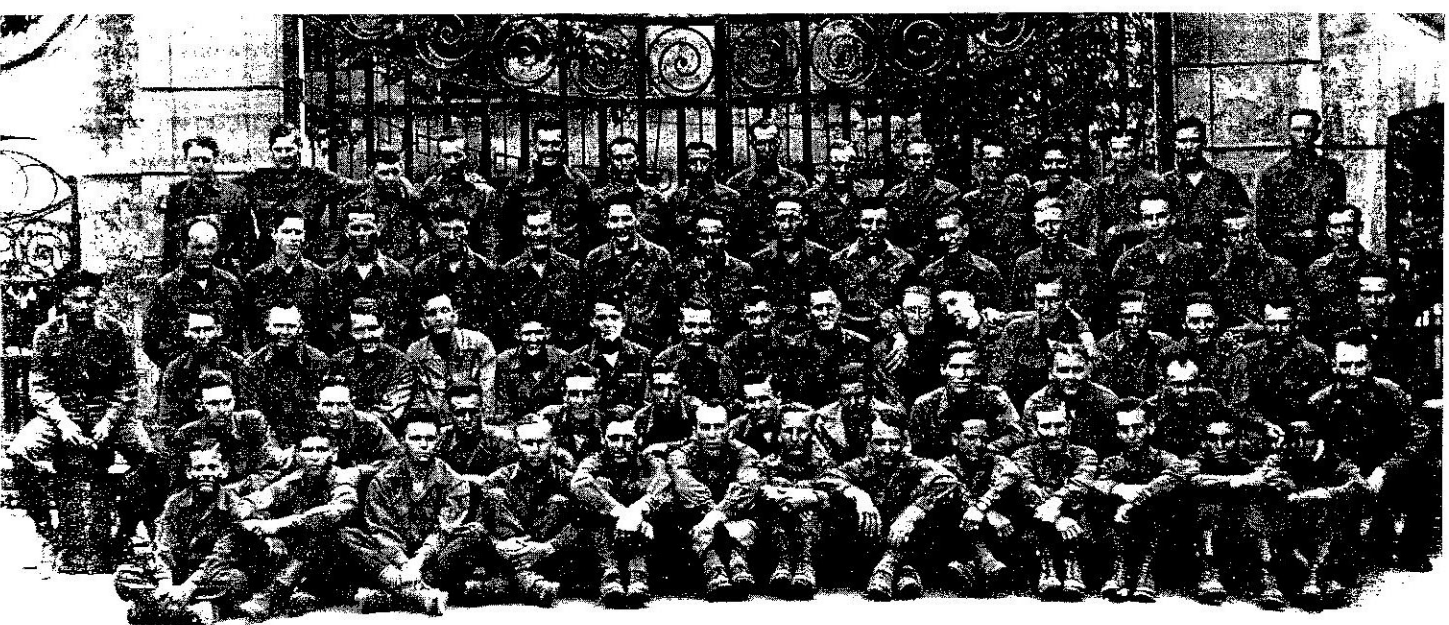
# BATTERY C



HEADQUARTERS SECTION

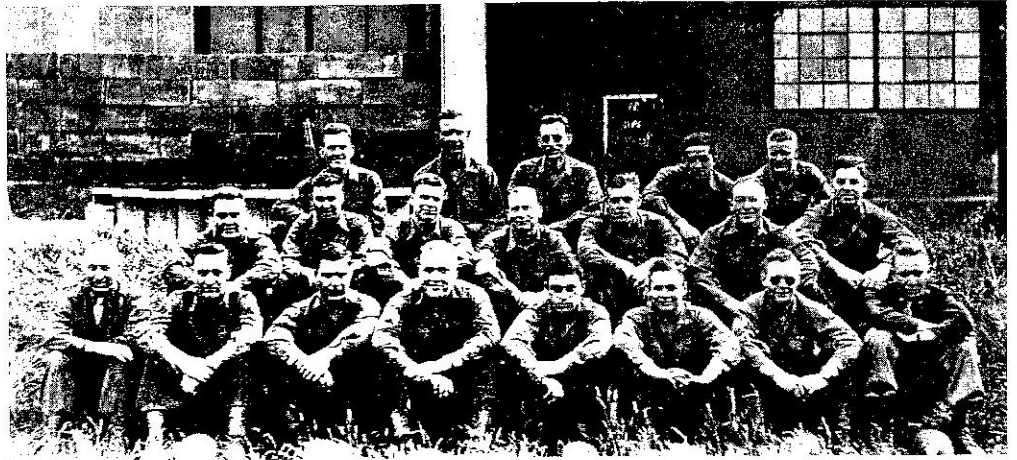


FIRST PLATOON

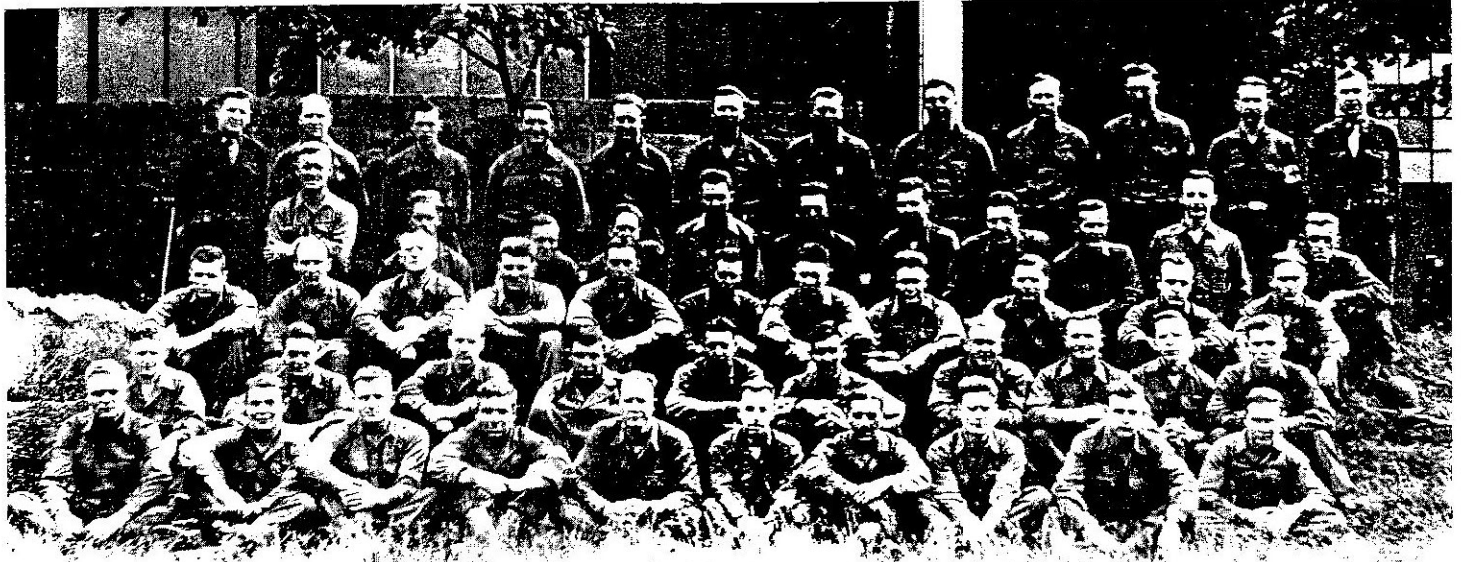


SECOND PLATOON

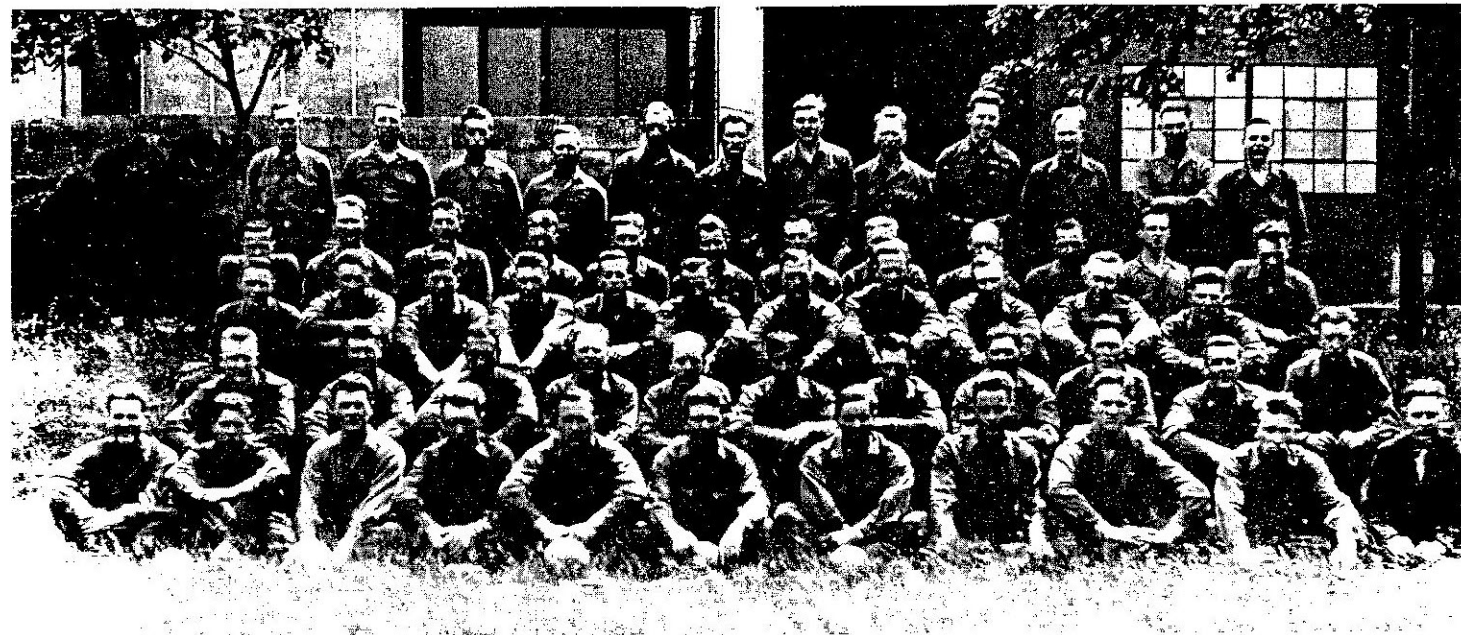
# BATTERY D



HEADQUARTERS SECTION



FIRST PLATOON



SECOND PLATOON

# **T R A I N I N G**

# Activation and

On 13th July 1942 a cadre for 531st CA Bn. (Sep.), consisting of 94 enlisted men and five officers from the 69th CA (AA), departed from San Diego, California. This cadre was met at the train by the Commanding Officer,

at 0001, 15th July 1942, Lt. Col. Mace called an officers' meeting at which time he appointed his Battalion Staff, Battery Commanders, and Battery Officers. The remainder of the day was spent in policing the area, and orientation



Lieutenant Colonel Rector T. Mace, and other officer members of the battalion. The men were transported to their assigned area in the AAATC and proceeded to get settled.

As the battalion had been officially activated

of the men.

Reveille was held at 6:30 a.m., 16th July 1942. "Chow" was served, and training was started at Fort Bliss, Texas.

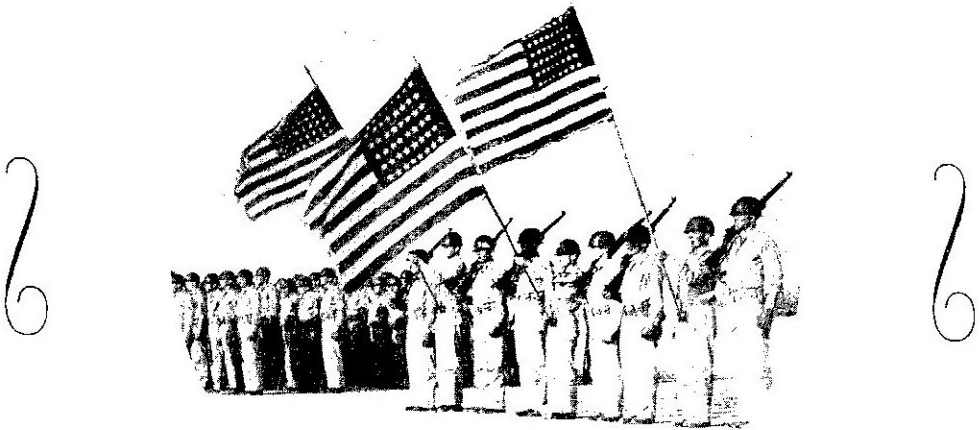
From activation until 30th August 1942 the

# Training at Fort Bliss

battalion consisted of 24 officers and approximately 100 enlisted cadremen. They came from army schools and other organizations, and were to form the nucleus of the new battalion. During these days, training consisted of ob-

had worn civilian clothes, and now wore new O. D. uniforms.

For all of us the next two or three weeks was among the most difficult of our military career, taking orders from officers and non-commis-



stacle courses, lectures, and teaching the cadremen methods of instruction.

Then on 30th and 31st of August 1942 the trains backed into the sidings at Fort Bliss and began to unload men whom a few days earlier

sioned officers we had never seen before, doing the obstacle course in the blazing Texas sun, and always that "Hup-two-three-four" all day, and ringing in our ears all night.

It was the first taste of army life for many

of us and utterly different from anything we had ever known. Everyone felt that he was alone in the army. Everything seemed wrong. The uniform did not fit properly, the food was not prepared as it was prepared at home, and it was always stand in line for mess, blankets, passes, or laundry. But after a few weeks, it soon became easy to keep in step with the man in front.

During the week of 28th of September to 4th of October, we went to the rifle range and fired our Garands for the first time. Some of us did well. Others often missed the bulls-eye.

Then the week of 12th to 17th October we marched 25 of the 35 miles to an anti-aircraft

firing range. The first night it rained, and that night we learned how to put up a "pup tent" so that it would keep us dry and would not blow down. This was our first target practice with the 40-mm. gun, and seeing hits scored on the target was quite a thrilling experience.

At 0400 on the morning of 16th October, we started that well remembered 25 mile march back to Fort Bliss. The first few miles were easy and we fairly ran through them until about 1000 hours. Then the miles began to get long and our packs began to get heavy. But that afternoon we reached base camp with the pennants flying, the band playing, and our feet very sore. For the next few days we busied



ourselves with cleaning up our equipment and correcting errors made at the firing range. Now we were becoming soldiers.

Nor was it all work. On Sunday there was always time to see a bull-fight in Jaurez, or enjoy a good dinner in El Paso.

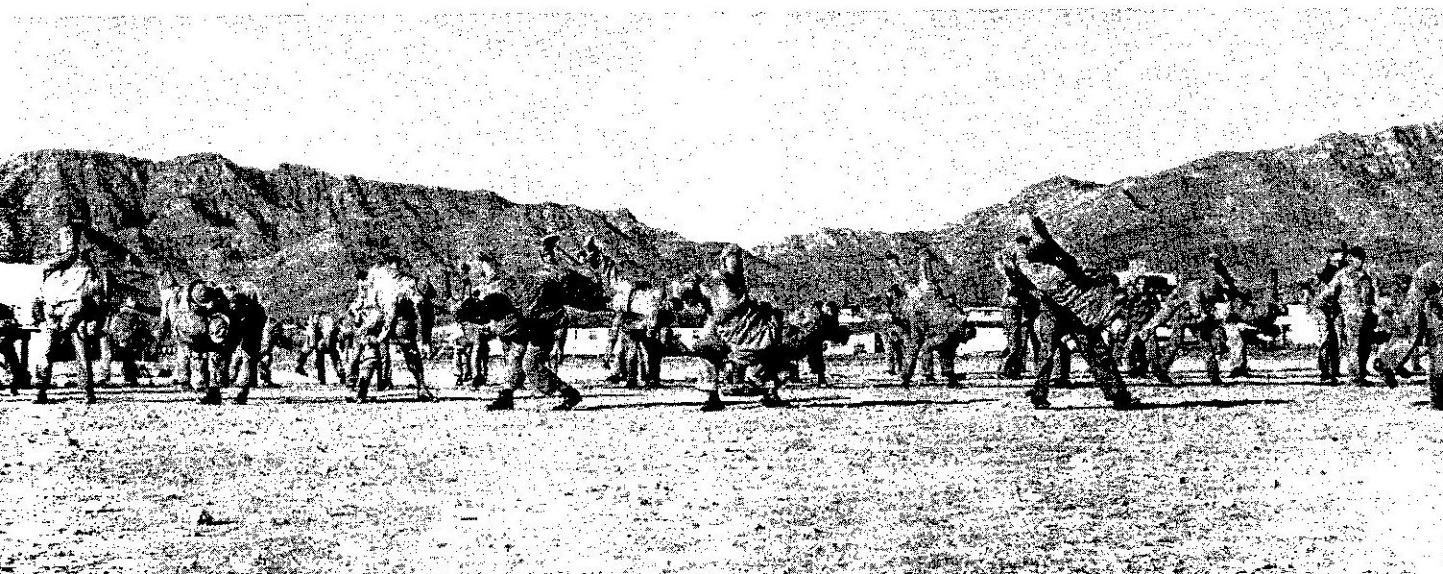
On 26th October we went to Hueco range to fire the Bofors guns again, but this time we rode in trucks. It was our most successful firing. Not only did we knock down many targets during the day, but with the aid of searchlights accounted for many hits at night.

Then on the morning of 23rd November the report was spread that there was going to be a field exercise. By noon we were towing our

guns across the sand to protect an imaginary infantry division from air attacks.

All went well until that night when we were attacked by Airborne troops acting as Commandos. That the attack was realistic was attested to by the number of black eyes and minor injuries that resulted. But, as always, the battalion came out on top.

By now we had learned about all that Fort Bliss had to offer, and it was time to leave. We practiced loading by driving our trucks onto railway cars painted on the pavement. Later we drove them on real cars and, saying good-bye to our friends of El Paso, we pulled out on the 1st December. On 2nd December the last train left Fort Bliss.



# Desert Maneuvers

We traveled westward from Fort Bliss for several days. Then, one morning, our train pulled to a halt, and the conductor announced that the little town was Indio, California, our getting-off place. We were in the midst of a desert. Sand dunes, cacti and barren hills were in every direction. Indio and its patches of green stood out conspicuously in contrast. The sun was shining and it was warm, even though it was December.

We were surprised and a little confused at our new surroundings. We were told that Indio was not our new station, but rather it was to be the Desert Training Center, still

deeper into the wilderness. So we stepped from the train into the ankle-deep dust, boarded trucks and rode 100 miles farther over monotonous desert roads to our camp.

What a disappointment! The site was covered with mesquite and sage brush and could be distinguished from the rest of the desert only by the roads which had just recently been built around it. Sullen gray mountains lay all around. The nearest town, Rice, three miles to the west, boasted only a railroad truck and five or six buildings.

In this surrounding, with little more than tents and determination, we set to work build-



Five degree mask? Well, we can always simulate, can't we?

ing ourselves a camp. We worked hard. In about two weeks we had a clean-cut motor park, neat battery areas with tents row upon row, and walks and streets. It was a good, livable camp. From four to six men lived in each tent, which was heated with a Sibly stove. Every man slept on a cot and there was usually a community clothes rack. The floor was sand and there were no windows. The wind whipped the sides of the tents, and occasionally there was more smoke inside the tent than outside. Water was hauled in cans, and the walk to the latrine was considerable. This was our home, simple and rough.

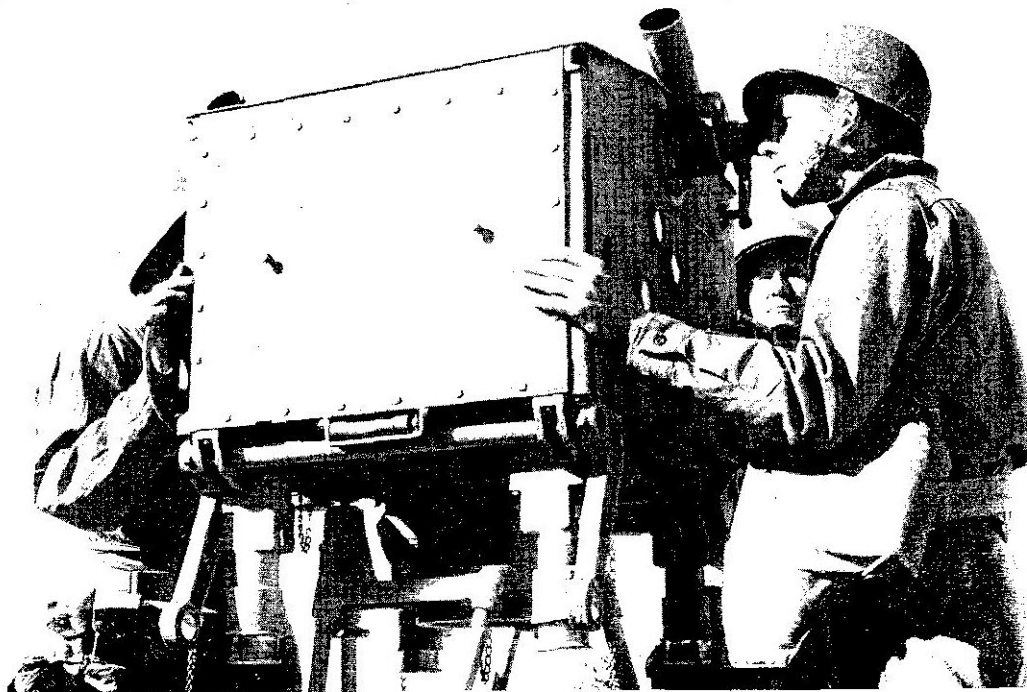
Upon our arrival at the Desert Training Center we had been attached to the Sixth Arm-

ored Division for administration and training. As the weeks passed we participated in the periodic division maneuvers, furnishing AA protection for the division trains. Our daily training in camp usually consisted of gun drill, calisthenics, lectures, tracking, and maintenance of the guns and trucks. We soon excelled at gun drill. Winter evenings we passed in the tent by the fire, reading and writing letters, playing games, or talking over the day's happenings.

During these winter months the days were warm, but the nights were cold. We soon experienced the kind of storm probably most common to the desert . . . the sandstorm. It began violently on Christmas morning and lasted three days. The wind blew many tents



We trained plenty on them, but after all you can't carry them on your back through hedgerows.



down and the driving sand was everywhere, covered everything, and got inside everything. It stung our faces and parched our throats. In spite of the storm, however, a great many Hollywood celebrities carried on with a scheduled dance, using a surface of planks surrounded by tanks for a dance pavilion.

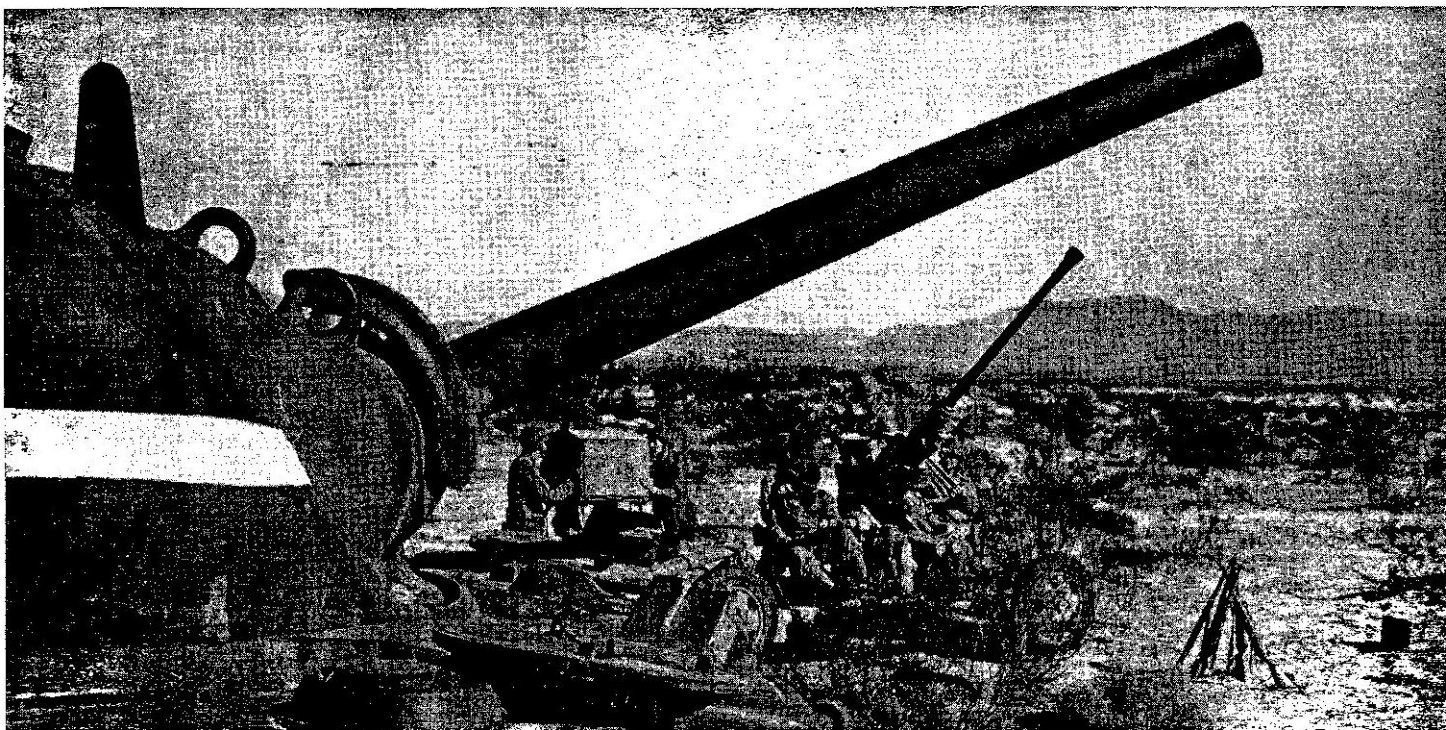
This storm was the desert in a bad mood. At other times the desert was beautiful. Sunrise and sunset usually were colorful over the mountains. Tinted clouds flecked a sky seemingly aglow with soft, red light; the mountains were bright here, dark there in the depths. Desert scenes were picturesque.

A daily routine of training, with limited recreational facilities during free hours, did become a little tiresome. Recreation came chiefly through week-end passes to San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Hollywood. Remember?

In February our battalion moved to Camp Coxcomb, an ideal desert camp situated about 15 miles north of Desert Center. Here, we lived in tents and trained and led about the same kind of life we had lived at our old camp.

The first large-scale desert maneuver for our battalion was with the Sixth Armored Corps during February and March, 1943. We maneuvered from Chuckawalla Pass to Iron

Keep your eye on that tank, buddy. There are plenty of rat races ahead.





Hold on to your dust respirator. Here we go again!

Mountain Pass; convoyed long distances over desert trails; and dug frequent slit trenches and gun positions in ground that seemed as hard as concrete. Water was scarce and the monotony of "C" rations was often relieved by a change to those equally unforgettable "K" rations. Alert gunners, good camouflage discipline, dispersion of men and equipment, and mobility seemed the key words of the maneuver for us. Our battalion was credited with knocking down several enemy planes in simulated air attacks.

With the end of the maneuver we joyously returned to the relative comforts of Camp Coxcomb.

Furnishing a cadre for a new AA battalion

was a happy, yet sad, event of our desert training, for while many new stripes appeared it meant that many old friends would depart. This cadre departed for Camp Haan, California, in April to activate the 817th AAA AW Battalion.

Training continued for several months, but in June the battalion went by motor convoy to the Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona. The beauty of the canyon and the surrounding country was a tonic to everyone. Then, of course, few will forget the little towns of Ashfork and Prescott.

Our second and last big desert maneuver was with the Ninth Corps. This exercise com-



Target! and they're doing it by the book, too!

menced the latter part of June and lasted till mid-July. The battalion was given the mission of protecting brigade field artillery, first at the defense of Palen Pass against the Seventh Armored Division, and later on during the withdrawal up the long valley from Cadiz Dry

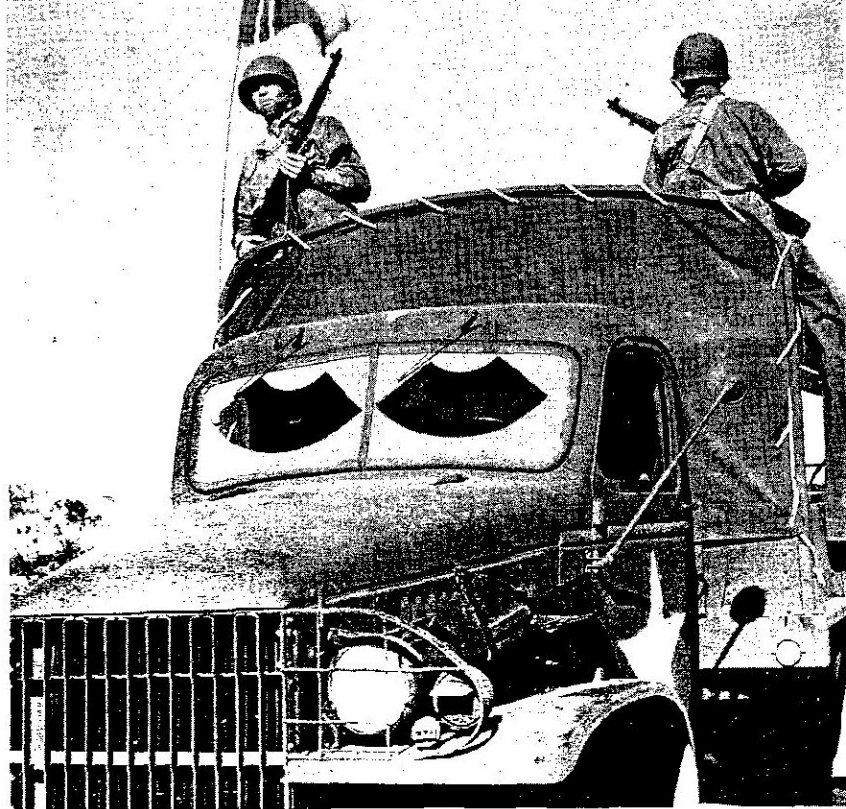
Lake. In the final phase some elements were placed in antitank positions at Fenner Pass. Days saw us sweating in the hot sun, digging slit trenches or gun positions in ground that reacted reluctantly to pick and shovel. Sudden moves over miles of dusty and ill-marked desert trails were the rule. Water was a critical item, and so had to be conserved chiefly for radiators and for drinking. Iron Mountain Pass, the Salt Flats, and the long range of Old Woman Mountains stretching up toward Goffs, were passed time and again in daylight and dark during the course of the maneuver.

Shortly after the maneuver our battalion celebrated its first anniversary. Colonel Mace reviewed the fine accomplishments, and battalion talent put on several skits. There was a band, and later on beer and eats.



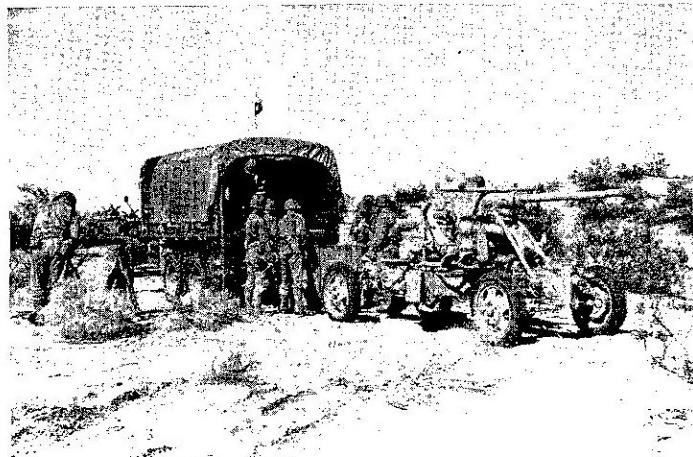
After living in the desert for so many months we thought we had come to know it, but we had yet to experience a desert rainstorm. One struck furiously one torrid afternoon in July, sweeping down tents and washing away equipment and belongings. A wall of water swept down from the Coxcomb Mountains through our camp carrying away almost everything. The storm lasted only two hours, but its effects were universal. Soon afterward we did our annual firing at Camp Irwin, and destroyed more targets than before.

Then came the happy news that the battalion was to leave the Desert Training Center. Our farewell party featured Red Skelton as entertainer, a band, and beer. When, one day early in September, our train pulled away from the railhead at Rice, we felt that our desert train-



Air guards alert; and remember those windshields?

ing had been the hardest and yet the best we had ever had. More important, we felt thoroughly trained for any task assigned us, had confidence in ourselves as soldiers, and were looking forward eagerly to new experiences ahead.



# Exercises at Richmond

We are really anxious to get back to civilization after our long exile in the desert. And so we look with keen anticipation at the neat buildings of Richmond Army Air Base. But they were not for us. We moved into tents in the woods and got right to work.

Our job was to learn how to cooperate with the Air Corps. We had the same job as the interceptor planes and we wanted to learn how they worked and what they could do, and at the same time take advantage of the firmer earth to build strong, permanent gun positions and consider the problem of camouflage.

But, before settling down to steady work, the city of Richmond was a challenge to a soldier with a free evening. In three days, everybody knew the best places to go; the best food, all the fun, even without having been to town. Compared to Los Angeles it was pretty quiet, but being able to get back to camp in a matter of minutes made up for a lot.

Gun positions were selected most carefully, each one in a perfect place to complete a defense. Then

the ingenuity and imagination of everybody in the battalion came into full swing. Any new idea to make a better gun pit, a better floor or side, or ramp was received and tested with enthusiasm. No camouflage scheme was too fantastic to be tried.

The positions advanced slowly, because everything had to be the best. The pits had to be tight and dry. There was every kind of a position, from one on a flak tower to one surrounded by a whole house. And all the while, we went to schools for camouflage, gas, and to learn the systems of the interceptors.

Furloughs were started in the course of our work. And the first of that famous series of battery dances was started, to the enlightenment and enjoyment of the local femininity.

The work was climaxed with a three-day field problem, incorporating all the features of our training. We ate C rations and slept at the pits. Nightly raiding parties were supposed to symbolize combat.

That was all for Richmond, and so we loaded the guns on gondola cars and said our farewells to the South.



Headquarters  
RICHMOND SECTOR, COMBINED AIR DEFENSE  
TRAINING CENTER  
114th Antiaircraft Artillery Group  
Army Air Base  
Richmond, Virginia



4 Nov. '43,  
GWD/htb

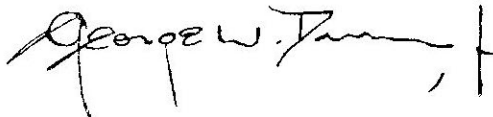
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SUBJECT: Maneuvers and Field Exercises.

TO: The Commanding Officer, 531st AAA AW' Bn., Fort Devens, Mass.

1. This certifies that your unit has had the following extensive field training:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>Rating</i>
9 Feb 43 to 5 Mar 43	4th Armored Corps Maneuver, DTC, Camp Young, California.	3 Weeks	Superior
28 June 43 to 17 July 43	9th Corps Maneuver DTC, Camp Young, California.	6 Weeks	Superior
12 Oct 43 to 16 Oct 43	Richmond Sector, CADTC Five-day Field Exercise, Blackstone, Virginia.	5 Days	Superior



GEORGE W. DUNN, JR.  
*Colonel, CAC*  
*Commanding*

# Our Stay at

Fort Devens, Massachusetts, was like something out of this world; something reminiscent of stories told to the "draftees" by the "old soldiers," of how things "wuz" in the Regular Army, but that nobody ever believed. Barracks—beds—mattresses—clean sheets—hot and cold running water. Rough!

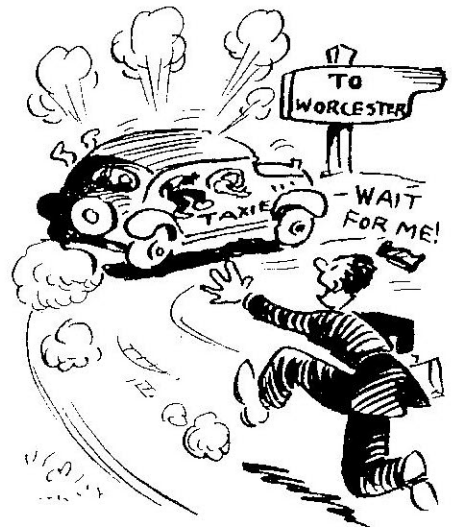
Our primary mission here was to prepare for overseas movement, and though we were not aware as to just when we could expect the call, preparations were gotten under way immediately to enable us to be "at the ready" at any time. Meetings were held almost

lucky because each man got a 10-day furlough out of the deal. The small arms experts were also out in force to show their stuff on the range and to do their "durndest"



to grab off some of the fancy prizes that were being offered in that competition. One overnight hike was undertaken and sleeping under the pines with "plenty of fresh air" was enjoyed by all. Everyone got a kick out of

daily between the staff officers and battery commanders, and between the non-commissioned officers of each battery, to determine what needed to be done and what was the best way to accomplish it. Training schedules were prepared each week and items listed thereon were given priority according to the need. Added interest was injected into the training by two contests. The biggest attraction was the competition between all the 40-mm. gun crews which was won by Sergeant Melphy of C Battery and his "Lucky 14"—



# Fort Devens

learning that our next-door neighbors had gone on a hike the night previous, but had returned to do their sleeping on the floor of their barracks. Just before leaving we had



one last big problem dealing mainly with camouflage, the spotting to be done from an observation plane. It was rumored that there was a little "rank pulling" to see who was going to get the opportunity to get sick



in the Cub. Then, too, there was that never-to-be-forgotten trek to "Icy Edwards." We often wonder how the 40-mm. barrels warmed up enough to fire.

There was another mission performed at Devens, although it was not the primary one and the training schedule didn't call for it. A lot of reconnaissance work was being done by all members covering the area in the triangle formed by Lowell, Worcester, and Boston. Seemed like everyone was attempting to do their bit to lift the morale of the Home Front, in fact it is believed that there were



even a few members of the WAC who were left with broken hearts when the boys departed.

Finally, after much standing of inspections, exchange of clothes, more inspections, sending surplus items home, drinking a few last beers (little did we appreciate how good they really were) and getting an APO number, we were ready to sail. The day we pulled out of Boston Harbor was filled with both apprehension and expectation, but right down deep every man felt it as being the saddest day of his life for we were leaving HOME.

# The Trip Over—



On 12th February 1944, the battalion, aboard the British ship *Empress of Australia*, sailed out of Boston Harbor.

For most of the men, an ocean voyage was an entirely new experience, and with thoughts of the submarine menace and the probability of seasickness, most of us looked forward to the trip with some misgivings.

The ship was one of the largest in use as a troop transport. Its weight was 23,000 tons and there were 6,800 troops stacked on its entire 620-foot length.

We had traveled only an hour before seasickness claimed its first casualties. Some of the

victims recovered in a couple of days' time; a few never recovered until they stepped off on English soil.

Our battalion drew varied assignments, including manning the ship's AA guns, M.P. duty, and PX details.

The second day out, we came up with the main body of the convoy. It was truly a magnificent spectacle, the ships sailing in fixed positions which they held with mechanical precision, even during blackout and dense fog. It was the largest convoy ever to sail for England.

We had one submarine alert during the trip, but nothing came of it. One ship developed engine trouble and was forced to drop out for a time.

Living conditions on the ship were all that you expected on a troop transport. Mostly there were more men than hammock space, so you slept on the tables or on the floor under the tables—anywhere space permitted. Another item was the chow, cooked British style

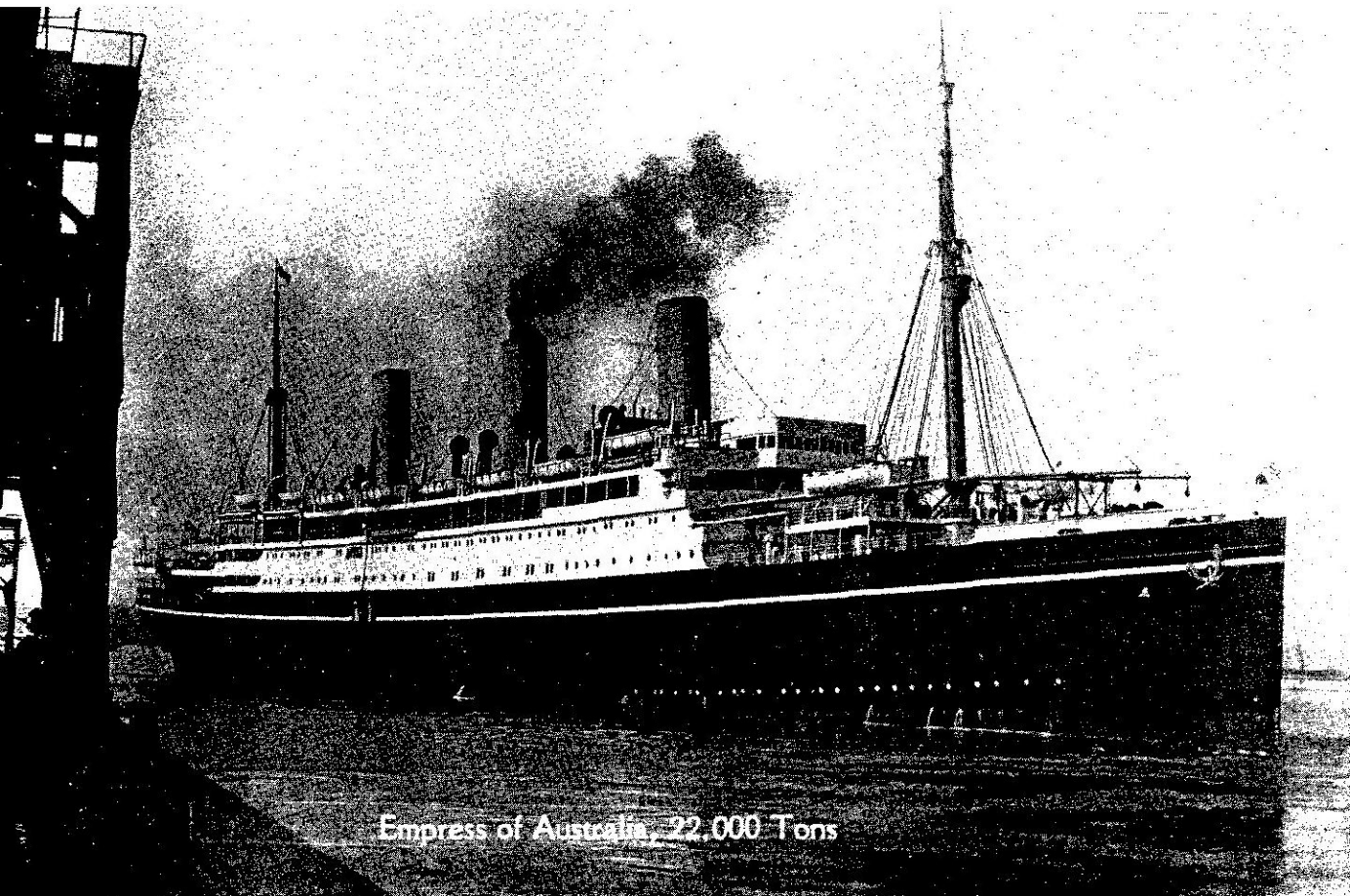
# From U. S. A. to E. T. O.

by a British crew. You get used to a lot of things in the army.

Time hung heavy on our hands, and the principal diversions, as usual, were "poker" and "craps." Some rather fabulous sums were won by a few.

The water turned black and the whiteflecked swells increased as we nosed far northward, skirting "Torpedo Junction." Iceland lay a few score miles off our starboard, but you couldn't

see it. Then, southward into the calm of the Irish Sea with the rolling shores of Scotland on the left and Old Ireland on the right. Our convoy began to break up, as ships pulled out to dock at Belfast and Glasgow. But the *Empress of Australia* sailed straight south for Liverpool, nosing up to its berth after 10 days on the high seas. On 23rd February we debarked in the land of light ale and bitters.



*Empress of Australia, 22,000 Tons*

# England

## REORGANIZATION FOR COMBAT

When we climbed down from the trucks in Sherborne, a small English village, complete with ancient castle, cathedral and prep school, we had been in England only a few days but had already seen, briefly, two famous cities, and suffered one train and one truck ride. Our memory of Liverpool was already like a set of colored slides; a bomb-scarred skyline; a dimly lighted ramp through which we struggled single-file, carrying all of our possessions; a strange, foreign train; and a Red Cross girl, passing out coffee and doughnuts. After that it was Weston Super-Mare, the resort town with the name that sounded so unusual to our American ears, where there was confusion, questions ("Where is the advance party?" "Where do we go from here?") and rumors, rumors on every side. There, too, most of us had our first taste of that thin, peculiarly ineffectual liquid the British call beer, and spoke to our first pink-faced English girl.

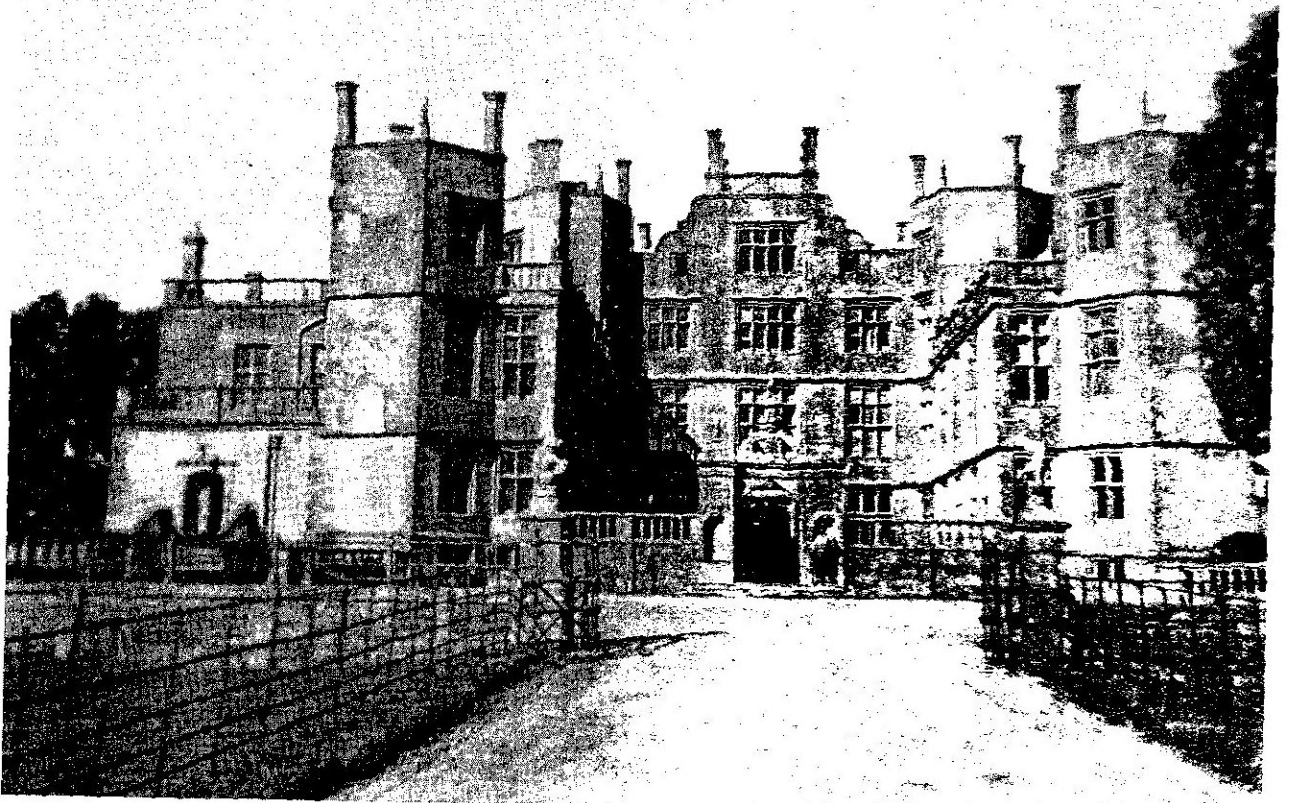
So it was that we came to Sherborne, and stayed just long enough to get used to being billeted in civilian houses, including the castle, where the officers were quartered and battalion headquarters was situated; or, in the case of

Headquarters and A Batteries, long enough to learn how to live comfortably in Nissen huts.

Having drawn only a few trucks at Sherborne, we moved by train, passing through Southhampton, which had been severely damaged by bombs, on our way to Camp Barkfold. While there we lived in the usual Nissen huts. Even the mess halls were nothing but overgrown Nissens. Barkfold was the place where army routine caught up with us again, for we drew 40-mms., directors, M51s and the rest of our trucks. The generally unpopular physical fitness program, which included one hike a week of progressively longer distances, was initiated there. It was at Barkfold, too, that General Hobbs spoke to us for the first time.

Wynches was the camp near Hertford and Ware. Remember? We convoyed there from Barkfold. Making a reorganization that was nothing short of revolutionary, we traded our directors for Stiffkey Sticks and put in an intensive two-week firing mission at Camp Stiffkey.

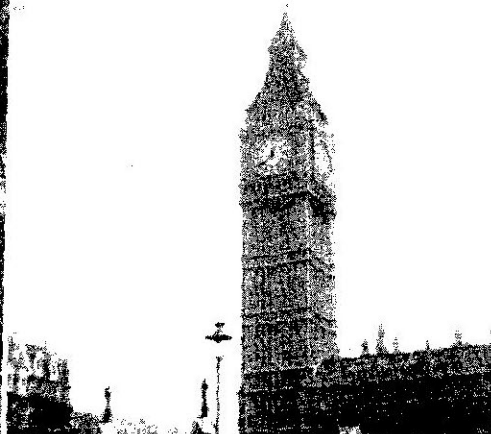
Wynches was more of an operational base than a camp, for, shortly after returning from Stiffkey, we left again for a three-day maneu-



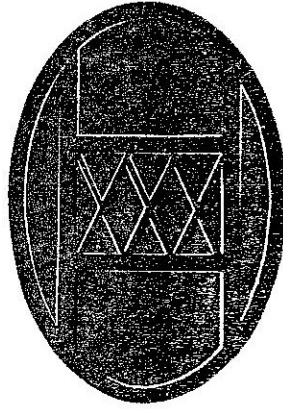
ver on the Salisbury Plains, in South Central England. At the end of this problem, nearly half of each battery left for assault training at Woolcombe in Devonshire in preparation for the big push. We spent the remainder of our time at Camp Wynches, drawing the combat equipment, including half-tracks which displaced our M51s, waterproofing the guns and

vehicles, and weaving green burlap strips into camouflage nets.

Shortly before the Invasion, we moved by convoy to Camp Remenhain near Hensley-on-Thames. It was there, on the eve of D-Day, 5th June 1944, that General Hobbs came to speak to us again. A few days later we went to the Marshaling Area.



# We Join "Old Hickory"



HEADQUARTERS 30TH INFANTRY DIVISION

APO. 30, U. S. ARMY

25 May 1944

*TO: The Officers and Men of the 30th Infantry Division.*

The task for which we have trained so long and so well is immediately before us.

In the complete accomplishment of this task, keep in mind, always, your feeling of pride—pride in yourselves, pride in your division.

Use the knowledge that is yours to fight skillfully and aggressively.

Fight with the knowledge and conviction that you are a better soldier than any enemy that may oppose you.

Fight with the spiritual knowledge that you are in the right.

Keep in your heart and mind the fact that our path must be only forward—always forward.

Above all, FIGHT—in every place and under all circumstances, FIGHT—and the God who looks after each one of us will guard us and bless us in that fight.

Victory will surely march with us in our forward progress.



*Leland S. Hobbs*

LELAND S. HOBBS  
Major General, U. S. Army  
Commanding

# From the Supreme Commander



GENERAL DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

*Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!*

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

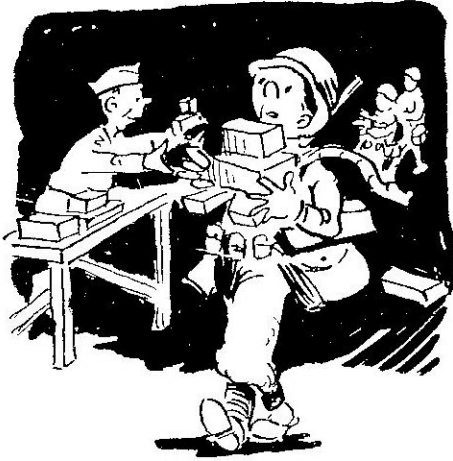
Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

# "Eleventh Hour"



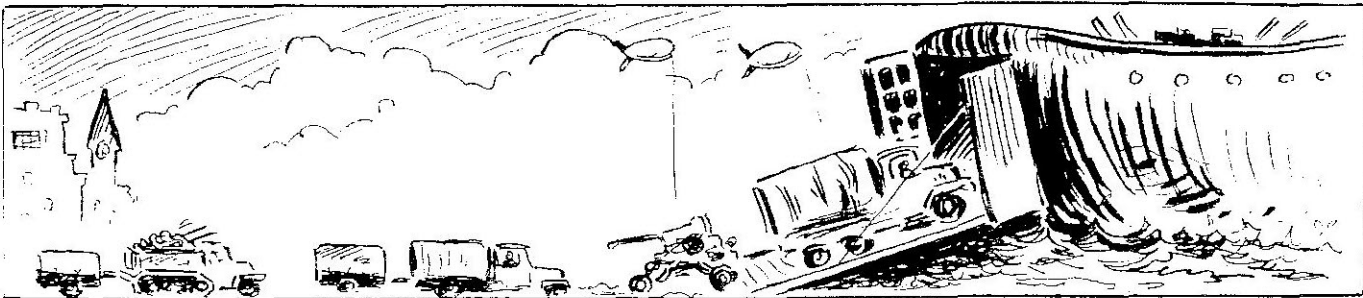
Except for the thought of unknown things ahead, the Marshaling Area was a dream come true. On first impression, though, the place had not looked like much. We had felt its impermanence and had realized immediately that it was a camp where many men stopped, but none stayed.

There was food like we had not tasted since we left the States. There was white bread, palatable as cake. The food alone would have made the Marshaling Area memorable, but in addition to that we had Time. Time to sleep. Time to shoot craps or go to the movies that were shown there every day. Time for talk, too, big talk about what we were going to do in combat, big talk that was suddenly stifled by the issue of those rubber life belts and the capsules that inflated them; those boxes of chocolate plainly marked EMERGENCY RATIONS, and those sulphadiazene tablets

whose purpose could not be denied. They were little things, but little things whose meanings could be intimately terrifying if dwelt upon.

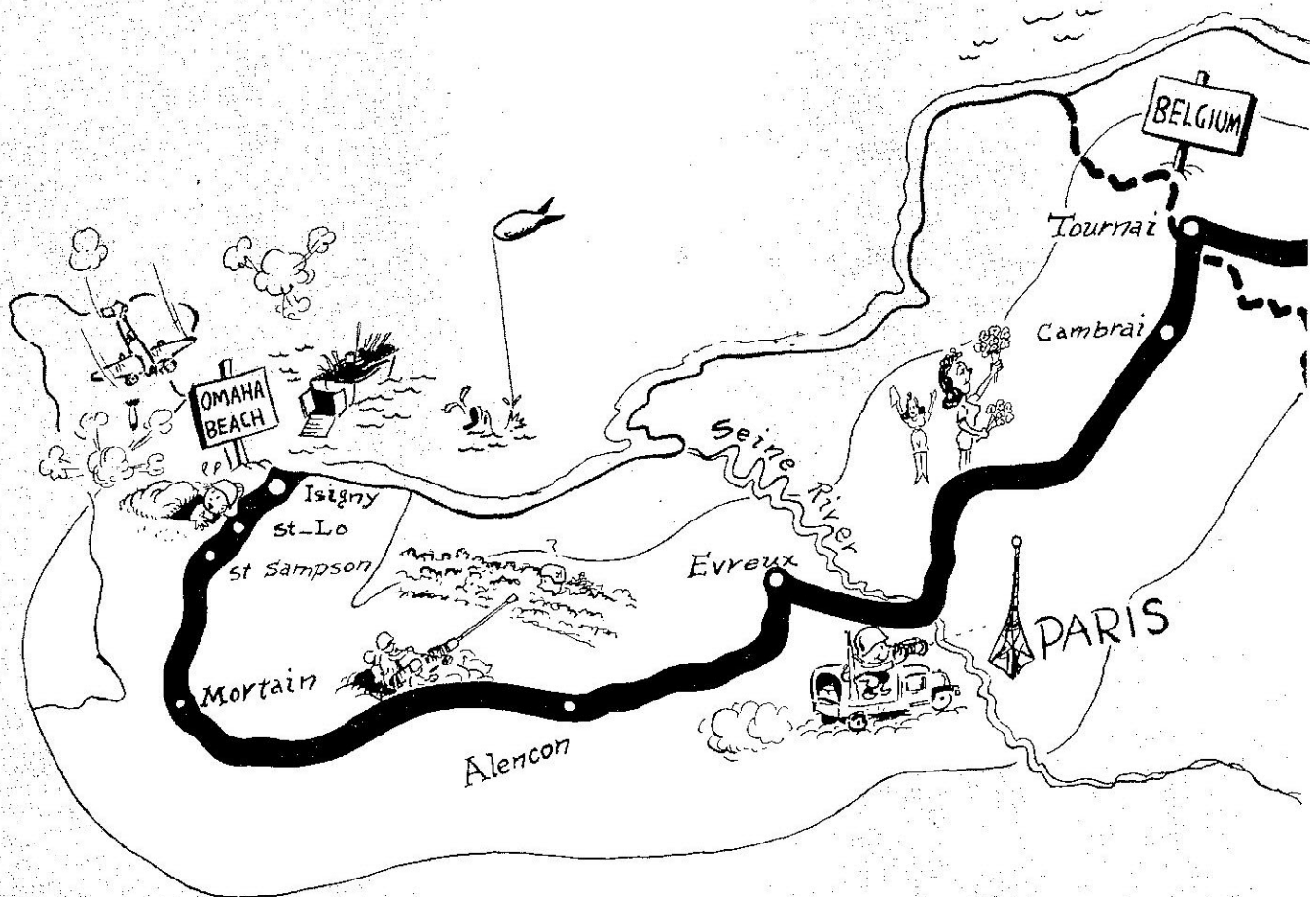
It was an orderly place, this Marshaling Area. There was none of the confusion that characterizes so many other places where enormous numbers of soldiers are gathered together. We knew why we were there and where we were going from there. One thing only escaped our comprehension. Neither our training nor our imaginations could tell us exactly how much was going to be required of us once we crossed that narrow strip of water. That was why we were inclined, if we didn't watch ourselves, to wonder whether we had said everything we wanted to in our last letters home.

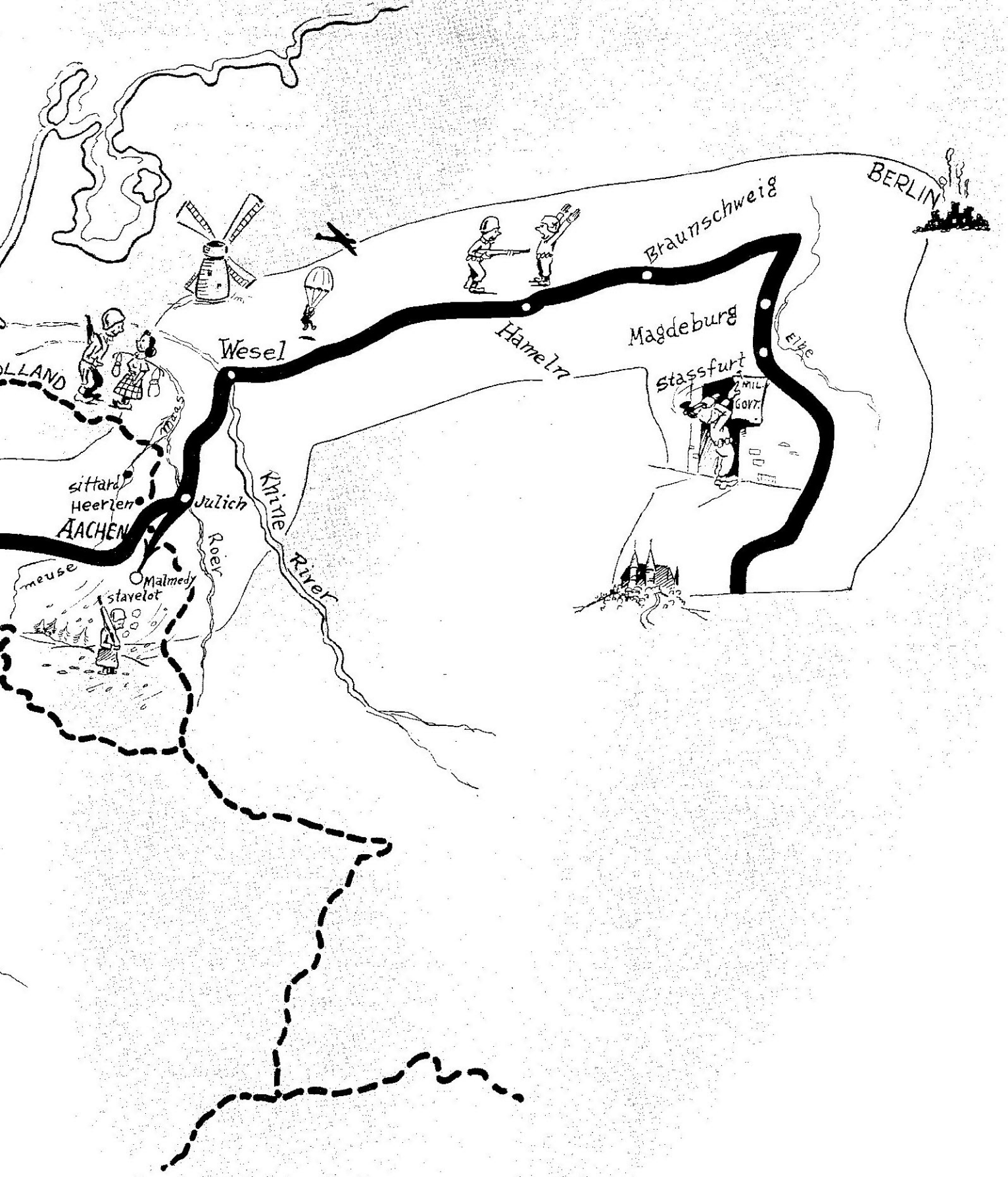
And then, past the luminous green of the English fields, past the clusters of unsymmetrical cottages, past the buff-colored cliff wearing an ack-ack gun like a chip on its shoulder; on down to the coast, where file after file of O. D. vehicles stood waiting their turn to load. Here were the ships, riding at anchor and making their way to and from the shore. Here were the barrage balloons, looking like a herd of fat Iowa hogs put out to pasture in the sky. Here was the 531st, its members squatting on their trucks surrounded by the nauseous smell of gas-impregnated fatigues, saying good-bye, each in his own (generally inarticulate) way, to England.



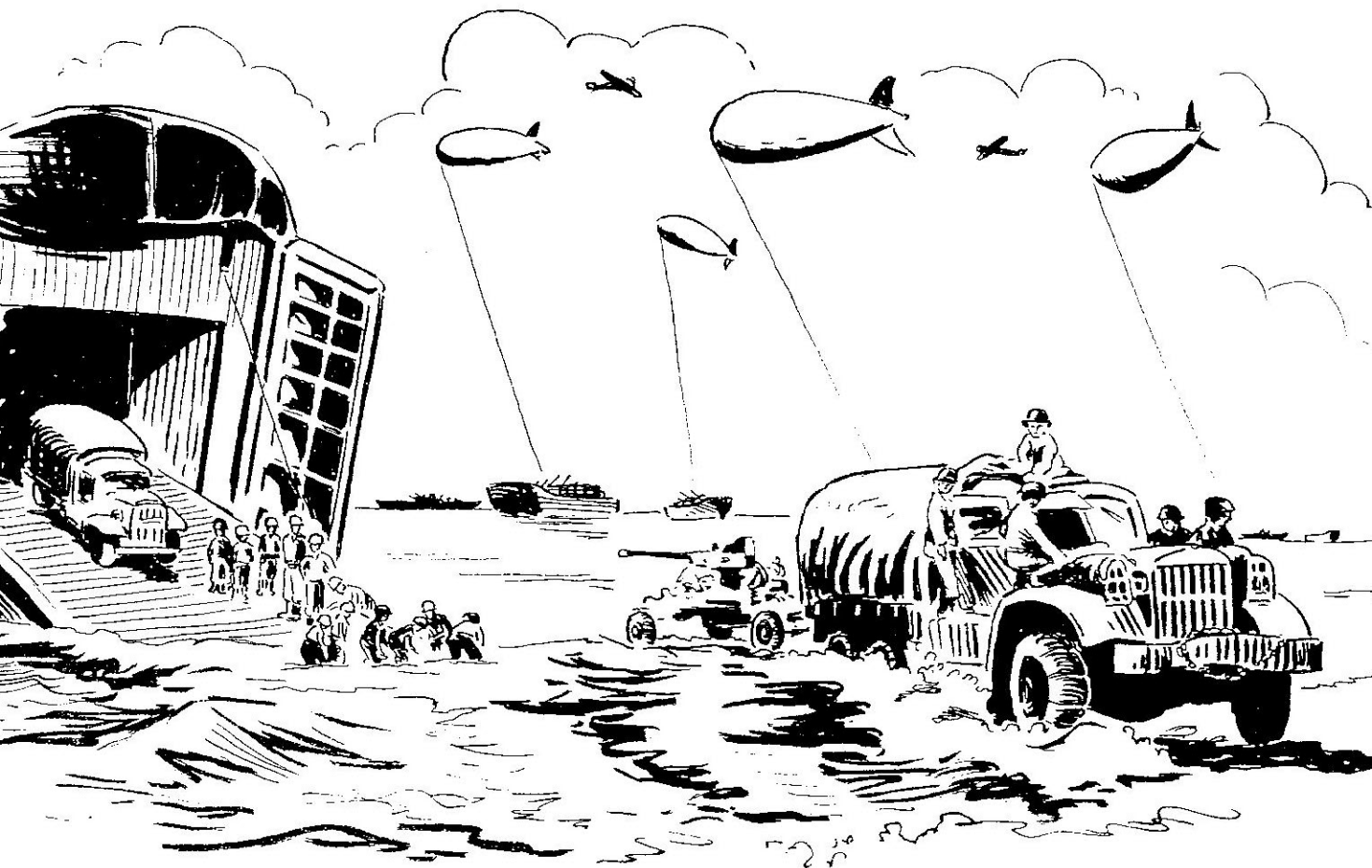
**C O M B A T**

# COMBAT ROUTE OF 531ST AAA BATTALION





# We Hit the Beach!



The Infantry put it better than anyone else.

"It wasn't Omaha," they said. "And it wasn't easy. . . . But it was kinda red!"

And that about tells the story of Omaha Beach. Omaha Easy Red Beach, if you want to be technical.

The Bofors of the 531st rolled over it. They rolled over the clanking ramps of the LCTs and over the debris-littered sand and up the sloping road to the cliff tops.

June 15—D plus 9—that was the day.

That was the day the battalion went into combat. That was the day the long hours of assault training and waterproofing paid off.

Omaha Beach was worth the price of admission—that is, if you care for fireworks. If you like to stand on a pitching barge while Jerry comes screaming down at you out of a flak-spattered sky, then Omaha Beach was the place for you.

The boys of the outfit will remember that place for a long time. There is a peculiar feel-

ing that comes to the pit of your stomach the first time you taste battle. The boys of the 531st got that feeling at Omaha.

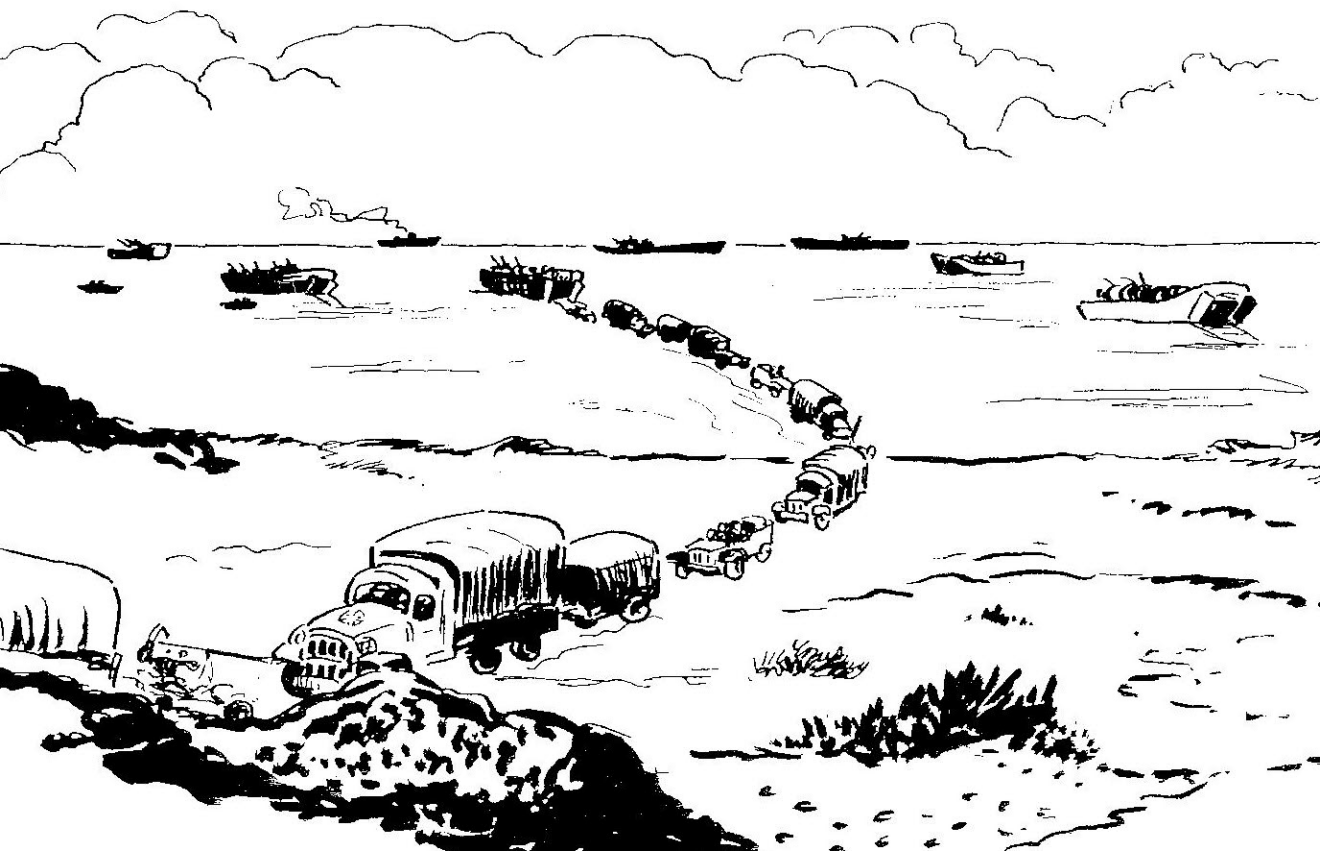
And they carried it with them long after they had rolled up the slopes to the assembly areas and through shell-flattened Isigny to the front—the historic, bitter, death-scarred Front in the hedgerows of Normandy.

If you like statistics then you can note that the first element of the 531st on the Continent of Europe was battalion headquarters. It unloaded on the afternoon of June 15. A Battery, which arrived the same evening, stood offshore waiting for the tide until early the following morning. The other batteries unloaded in swift succession and by evening of the 16th all were in the line with their respective

field artillery battalions. It didn't go off exactly as they told you it would. There was confusion on the beach and the guy who was supposed to tell you where to go generally didn't. You didn't know what to do with your lifebelts and you had a hell of a time finding the initial assembly area. Things didn't go off just right, but they went just the same.

Those are the statistics, if you care for them.

The boys in the outfit won't remember much about who preceded whom and why. And maybe they won't care much. But they will never forget the day that History and a bunch of Ack-Ack kids from Minnesota and Nebraska and Iowa and Texas and a lot of other places swept over the bloodiest patch of beach this world has ever seen—on their way to victory!



# The Normandy Campaign

There was great contrast between the beach with its feverish activity to the Normandy countryside of rolling green fields, hedgerows, numerous herds of cattle, and the quaint cottages of French farmers.

As we moved through Isigny we saw for the first time a scene that was to become a common one to all of us. Rubble strewn streets, gaping holes in houses, civilians wandering in the wreckage trying to salvage anything of value from what used to be their homes.

Our first night in Normandy was uneventful, except for occasional appearances of the Luftwaffe which, oddly enough, seemed interested in dropping flares and drawing all the fire it could from the huge antiaircraft concentration around Omaha Beach. Our mission was protection of the field artillery of the 30th Division, each battery accepting responsibility for one battalion of field artillery.

At this time the 30th Division was holding a line along the Vire Canal. The situation was,



to a certain extent, static, but each day brought new experiences and new lessons. It wasn't long before we learned that man's best friend was a slit trench with a heavy top on it.

The Luftwaffe was scarce, but night appearances and occasional daylight reconnaissance missions at high altitude were proof that the enemy had planes and that some day he would challenge our gunners.

It wasn't long before preparations to cross the Vire Canal were completed. In this attack individual batteries were given additional missions, such as antitank, protection of bridges over the canal, and direct fire against enemy ground troops.

The Vire Canal was tough. It was tough because it was our first real offensive action. It was tough because direct fire missions with

tracer ammo offer Jerry a very tempting target.

It was tough because, after the crossing had been made, he threw a very rough counter-attack which made things look strictly on the dark side for awhile.

But we got across the Vire. And we held. And, more than that, we advanced. We pushed, yard by yard, through hedgerows that will go down in history as more deadly obstacles than any West Wall or Siegfried Line. We saw the dead, friend and foe, piled up in the fields and along the roads. And it wasn't pretty. But it was war, and we were learning. When you got down around Pont Hebert, near the St. Lo Cauldron, you knew that you weren't a rookie any longer. You knew the score!



# B R E A K T H R O U G H



We moved into position for the battle of St. Lo about the middle of July. It was hot and dusty, which was quite a change from the chilly, muddy days of the start of the Normandy campaign. There was the usual amount of dead cattle, cider barrels, and hedgerows. It didn't mean much at the time, but this was the first battle in France with no fixed objective. We were supposed to start out and keep going as long as possible. A few German planes came over, most of which were knocked down. So far, this was the same as every other position we had been in.

On the morning of the 25th July, the mass bombing that made this battle stand out above all others commenced. First came the P-47s. The sky was full of them. After an hour or so

of dive bombing, the mediums came. Flak from 88s was heavy at first, but fizzled out as the swish and rumble of bombs became continuous. After the mediums came the heavies: the B-17s and B-24s. The earth rocked from the concussion and smoke and dust rolled up in clouds. American stragglers came wandering back wild-eyed and dazed.

But if Americans were dazed, the Germans were paralyzed. At first you didn't know. Then they began to come out of their holes, jibbering like monkeys. The infantry pushed through the heavy crust along the St. Lo-Periers highway. The tanks rolled up, got clear of the maze of battered roads, and then began to stretch out across the peninsula to Contances and Avranches. It was a breakthrough!

# M O R T A I N

Mortain was the pay off, the high mark in the combat career of the 531st. The enemy, realizing the extreme threat posed by our breakthrough, marshaled and hurled his maximum armored might against the 30th Infantry Division, which was holding open the narrow corridor between Mortain and the sea at Avranches for our spearheading armor which was breaking loose into the Brittany peninsula and Northern France.

Mortain had been quiet, but it didn't stay that way. Even before we had occupied our positions after a road march from south of St. Lo, the Luftwaffe was over in strength, strafing and firing rockets. Then came the Panzers—four division of them. Many of the 40s were set up in antitank positions. Ack-ack men, fighting as infantry, moved up on

foot armed with bazookas and rifle grenades as the enemy spearheads overran our forward positions. At least three enemy tanks were put to rout by these men.



The Germans sent their planes over every night in an effort to knock out our artillery. The rain of bombs and shells seemed almost constant. But the boys on the 40s stood up and took it. And they fired back into the darkness at the flares and the JU 88s whenever they could catch a glimpse of them.

And the whole 30th Division—"lost battalion" and all—stood up and took it, and when, after a bad day at the hands of rocket-firing Typhoons, Von Kluge's Panzers decided they had had enough, they pulled back, and the 30th Division and the 531st went over the hill at battered Mortain and out onto the broad plains that lead to Paris.



# The Northern

Domfront was just a stopping place after Mortain. Jerry was on the run. We pulled into position after a few small skirmishes and prepared for a long road march to exploit the trap then closing at Falaise.

It was funny in a way, around Domfront. Funny because you saw guys throw their arms around each other and exchange greetings like long-lost friends. After all, they hadn't seen each other since England. Getting the batteries together again was quite an event.

On 20th August, in the evening, we moved out. It was an all-night march, swinging east,

then north through Lemans toward Falaise, and then east again toward Paris. Everybody was on the road, including the Maquis, and you were lucky if you didn't land in the ditch. Strange-looking shadows loomed out of the darkness and shouted, "Vive l'Amérique!" or "Les Boche kaput!" You hoped so.

We pulled into an assembly area west of the Seine, and the division began to deploy. C Battery, encountering a roadblock near Boissy-sur-Damville, lost an officer and one enlisted men, who heroically gave their lives to wipe out the obstacle. Two days later, near Evreux, D



# France Campaign

Battery killed 20 and rounded up 67 prisoners in an infantry skirmish with the enemy.

Those were the days of the rat races. Those were the days of march ordering four and five times in 24 hours. Those were the days when each battery rounded up prisoners by the score—from haystacks, from woods, from barns. Those were the days when we thought the war would end in a few weeks.

We swept north to Louviers to head off some Germans headed for the Fatherland. Then south again to Evreux and to the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt. We crossed the Seine

at Mantes on 28th August and swung south along the east bank toward Paris. You could see the Eiffel Tower on the horizon. So near and yet so far.

They said we were going to Paris, but we didn't. There were enemy pockets in a dozen different localities, and Paris could wait. It had liberated itself, anyway.

The main headache in those days was gasoline. Gasoline and food. You weren't worried yet as you sped through German airfields on the broad fields of the grain belt of France. But you wondered sometimes if you had been



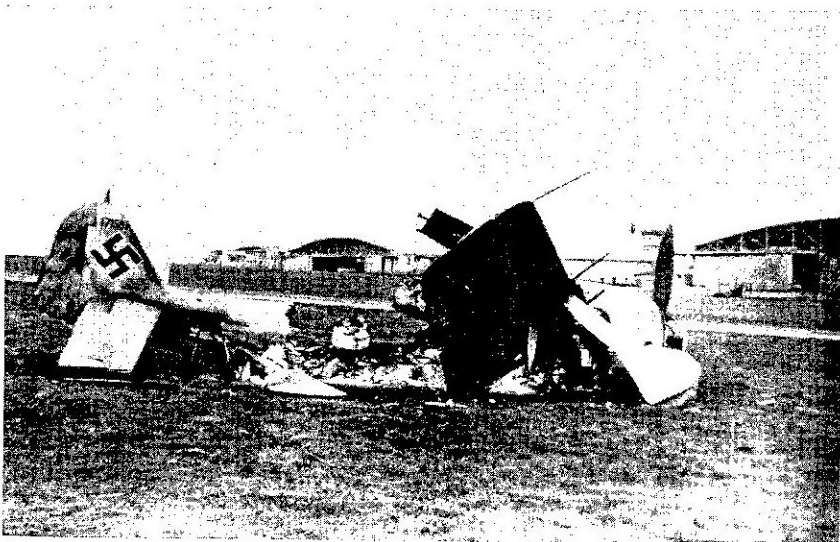


a little too generous in responding to cries of "Cigarette pour Papa!" or "Bon-bon pour Mama!"

You wondered about that—when you took time out from being amazed at the hysterical reception given to troops of the Army of Liberation in every city and hamlet. You wondered about that after pretty Mademoiselles had kissed you frankly and without embarrassment,

and after your vehicle had been bombarded with apples and flowers . . . and maybe a bottle or two of wine.

And all of a sudden it became very serious when you passed Beaumont and bivouacked in preparation for something big that was obviously brewing. You were going on a long road march. You were going on Jerry gas, maybe—or maybe you would walk—but you were going.





# T H E L O W C O U N T R I E S

enemy had jammed the road and had been annihilated.

The Meuse River and the Albert Canal were the next major obstacles, and it was not until 11th September that a bridgehead was established. In the meantime we had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the Belgians. We frequently saw columns of the newly-organized Belgian White Army marching through the streets of villages, preparing for their part in the fighting ahead.

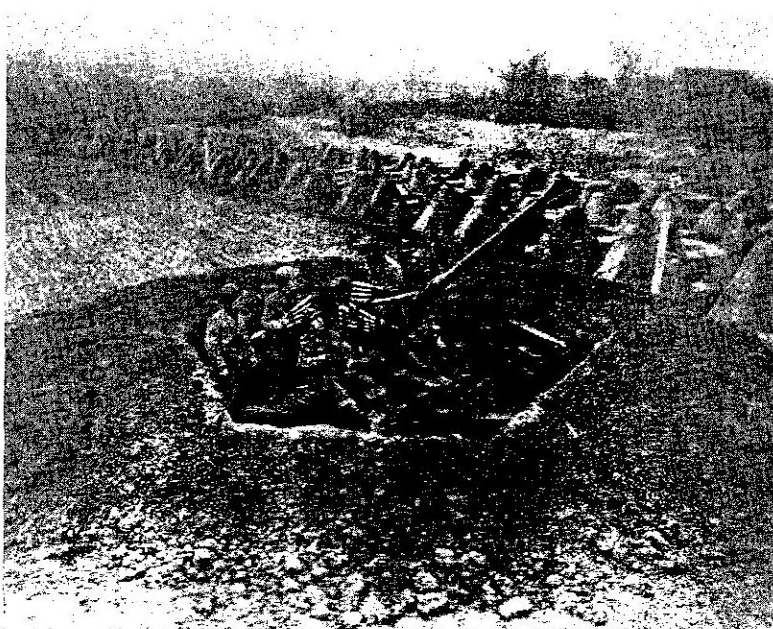
The avalanche gathered speed. The 30th Division, on 2nd September, swept into Belgium—the first Allied troops to enter the Lowlands. Joyous civilians, waving the Belgian national colors, showered us with food, drink, flowers, and kindness. One hundred and eighty miles in 72 hours! That was a record for them to shoot at!

The capture of the famous Belgian fort, Eben Emael, by troops of our division, paved the way to a successful crossing of the Albert Canal. We moved over the canal, Liege fell, and on 12th September we entered Holland—first among Allied forces.

For several days the battalion was located in the vicinity of Tournai, just a few kilometers from the French border. Then, after doubling back through a small part of France, we proceeded toward the cathedral city of Mons. Evidence of the Battle of Mons could be seen everywhere. As our convoy rolled along, we saw wrecked German vehicles of all descriptions stretching for miles on both sides of the highway. Here was the spot where the retreating

The battalion moved quickly to the vicinity of Heerlen, and we began to learn about the friendly Dutch people. Here there was little damage, and the population carried on its daily routine with reasonable normality. The men of the battalion made many friends here. It was pleasant, but there was something else. The Siegfried Line was just ahead.

# The German Campaign



## SIEGFRIED LINE

They had another mass bombing at the Siegfried Line. It wasn't much of a show. It looked as if the infantry had to go in and take the pillboxes one at a time. And when you got a close look at them you understood why. Firebombs, or even block-busters, don't have much effect on 10 feet of steel-reinforced concrete.

You had to learn about the Siegfried Line the hard way. They made a lot of plans, and the artillery fired a lot of rounds, a lot of it direct with AP, but in the long run the in-

fantry went in and took the forts. The attack began on 6th October when elements of the 531st crossed the Wurm River at Ubach. It went slowly but steadily until the second day, when the Germans threw their counter-attack. It was a good one, but it wasn't good enough.

Remember Herzogenrath, Merkstein, Kolscheid, Bardenburg? Those were the towns we went through closing the trap from the north on Aachen. Those are the towns where we set up the 40s in the dragon's teeth, and wondered when we would get to Cologne.

And then Aachen fell, and the outfit took a rest. It was nice at Speckholzerheide. There was beer and music and dancing and there were girls. Every battery spent a few days there. And then they went back into the line and started the long, hard push toward the Rhine.

One thing happened. We were transferred from the First Army over to the newly-formed Ninth Army under General Simpson. A lot of us didn't like it at first. There came a time when we changed our minds about the Ninth Army.

When we kicked off again, in the middle of November, it looked as if we were long gone for Berlin. Things moved pretty smoothly the

first few days. There was Alsdorf, Mariadorf, Broichweiden, Warden. And the rains came. There's no need of talking about the mud west of the Roer. If you were there you know all about it. If you weren't, well then you've never seen mud! And there were mines. And there were casualties.

We skidded, rather than fought, up to the Roer. At one time or another, there was the Vire, the Seine, and the Meuse. And then there was the Roer. That was something special. That was something everybody sweated out in a personal, individualistic manner. There was Lohn, Pattern, Inden and Altdorf.



# ' ' T H E B U L G E ' '

It was 16th December 1944. General Von Rundstedt was in a gambling mood. He massed his Panzers and hurled them in one last desperate thrust through the American lines in hopes of delaying German defeat. So they pulled the 30th Division and the 531st off the Roer River line, and rushed them down into Belgium to help stem the tide.

On the night of 17th December, the 531st moved southward. That night was one of horror, rain, and cold. Enemy planes bombed and strafed the long convoy and we could do little to stop them in the dark. On 18th December,

we moved into the hottest spots since Mortain—at Stavelot and Malmedy. The 40's were antitank guns again.

Then the snows came. For days it snowed, a dry, packing snow that piled up two and a half feet or more. And the Boche came. They came in American uniforms and American vehicles. There were paratroops and Panzers. But they hit the 30th Division and they pulled back from Malmedy and Stavelot.

On 1st January 1945, the Luftwaffe appeared in strength. German aircraft of every description, and flying low, made lightning raids





all over the area. In approximately 10 minutes the 531st had shot down eight enemy aircraft and damaged many others. It was a red-letter day. The Lufawaffe was about through.

Then the 30th started rolling. Slowly we pressed forward, passing through the much-bombed Malmedy and thrice captured and lost Stavelot—the scene of desperate but brilliant fighting by infantry and tank troops. South of Malmedy was Five Corners, infamous for

the grim massacre of American prisoners of war. South of Five Corners was Ligneuville and Recht and St. Vith . . . and south of St. Vith, Von Rundstedt gave up and pulled back into Germany.

One month and three days after our arrival in Belgium we were back on the Roer—a hard job well done and many more planes added to the brilliant record of the 531st.

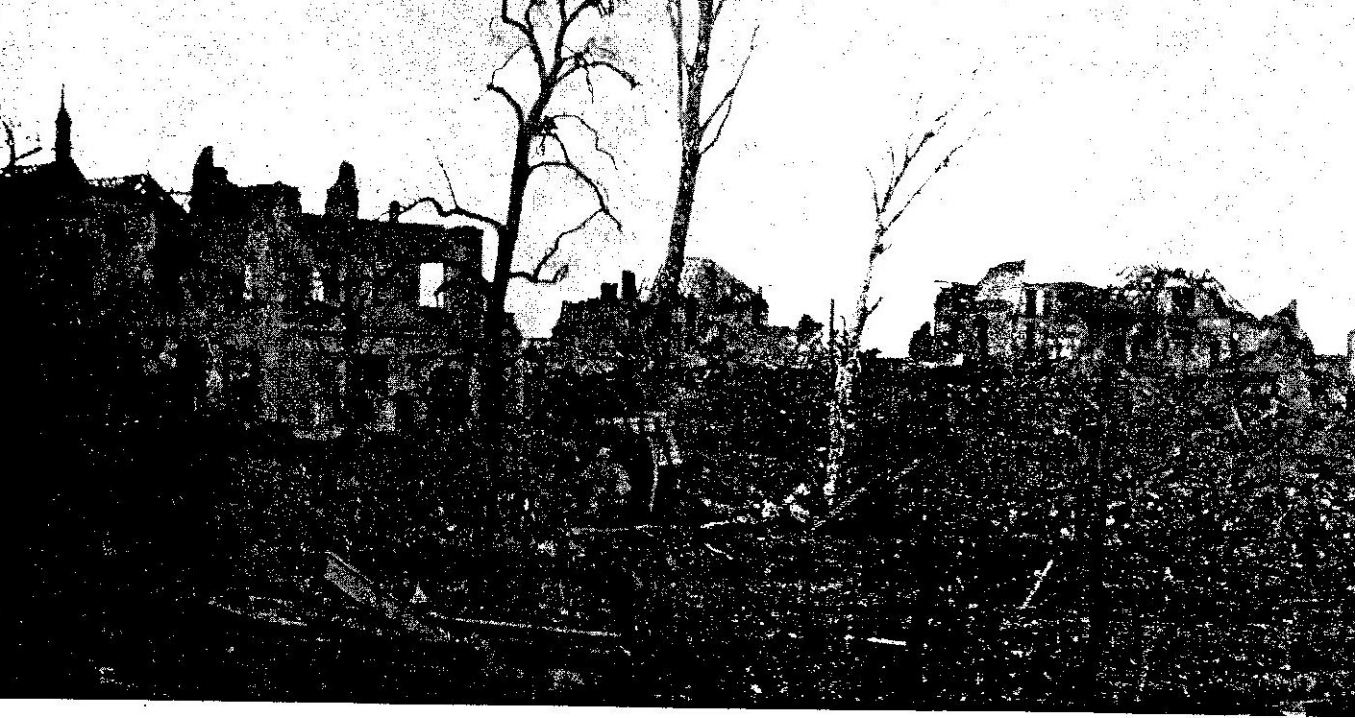
# T H E R O E R

Mud and death. That is the story of the Roer. Both were ever-present. We were careful not to allow our presence back on the river to become known to the Jerries, as they had learned to both fear and prepare for us. Back with the Ninth Army after our Bulge experiences with the old, familiar First, we were again assigned to the XIX Corps and the 12th AAA Group. And something new had been added. The Luftwaffe showed up with its brand new

jet jobs. Trackers on the 40s began to get a little dizzy.

Elements of the battalion sent out the first vehicles to cross the Roer when the big assault came on February 23. Such towns as Altdorf, Lich, Kirchloreshorf, and Krauthausen will be long remembered as hot—but definitely! Attached to us for the operation were searchlights of Battery C, 226th AAA, for battlefield illumination. We experienced nightly and al-





most daily raids, and the jet pilots found that they still couldn't fly as fast as a 40-mm. round.

Mud and death is the story of the Roer. And victory too. Breaking through the crust which had held us up since November, we began to see scenes reminiscent of France. Long lines of prisoners were filing back to the rear. Jerry didn't look too enthusiastic any more. We began to roll swiftly. We began to roll right up to the Rhine. We began to wonder if we would roll right across the Rhine. The armor went through us. Towns like Munchen-Glad-

bach and Krefeld—big towns—fell easily. Julich, beaten and battered bastion of the whole defense system, yielded its crumbling shell with only a token struggle.

And then they pulled us back. We wondered as we heard stories of the First Army and the Remagen bridgehead. But we didn't wonder long. When they put us to loading and unloading assault craft on the Maas in Holland we knew that the big drive across the Rhine would come in the north. And the 30th Division would lead it!

# A C R O S S   T H E   R H I N E

The Rhine operation was the biggest thing since the invasion of the Normandy beaches. From March 6-18 we trained for it. And then, under cover of night with unit designations painted out, we moved up to our positions on the west bank of the river just south of Wesel.

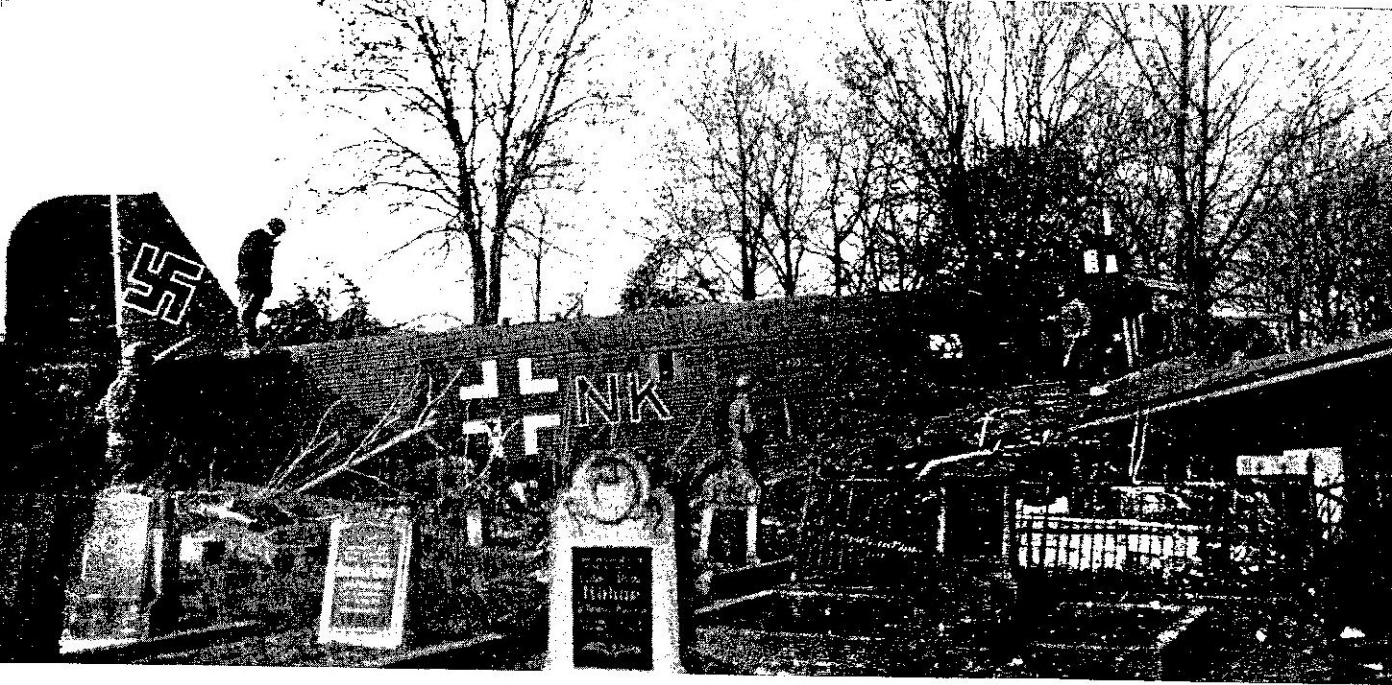
We were under observation, and had to dig in at night. The men were billeted in houses evacuated by Germans, all of whom had been moved out of the area. Movements were restricted, although a huge smoke screen hung over the operational area.

Colonel Mace was responsible for coordinating all AA defense in the division zone. Attached to the battalion for the Rhine crossing were 12 batteries of AA—something of a record. Most of the attached AA was to protect the bridges when built, but the job of the 531st (as usual) was to push on with the infantry, exploiting any gains that were achieved.

Night came on March 13, and with it came the Lancasters. They unloaded a terrific weight on Wesel while British Commandos on our left crouched silently to move in on the town. D-Day dawned, the 24th, to see infantrymen of the 30th Division streaming across the historic river in assault boats under cover of a thundering barrage from massed artillery. One 40-mm. crew fired seven rounds into a German machine gun position and silenced it completely. The line batteries began moving across the river ahead of the tanks.

They say, some of them, that crossing the Rhine was easy. Well, there's something to that. The Airborne, dropped that morning, did a lot to soften up the enemy defenses. And the doughfeet of the 30th did a lot more. But there were a few days on the east bank of the river when you wondered . . . days when the 116th Panzer Lehr Division was throwing its





full weight into an effort to stop a breakthrough.

But the 116th Panzer Lehr didn't make the grade. In fact, the 116th Panzer Lehr ceased to exist after a couple of days. And then things began to roll. After the desert—after

Northern France—rat races weren't exactly new to the 531st. But this rat race was Prima! There were spots (like Detmold) when you stopped to clean out some nasty road blocks. But mostly it was ride, ride, ride! Paderborn, Hanover, Hameln, Brunswick . . . those are all names familiar to men of the outfit. Those names and the long, gray lines of a defeated Wehrmacht moving back to the rear.

We got in a lot of shooting, and we knocked down a lot of planes. And it was a good thing. Because all of a sudden we were at Magdeburg and the war was over. The newspapers say that the war ended May 8. But it ended before that at Magdeburg for the 531st. We got in a few engagements after we hit the town April 13. But then we settled down and just waited for the Russians. And finally the Russians came, and the war was over . . . officially.



# VICTORY!

The radio said that the Germans had surrendered unconditionally. And everyone was glad.

But they didn't have much time to be glad, because the outfit had a new assignment. It was on 6th May that the battalion was ordered to the area of Stassfurt, about 35 miles south of Magdeburg, to take up the work of military government.

Military government was something new. It was something we were never trained for. It

was a thousand problems—presented overnight—with a thousand possible answers. Passes, burgomeisters, DPs, Nazis, food shortages, transportation, records, investigations, red tape! These were the things that became of paramount importance. Static guard, patrols, riot squads, interrogations in an alien tongue! These were the things which supplanted combat for the enlisted man.

But it was interesting. And, even if we didn't have much time to realize the war in



# . . . AND AFTER



the ETO was over, or much time to celebrate, we had the comfortable knowledge that they weren't shooting at you any more; that there wasn't any more blackout. There was a lot of talk about, "Where do we go from here?" And we cleaned up the guns and painted them, in

preparation for turning them in. Our battalion softball team played again and remained unbeaten. And, in the back of everyone's head a lot of figuring was going on: USA, ETO, CBI? How many points do you have? As in the beginning, the thoughts of the boys in the outfit were back home.



# FACTS AND FIGURES



The preceding pages have unfolded to you gradually the active life of our battalion, bringing to a close the activities at a time when our fighting in Europe was behind us. The accounts we have given tell the story in words. As a conclusion, we feel that a summary in Facts and Figures is appropriate to show what we have achieved:

649 Enemy Soldiers Captured  
44½ Enemy Planes Destroyed  
27 Enemy Planes Damaged  
13,134 rounds .40-mm. expended at air targets  
322,386 rounds .50-cal. expended at air targets  
705 rounds .40-mm. expended at ground targets  
1,493 rounds .50-cal. expended at ground targets  
112 Bronze Stars awarded  
7 Oak Leaf Clusters to Bronze Star awarded  
9 Silver Stars awarded  
1 Soldiers Medal awarded  
6 Croix de Guerre awarded  
122 Purple Hearts awarded

# BATTERY A

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 75 ALBERT PETERSEN, Rt. 1, Gray, Iowa.  
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 90 VICTOR F. SCHINDLER, Rt. 3, Shiner, Tex.  
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 33 VERLE W. PALMER, Newburg, Iowa.  
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 70 WILLIAM A. CULLEN, Bovero, Colo.  
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 72 ROY O. DILLEMUTH, Pomeroy, Iowa.  
 73 SAMUEL E. FAVAT, Rt. 3, Frankfort, N. Y.  
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 MAURICE C. WHITAM, Hayden, Colo.  
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Dear General Hobbs:

Now that I am leaving the service, I thought it might be well to give you the following information for whatever satisfaction you might derive therefrom.

I was historian of the ETO. Toward the end of last fall, for the purpose of breaking the log-jam of paper concerning division presidential unit citations, General Eisenhower instructed me to draw up a rating sheet on the divisions. This entailed in the actual processing that we had to go over the total work of all the more experienced divisions, infantry and armor, and report back to him which divisions we considered had performed the most efficient and consistent battle services.

We so did, and we named certain infantry divisions in the first category and same with armor, and we placed others in a second category and yet others in a third. The 30th was among five divisions in the first category.

However, we picked the 30th Division No.1 on the list of first category divisions. It was the combined judgment of the approximately 35 historical officers who had worked on the records and in the field that the 30th had merited this distinction. It was our finding that the 30th had been outstanding in three operations and that we could consistently recommend it for citation on any one of these three occasions. It was further found that it had in no single instance performed discredibly or weakly when considered against the averages of the Theater and that in no single operation had it carried less than its share of the burden or looked bad when compared with the forces on its flanks. We were especially impressed with the fact that it had consistently achieved results without undue wastage of its men.

I do not know whether further honors will come to the 30th. I hope they do. For we had to keep looking at the balance of things always and we felt that the 30th was the outstanding infantry division of the ETO.

Respectfully yours,

/s/S.L.A. Marshall

Colonel S.L.A. Marshall, GSC  
Historian of ETO