

~~SECRET~~ A  
NOTE: To all Btrys., 500th AFA Bn.

Read over the Unit History and make corrections, additions, and suggestions, if you have any, and return to Bn Hqs as soon as possible.



np 43  
10 Oct 44 - May 9 45

HISTORY  
of  
500TH ARMORED FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

By 1600 on the afternoon of 13 October 1944 the 500th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had boarded the USS Sea Robin. After one look at the ship, 1st Lt Peters decided to come over on the Queen Elizabeth and joined us later. The rest of us were not so lucky; we stayed. Forced to remain below decks so the enemy would not think the Sea Robin was a troop ship (the enemy probably wouldn't have thought that anyway), few of us saw the Statue of Liberty as we left New York on the 14th. We had a good view, however, of a shoreline variously identified as Brooklyn, or Atlantic City. That was our last look at the States.

Then followed two weeks at sea; two weeks which probably purged all of us of any seafaring notions we may have previously entertained. A combination of cramped, crowded quarters, amazingly poor food, and above all the unique pitch, toss, and roll attained only by the Sea Robin did the trick. After lasting through the Atlantic, we were floored by a record 32 degree roll in the Mediterranean. When we finally arrived at Marseilles on the 28th, most of us were determined to either fly or swim on the way home.

It was on shipboard that the battalion had its first casualty. Capt. Bror H. Anderson, our S-2, died of spinal meningitis on the 24th of October, and was buried near Marseille.

On docking at Marseille, our collective signs of relief proved premature. The afternoon of the 29th we left the ship on foot for our new home at Delta Base Section, some ten miles away uphill. Led by our battery commanders, we disdained the example of weaker-spirited organizations and carried our bedrolls all the way. Finally most of us made it out to a bare, wind swept hill, our home for the next ten days. Already there to welcome us was the advance detachment consisting of Captains Rice and Rarvin., Lt Graber and T/Sgt Rossi, Sgt Winkler, T/5 Borden and Sgt Campbell, who had spent long arduous hours preparing for our arrival.

And then we worked. We cleaned up the M-7's, the halftracks, the trucks, and the peeps. We loaded ammunition, unloaded it, and loaded it up again. We kept a big guard to prevent moonlight requisitioning by less scrupulous outfits, and we discovered there was not a single aiming stake to be had in Southern France. Despite all this toll, we found time to absorb a little culture in the better bars of Marseille.

When Col Swanson told us that we were going into action with CCA, we were ready and we knew it.

Two trains, representing the pride of French railway, were allotted to the battalion for our move up to Epinal. Evidence of recent occupation by chevaux was all too prevalent in our "forty and eight" cars, but we managed to clean them up enough for eight-hundred men to climb on each one. The halftracks and trailers went on flat cars. The first train, with Major Murtha in charge, left on 6 November followed by Capt. Rice's train the next day. Four days



in a box car was no fun. But along with the stops, switches, and hot boxes normal to French railroads, we had one interesting incident in which Lt Graber attempted to race the train. The train won and ran ahead of Lt. Graber for two days.

Meanwhile Col Swanson brought the peeps and trucks up by motor convoy. A fortunate few of the battalion rode up through the Rhone Valley with him. But the luckiest yet were the gun section chiefs, drivers, and battery executives. They had to wait a week after everyone else left for prime movers to arrive; the week was well spent.

The last M-7 straggled into our muddy bivouac area at Charnes on the 18 of November, where we were hastily completing our preparations for combat. Two days later CCA was attached to VI Corps Seventh Army, full of expectation we moved out in the direction of St. Die. But our hopes were not immediately fulfilled. After a couple of nights on the road-the first of many with CCA- we turned north from La Salle toward Blamont to find that the French had been there before us. With some twenty more miles of slightly confused marching behind us, we closed in at last at the town of Lafrimbolle. Finally there was nothing ahead of CCA but the Vosges Mountains and the enemy.

As Col Swanson had promised before we left the States, A Battery was advance guard for the battalion. With CCA's lead battalion, the 62d Infantry, were Lt Miller and Capt Newman with their sections; these were the first men in the battalion to hear the crack of mortars and crunch of 88's which were to become so familiar. When the 62d was held up by a road block, A battery dashed forward into position, nearly overrunning the CCA command post. But our virgin guns remained silent until the following day.

Along its route of advance the 62d was encountering numerous road blocks. Since none of these were defended in strength, no artillery concentrations were needed on them. But progress was slow; high mountains rising on either side of the road confined us to narrow passes, and continual fog limited our observation. We were road bound. Confronted with this situation, Col Karlstad ordered the 48th tank battalion to turn the German left flank and establish a breakthrough along the axis St. Quirin-Abreschviller-Grandfontaine. Baker battery went with the 48th.

When the surprised Germans made a violent attempt to stop the onrushing tankers, the guns of the 500th spoke for the first time:

"In the early part of the drive across the Vosges Mountains near St Quirin the advance elements of the 48th Tank Battalion ran into a strongly defended road block. Artillery support was badly needed. Capt Adams, who was with the forward elements, radioed back and B Battery of the 500th AFA went into position. It wasn't much of a position, but soon Lt Vincent ~~knuxix~~ J. Hanneken had his six guns laid and ready to fire. The commands came back, and Sgt Mike Messich's crew went into action on the adjusting piece. T/5 Marvin Townsend maneuvered his tank in the direction of fire, Cp Stan Grabowski set off the deflection, Pfc Arthur Matera took care of the elevation, and Pfc Marshall Bettes took the round threw into the breach. Sgt Messich signaled that this gun was ready, and at 0847 hours on November 23, 1944, when Pfc Matera pulled the lanyard, the first artillery round fired in combat by and



artillery unit of the 14th AD was on the way. It was the first of many that helped pave the way for victory."

Lt Hocker shot the first observed mission, silencing an enemy mortar. He smoked an enemy OP and fired with excellent effect on an enemy medium battery. Cpt Adams and Sgt Bruce computed data for interdiction fires which proved to be very effective. The 210 rds that Baker battery fired accounted for the fact that no enemy mortar or artillery fire was encountered by the 500th, thereafter in the Vosges Mountains.

During the next two days the battalion moved by a series of jumps and halts over icy roads toward Molsheim and the Alsations plain. On November 25 three German soldiers, the first of many hundred, to be taken by the 500th were captured by the intrepid C Battery maintenance crew.

The next mission of CCA was to capture the Alsatian city of Selestat in conjunction with other troops. At Molsheim on the morning of the 27th we turned south toward Epfig. We went into position at Neidernai while the 48th drove toward Barr and the 25th Tk Bn penetrated into Gertwiller. It was not long before we found that we were up against a resourceful and well armed enemy. While we were organizing our positions, the Germans shelled Neidernai for twenty minutes. 1st Sgt Paul B Green was killed, and T/3 Jerome Krutzsch of the Medical was wounded. That day the full meaning of the war was brought home to us. An organization does not understand what war is until it has casualties; then it knows only too well.

The night of the 27th the Germans counterattacked. With the good Alsatian civilians assisting them, a large force of Infantry infiltrated into Gertwiller from Barr. At the same time German tanks stole north from Epfig. Taken by surprise we suffered heavy losses both in tanks and infantry. The next day we set off to restore the situation. Lt Cotton, Lt Jahnke and Cpt Alexander and their sections went up with the 25th tankers to capture Gertwiller. Green as grass they first went up to the front in peeps. Only to retire hastily and start digging in an OP complete with BC scopes in plain view and close proximity of the Germans beside a crossroad on which the German armor and guns had registered. They spent the rest of the day dodging 88's and small arms, in the mean while trying to fire at German armor and infantry in the town. The first of hundreds of battalion concentrations fired by the 500th landed in Gertwiller with beautiful effect. Fifty dead Germans were counted in one building alone. When desperate German infantry infiltrated up the railroad tracks toward our observation post, Lt Cotton, Sgt Paroubek, Cpl Edgar and T/5 Cabo teamed up to drive them off with their tank 75 and machine guns. Altogether around 400 rds were fired on Gertwiller, discouraging the Krauts so much that they pulled out the next day.

On the 29th CCA pursued the retreating Germans down toward the village of St Pierre; the 500th displaced into Gertwiller. In its enthusiasm, A Btry went into position some 800 yards short of St Pierre to discover that there was no infantry to its right and front except German infantry. Luckily nothing happened other than some



intermittent machine gun fire. The next day our infantry assaulted St Pierre after a fifteen minute preparation observed by Lt Hocker and S/Sgt Jeardoe of B Battery. One round hit a German ammunition dump which blew up with a tremendous explosion. The Krauts replied from the direction of Epfig with some 88's, but five unobserved volleys from A Btry (illegal in the 50th in those days) put the quietus on them and we took St Pierre without difficulty.

In November, the first month we were in action, the 50th fired 2281 rounds, took thirteen prisoners, killed many Germans and wounded many more, and suffered two casualties. Our introduction to battle was complete.

We moved December 1st from Gertwiller down to Epfig. With CCA reverting to Corps reserve, at last we had a chance to catch our breath. But it didn't last; after being attached to the 36th Inf. Div Arty, detached, and attached to the 17th FA Group, we were finally given the mission of reinforcing the fires of the 928th FA. On the 3d we displaced from Epfig down to Ebersheim where we registered by liaison plane for the first time. Ascertaining the disconcerting information that there was little between them and the enemy the S-3 section fired several unobserved volleys at an alleged mortar position and withdrew hastily, fooled by the batteries.

Having been reattached to CCA we started at 1900 on a forty mile trip to Geiswiller. We moved at night to conceal our intentions from the Germans and to maintain our high standard-acquired by frequent practice of night movement. Between three and five on the morning of the 4th, most of us straggled into Geiswiller. At last we got a much-needed rest.

C battery was detached from the battalion on 6 Dec and assigned to a task force of the 94th Recon Sqd. While the rest of the Bn continued its program of maintenance and rehabilitation, on the 7th Charlie battery moved from Weyersheim to Wantzenau on the Rhine. There Lt Miller and Capt Newman fired nearly 600 rds at enemy inf. in Gamsheim. Two ME 109's strafed the battery position shortly after noon chow; when the battery's Ack-Ack opened up on them, German artillery began shelling the battery. Lt Leroy moved the M-7s to a new position on the other side of town, and resumed fire. Later the Germans began shelling the new position; evidently there was a Pfc Loyd Herman in town with a radio set directing the Kraut fire. Pfc Loyd Mello was slightly wounded in action and several tanks were peppered with shell fragments.

The attack to clear northern Alsace of the German invaders was crystallizing on (November 8) the battalion was attached to the 103d Div Arty to reinforce the fires of the 928th FA. C Btry returned from its mission with the 94th, and the three firing batteries moved to a field near Engwiller, while Hq went to Miesenheim. Here we remained til Dec 11, firing a few rounds and waiting for the jump-off. The only excitement occurred when two Kraut-operated P47's were shot down trying to strafe us. Our attacks making good initial progress we displaced to Greisbach the morning of the 11th. There Pfc Donald Hull of A Btry liberated a Kraut full-tracked vehicle, but was persuaded under duress to give up to friendly infantry. The next day we moved out in a field short of Worth, where for the first time we found teller mines in our gun positions.



All our displacements were made with great difficulty. Heavy fall rains had made every field a sea of bottomless mud. At Griesbach we were badly struck; for example, "A" Battery had to cut down a small forest to get out. Near Wörth the situation was even worse. In black darkness the firing batteries had to pull out of their respective quagmires, cross the Sauer River, and go into position near Gunstett. Before the executives had completed laying the batteries, we were pulled back across the river, to form a battalion column near Hegeney.

The 14th Armored Division had been committed. We were to support the 62nd Infantry of CCA.

After sitting on the road most of the 13th, waiting for CCB to clear, we moved through the Hagenau forest to Surbourg, where we took up positions on the north side of town. Capt. Newman, Lt. Miller, and Lt. Cotton with their sections handled our observation with the 62nd. From Surbourg we displaced to Schoenenbourg, which had been liberated by two squads of infantry and a 500th battery commander. Here a captured SS barracks produced so many articles whose trophy value exceeded their military value that it became almost impossible to squeeze our T/O personnel into our T/O vehicles. Leaving Schoenenbourg on the afternoon of December 15th, we marched to Ingolsheim; there we encountered a new device of the enemy - the box mine. There also the firing of a friendly 240 mm. howitzer forced Fire Direction to give up the mansion they had selected a few yards in front of the muzzle of the gun.

At Riedselz our forward elements had run into trouble, German artillery, mortar, and automatic weapons fire coming from the high ground north of the town blocked our advance. Our observers shot several missions on various Kraut targets. Lt. Hocker did a particularly good job on our base point, which was also a German strong point; while registering on it he burned it down completely.

After the sharp delaying action at Riedselz, the Germans withdrew to their Siegfried line defences, offering little resistance to our advance into Wissembourg and over the German border to Schweigen and Rechtenbach. Following closely behind the 62nd Infantry, the 500th occupied positions along the railroad tracks in Wissembourg on 16th December. S/Sgt Ulrich Amos's gun was the first to fire into Germany; it registered and fired 100 rounds on various targets before the rest of the battalion arrived. In Wissembourg each of the batteries took over a Nazi hotel or apartment house. (Naturally, there was no looting; but all legal military trophies smaller than a four-poster bed were soon on their way to the States. Pvt. Martin P. Gerberg alone sent home enough to keep his Brooklyn business operating for years to come.

On the 17th Headquarters Battery, Service Battery, and the CP group, who had been a day behind the firing batteries all the way up, arrived.



The 62nd was stopped before the Siegfried Line at Ober-Otterbach. On the 18th of December the newly arrived 68th Armored Infantry Battalion attacked. Lt. Wrathall, Lt Jahnke, and Capt. Alexander with their sections were observing. The day saw hard and bitter fighting; while we took the town, we were unable to hold it. When two pl toons were cut off on the northern side of the town, Capt Alexander fired smoke and time missions, enabling them to withdraw. Then we reorganized and dug in.

For the next four days the 68th remained on the low hill south of Ober-Otterbach. The Germans had all the advantages: high ground, observation, the Siegfried Line. Also they had artillery. Our OP was manned in shifts by S/Sgt. Bailey, Cpl. Swanson, T/5 Manthei, T/5 Spilke, T/5 Moore, Pfc. Hornsby, Pfc. Rice, Lt. Jahnke, and Capt. Alexander of "A" battery. Each morning we had to dig in a new OP, because each day the Germans adjusted their 105's on us. The men manning the halftrack radio, in defilade half a mile behind the OP, heard this on their phone: "The Krauts are starting now (explosion) 1st one landed short. 105 from due north. Time for the second. (explosion) Just over. Here comes the third; I'm ducking" (an explosion and then silence.) The Germans inflicted some damage on our OP nearly every day, but no artillerymen were hit.

The reason why the Germans were so anxious to wipe out our observation post was that our artillery was now our sole offensive arm against the Siegfried. Our infantry could not move; at the extreme ranges of the pillboxes, our tank guns could do little damage. We could hurt the Germans only with artillery and they knew it. Continual fog severely limited our observation, but we managed to knock out the principal German fort in the area with 8 inch howitzer ~~concrete-piercing~~ concrete-piercing shells. It was the first time the 500th had fired heavy artillery. Also the first night adjustment was made; T/5 Moore knocked out an enemy mortar by adjusting on it with white phosphorus.

In the meanwhile, Sgt. Paroubek, T/5 Woods, Pvt. Edelstein, Pvt. Pandolfi, and Lt. Cotton had set up their OP on the right flank after having been driven back twice by mortar and 88 fire. Lt. Hocker had gone out with "Task Force Shedd" to find a hole in the Siegfried Line. Surprisingly enough, Task Force Shedd found no holes.



CHAPTER II

But there was humor at Over-Otterbach too. Cpl Swanson of A battery, while preparing for defecation in defilade from the Krauts, had to throw himself in a most undignified and uncomfortable manner into a ditch to get away from a Kraut 105. He was one man who was actually caught with his pants down. And after some mighty close mortar shells had made Sgt. Paroubek hit the ground, he rubbed his hand across his fevered brow to discover that both hand and brow were liberally smeared with some of the best stuff that Alsations keep in their courtyards. And though it didn't seem amusing at the time, the Kraut round that hit the top of the hill by Lt. Hocker and S/Sgt Jeardoe, rolled all the way down the hill past Cpl. Jones, T/5 Gizzi, and Pfc. Motz, to stop under T/5 Gladfelter's haaftrack, might seem that way now to the B Battery RO section.

During our stay at Over-Otterbach, the German Ardennes offensive was gaining full momentum. To meet the threat Third Army was being shifted north from the 19th to the 21st of December. Seventh Army was ordered to take over the Third Army sector and to assume a defensive attitude. An 84 mile front from Saarbrücken to the Rhine had to be held by the Seventh; ten of these miles were to be the responsibility of Task Force Hudelson.

The 62nd Infantry, the 94th and 117th Reconnaissance Squadrons, and the 500th were the principal elements of Task Force Hudelson. We moved from Wissembourg through Gumbrechtshoffen to Baerenthal, arriving there on December 24. We spent a quiet Christmas, and a peaceful week followed. The friendly smiles of the civilians, the serenity of the quiet valley of Baerenthal and of the snow-decked fir trees on the hills made the war seem far away from us.

*On Christmas Day Alby sent the Krauts a Christmas present of 6 rounds of over ripe horse manure.*



## CHAPTER II

"An enemy attack is to be expected tonight." Task Force Huddelson received this message from VI Corps on New Year's Eve. The attack came.

Before the new year was more than a few minutes old, the Germans launched a general offensive with six divisions: the 19th, 36th, 256th, 361st, 559th Volksgrenadier, and the famous 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. Task Force Huddelson bore the brunt of the attack. Despite a stubborn, tenacious defense by the 62nd and elements of the 94th and 117th Recon. Squadrons, the enemy poured through our thin lines, climbing over the bodies of their own dead. "C" Battery at Fourneau-Neuf was shelled for thirty minutes at 1030; at 1130 and again at 1200 Baerenthal was shelled. By noon the Germans had cut the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal road, cutting "C" Battery off from the battalion. Pfc Eric Hoffman of Hqs. and Pfc Leo Fox of "B" Battery were wounded by shell fragments, and a Hq. wire vehicle was knocked out.

Enemy infantry attacked Baerenthal where our guns were firing as fast as they could; "A" Btry fired 511 rounds in the incredible time of five minutes. A vicious small arms fight began. As we pulled out of our positions, we fought a bitter rear guard action. Spraying the woods with their multiple 50's and 37's, our Ack-ack crews saved us from being cut off. Lt. Harkins, Sgt. Biasotti, and Pfc Hull of "A" Btry. each killed Germans with their sub-machine guns. One of the heretofore friendly civilians - a woman - sniped at an Ack-ack track, which turned its 50's on her and cut her in two. Cpl. Wilson of "A" Btry. was slightly wounded by a sniper bullet which glanced off his helmet. A Forward Observer tank and the "B" Btry. Executive halftrack could not be evacuated; but while Lt. Hocker covered the withdrawal with his halftrack machine guns, the rest of the vehicles left town.

The battalion attempted to withdraw down a treacherous, narrow, icy road perpendicular to the German advance and exposed to their fire. Their steel tracks unable to grip the frozen surface, two "A" Btry. M-7's overturned. Sgt. John Tassi and Cpl. Michael Cerrato were killed. Sgt. Steve Okeneski, Cpl. Leonard Soucy, Pfc. William McNickle, Pvt. Lloyd Gillem, Pvt. Marvin Zabel, and Pvt. William Hintz were wounded. The remainder of the battalion completed its withdrawal to its alternate position at Picardie.

In the meanwhile "C" Btry. had been under continual fire. Earlier Cpl. Flotkoetter had laid a line from the battery position to "C" Company of the 62nd, which had been cut off at Bannstein. To establish and maintain his line which was the only means of communication that "C" Company had Cpl. Flotkoetter knocked out a German machine gun and braved unceasing artillery fire. After our infantry had withdrawn, just before noon "C" Btry began its displacement. Moving out of the position, one M-7 hit a land mine and was disabled. As the Germans were closing in,



Lt. Leroy destroyed the gun and led his battery back to join the battalion at Picardie.

On the following day the battalion licked its wounds at Picardie. As Task Force Huddelson had been relieved, we were assigned the new ~~mission~~ mission of reinforcing the fires of the 155th FA Battalion, supporting the 313th Infantry of the 79th Division. We fired 362 rounds to slow the attack of the 256th Volksgrenadier Division. The Germans persisted in their attack, and "C" Btry. moved to Lichtenberg. Capt. Vasaly with the Liaison Section went to the CP of the 1st Battalion, 313th, to undergo some harrowing experiences. Lt. Wrathall, T/4 Mesias, T/5 Wood, Pfc Comis, and Pfc Gregg reported to "A" Company, 313th, in Wildenguth, where they were promptly cut from the rest of our troops for three days. Lt. Hocker stopped a German attack at Reipertswiller, knocking out two tanks and killing hundreds of infantrymen.

But the Germans kept coming. Reipertswiller had become the key to their attack; they had to have it, and they intended to get it regardless of losses. The ranges we fired kept getting smaller and smaller until we went entirely off the slipstick. We poured round after round at the Germans only 1200 yards away. At 2300 "A" Btry. displaced to Ingwiller and was registered using WP shell by 0200. Then "B" Btry. followed. When "C" Battery joined the Battalion the next day, the displacement was complete. At last we could fire like artillery again, where the cannoneers can't see the targets.

During these trying days, Service Battery was also performing unusual jobs. T/4 John Jerrel repaired a damaged weapons carrier under fire in Baerenthal and evacuated wounded with it. Pfc. Bernard Dombrowski and Pfc James Blakeman drove a six-by-six through Reipertswiller gun positions, under fire from enemy on the opposite hills, to pick up ammunition left when the batteries displaced. M/Sgt Stanley Rossi and his tank recovery crew made repeated attempts to recover the vehicles lost at Baerenthal, despite enemy machine gun and mortar fire. Also 1st Sgt Innes of "B" Battery went back to Baerenthal to recover his battery records from immobilized executive halftrack.

On the fourth day of January, Col. Swanson, with whom we had come so far, left the 500th to take over Division-trains. Major Murtha assumed command of the battalion, Major Lanigan became Executive Officer, and Capt. Adams was given the S-3 job in recognition of his fine work during combat as battery commander of Baker Battery. 1st Lt. Hocker took the battery.

The Germans besieged Reipertswiller from the second of January until the sixth. Although they cut the sole American supply route several times, they were unable to take the town. Frontal assaults were beaten off, and the enemy penetration on the left into Wingen was eliminated. The frustrated Germans shifted the main force of their attack to a new sector where they expected more success. They struck at our thinly-held lines in the northern Alsatian plain near Aschbach, ~~1944~~



hoping to break through the Haguenau forest toward Strasbourg.

FROM PICARDIE  
To meet this threat, CGA moved on the freezing night of January 6th to an assembly area south of Soultz. The "A" Btry BC, RO, and Assistant Executive sections, our observers at the time with the 313th, had a ticklish time rejoining the battalion, as the only road back was commanded by German fire. Lt. Harkins was pinned down in Picardie until the following morning.

We went into position at Reimerswiller on the morning of the 7th. We dug in, sent out observers, moved in on the civilians, and settled down. Things were quiet until the when the Germans struck furiously at Hatten and Rittershoffen with elements of the 47th Volksgrenadier, 7th Parachute, 25th Panzer Grenadier, and 21st Panzer Divisions. CGA struck back; later CGB and CCR were committed. It became one of the fiercest battles of the war.

All the observers sections in the battalion were employed. On the first day of the battle, Lt. Wrathall's FO tank knocked out an enemy Mark IV in a tank battle. On the 12th Lt. Vanderbeck, our assistant S-4, who had gone into Rittershoffen with the 68th, was seriously wounded by fragments from a German bazooka. Pvt. Albert F. Reiss was also hit. Two days later Lt. Hocker was wounded in Niederbetsdorf, and Pvt. Willie Goodman of Service Battery was struck when the Germans bombed Surbourg.

From the day the Germans struck at Hatten until the 20th of January, the 500th participated in one of the most bitter battles ever fought. For the observer sections in a Rittershoffen cellar, in a tank by the railroad station, or in a frozen stream along the woods south of Hatten, it was a seemingly endless period of unceasing danger, of waiting for the next round to come in. Daily men went out to do their jobs, knowing well that they might never come back. For the firing batteries and for the fire direction section it was a nerve-straining ordeal, of sleepless alert, of firing normal barrage one thirty seconds after our infantry called for it in the middle of freezing nights, or hurling thousands upon thousands of rounds at the Germans. For Service Btry., for Headquarters, for all, it was a time in which every man did his utmost in his job to keep the Germans from breaking through.

When the Germans attacked, we threw the massed guns of seven artillery battalions against them. When they assembled for another attack, we threw more. When their planes came over to bomb and strafe us at noon time, we drove them off, shooting down an Me109. When their batteries replied to our fire, we silenced some of them. We stopped the German offensive.

Having failed at Hatten, the enemy thrust shifted to the Gambsheim bridgehead, where they met with more success against the 12th Armored Division. Since our flank was exposed we had to withdraw from Hatten







to our final defensive position - the Haguenau Switch. CGA was the rear guard for the withdrawal. On the freezing night of 20 January we pulled back to Surbourg by battery, keeping up our fires as we withdrew. Around noon on the 21st we completed our retrograde movement by going into position at Uhlwiller.

The next day we shifted to better positions at Huttendorf; but after staying there only one day, we marched to Geudertheim to reinforce the fires of the 131st Field of the 36th Division. Here a "C" Battery halftrack was knocked out by mortar fire. After an otherwise pleasant stay, at midnight of the 25th we pulled out.

A penetration had been made in the lines of the 103rd Division at Schillersdorf. We were moved up to help combat this threat to VI Corps' defensive position. In the midst of a snowstorm, # with three foot drifts on the roads, we marched from Geudertheim to Lixhausen with fewer wrecks than we expected. The 26th we occupied positions in Uttwiller to find that the penetration had already been sealed off. We settled down for the winter.

During the month of January we fired 14,853 rounds, making a total of 24,238 for our first three months in combat. The 500th had assisted materially in stopping the German Alsace offensive.

On February 1, 1945 the 500th AFA Bn. had the mission of general support, reinforcing the fires of the 323 FA Bn., 103rd Inf. Div.

The Battalion less "B" Btry was still in position in Uttwiller, France.

It was during this time that the Krauts were holding a more or less defensive line along the Moder River and were not inclined to show themselves, especially during daylight hours. The Forward Observers will tell of their humorous SOP regarding artillery concentrations. One Kraut in the open was good for one battery concentration, two Krauts and you shot the battalion, three Krauts were considered a counterattack and all hell would break loose.

A story is told about Lt. Frank Cotton that more or less gives credence to this SOP. It seems Lt. Cotton was occupying an OP and noticed a Kraut and a woman walk out of the woods and crawl into what looked to be a well furnished foxhole. Not wanting the "soldat" to be any happier than necessary, Lt. Cotton tossed in a few volleys and no more was seen of the would be "love nest occupants". The consensus of opinion among the OP personnel was that at least one Kraut had died happy (or should have).

The Red Cross girls paid their first visit to the Battalion during February. The sight of an American girl had its usual effect and for almost two hours no one mentioned propositioning an Alsatian lass. 1st Lt. Howard T. Graber performed his usual affix service



at the time and piloted the girls around the battalion area, or maybe we should say flew low over our positions in his peep.

The Academy award picture "Going My Way" will long be remembered by members of the 500th AFA Bn for this was the first movie presented to the men since the Battalion was committed in action in November.

Still in support of the 383rd FA Bn., 103rd Inf. Div., the 500th was being registered on the base point by an observer from the 383rd when in the middle of the registration the observer radioed back "Battalion one round, I think I got an Ammo dump." The battalion volley was fired and ten minutes later when the debris and dust had finally settled the registration was continued. This incident made the men of the Battalion even more sure that their slogan, "The 500th hits more accidentally than the rest of the artillery battalions hit on purpose", was correct.

Even at this early date the men of the battalion were learning what the "Army of Occupation" was going to do. The lack of activity on the VI Corps front gave the battalion an opportunity to give concentrated attention to the maintenance of vehicles and equipment, sanitation and personal cleanliness. We soon discovered that inspections were the "Order of the DAY".

On the 18th of February the battalion again reverted to 14th Armored Division Artillery control and occupied positions in Ringendorf and Ettendorf, France where we remained the rest of the month.

The second decorations were awarded to men of the Battalion when on February 4th, the Bronze Star was presented to Lt. Norman Jahnke, Recon Officer, and S/Sgt John W. Bailey, Recon Sgt., both of Battery "A". Later in the month 1st Lt. Philip Wrathal and 1st Lt. Robert Hoeker were also awarded the Bronze Star Medal. Lt. Wrathal also received the Oak Leaf Cluster to the Bronze Star. The Liaison Pilots and Observers, 1st Lts. Delong, Dorland, Keller and Luceri were awarded the Air Medal on the 12th of February.

Because of the nature of the fighting during February the artillery fired very few heavy concentrations. The majority of missions fired were either by single battery of battalion. The most enlightening description of the use of artillery during February was given by Major Maurice Adams, Battalion Executive Officer. He explained that "105's were used for sniping."

The old adage "March comes in like a lamb" again held true as the battalion remained in defensive positions, the first half of the month.

Six observation posts were established and everyone was given a chance to man a ground OP. The FO Sgts., Paroubek, Stevenson, Sullentrop and their crews, Shannon, Zigmont, Chapman, Plew, Rossi,



Garner, Edgar, Marostica, Hopper, were given the opportunity to see how the other half lives.

An interesting bedtime story is related about the BC Section of B Battery. Pfc Albert Seigel, T/4 George Ferguson, and Pfc Norman Stenerson, were on duty one night on an OP near Phaffenhofen in Alsace when a barrage was placed on the OP. The house was hit several times. During the height of the barrage the phone rang and 1st Lt. Frank H. Cotton (officer in charge of OP) remarked that he could see their OP had been hit and was wondering if they had been able to observe any gun flashes which might indicate the position of the guns doing the shelling. Pfc Seigel who was operating the phone came back with "Hell No! Stenerson is on top of me and I'm under the bed." Seigel then inquired if Lt. Cotton had been able to see anything "We see anything" replies Cotton, "Hell That's why I called you. I'm under a bed also."

During their stay in Ettendorf, B Btry, was given the mission of upholding our good neighbor policy. It seems that a number of chickens were missing from the coop belonging to the people in whose homes they were billeted. The cry these people raised was heard in FDC. So as would naturally be expected the chicken coop was placed in the guard post for the nights to follow. Each morning Sgt. Winfield Thomas lined his crew up. Cpl Eiss, T/5 Norris Jones, T/5 Wilbur Poole and Pfc Hauson also 24 chickens, 12 geese and one rooster then reported all present or accounted for.

During the early part of the drive to the Siegfried Line the battalion went into position near the towns of Rittershofen and Hatten which had been the scene of the most bloody battle the 14th AD had engaged in.

Taking the opportunity to see just how effective our fire had been in this area many of the men and officers revisited these two towns.

1st Lt Howard T. Graber and Pfc Martin Gerberg were viewing the destruction of the town when out of a demolished home came an old lady carrying a cigar box. She approached Lt. Graber and Pfc Gerberg and handed the box to them. Upon opening the box it was discovered that it contained "dog tags" of men who had fallen in the battle for Hatten. The Alsatian people had buried our dead when we had withdrawn and collected the dog tags of every man. It was hard to realize that of more than 200 men all that remained was a cigar box full of pieces of tin.

Shortly after the start of our drive to the Rhine, which started March 17, 1st Lt. "Hank" Dorland was given the mission of ferrying an Army Courier. Lt. Dorland took off just as the air field was being moved to a new location. He knew the general vicinity on the map where the new field was to be established, but had never seen the area on the ground. He had a few delays enroute and upon his return it was getting late and darkness had



already closed in. Flying 50 feet over the tree tops and following the dim outline of the roads Lt. Dorland located the field. All he had to see by were two sets of peep lights.

Marking his preliminary run Lt. Dorland caught the reflection of something shiny directly in front of his plane. ~~HEARD~~ HIGH WIRES!!! The dread of all pilots! "Hank" tucked the nose down and brought the "Kite" in on the first run. As the plane slithered to a stop he was greeted by every man on Div Arty Air Section. There was never a B-17 that was sweated out, or prayed in, anymore then "Hank" Dorland and his "Kite".

On 24th of March the battalion closed in position in Bellheim, Germany, Btry A was the lead battery and received the first mission to be fired across the Rhine. Sgt. Ponzi, Chief of section of No. 2 gun alerted his crew, Cpl Schneider, Pfc's Del Priore, Huntly, Lemmon, Sustin, and T/4 Schmidt. Everyone was tense this was what they had been waiting for. The elevation was given and in a matter of seconds came the command from the exec, 1st Lt Albert J Elgin, "FIRE"!!! That round marked a new phase in the battle for Germany.

On the night of 25-26 March the battalion fired over 1,000 rounds as our part of a diversionary barrage to cover the XV Corps ~~XXXXX~~ crossing of the Rhine River. After this demonstration the battalion left for a Division Assembly Area near Dierbach, Germany where we remained until the end of the month making preparations to cross the Rhine River.

*On the march from the intro to the Rhine near Hirschheim A Btry pulled off the road and completed a mission, knocking out Art guns & infantry, in less than 5 min.*



APRIL

On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, the Battalion went on its 'Easter Parade' by crossing the Rhine River in the vicinity of Worms, Germany. This was our first mission under the XX Corps and we were to be the left flank of the 7th Army. After crossing the Rhine at 0800 the Battalion proceeded to a rendezvous area in the town of Zielbach.

On the 2nd of April 1945, in the early morning, CC"A" moved up to attack with the 500th AFA Bn in direct support. Resistance was unusually light and few missions were fired. As the attack progressed, "A" Btry, which was advance guard battery, fired on enemy personnel attempting to board railroad cars to escape our attacking infantry. Large numbers of the rapidly shrinking Wehrmacht were wiped out. Other missions effectively silenced a self-propelled gun and anti-tank gun. In the first days of this attack many PWs were taken by the batteries with "A" Btry leading the parade with 134.

On April 4th, Capt. William B. Rice, the commander of our Service Btry fell into enemy hands while reconnoitering a position for his battery. Sgt. Alfred R. Hall, who was accompanying Capt. Rice, narrowly escaped capture. At one time, while making his way back to the allied lines, he had to hide in a water filled ditch while German horse drawn artillery passed along the road only a few feet away.

As the attack progressed CC"A" was broken into two combat teams with the 68th AI Bn and "A" Btry composing one and the 48th Tank Bn and the remainder of the 500th as the other.

"A" Btry was kept very busy firing for the 68th for the next few hours but the 69th AFA Bn relieved them and they rejoined the Bn.

The events of each day now seemed to follow the same pattern as the enemy would blow bridges and sight self propelled guns to hold our advance. It seemed as though a minor delaying action was all the fight he had left. Snipers were frequent and troublesome and the enemy continued to surrender in great numbers.

Our advance never-the-less was swift and in a few days we could hear the fighting behind us. It was a strange feeling to hear American Artillery shells bursting to your rear.

On the afternoon of April 7th the leading elements of the 48th Tank Bn. entered Neustadt. Accompanying them as artillery observers were Lt. Milton O. Turner and Lt. Frank Cotton.

Lt. Turner's M4 tank was the 4th in the column and Lt. Cotton was following the column in his halftrack. On the outskirts of town no enemy was observed but as the tanks approached the center of the city, sniper fire began to rain on the hulls of the tanks. As the column halted, Lt. Turner opened his turret to investigate the trouble. An instant later he slumped over against the hull as a sniper bullet killed him instantly. Cpl. John Rossi, his gunner, was wounded by the same bullet. By this time the street had become a hotbed of small arms and bazooka fire and as the progressed Lt. Cotton sprayed each window with



his .30 caliber machine gun to keep the sniper fire down. His position was extremely precarious as his was the only halftrack in the town and his men were entirely exposed to the towering buildings on either side of him.

As the Battalion approached Neustadt the activity of the enemy increased. Nevertheless positions were occupied and gun crews dismounted and patrolled in infantry fashion and succeeding in killing or capturing large numbers of enemy personnel.

During this action, enemy 152mm Nebelwerfers were falling in the btry positions and 2 men in "C" Btry were slightly wounded. An enemy observer was spotted on a nearby hill and was brought under direct fire by Able Btrys M-7's. Nebelwerfers continued to harass our positions throughout the afternoon but as night fell enemy activity suddenly ceased. In 24 hours this hotbed suddenly became rear echelon as the 45 Infantry Division bypassed through us.

The next few days the Battalion had a well earned rest as maintenance and repair were conducted.

Returning to action CCA was again split in two combat teams. This time "A" Btry was detached to support the 48th Tank Bn and the remainder of the Bn supported the 68th AI Bn.

It is interesting to note that as our columns penetrated deeper into the Redoubt, there was a great increase of Air activity. During the period our AA crews downed two FW 190's and sent several others on their way with smoke pouring from them. In one of these instances the Bn AA crews fired several thousand rounds at a plane with no immediate effect, but several minutes later out of the woods came a group of 74 SS troops lined up in columns of twos carrying a white flag as a guidon. On interrogation they stated that our AA fire had been so terrifying that they thought a whole division was attacking them.

During this period Able Btry, who was detached to the 48th Tank Bn, was also having a lively time as this extract from their morning report will indicate "Four enemy planes FW 190 came over ~~division~~ our position. One was hit and was seen going down before it was out of sight. Enemy made a counter-attack this morning but it was repulsed. Btry fired approx 300 rounds. RD Section helped liberate 3 towns. BC and driver liberated another. Btry laid on compass 4800. Fired several rounds then changed to compass 2400. Two guns laid on compass 4800 leaving 3 guns on compass 2400. Btry fired in opposite directions at the same time. We had them surrounded."

On 16 April Capt. William B. Rice, who had been missing in action since April 4, returned to the Bn. He had been taken prisoner and had escaped his captors, the 2nd Panzer Div. At 2000 that same day, while making a reconnaissance, Capt Rice and his party were ambushed and again he was taken prisoner and reported to be wounded. Capt Ezra Newman led the remainder of the party to safety after destroying the vehicle.



April 18th found the Battalion at Grubb after a drive in which practically no opposition was met. At Grubb however higher headquarters reported that the enemy was preparing to attack in three division strength on a line extending from Neumarkt to Feucht. Orders were to hold our positions using all available weapons. Steps were taken to improve our perimeter and as the German attack progressed our right flank became exposed. At one time during the attack the Battalion had batteries firing in opposite directions. As the attack progressed, CC"R", the unit on our right, repulsed the enemy through a series of counter-attacks and restored their lines.

Neumarkt at this time appeared to be the enemy strong point as the 18th Tank Bn. had been attacking it without success. An ultimatum was given to the enemy to surrender the town or have it destroyed and our troops were ordered to withdraw. Preparations were made for artillery and air bombardment of Neumarkt. On the 20th of April, having received no message from the enemy regarding the ultimatum, we upheld our promise and with the screaming roar of dive bombers, the crash of artillery, we destroyed Neumarkt. Two days later as we were leaving the area, the town was still a mass of flames. Today Neumarkt is a tribute to the German people from their own SS troops.

Following this action, the division was attached to the III Corps of the Third Army and again the Battalion was in CC"A" in direct support of the 68th AIB. Our next objective was to seize crossings of the Danube. The Division continued on its mission and moved rapidly to the southwest meeting light resistance. Town after town was taken without firing a shot. The biggest difficulty encountered were the many streams to be crossed over which all bridges had been blown.

As we moved to the southeast, deeper into the heart of the redoubt, we began to understand the secret of Nazi Germany. An endless stream of humanity passing in the opposite direction. Liberated PW's, slave laborers of every nationality. Slaves of the German Reich who supplied labor for Hitler's war industry and farms. We shall never forget the some six thousand Czechoslovacians we liberated near Mainburg, who hadn't eaten in six days. The sunken, hollow cheeks and glazed look of starvation in their eyes, or the tears of happiness that were shed as they grasped our hands. That morning, as never before, the fact was brought home to us why we were here fighting this war. We moved on with a new determination. This must never happen again and Germany must pay for her crimes.

Continuing on our mission, the Danube was crossed at 1330 28 of April 1945. Orders were received to continue on to the town of Landsht. Moving very swiftly against light resistance our columns moved on to reach their objective and liberate the high PW camp at Mooseberg where Sgt W. A. Thomas of Baker Btry found his brother S/Sgt James Thomas among the liberated prisoners.

Again orders were received to attack and seize crossings over the Inn River and on the 2nd of May the Bn reached the river.



On the 2nd of May, near the village of Erharting, over the radio of Baker Battery's Executive Officer came the familiar words "Fire Mission, Enemy vehicle will adjust" 1st Lt Hanneken quickly picked up the telephone and talked to Sgt Messick, the Chief of Section on #1 gun. -- Base deflection right 40, Si 300, Elev. 270. Bettis, No. 1 man, spun the elevating handwheel as the muzzle of the 105 howitzer swung to meet the sky. Komelsky, No. 2 man, received the shiny brass shell from Knettener who, assisted by Townsend, had prepared the powder lots. Komelsky rammed the shell into the breach. Sgt Messick raised his hand -- Fire -- With a crashing roar the shell left the howitzer. The last round to be fired by the 500th AFA Bn sped on its way into German territory. This marked the 40995th round to be fired by this Battalion into German ~~territory~~ Army. Sgt Messick and his section, by strange coincidence, also fired the first round to be fired by the Battalion when we were first committed into action in the Vosges Mountains.

And so with the end of hostilities on May 9th the long trek across Alsace and Germany ended and the 500th began its duties as occupational troops which we are still in the painful process of performing.