

March: (cont'd)

Whenever an artillery mission was being fired Lt. Gregor and his men really knew about it.

It was while in these positions that "C" company's commander, Capt. McKenzie, was seriously wounded in the right leg by enemy long range mortar fire and had to be evacuated. This was a serious loss to the Battalion and every man in "C" company was hoping for the captain's speedy recovery and return. That wasn't too likely, however, and Lt. Hofmann <sup>went</sup> ~~came~~ down to take over "C" company, while Lt. McPhillips became reconnaissance officer.

While this was going on, Lt. Redden was across the Rhine with the front line infantry acting as an artillery liaison officer for the two firing companies. Here, he really learned to appreciate being in the TDs and not the infantry. While he was gone, his platoon took over guarding the Battalion CP, while Lt. Dushkin and his platoon were detailed to Corps traffic control to help untangle the snarl of traffic flowing into the Remagen Bridgehead.

Someone had written that spring comes a month early to the Rhine Valley and this proved very true for all the snow ~~was~~ gone. The trees were beginning to bud, and the sun stayed out longer and brighter each day. At last the mud was slowly drying up and ~~monaie~~ and the army's mechanized progress climbed rapidly.

This artillery mission didn't last long however, for on the 15th the Battalion was relieved from the 401st F.A. Group and crossed over the Rhine into the bridgehead, only 8 days after the capture of the bridge itself. Now the Battalion was working under the 8th T.D. Group, commanded by Col. Larter, and its mission was to support the 9th and 99th Divisions in the III Corps sector. This was to be accomplished by either direct or indirect fire positions, depending on the situation.

When the Battalion did cross the Rhine beginning at 0630, the 15th, it was not just a matter of driving over a bridge. A dense fog hung low over the water and this provided cover from ~~gun~~ AA guns for strafing

March: (cont'd)

Heinie jet propelled fighters. Enemy fighters swarmed over the bridges but fortunately no one was hurt and no equipment lost. After the last vehicle crossed at 0800, everything went as scheduled. The three gun companies moved into previously reconnoitered assembly positions and from there into firing positions. The Battalion CP was required to stay close to Group CP for liaison purposes and they set up at Erpel. Now all were across and everyone was proud to be in this center of action. Later it became known that the 817th was the only towed T.D. Battalion to participate in the battle of the Remagen Bridgehead.

Within a few hours after crossing, all guns were in positions and the positions were being bettered with each hour. "C" company was directly along the Rhine River's east bank, prepared to leapfrog forward by platoons, but "B" company and "A" company were inland and covering much wider fronts. Recon, of course, had QPs out screening the gun companies.

One of the most dramatic sights witnessed by members of the Battalion was the collapse of the Remagen Bridge on the 16th of March. Of course, three ponton bridges had already been built over the river so the bridge's collapse didn't materially affect the war. As <sup>it</sup> happened some of the Battalion's "medics" were on hand and helped treat those injured in the collapse. The enemy had really tried to bring the bridge down with artillery, bombs, and V-2s, but it had finally collapsed, unannounced, from the strains of initial overloading.

→ The next day, the 17th, the Battalion CP moved to more centrally located quarters at Linz and "C" company, remaining in its same positions, began to support the 18th Cavalry Squadron, which had taken over part of the 99th Division's zone. A, B, and the Recon platoons remained in essentially the same situation as before. After the cavalry and infantry had taken Honnigen, south of the initial bridgehead, the cavalry prepared to move into Rhinebruhl, the next town south, and "C" company established a base of fire for their attack.

March: (cont'd)

Then after the town was taken, they covered all tank approached to the town, and as seems to be usual with towed TDs, ended up with their guns and security the most forward elements of the squadron's installations.

About now, with very little artillery coming in and no small arms fire at all, some of the men became careless about digging in and taking shelter. This brought tragedy to "A" company where a shell landed in the midst of a group sitting in the open, killing Pfc. Malone outright, and fatally wounding Pfc. Heitman and Pvt. Licata.

About this time word was received from the First Army that the Battalion was to be, within that week, converted from towed to self-propelled---the dream and wish of all T.D. men was to come true. The weapon was to be the M-18 Hellcat, so everyone was doubly enthusiastic to think of getting this speedy destroyer.

Immediately the colonel formulated plans and the <sup>gears</sup> ~~guns~~ were shifted to put this change-over into speedy motion. With confidence and enthusiasm everyone worked hard. Many difficulties, both technical and tactical arose; the companies had to be pulled out of the line; destroyers obtained; 3" guns and half-tracks turned in; but everything was accomplished in the usual efficient 817th way. Of course, a new T/O and E, 18-25, 15 March 1944, was in effect, and this called for only 607 enlisted men as against some 720 for a towed Battalion. Also, a reconnaissance company with three reconnaissance platoons and a pioneer platoon had to be activated and all equipment drawn for them.

Further casualties occurred during the last days of as a towed battalion. On the afternoon of the 20th, Privates, Kitchen, Koteras, and Schultz of "C" company's 1st platoon were wounded by artillery fire and evacuated. Then, that evening one shell killed T/5 Lyons and wounded Lt. Tally and Pfc. Lane as they stood near the "C" company CP. Both Lt. Tally and Pfc. Lane had to be evacuated.

By the 22nd, most of the equipment had been obtained, but the companies had not yet been relieved from their assignments with the 9th and 99th,



March: (cont'd)

"C" company now having departed from the cavalry and moved on the 18th to support the 9th Division.

Oddly enough all of this conversion work had been accomplished prior to receiving an official order, clearly illustrating the enthusiasm among the members of the Battalion at being converted.

Changes became commonplace and seemed to hit the Battalion all at once. In addition to losing 102 enlisted men in the change, Major Rummele, Executive Officer, was transferred to the G-4 section of III Corps, and Lts. Kappelke, ~~and~~ Coburn, and Cannon to the 8th T.D. Group. Of course, this left the Battalion short on officers but here again the reflections of a good organization were seen when many of the NCOs pitched in and did the work of the absent platoon leaders. This departure of so many officers called for reorganization and when all changes had been made, the staff and company commanders stood as follows:

Bn. Commander.....Lt. Col. Bardes  
Bn. Executive.....Maj. Hahner  
Bn. Executive.....Capt. Omenhiser  
5-3  
Bn. S-2 .....Lt. Hofmann  
C.O. Co. "B" ..... Lt. McPhillips  
C.O. Co. "C" ..... Lt. Burton  
C.O. Recon. Co ..... Capt. Sternfels.

Finally, on the 26th of March, the gun companies were relieved, and assembled in the vicinity of Honnigen on the Rhine, where their equipment was issued, drivers learned to drive their tracks, and gunners studied the manipulation of the 76mm gun. Inside of 48 hours the change-over was completed and the Battalion was ready to act on its first orders for employment as a self-propelled unit. Now would come further, and even more aggressive action for this fighting outfit.

Now, a few words to assist in clarifying the "big picture" on the battle fronts, and where in this "big picture" the Battalion was located.

March: (cont'd)

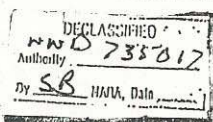
The First U.S. Army had broken out of the Remagen Bridgehead and with an armored spearhead was fanning out over the countryside---moving about 150 miles ~~eastward~~ and by-passing all pockets of resistance. The Third Army, to the south about 40 miles had crossed the Rhine and was moving eastward at a burning pace, with the ultimate objective of swinging northward to meet the 1st Army and form the Marburg pocket. To the north, the 9th Army had crossed the Rhine, north of the Ruhr, and was driving straight east, aiming to eventually hook up with a prong of the 1st Army, which was to shoot northward from Marburg and Giessen and encircle the Ruhr ~~area~~, reported to contain about 115,000 troops. It was with this northward encircling arm of the 1st Army that the 817th was to participate.

On the 28th, the Battalion made a long march eastward, still with the 8th T.D. Gp. They climbed the hills overlooking the Rhine and breezed down the famed autobahn to the vicinity of ~~Giessen~~. Then, the Battalion turned north on secondary roads and assembled near Wiebach. Here they idled two days, although the reconnaissance platoons and the company security sections were busy scouring the local woods and small villages and picking up prisoners.

→ On the 30th, the Battalion's association with the 8th T.D. Group was brought to an abrupt end when orders were received detaching the unit from the III Corps and assigning it to the VII Corps with the mission of supporting the 104th (Timberwolf) Infantry Division. At this time the 104th was following up the 3rd Armored Division which had just linked up with the armor of the 9th Army at Lippstadt, and the Timberwolves were stretched tautly and dangerously over a wide front, their thin lines especially vulnerable to an enemy armor attack from the west. The Battalion's mission was to protect this left flank.

While the Battalion began an 80 mile blackout march, its first as S.P.'s, the Colonel and the company commanders went north to the Division CP to get instructions and present their plans.

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March: (cont'd)

The Battalion, meanwhile, arrived at Sachsenburg, assembled there, gassed up, and was told to be ready to go again in a short time. Before daylight the gun companies moved out to the vicinity of Medebach to help repel a reported attack of 30 enemy tanks and 400 infantrymen. The Battalion entered the fluid lines of the Division's left flank and prepared to execute its first mission as a self-propelled unit.

Thus in the early morning of the last day of March, the Battalion entered on the first day of the most active period of its history----- its fighting support of the Timberwolves of General Terry Allen.



April:

April, 1945 was the most active month in the history of the Battalion. In the last days of March <sup>the 817<sup>th</sup></sup> ~~we~~ had been attached to the fast moving Timberwolves, who were in turn following the 3rd Armored Division, and even had one Regiment accompanying the 3rd Armored. So, the association that began in late March was to continue all through April.

The three gun companies, each with one reconnaissance platoon in support, were assigned the mission of holding the left flank of the spearhead moving ~~north~~ by supporting the 413th and 415th Infantry Regiments. For these missions the ~~doughboys~~ and the T.D.s worked hand in hand. The infantrymen rode on the outside of the T.D.s and the faster the Hellcats moved the better they liked it. Opposition, of course, varied with the sector, and the enemy himself made periodic thrusts into our flanks in an effort to ~~break through~~ to their own lines far to the east. Had the enemy only known the American weakness here they might have massed for a ~~gigantic~~ effort and easily broken through. But their intelligence had broken down and they didn't know how thin our lines were. Fortunate, this was for us!

During the first two days of April, the gun companies were showing the "doughs" what they could do. They accounted for 55 PWs and destroyed numerous pillboxes. "A" company, in particular, had a hot time of it in Medebach. Here on the night of 1st of April the Germans counterattacked and got through the infantry into the center of the town. Capt. Vogel looked out from his CP to see Heinies across the village square shooting Panzerfaust's at two of the 750th Tank Battalion's tanks parked there. Fortunately, they were duds and a tanker took care of the Heinies with his 50.

On the outskirts of Medebach the enemy had swung north around the town and encountered one of our reconnaissance outposts.

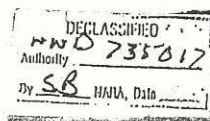
April: (cont'd)

Outnumbered about 200 to 10 the reconnaissance men were forced to withdraw to the woods, firing all the time. In the exchange of shots, Pfc. Nowakowski was killed and he lay dead across his hot machine gun. Unfortunately, communications had broken down and "A" company was not warned immediately. It was because of this that Capt. Vogel was surprised to look out of his CP and see Krauts across the town square.

The good work the Battalion was doing was getting around and comments on their achievements were many. On the 4th of April, this report was published in the 104th Division G-3 Periodic Report: "This welcome addition to Timberwolf power tacked the following addition onto its already impressive record: 12 points of resistance were overrun, 8 machine gun nests knocked out, one 20mm nest destroyed, one SP with occupants destroyed and assistance given to foot troops in the capture of over 100 prisoners of war. Lt. Col. Bardes and his men are providing worthy support to the Timberwolf Division".

Under fire the officer's and men of the 817th were at their best. Many engagements took place, too numerous to mention all, but there are some that deserve mention in these pages. On the 5th, the Battalion got its first tank, the first it had seen, when one of Lt. Floberg's T.D.s knocked out a Panther tank and killed all of its occupants. "B" company was, at this time, attached to the 4th Cavalry Group, in the vicinity of the Altenburen-Olsberg highway. Lt. Floberg, with two destroyers, spearheaded the attack into Altenburen and met moderate fire on the outskirts of town. Not wishing to endanger the destroyers, Lt. Floberg proceeded on foot into town to observe enemy activity. Spotting a Mark V Tank in the street he tactfully and skillfully maneuvered one destroyer to within 100 yards of the enemy tank, directed fire from a ditch and with three scoring hits knocked it out of action. The enemy then brought their two remaining vehicles into action, but under the supervision and direction of Lt. Floberg they were disposed of in short order. For his clear courage and skill in this action, Lt. Floberg was later awarded the Silver Star.

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April: (cont'd)

Further to the north in the small town of Niederam, Lt. Schneider had a breath taking experience when, on foot in the town seeking enemy installations, he dashed into a house to take cover. In an instant a Panzer pushed up to the house and poked its gun through a window. Lt. Schneider hit the floor under the window sill while the tank fired 5 shots into the room. Fortunately they were AP and not HE and Lt. Schneider escaped untouched.

The seriousness of the menace ~~to~~ this western flank lessened when the XVIII Airborne Corps, with the 9th Infantry Division and the 7th Armored Division were brought up to move west and clean out the Ruhr pocket. There on the 6th, the Battalion was assembled, except for "B" company, at Marburg, and prepared for future operations. These new operations were to take the 817th further north and then directly east. "B" company was still with the 4th Cavalry Group near Brilon ~~Dulon~~ and was to remain and help in the mop up of this fringe of the Ruhr sector.

April 7th saw the beginning of the rapid dash eastward from the area of Nieder-Marsburg. The 104th was to attack immediately and seize a crossing on the Weser River, the first big natural barrier on the road to Berlin. The mission of the regiments, which "A" and "C" companies, together with their reconnaissance platoons, ~~was~~ <sup>were</sup> to <sup>help</sup> accomplish, was the seizure of high ground on the Weser's east bank to permit VII Corps Engineers to begin bridging operations. One platoon of "B" company's and one of "C" company's were the first to hit the river at Gieselwerder, Germany-----only to find the bridge blown. However they used their initiative and headed south along the river in search of a bridge which they found in the V Corps sector. Here they crossed, turned north, and continued on their mission, meeting only light resistance, which was brushed aside. In short order their mission was completed, bridges were built, and the Division and the Battalion were soon east of the Weser.

April: (cont'd)

Back in March, when the Battalion was converted, Lt. Col. Bardes had decided to reorganize his CP Group. Previously all of the staff travelled together. Now, there was to be a "TAC" CP, and well as the forward CP. Major Hahner, the executive and Lt. Crandell, the S-1, were the nucleus of the forward CP, while the stripped down TAC, consisting of the C.O., S-2, and S-3, made the tactical plans for the Battalion. The TAC CP was always well forward and easily available to all companies. From this TAC CP the Battalion Commander went almost daily to visit the forward platoons and to see that they were being properly employed. This small CP, which of course had the staff sections, headed by T/Sgt Abbott and T/Sgt Saarie along, was a marvel of efficiency and was a great asset to the Battalion.

Now, back to the battle; the race against time was on. The German's were disorganized and scattered. Constant pressure had to be put on them to keep them from being able to reorganize. Daily, the Battalion advanced from 25 to 40 miles, and the supply sections of headquarters company were working 24 hours a day to fall the seemingly limitless thirst of the Hellcats for gasoline. The Weser had been crossed and then there was a mad dash for Warburg; then the Leine River and Göttingen. The Leine River crossed, they pushed onward ever eastward into the heart of the black Reich.

Along the highways of battle the townspeople and farmers gaped in amazement out of the windows of their white flag bedecked houses at the equipment and material of this great American Army. They forget the advances of their own blitz of '39 and '40 and marvelled at ours. They were being conquered and overrun, and they knew it.

Each day every installation of the Battalion moved. The name of last night's town was soon forgotten and all eyes were eastward. "Onward! Onward!" was the cry and the 817<sup>th</sup> rolled on, sometimes carrying the doughboys with them. Soon perhaps, it would be "Finis la guerre" and all could think of going home.

April: (cont'd)

The rapid strides of the forces of course left pockets of the enemy and many took advantage of the rugged terrain of the Harz Mountains to hole up there. A reported 15,000 Krauts were there and, of course, rested on the flank of our supply lines and were a threat to the security of the advancing troops. Here at the Harz Mountains <sup>the 8/7<sup>th</sup></sup> ~~our~~ reconnaissance company, as a unit, received its baptism of fire and came through with renewed vigor and a real esprit de corps. "B" company had rejoined the Battalion and they too took a sector of the Harz mountains to secure. It was in one of the several engagements here that Sgt. Rendon of "B" company and Pvt. Hibbard of Recon company were killed or mortally wounded. Their buddies, though, more than avenged their deaths by piling up the Kraut dead. A few days before, Sgt. Stamm of "A" company had died when his ~~destroyer~~ overturned during a motor march to engage the enemy. This brought the Battalion's dead to 17----low for a unit our size, but still too many.

"A" company and "C" company also had a share of work to do in the Harz sector but they soon moved forward again while "B" and Recon stayed behind waiting for the 9th and 1st Divisions to the north, to drive eastward and clean out the Harz mountains. Incidentally, this mountainous region finally yielded 150,000 instead of 15,000 troops.

During the Harz mountains fighting, Lt. Schnieder, who had gone to the aid of a wounded man, was himself wounded in the groin. Lt. Gay, also present, dashed across the fire swept field to their aid. There, in the face of still further fire, he signaled for a tank to come up which knocked out one machine gun nest. Then, partially covered by the tank, but still with bullets flying around him, he carried the men to safety; and by his gallantry and heroism earned the Silver Star.

On the 17th of April almost every member of the Battalion saw one of the things he was fighting for, for on that day, the Battalion passed through Nordhausen, where one of the Nazi's notorious concentration camps was located.



April: (cont'd)

Here row upon row of starved human beings----Germans, as well as Poles, French, and Russians, lay testifying to the beastiality and brutality of the German people. Everyone had rather doubted the atrocity stories they had heard and thought perhaps the German people were not to blame, but here they saw with their own eyes what went on in the very midst of "good" German civilians. After this, the Battalion pushed on with renewed determination.

While "B" company and Recon remained engrossed with the Harz problem, the TAC CP moved to Sangerhausen and "A" and "C" companies moved up with the infantry, to prepare for a dash eastward to the Saale River and the city of Halle.

On the 19th, they reached the Saale at Halle but found all bridges blown and were forced to turn northward to cross the river and then descend on Halle from the north. Meanwhile "B" company and Reconnaissance company were relieved in the Harz sector and also came up to the Saale River. On the 20th "A" company with one platoon of "C" company started participation in the battle of Halle in support of the 413th Infantry Regiment. At the same time, "B" company crossed the Saale and drove eastward to the Mulde River with the 415th Regiment. The remainder of "C" company also drove to the east towards Bitterfeld.

By the 21st, the TAC CP was in Delitzsch, <sup>20 miles</sup> NE of Halle, but "A" company and one platoon of "C" company still were fighting for by-passed Halle----the 10th largest city in Germany. Further east, the rest of the Battalion advanced up to the Mulde River, where the infantry halted and dug in. The drive eastward was at an end. The next river to the east was the Elbe, but the Russians were moving up to it and higher headquarters had decided to operate patrols only between the Mulde and the Elbe.

By the evening of the 21st, Halle was cleared and "A" company also moved up to the Mulde. Recon Company had meanwhile been in reserve and was still on the west bank of the Saale, near Dolau.

April: (cont'd)

So, on the 22nd of April, all of the gun companies were along the Mulde River with the infantry regiments. They were refitting and preparing for further action.

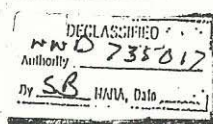
It was unfortunate that during the last days of the Battalion's battles further casualties occurred but in an engagement near Bitterfeld Cpl. Ballone of "C" company's first platoon was killed while directing the fire of his destroyer. Just east of Halle, Sgt. Ball and T/5 Beaver were killed when their M20 ran into an unmarked minefield along a country road. "A" company's final casualty was T/5 Logan, killed in action along the Mulde River.

The actual fighting had come to an end and now came the task of garrisoning the conquered territory. On the 22nd, Lt. Col. Bardes was named Garrison Commander of Halle and he moved his TAC CP and all Headquarters company installations into the city. Reconnaissance company was brought into guard the CP and to patrol the streets, although one platoon from each company remained at the front on patrol duty. The other two platoons and the company CPs moved into Halle and its environs to guard vital installations and control the populace.

Thus the final days of April saw no fighting, and no action except by the platoons on the Mulde which operated patrols to the Elbe. The war was as good as over and the 817th was now almost in the center of Germany, 137 kilometers from Berlin. It was as a fitting show of our conquering power that the Battalion CP was located in the headquarters of the Gauleiter of Halle-Merseberg. The eagles and swastikas were torn down and the Stars and Stripes went up.

April, the most active month in the Battalion's history was at an end. The 817th had come all the way from the Rhine to the Saale and had participated in battle with one of the Army's best divisions. Its missions had always been accomplished. Now the 817th assumed new duties in anticipation of the post-hostilities period and confidently awaited any further assignments that might come.

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## UNIT HISTORY

FROM: 1 May 1945 To: 31 May 1945

When we turned the last page of the April calendar over to start a new month we all knew that the war was practically over, but in these first eight days of May, before final and official victory, we still performed combat missions, and after V-E Day the Battalion assumed its first post-hostilities duties.

Our minds were full of hopes, anxieties, ideas and wishes during this month. First the hope for quick victory; then the anxieties of the point system; then each man had his own ideas on our future; and concurrently with these hopes and ideas, the wish of everyone to return home soon to our beloved America. Rumors were as numerous as the cobblestones in the streets of Halle, but fortunately the wildest didn't materialize and the calm evenness of garrison life in defeated Germany hung smoothly over each and every member of the Battalion. Peace marked the month of May, peace after a full victory.

On the first of the month the Battalion was of course still attached to the 104th (Timberwolf) Infantry Division, with the C.P. located in Halle in the offices of the former Nazi Gauleiter of Halle-Merseburg. Our mission was to maintain law and order in our assigned zone of responsibility, which included not only Halle, but many of its adjacent outlying farming villages. So in the city which just shortly before we had helped capture, and with our 50's and 76's had made anything but quiet, orderly, and lawful appearing, we now turned with these same weapons to restore and maintain order. Our problems turned from the Wehrmacht and SS to the German civilians, returning German P.W.s, ex-allied P.W.s, and D.P.s. Located in Halle with the Battalion C.P. was our Reconnaissance Company, operating two static posts, keeping its men physically sharp with a sensible training program, running 24 hour roving patrols, and with one platoon ever alert for immediate action. Our A Company also operated static posts. C Company, which had been nearby, just West of town in Nietleben, the first platoon having come back into the fold after relief on the Mulde River by B Company, moved into Halle to B Company's old quarters. Baker Company itself was the only company at this time still on a purely tactical mission, for they were with the leading elements of the 104th Division along the Mulde River.

This seemingly listless life as garrison troops was not without its excitement. During the first two weeks we were constantly receiving calls from the Military Government to investigate disturbances in Displaced Persons Camps, railroad yards, and in the city proper. On May 4 C Company picked up two P.W.s, former SSers, who had four Panzerfausts, ten grenades, one machine gun, three rifles and two boxes of ammunition in their possession. These two brought our Battalion P.W. total up to nine hundred and nineteen. Eastern European D.P.s seemed to be the main source of trouble but they were always brought under control without a shot being fired, and there were never any riots of D.P.s against their former German oppressors.

During this time our Headquarters Company had set itself up in a convenient location in Southern Halle and was servicing and supplying the Battalion. A large garage was taken over by the Motor Personnel and all vehicles were thoroughly checked and were given a new coat of paint. The S-4 was not idle and needed clothing and equipment began to roll in - slowly but surely.

On May 3rd check points were established on all roads leading out of town to keep civilian circulation at a minimum and these were maintained for ten days, when the six kilometer travel limit was lifted. Also on this date B Company was relieved of its mission of supporting the 104th along the Mulde River and they moved into Diemitz, an eastern suburb of Halle, and again began operating under Battalion control. They too took up static posts, check points, training and maintenance.

Daily inspections by the Battalion staff were initiated on May 4th to insure that high standards of training and maintenance were being observed, but these were more of a help than a hinderance to the companies.

Curfew violators, disorderly persons, and traffic violators were continually picked up, but the only big excitement came in A Company's sector where at 1700



hours on May 5th a terrific explosion rocked the old German barracks. An 88 mm gun had been blown up by a hidden charge in the tube. There were no casualties, but the remaining guns located there were examined and found to contain similar charges which were neutralized.

A temporary gasoline shortage in the area halted roving patrols on May 6 and a system of "roving-static" patrols was initiated by Recon. Company - a tribute to their initiative and resourcefulness. One of the posts established on May 7th of Recon Company was on Kleine Nickolaj Strasse in the prostitute sector. They also operated static posts on bridges and ferries to keep ex-allied P.W.s out of town.

On the same date, May 7th, B Company uncovered a cache of 156 cases of Panzerfausts and many cases of small arms ammunition. Nearby an SS trooper and a Hitler Youth were taken into custody and turned over to the Military Government.

V-E Day brought forth few real celebrations because we were all so far from home and we knew that we still had the barbarous Japs to defeat. Nevertheless we all relaxed with the knowledge that the war in Europe was over and we, having come through the fighting safely, could look forward to the ensuing days with a measure of safety, security, and comfort.

From here on in there was little to report. On May 10th we assumed responsibility for a new area, substantially the same, but smaller, as per Operations Memorandum No. 84, 104th Infantry Division. Curfew violators were picked up each night; a raid was made on a Russian D.P. Camp to halt an arson plot; and other raids were made periodically.

Now the accent was on training for future operations and orientation of the soldiers for the Pacific Theater. All entered into this program with enthusiasm and vigor as the companies rotated two weeks of training with one week of guard and patrol duty.

An interesting tour of duty saw one platoon of A Company on guard at the SHAEF-Russian conference at the Halle Airport. They were relieved May 22 after a six day stay.

So May came to an end with the Battalion now guarding a variety of installations-- a huge feed warehouse, sugar refinery, an ammunition train, distillery, railroad station, power plants, gas plant, Count Von Luckner's home, laundry, and prostitute district. We were still in the air regarding our future assignments but morale ~~being~~ high, in spite of the non-fraternization rule. We awaited our military future - whatever it might be. Perhaps June would hold the answer. At any rate we made preparations to start June off in fine fashion with a "Organization Day" celebration of our 3rd anniversary.



## UNIT HISTORY

From 1 June, 1945 to 30 June, 1945

June opened with a day full of activities and festivities for the Battalion, for June 1, 1945, was the third anniversary of the organization of this unit.

For that day we took over the University Sportplatz in Halle, Germany. Here was a large field for parade and sports events, tennis courts, shaded lanes for walks and lazy lolling about, and a cool stream for canoeing and swimming. A series of athletic events had been scheduled and each company had a team entered in each event.

The day started with a review of the Battalion and presentation of awards and decorations to some of our officers and men by Major General Allen, who was the guest of honor. Following the review, the General, the Battalion Commander, and the various Staff officers retired to the tennis club house where General Allen was entertained at dinner. In the meantime, the competitive athletic program was under way. Company A won the canoe race; Headquarters Company the 100 yard dash; A Company the Tug-of-War; B Company the wheelbarrow race; and Company B the 400 yard relay. Time was then taken out for lunch, beer, and ice cream, and following that three softball games got under way. C Company swamped Headquarters Company; A Company defeated B Company; and the Officers turned back Reconnaissance Company. When the results of the day were tallied, A Company had the most points and was declared meet winner. As a reward, this company was to receive the next quota of passes given to the Battalion. The day's festivities ended at 1600 and all companies returned to their areas -- a full and enjoyable day having been had by all.

From festivities all companies again returned to business. The A. T. Company of the 415th Regiment of the 104th Infantry Division had taken over our posts for the day, and we relieved them. Reconnaissance Company resumed their roving patrols and the gun companies took over their static posts, the same that they had had during the month of May. The Battalion CP and all of the Company CPs remained in their same locations in Halle, except B Company's which was in the suburb of Diemietz. Of course we were still attached to the 104th Division and hoping to remain so as they had been slated for early redeployment to the Pacific via the United States.

The Battalion continued its policy of two weeks of guarding and one week of training. C Company underwent extensive training during the first week of June, followed by B Company and then A Company.

The first week of June saw little excitement. Twenty-two Germans were picked up as curfew violators and seven PWs were found without proper identification. They were turned over to the Military Police.

During the second week of June, by VCG VII Corps, we were relieved from the guarding of the sugar refinery, food warehouse, two power plants, and the city gas plant. This released more men for training. Reconnaissance Company continued its active roving patrols and picked up one German officer who had no identification and three women violating the liberal 2300 hours curfew.



On June 11th, our happy association with the Timberwolf Division was terminated as they completed preparations for return to the U. S. A. and were relieved by the Seventh Armored Division. We were in turn attached to the Seventh Armored Division. Our mission remained the same however, and none of our installations were changed, excepting B Company's CP which moved on June 12th from Diehietz, west across the Saale River into better-located quarters at Krollwitz. Some new installations were guarded by our Battalion as A Company took over the DP Camp at Wormlitzer and an alcohol distillery and a winery in Halle. In line with the policy of our new higher headquarters, one company, in this instance, B Company, was held in mobile reserve, ready to deploy to any part of the Battalion area with 80% of its personnel in a half hour.

One of the more interesting assignments received by the Battalion during June was that of aiding the military government check valuables deposited by civilians in the banks of Halle. Two officers and twenty men of Company B had this job and were quite surprised at the variety and wealth of objects being returned to the German civilians.

The famous sea-raider of World War I, Count Von Luckner, departed from Halle on June 12th and of course we were relieved from guarding his house, as had been requested by the Military Government. At the same time, however, we were given an additional assignment of patrolling the Halle Airport with four M-20s daily from 0730 to 2100.

Simultaneously with all of our regular guarding and patrolling each company was training all available personnel in vital subjects that will be of us in future operations -- especially in the Pacific Theater. It was just as well that this training had been planned for it was during the third week of June that we received word that we were to be redeployed directly to the Pacific. Of course, there was a sudden drop in morale on hearing this news, especially since we had practically been assured by authoritative sources that we were first going back to the states. However, everyone realized that a job had to be done and that we were perfectly fit to do it, and everyone returned to good spirit after the first shock of this news had passed away.

On the 21st of June so that we might more easily prepare for our movement to an assembly area, the 440th and 489th F. A. Battalions of the 7th Armored Division relieved us of all of our static posts. This left us only with our Reconnaissance roving patrols to operate. Our reconnaissance patrols continued to pick up curfew violators and they also apprehended two PWs without identification.

The first contingent of our Battalion left on its westward trek on June 23rd when 197 enlisted men, one warrant officer, and seven officers pulled out by train with all the full tracked vehicles of the Battalion. The trip was uneventful, but frequently punctuated by long halts, necessitated in Germany by the large amount of traffic on the few available routes and lack of cooperation of German railroad personnel, and in France by the scarcity of locomotives. Enroute, we passed countless trainloads of Russians and Poles heading eastward to their homeland, and German evacuees returning to the bomb blasted Rhineland. Our flatcars with the M-18 destroyers were switched off to an Ordnance Depot at St. Dizier, France, but the kitchen car and passenger coaches continued on to Camp Washington, D. C., near Laon, France, arriving there on the morning of June 28th.



While the train was on the road, the remainder of the Battalion departed from Halle, Germany, in motor convoy on June 26th. The weather the first day was very good and over 200 miles were made before the nightly halt at Giessen. The second day, rain, both morning and afternoon cut down our mileage to 135, the Battalion stopping at Trier, Germany. This was to be our last night in Germany for the next morning we crossed the French border in a driving rain and sped towards our destination -- Camp Washington, D. C. -- near Laon, France. Two accidents occurred enroute, due mainly to the slippery roads. In one, a civilian car ran into one of our M-20s. In the other, an M-20 of Reconnaissance Company slid off a bridge and crashed to the river bed 30 feet below, fortunately injuring only one man. At any rate, the total trip of over 550 miles was very successful and except for the one M-20 of Reconnaissance Company, all vehicles reached their destination in good shape.

Settling down in Camp Washington took up all of our time for the remaining two days of June. We were oriented on AAC procedure and began to work under this new organization.

Luck seemed to still be with the Battalion during the usual lucky months of June, July, and August for on June 29th, we received a change of orders calling for redeployment indirectly through the United States. Morale, of course, soared, and we awaited the coming of further developments, plans, orders and preparations in the month of July.

July:

In the whole history of the 817th T.D. Battalion, there has probably never been so inactive a month as was July, 1945.

Having arrived at Camp Washington, D.C., near Laon, France on June 28th the Battalion settled down quickly in the first few days of July into its new quarters and began processing for redeployment to the Pacific via the United States.

Soon, Capt. Cornett, the S-4 had collected all but the minimum essential equipment which the Battalion was to take with it, and had turned it in to the Army's various supply agencies. The tank destroyers themselves never reached the camp, but Capt. Terry turned in the rest of the Battalion's vehicles to Ordnance, retaining only those jeeps and 2 1/2 tons' necessary for housekeeping duties.

As all of the arms and what little equipment that was left was packed and boxed, a training schedule was ~~impractical~~. Each day, after reveille and breakfast, the companies had close order drill and calisthenics. Following this, and for the rest of the day, softball games and other athletics held sway.

There were few if any passes and the sun stayed up till 10:30 PM so that each man had to amuse himself as best he could. The outdoor theater was finally opened by the post and movies started at 2245 or 2300 hours each night. Of course, there were yet no seats, but everyone went just to have something to do.

After the equipment and vehicles were turned in, the supply, motor, and communication sections could rest on their laurels. There was, however, much paper work to be done and the company clerks kept their typewriters pounding endlessly under the direction of the Personnel Adjutant, WOJG Monsky.

July: (cont'd)

On the 15th, word came to be ready to move on the 25th. This had everyone on his toes and all rosters were hastily completed and the last nails driven in the packing boxes. Later orders were received rescinding this alert.

Then, on the 28th, the Battalion was alerted for movement to the port on the 2nd but soon orders came dealerting the Battalion and placing them in a very questionable category. Officially, they were IIb, but as one visiting major said, "You seem to be in 6 7/8".

The advance detail, comprising Major Hahner, Executive Officer, Lt. Grandell, S-1, Capt Cornett, S-4, and a 1st Sgt, Supply Sgt., Mess Sgt., and 2 cooks was always ready to go but they soon wearied under the various alerts and hoped for a definite clarification soon.

A training directive was received from the Assembly Area Command (AAC) in the 3rd week of July, designating the various essential elements of training for Battalions being redeployed to the Pacific. Part of this schedule had been completed by the Battalion in Halle, Germany, but in the last week of July training began which was to complete the program. The visit of a Military Intelligence Training Unit to the camp was also taken advantage of and many men were well oriented on Jap **technique**, weapons, and appearance by this MITU team. Several Combat Bulletin films were also seen so that the training was not all lectures.

July's weather during the day was much like that in the states with a hot sun baking the ground into a hard but dusty prairie. On the contrary, the nights were very cool, almost cold.

Lt. Gregor, Battalion athletic officer, arranged a Battalion softball league with each company entering a team and the Battalion Officers' team making the 6th entrant. Surprisingly enough, at the end of July, the officers led the league with 8 wins and 2 loses.



July: (cont'd)

In second place was "C" company with 6 victories and 4 defeats.

So, July came and finally went---a month full of false rumors, high hopes and dashed hopes. It yet remained for higher headquarters to give the 817th definite, sure word of its future, and so everyone looked expectantly to August for a decision.

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