

History of
Headquarters Company
819th Tank Destroyer Battalion

The original members of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company were part of a cadre from the 705th TD's, then stationed at Camp Cooke (now Vandenberg Air Force Base) California, near Lompoc and Point Conception on the Pacific Coast. The cadre consisted of a small number of Regular Army Em, several Enlisted Men, and five green 2nd Lts (but I repeat myself). The Em and Lts Dean and Vernon Okerstrom entrained at the Southern Pacific way station Surf near the camp. After a change of trains and more Southern Pacific out of LA, the train eventually arrived at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas on June 1st, 1942 where it was met by Lt Col Kenneth Pugh, the Battalion Commander and a West Point graduate of the Class of 1922 who had been a 1st Lt for many years as a RA Officer.

Also in the welcoming committee were a contingent of recent officers graduates from a Reserve Officer's refresher course at Fort Benning, GA. Among those included: Robert Dauterman, John Doty, Fred Fenske, Harold Fike, Dan Fling, Lee Long, Roy Mueller, Gene Overton, Charles Overstreet, Jack Pace, LeRoy Sample and Larry Wickline, all were 1st Lts.

The Battalion Sergeant Major was an old Field Artilleryman from Fort Warren, WY, Sgt. Marshall. After a stint in that position he transferred to C Co as First Sergeant and was replaced by Charles Wilson. Master Sergeant Newton E. Dykes from Port St. Joe, FL was the Battalion Motor Sergeant where he put his tours in the CCC's to good use. R.J. Douglas was also in Bn. Maint. Al Coan replaced Wilson in the Personnel Section of Hq. Sgt. Brendair was the Bn Supply Sgt and hailed from Cleveland Ohio. The First Sergeant Lamb/NG later left for the Paratroopers at Ibis. He was replaced by Alfin Jorde and held that position until the unit was deactivated. Ollie Arnold Haugstaad was the Truck master and was another good one from Minnesota. Our Mess Sgt was Brant and lead cook was Shafer who later was made Mess Sgt of RCN Co. Another cadre member was Weiss, a welder/mechanic from Bule Island, Ill. There are many more faces that I can see in my mind's eye but can't put a name to them. (A dogtag check would be required).

In addition to the above listed persons, there was a Medical Attachment headed by Captain Kling from Massilon, OH and later a Dental Officer from Greenville, MI by the name of Doc McKinnzie. Bill Bossie was a Medic but was later transferred to a QM Service.

Besides the army personnel, there were two civilians: Mr. Darst and Mr. Morrison. They were veteran automotive advisors and rendered valuable training to all members of the Motor Pools. Mr. Darst was an International Truck man and company representative that helped the Six Companies build Boulder Dam.

Mr. Morrison was a service manager for the Chevrolet Dealership in Oklahoma City, OK. They were attached to Chaffee, Bowie and at Hood but left behind when the outfit moved

to the Mojave at Ibis, CA. They both had a kind and fatherly attitude toward everyone in the Battalion and were greatly appreciated.

Major James Wooster came from the New York National Guard and made his home in Syracuse. He arrived as a Captain at Chaffee I think. A capable officer, whom we thought might replace Col Pugh when he left, remained as Executive Officer. He had the unique experience as an observer during the Marine Invasion of Peleliu, where he said that at night, he slept in a hole beneath an M-4 tank. He was a stickler for clean kitchens, clean latrines, and clean 50 Caliber Machine Guns.

In California maneuvers, Major MacFarlane joined the Bn. He was an affable Irishman who regaled us with stories of strike duty at New Mexico mines while in the National Guard. He left us in Hawaii and was replaced by another affable officer from Comfort, TX: Major Krauter.

By this time 2nd Lt Griffith from Texas and OCS at Ft. Ord joined the company as Transportation Officer. When we left Hawaii, he stayed at the Kiluea Military Rest Camp. He returned to Cities Service Oil Company after the war and then went into oil landman business himself in Tyler, TX. There were other lieutents that were attached to the unit for varying lengths of service before transferring to the Air Corps for pilot's training. Among them were Harold Fike, J. Warren Nagle, Vernon Okerstrom, Teddy Renkiwicz. A Lt. March of the cadre left the 819th early; he along with Rinkiwicz and Lloyd Simmons made the trip to Chaffee independently while Lts. Dean and Okerstrom accompanied the cadre by train. Both Dean and Simmons stayed and in time rose to be Captains.

At Camp Chaffee, new members joined from Basic Training at Camp Wolters. Walter Pearson of Rockport, IL was among them. He was the ten ton wrecker driver and gifted welder.

While at Chaffee the battalion received five outstanding graduates from the Fort Sill Artillery OCS School: Truman E. Roberts, Harold Merchant, Ray Duncan, Ervin Schley and Gordon Dodd. Roberts eventually commander A Company, Merchant filled many spots as a 1st Lt., Ray Duncan was a B Company mainstay, Ervin Schley was a Recon Platoon leader and later Company Commander, Dodd Bn Communications Officer.

The other Recon Platoon Leader was Lloyd Knight of Weatherford, TX and a former member of the 124th Texas National Guard, a Cavalry outfit.

In addition to Warrant Officer Mr. Rimer, we had a CWO Wilber Kleinschmidt.

Some memorable events must include the movement by rail from Chaffee to Camp Bowie, TX. A and B Companies made up the first sections and C with Headquarters make up the second. As Col. Pugh proclaimed this real, wartime training, guards were seated in half ton trucks on the flat cars behind the coaches. When the trains stopped for water, the guards were changed and the tiedowns on the vehicle inspected and tightened.

One truck had Walter Pearson and Joe Horvath seated with a .30 caliber machine gun on a pedestal mount. It was later learned that they had tried a little marksman ship with their rifles and then progressed to bigger things. At Camp Bowie, Co. Pugh had an accounting of the ammo. Fortunately, a friendly unit came up with the discrepancy.

At Bowie, the main body of draftees arrive. Col Pugh was as concerned about their welfare as he was the ammo. The first thing he asked was, "When were the men fed last?" He was real Army.

Times places and dates are nice to know but memory is quite random after fifty years or so. So here are bits and pieces that come to mind. Our supply section at company level was Lloyd Cohee of Casper, WY. Moon Mullins of Mechanicsville, IA, Frank Cannon was official rations corporal and unofficial bootlegger while at Bowie. In the motor pool was Castleberry, Walter, Ver Meer, Drawbaugh, Bode, Johnson, McComas, Krauss, Island, We lost Sgt Levy, the Message Center Sgt, one Saturday night in Hilo and a cook Kowalski the next. The company marched from mortuary (Levy) and the Church (Kowalski) to the cemetery in Hilo behind a band with crepe draped drums. Palmer Dawson did his duty at Headquarters and being an efficient typist was kept busy preparing reports and documents, as were other typists in supply and personnel. We had several truck drivers in supply, among them: Whiten. Motok was the company barber and a regular on guard duty. Wiley used to truck the dry cleaning and laundry to LA fro Ibis and had a good friend at the laundry. Mark Nally was the company Runner and often talked about working in a mortuary when they sold a lot of coats with no backs in them. He took great delight in waking everyone during maneuvers. I think Waca, TX was his home. Bob Powell attracted Col. McCurdy's attention and made him his driver, a job Bob did not seek. He did a good job of it. Giddings and Gerard were other mechanics Bn Maintenance as was Suchi. McComas and Johnson were Parts Men.

In Hilo, Headquarters and Headquarters Company and the Medics were quartered in huts on Waianuenue Street separate from the firing companies. The Motor Pool was up the Saddle Road about a quarter of a mile. As a consequence the small number of Privates mostly ammunitions handlers were faced with a trilogy of KP, Guard Duty, Latrine Duty and frequently. Sgt. Jorde did his best to be equitable. In addition, there was a good deal of grass lawn that really grew in that town that got 10 inches of annual rainfall.

At Hilo, Fr. Kling got transferred to the Philippines. Dr. Palmerantz replace him; Capt. Pace directed all his Brooklyn jokes at him. He in turn was replaced by Captain Pearlman of Cincinnati, Oh; Doctor Pearlman had seen service with British forces earlier in the war. At Hilo, we had a gentle Dr. Medeau as a dentist.

The 819th had several false starts at shipping out while at Hilo. Joe Villareal of Anonito, CO was usually a radio operator in Supply Section, but it seems he spent an awefully lot of time and energy making boxes and crates as somewhere it had been written down that he had carpenter skills. Harry Smith and Abrahams were cooks, good men.

George B. Lowrie fulfilled the job of Liaison officer. His home was Grosse Point, MI. His boyish appearance belied his age in the 30's.

At last, comes Albert J. McCurdy, Junior, Lt. Col. and Battalion Commander. A PFC motorcycle dispatch rider in WWI, he held permanent rank of Technical Sergeant in the Regular Army. The Col. joined the unit at Camp Hood while a Major and was promptly promoted to Lt. Col. McCurdy had served in the cavalry under Patton and picked up some of his ways so he ran the outfit with a tight rein. He had a tough job keeping the troops morale up while on those islands of Palau so far from home and any place else. McCurdy went on to Europe after the war and made full Colonel for a time. He later returned to his permanent rank of Tech. Sgt, as Captain Shorter can attest. At one time we had Captain Long and Lieutenant Shorter. Lee Long came down with the measles or such at Stoneman and wound up with an infantry company in the ETO. Lt. Shorter returned to the Army during the Korean conflict, and VietNam; he retired while at Fort Leavenworth as a Lt. Col. He lives in Lansing, KS.

Captain Pace left the 819th in August '45 to act as a prosecutor at the Manilla War Crimes trials. He wanted to take Vaughn Papke with him but it didn't work out. Pace was a long time City Attlmey of Lincoln, NE.

Captain Wickline lives in Fresno, CA with his wife Gladys, a former Army Nurse at Camp Hood. He worked for Borroughs Co for many years. Wickline was Headquarters Comandant and Hq Co CO. Warren Beach was Capt. Wickline's driver.

There were about 106 members of Hq Co; each was important and did his duty and I regret that I can't recall his name as his service should be cited as well as those mentioned above.

Prepared 7-24-99 by Bill Dean, Former 819th Motor Officer

(*Note from Bill: "Any errors in fact or spelling are mine alone and I apologize for such errors. For all you Hq Co members, wherever you are, I salute you." BD)

More Memories

A prominent member around the Orderly Room was Captain Wickline's driver Warren Beach who also was a radio operator, company bugler, and a special detail we we received inoculations and booster shots. He caught the captain when he fainted while getting shot. Captain Wickline never shirked getting a shot, he just fainted involuntarily. Beech's other special duty was to get all decked out in Class A uniform and play taps at the local burials for casualties from Italy; They were mostly from the 442nd Inf. Regiment. The wakes following the funerals left Beech in crimped condition and smelling of Saki. He did his duty like a good soldier!

Another outstanding NCO was Sgt Birch of the Recon Platoons. On Peleliu he was given a field commission as 2nd Lt.

Memories of Hilo that come to mind were the gas mask drills we had every Friday after lunch. I was always glad they didn't come before lunch. I also remember that a USO show came to Hilo but the local baseball park was too small; instead of getting to see Bob Hope and his troop, we got up a basketball game in the local high school. We played in our sock feet and skidded all over the floor. Larry Wickline showed off his considerable shooting skills. Another time a high school gym came in handy was at the end of some maneuvers. Those showers in the Blythe, CA high school will never be forgotten or any more welcome.

Other events that you may recall is the way Dr. Kling had us fix up a 6x6 for a mobile medical office so that he could visit each company during the spinal meningitis quarantine at Camp Bowie. A Col made us remove it as the Colonel said we couldn't tie up a truck that might be needed to haul ammo. Dr. Kling was not impressed.

When the directive came out to paint white stars on our vehicles, Bert Schoen said he didn't mind as it reminded him of Texas.

Lolich from Clint, IA was the PX proprietor to whom I entrusted 48 cases of beer on Peleliu. Lt. Lowrie collected beer money for a 6 months ration. Since several fellows were interested, I bought up their share with cash that I had won in the Anchor Pool when the boat dropped anchor at Peleliu and was the only one with enough cash. Walter Pearson bought a case every Saturday night for someone in the Maintenance Platoon was having a real or imaginary birthday party.

There was an incident about Lt. Wood being concerned about the state of alertness of Cpl Mulholland while on guard. Anyway, the next time Mulholland had guard duty and Wood was OD, he called the Officer of the Day in the middle of the night for a little revenge.

Another questionable incident involved Teague getting wounded while cleaning his M-3 Machine Gun. Lt. Schley saw to it that Teague's wound did not prevent him from leaving Hilo with us.

You'll remember that when we left the states, we shipped some equipment separately and some went with us. While on Hilo, Captain Wickline asked Sgt. Jorde one day if his wife had delivered the baby. Jorde replied, "No, it's still marked T.A.T." (To Accompany Troops)

These are just some additional items that come to mind.

Prepared 8-4-99 by Bill Dean Hq Company