

ACTIVATION AND BASIC TRAINING

The story of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion does not start back in the musty annals of early American military history. Insofar as antiquity and tradition are concerned it is conspicuously new, but the few years since its activation have been packed with accomplishment, heroism, and battle experience in keeping with the highest traditions of any unit in the United States Army. The 81st was formed when the country was faced with the necessity of creating a highly trained, efficient army in a minimum of time.

The 81st Chemical Battalion (Motorized) was activated by the following order:

HEADQUARTERS FORT D. A. RUSSELL, TEXAS

General Order
Number 22

25 April 1942

ACTIVATION OF CHEMICAL WARFARE BATTALION

1. Pursuant to instructions contained in General Order No. 39 Headquarters Third Army, Smith-Young Tower, San Antonio, Texas, dated April 14, 1942, and War Department letter, March 25, 1942. AG 320.2 (3-14-42) MR-M-GN, Subject: Activation of Chemical Battalions, the 81st Chemical Battalion (Motorized), Fort D. A. Russell, Texas, is activated this date.

By order of LIEUT. COLONEL FRANKENBERGER.

Official:

CLAUDE F. SPANG
Capt., Inf. (CASC)
Adjutant

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Capt., Inf. (CASC)
Adjutant

Thus was born the 81st, without fanfare, but with quiet purpose. It was up to the Battalion to write its own history and these pages will show how well the job was done.

The original cadre of the battalion was specified in a special order from Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland, dated April 19, 1942, ordering five officers and seventy-six enlisted men to report to Fort D. A. Russell for duty. Lt. Col. Thomas H. James, CWS, was assigned to the battalion as Battalion Commander.

Surprising as it may seem after three years and the usual drifting, transferring, and evacuation of personnel, a fair number of the original cadre were still with the battalion at the end of the war in Europe.

These "old-timers" are listed below:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Rank at Activation</i>	<i>Present Rank</i>
Jack W. Lipphardt.....	1st Lt.	Lt. Col.
Ernest G. McDaniel.....	2d Lt.	Captain
Herbert F. Levy.....	2d Lt.	Captain
Harold L. Hausman.....	2d Lt.	Major
John W. Bundy.....	Master Sgt.....	1st Lt.
Charles S. Gardner.....	Pvt.	1st Lt.
Walter R. Young.....	Pvt.	1st Lt.
Edwin E. Johnson.....	Corporal	Tech. Sgt.
Rupert A. Price.....	Staff Sgt.....	1st Sgt.
Leonard P. Gibbs.....	Sgt.	1st Sgt.
Oliver H. Fisher.....	Corporal	Pfc.
Paul A. Sellers.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Steven A. Emery.....	Pvt.	Master Sgt.
Victor F. Minchow.....	Pvt.	Master Sgt.
Rudolph A. Hilland.....	Tec. 4	Tec. 5
Harry E. Randall.....	Corporal	Master Sgt.
Timothy J. Sweeney.....	Corporal	Pfc.
Charles H. Miller.....	Pvt.	Tec. 4
John Kuchmy.....	Pvt.	Tec. 5
John H. Yungclas.....	Pvt.	Tec. 4
Joseph E. Clapham.....	Pvt.	Tech. Sgt.
Frank Florio.....	Pvt.	1st Sgt.
Toney Sirianni.....	Pvt.	Tec. 4
Mike Carahalios.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
George A. Haase.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Michael A. Martino.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Alfred Paparelli.....	Pvt.	Staff Sgt.
Theodore F. Shulski.....	Pvt.	Tec. 5

Lt. Col. Thomas H. James assumed command of the 81st Chemical Battalion by its first general order, dated April 26, 1942. A West Pointer and a Regular Army officer of wide and varied experience, he immediately set to work organizing the battalion. To him and to the able officers and men aiding him is due the credit for bringing

the organization to the peak of combat efficiency and morale it had attained by the time it was first committed to battle. The day that Col. James assumed command the cadre was assigned to the various companies, thus creating the framework upon which the four letter companies and headquarters were built after the arrival of additional personnel.

Fort D. A. Russell, the birthplace of the 81st and where it experienced its growing pains, is situated just outside Marfa, Texas, in the heart of the Big Bend Country. The Fort was an old one, having been a cavalry post of the Border Patrol. Marfa itself was a little cattle town with a big sense of hospitality and a bit of Old Mexico. The Paisano Hotel, the Marfa Joy, the Crewes and Jimmy's Place will strike a familiar, pleasant note to all who experienced their hospitality. Mexico wasn't many miles away and Ojinaga and Juarez drew many visitors from the 81st in search of Mexican atmosphere. The first impression of Fort D. A. Russell and the surrounding territory was that of vast waste and plenty of space, without a tree or a really green blade of grass for miles around, but soon the charms of the plains, the rugged beauty, mellow sunlight, and glorious nights won over. Surrounding the Fort was a range of small mountains, the Smith Hills, and off in the distance could be seen the landmark of the country, Cathedral Mountain.

In May, approximately 75 men joined the battalion, coming from all over the country, and on June 9 approximately 250 men came from Fort Dix. Between June and October small groups were assigned until October 17 when Mississippi descended on us. About 500 men from the land of turnip greens and cornbread were assigned to the battalion without any previous basic training. This created a gigantic task on the part of the officers and non-coms to train and condition these men and fit them into the organization; a job accomplished in a minimum of time through the untiring efforts and the whole-hearted cooperation of the men. The battalion to this day consists largely of those Mississippi lads, although they could not be recognized as the raw, green recruits of those days. Today they are seasoned veterans, proven in battle, equal to any combat soldiers in the Army.

Equipment and training aids were scarce and inadequate in those days, but American ingenuity at improvising when equipment was lacking paid dividends. The battalion at first was equipped with .45 cal. revolvers as small arms and the men were trained and fired for record using them, only later to be equipped with Enfield rifles and

again go through the same process. Despite the antiquated weapons, nearly all qualified and many made sharpshooter and expert.

From activation until November of that year the 81st Chemical Battalion was a battalion without mortars. Although it was discouraging not to have the basic weapons to work with, the time was well spent in physical conditioning, the school of the soldier, identification of chemical agents, field marches, field hygiene, small arms training, etc. Few will forget the obstacle course; but then also memorable were the swimming parties at Balmorhea and the company beer parties. Organized athletics were stressed in the battalion, and good-natured team rivalry was at a high peak among the companies in baseball, basketball, football, and track.

The hikes to Smith Hills and Cathedral Mountain over the hot, rough, dusty coleche will be remembered by all. The bivouacs at Smith Hills, with the night patrolling exercises, were all too realistic to some who were the victims of over-enthusiastic patrols looking for prisoners.

In September the mortar carts arrived, but still no mortars. It afforded a good deal of amusement to have to drag the carts over hill and dale for miles just to "get the feel of it." In October the mortars arrived and everyone's morale went up. We finally had our guns! From then on the bulk of the time was spent in mortar drill, care and cleaning of the mortar, and the tactics and technique of firing. Dry run followed dry run and now everyone wondered if we were ever going to fire a live round. Gunner examinations followed soon after, and the results were excellent.

In January 1943 the anticipated day came. A few rounds were released to the battalion and everybody was in a dither as to who would fire the first round. The signal honor fell to C Company and Pfc. Pace was the lucky man to drop the round down the barrel while the battalion waited with bated breath.

A general idea as to the difficulties encountered due to lack of training equipment can be had when one considers that for a long period of time the battalion's ammunition dump contained exactly 25 rounds of FS for training purposes.

Several more shoots were held after that, and that the constant drills and dry runs had paid dividends was evidenced by the accuracy of the shooting.

The really big event of the firing in Texas was the battalion

shoot at Turner's Ranch in February 1943, when the outfit was given permission to fire up all ammunition on hand. On this occasion the battalion took up prepared positions the night before and at dawn all mortars in the battalion fired what was then considered an enormous number of rounds of WP and FS; even the now-forgotten Livens projectors were fired. Many will remember digging the emplacements for those Livens in the hard, oh so hard, Texas soil that night. The Colonel, there on an inspection tour, commended Col. James on the accuracy and efficiency of the firing.

Soon after, the battalion was alerted for departure from Texas for participation in Louisiana maneuvers.

On April 2, 1943, the first contingent of the battalion left Fort D. A. Russell for Leesville, Louisiana, and on the following day the rest of the organization followed. The grand send-off the people of Marfa gave will long be remembered by those present. They were truly sorry to see us go. The 81st had made a wonderful impression on them and had gained many friends. A military band from the airfield nearby serenaded the train as it left the station. The first phase of our military career was over, and ahead of us lay the task of preparing ourselves for combat by rigorous operations in the field.

II.

MANEUVERS AND TRAINING IN THE U. S.

Louisiana Maneuvers

The 81st Chemical Battalion arrived at Camp Polk, Louisiana, on April 5, 1943, where it participated in maneuvers in conjunction with the 85th Division until May 4. The battalion gained much experience in the reconnaissance, selection and occupation of mortar positions and in the tactical employment of mortars in support of an infantry division. This was its first experience in operating with troops other than its own. Probably the biggest problem during these operations was that of supply and mess. Many times the companies "sweated out" the mess trucks, but in most instances the "chow" came through. This was also the unit's first experience at living in the field for a prolonged period, and the chiggers, ticks, "piney woods rooters," snakes, and rain, torrents of it, all did their best to make it an arduous one.

The rumors flew wide and free from every latrine in the area, especially after a showdown inspection in which all equipment was brought up to combat strength and serviceability, but we "cooled off" for a while.

For the battalion, Louisiana maneuvers constituted a good shake-down. It demonstrated our limitations and possibilities, and the things that must be accomplished before the peak of efficiency could be reached. It was a "dry run," but like all dry runs it paid dividends when we fired for record.

It was in Louisiana on Easter Sunday that the battalion held its first anniversary and Col. James presented to the unit, in a colorful ceremony, its battalion colors on which were portrayed its insignia and motto. Col. James devised the insignia while the battalion was stationed at Texas. The shield has a field of blue and gold, signifying the colors of the Chemical Warfare Service. A spouting volcano, a replica of Cathedral Mountain which is the outstanding landmark for miles around Fort D. A. Russell, is rampant on a golden background. The spout of smoke and flame was added to signify our future mission of smoking and burning the enemy. Subjacent to this is the white Lone Star of Texas on a field of blue. Below the shield is a scroll bearing the battalion's motto, "Equal to the Task," picked from many submitted to Col. James. To Lt. Bundy (then M/Sgt.) goes the credit for devising that phrase. How prophetic those words were will be proven in the pages to follow.

Amphibious Maneuvers at Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida

On May 6, 1943, the 81st arrived at Camp Gordon Johnston, Carrabelle, Florida, for participation in amphibious, commando, and physical training. The battalion was attached to the 28th Division for administrative purposes during its stay there. The program was vigorous, hazardous, and exciting, and several fell by the wayside due to the rapid pace and constant exertion under the hot, tropical Florida sun.

The program consisted of combat swimming, speed marches, unorthodox exercises (and we do mean unorthodox), street fighting, Judo, hand-to-hand fighting, use of knife and bayonet, cargo net practice on mockups, loading and unloading in small craft, demolitions, and the use of explosives. The battalion also had its first taste of the infiltration course at this time. The attack on Schicklgruber village with live ammunition furnished plenty of excitement and firsthand experience in street fighting and battle sounds.

Trips to Tallahassee, beach parties, and other extra-curricular activities took the curse off this particular period, but no one was sorry when orders came to leave the place that Winchell had dubbed "The Alcatraz of the Army." Every man that came through that training will admit, however, that he was in better physical shape for it. The battalion departed from this station on June 9-10, 1943.

Camp Pickett, Virginia

On June 12, 1943, the 81st Chemical Battalion arrived at Camp Pickett, Virginia, where it was stationed until October 14 of that year. During that time the battalion was trained in the use of the Springfield rifle, the carbine, and the BAR, firing for record in all these weapons, and the old Enfields were finally turned in. It was at Camp Pickett that the battalion fired its first rounds of HE and everyone was more than pleased with the wallop it packed. A good deal of time was spent in mortar drill, bringing the squads, platoons, and companies to a high degree of efficiency.

Many of the personnel found accommodations in nearby towns and brought their wives there to be near them. Practically every officer and man was given a leave or furlough during the five months that the battalion was stationed there.

During the months of August and September, the battalion participated in several amphibious maneuvers with the 28th Division at Camp Bradford, Norfolk Naval Base, Virginia, and B Company spent two weeks on mountain maneuvers in West Virginia. In the course of training at the amphibious base the battalion received instruction and training in the use and adjustment of life belts, and in the purposes and characteristics of various types of landing craft. Naval customs and terminology, net scaling and adjustment of equipment, embarking and debarking from landing craft, loading and unloading of vehicles, and the installation and firing of the mortar in LCVPs were all studied. Later on the battalion, attached to the 28th Division, engaged in the practice assault on the "Solomon Islands" in Chesapeake Bay. For many members of the battalion this was the first experience with sea travel, and as a result a few cases of mal-de-mer were experienced. For its first ship-to-shore operation the battalion did an excellent job. This was also the battalion's first experience with C and K rations, and actually we thought they were good.

Company B, attached to the 109th Infantry of the 28th Division, spent a rigorous two weeks in the vicinity of Elkins, West Virginia, participating in mountain maneuvers. The long hard pulls, and hand-carrying the mortars up those steep mountains, taxed the energy of everybody, but a different method of moving equipment was learned.

On August 13, 1943, D Company was detached from the battalion for overseas duty. The first contingent of the outfit was on its way. Many envied them, others were damned glad it wasn't their company, but all wished them Godspeed. Eight months were to go by before they rejoined the battalion.

The battalion (less Company D) was alerted for overseas shipment on September 30, 1943, and at once plunged into the feverish activity of its P. O. M. (Preparation for Overseas Movement.) All leaves and furloughs were cancelled, and censorship and security regulations were explained to the men.

On October 14, 1943, after Col. James's memorable "This Is It" speech, the battalion departed from Camp Pickett, Virginia, for the P. O. E. staging area at Camp Shanks, New York.

III.

STAGING AND OVERSEAS MOVEMENT

Camp Shanks

The battalion arrived at Camp Shanks on Friday, October 15, 1943. Here the unit was processed, every item of equipment checked for serviceability, and all excess personal belongings discarded.

Every officer and man was given a thorough last-minute physical inspection (which consisted of counting the number of arms, legs, and eyes a person possessed). All organizational equipment had been turned in at Pickett and new equipment was to be reissued on the other side. From this it was deduced it was not to be a "shore to shore" operation. Since the unit was alerted shortly after arrival at Shanks, it was restricted to the immediate area for the duration of its stay there. Just forty-five minutes from Broadway, and not a thing could be done about it! One man could see his home from Camp Shanks. That really hurt. All the unit censors were kept busy deleting and cutting up letters, but finally the word came.

On October 20, 1943, the battalion embarked on the *Capetown Castle*, a British ship formerly used on the South African run. The lights of New York, crossing the river on the ferry, the Red Cross doughnut girls, and the band at the docks, played on personal sentiments. Everyone was quiet and tense until the band started playing "Dixie," and then every Rebel throat in the battalion, plus a few renegade Yankees, took up the tune while marching up the gang-plank, loaded down with what seemed to be a ton of equipment.

Sea Voyage

The following day, October 21, 1943, after everyone had been assigned quarters, the *Capetown Castle* steamed out of New York harbor. Many of the men missed their last chance to look at the "Old Lady with the Torch" because the decks were cleared, but those who did, wondered when they would see her again.

The ship wasn't long at sea before boat drills were started. It was difficult to get used to wearing life belts at all times. Crap games started everywhere. Musical instruments soon appeared and close harmony on the deck at night was customary. It was good to see the old battle wagon, the *Texas*, and off on the horizon various cruisers, destroyers, and destroyer escorts. The nearest ships to the *Capetown Castle* in the convoy were the *Empress of Australia* and *Monarch of Bermuda*. One of these was loaded with American

nurses. So near and yet so far! The latrine situation was quite a problem, and many a helmet was used for a purpose other than the one for which it was intended.

Catalina flying boats and naval blimps escorted us for several days until we got well out to sea. The route followed was the southern one, long and circuitous, but safer. The constant zigzagging of the course of the ship was difficult to become accustomed to at first, and a few cases of seasickness resulted. Despite all orders prohibiting the same, rumors flew fast and furious. It was later learned, after the voyage was over, that the *U. S. S. Murphy*, one of the ships in the convoy, had collided with another ship, resulting in the *Murphy* being cut in half. The bow section was lost, but the stern section made it back to New York. The danger of submarine attack was ever present but it did not hinder one bit the harmony sessions, crap games, pseudo-rumors, and high morale.

The trip was a long one, taking in all eleven days. Company D, which had left in August, was fortunate to be sent over in the *Queen Elizabeth* which travelled alone, without escort of any kind, due to her speed: she made the trip in five days.

On November 2, 1943, the *Capetown Castle* docked at Liverpool, England, amidst the music of an English regimental band and the cheering and waving of a mixed crowd including ATS girls, soldiers, and the inevitable American MPs. Everyone lined the rails and started throwing cigarettes, chocolate, money, and sundry articles to the ATS girls, but in many cases the aim was poor and it afforded a great bit of amusement to see the mad scramble for it. Over the public address system the new arrivals were told how to behave in England and a little bit of what to expect there. One particular incident stands out: a Scottish officer wearing kilts walked down the dock, and the clamor of the catcalls, whistling, and yoo-hoos was deafening. The battalion disembarked on November 3 and entrained on the curious little English railroad cars that were to carry us to Penkridge, Staffordshire, arriving that afternoon. Part of the battalion had an opportunity to see the havoc of the blitz in Liverpool.

The battalion was finally overseas!

IV.

ENGLAND AND THE ASSAULT TRAINING CENTER

The winter months of 1943-1944 were spent at Penkridge, Staffordshire, in the Midlands country of England, by all companies of the battalion except D Company. During this time the unit was reequipped with all its organizational equipment and was kept in shape by a varied program of exercises and many hikes to nearby (?) Channock Chase. Penkridge was a sleepy English village and at first the natives didn't know quite what to make of the "Yanks," but when the civilians found out that Americans weren't all gangsters and that they might sleep safely in their beds at night, they became quite friendly and hospitable. The cultural points of interest were Penkridge Church, Litchfield Cathedral, and Hatherton Hall. For those interested in culture of a lighter vein, Civic Hall at Wolverhampton, the pubs at Stafford, Cannock, and other neighboring towns served to keep all amused. "You cawn't miss it," "Any gum, chum," and "Time please, gentlemen," became familiar phrases, and despite the protests that it was awful stuff, copious quantities of "Mild and Bitter" were consumed.

All during this period, D Company was at the famous ATC (Assault Training Center) near Ilfracombe, North Devon, acting as school troops. It was not relieved from this duty until April 1, 1944, at which time it rejoined the battalion.

From December, 1943, through April, 1944, each company of the battalion, including parts of Headquarters, participated in intensive amphibious and assault exercises at the ATC and along the western and southern coasts of England. Few who participated will forget the regimental landings, firing from LCVPs, the company assault problems, the "hedgehog" at the Assault Training Center, or the exercises Duck 1 and 2, and exercises Fox and Fabius. It was learned later that enemy "E" boats were operating in that vicinity at the time. All these problems were considered rough, but it was found later that they were child's play compared to actual combat.

The battalion was reorganized under a new Table of Organization on February 14, 1944, and the 376 men rendered surplus by this reorganization were transferred in grade to the 92nd Chemical Battalion then being formed. The members of the unit were sorry to see so many of their friends leave, and the men concerned hated to go, but it was a necessary action.

In March the battalion left Penkridge for Poole, Dorset, where it was rejoined on April 1, 1944, by D Company. All companies

participated in the AA firing at Newquay with the .50 cal. machine gun, and in intensive mortar shoots at Exmoor range in North Devon and at Canford Heath near Poole. However, despite the intensive training program carried out by the battalion during this period, all personnel had sufficient time for recreation. Most of them managed to get to London and many other places of interest on short passes. The foggy weather gave birth to the famous story that England was kept afloat by barrage balloons, but the blackouts seemed to enhance sociability rather than kill it. Many English friends were made, and two men asked for and received permission to marry English girls.

On February 15 the battalion had been attached to V Corps of the First United States Army. The battalion was further attached to the 1st Infantry Division on April 20, 1944. It was about this time that the field artillery method of observation and firing was adopted. Its advantages over the old mortar methods were soon proven in combat.

MARSHALLING AND EMBARKATION

After a little more than six months of intensive preparation following its arrival in the United Kingdom, the battalion was alerted on May 12, 1944, for what proved to be the greatest event in modern times, the invasion of Europe.

Together with elements of the 1st Infantry Division and attachments, the battalion moved into the marshalling area near Dorchester, Dorset, on May 15, 1944. The assault group of this battalion was composed of 437 officers and men and 35 vehicles. Once in the marshalling area it was held incommunicado from the outside world. The residual elements were moved to Bournemouth, Hants, at this time, to join other residual elements of the 1st Division. Later the rear echelon was moved to Falmouth for embarkation, and the initial build-up (overstrength) was moved to Tiverton for shipment so as to arrive in France and join the forward echelon on D plus 5.

The entire assault echelon was moved to Camp D-11, where it remained as a battalion until Sunday, May 28. During this time everyone, from the battalion commander to the private of the line, was briefed on the operation. Complete and comprehensive relief maps, recent aerial photographs, and the latest intelligence reports were used, so that every detail of terrain, location of enemy installations and underwater obstacles, etc., was learned with painstaking accuracy. Col. James gave what later proved to be his last talk to us, expressing complete confidence in our ability to live up to the words "Equal to the Task."

On this date the assault echelon was broken up and attached to two combat teams—the 16th and 116th. Companies A and C were attached to the 16th CT, made up of the 16th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Division and attached units; B and D Companies to the 116th CT, made up of the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Division plus attachments; and battalion Headquarters to the 1st Division Headquarters. Company A then moved to Camp D4 and D8, B to D1, C to D 10, D to D1 and battalion Headquarters to D5.

Beginning on June 1 and continuing through June 2, the entire assault echelon was moved to Weymouth harbor where it embarked on various craft, including APAs, an LSI, and LSTs. Company A was assigned to the *S. S. Henrico*, an APA; B Company to a British APA, the *Empire Javelin*; C Company to the *Empire Anvil*, a British LSI; D Company to the *U. S. S. Charles Carrol*; and Headquarters Company to the LST 83. The rear echelons of the various

companies embarked at a later date in two Liberty ships, the *Lucille Stone* and *Louis Kossuth*. After leaving the marshalling areas, the battalion commander had no further contact with any of his companies until the landing on bloody Omaha Beach on D-Day. In all, the assault groups spent ninety-six hours on the choppy waters of the Channel.

After the assault groups had embarked, it was announced that D-Day would be June 5, but later an announcement was flashed that D-Day had been postponed for twenty-four hours due to bad weather off the coast of Normandy. H-Hour was to be at 0630 hours, June 6, 1944. It was later learned that it had to be then or be postponed at least a month. What a decision to rest on the shoulders of one man! Yet a more capable man than our Supreme Commander, General "Ike," would be difficult to find.

On the afternoon of June 5, one by one the craft slipped out from Weymouth harbor to assemble with similar groups somewhere in the Channel. The immensity of this mighty invasion fleet was awe-inspiring to everyone who participated in General Bradley's "greatest show on earth." Here was the armed might of the "decadent democracies" spread out as far as the eye could see. The dry runs were over: this was the record shoot, testing whether a free people could hope to meet and vanquish the regimented power of a brutal dictatorship. It was truly to be a "battle of the giants."

VI.

INVASION AND THE BEACHHEAD

Just before dawn on June 6, as the armada approached the coast of Normandy, bright, lightning-like flashes could be seen illuminating the whole horizon. The arrival of the mightiest convoy that man had ever assembled for a single operation was heralded by a thunderous rumble directly to the front. This was the initial air and sea bombardment laid down on Omaha Beach early that day in an effort to neutralize or soften up the enemy's prepared positions. Despite the immensity of this preparation and the gigantic losses inflicted on the enemy, the fighting forces were to learn soon enough that they would yet have to pay heavily to gain that little strip of France.

Approximately fifteen miles from shore the larger craft hove to, and at 0430 all companies transferred their men and mortars to LCVPs. As the men clambered down the cargo nets in the murky, false dawn, the Navy wished them Godspeed, and the craft shoved off from the mother ships into a choppy sea for the rendezvous areas several hundred yards offshore. Here they circled, endlessly it seemed, causing the boat teams to be wet to the skin and, in many cases, violently seasick. All during this time the promised air support passed overhead, wave after wave, and faces lifted to see it were filled with gratitude.

Battleships and cruisers fired salvos into the Nazi defenses, destroyers steamed offshore battling 88s emplaced solidly in the bluff, while smaller vessels sprayed the beach defenses with rockets. Finally the craft straightened out into waves and headed for Omaha Beach with all the speed and power they could muster. All the companies were in either the fourth or fifth wave of the assault echelon. Soon empty LCVPs passed, returning to the APA. Seeing the empty craft relieved the strain a bit, for then it was known that the first wave had managed at least to disembark. The din of the battle came closer and closer, and to the sides and rear could be seen spouts of water where enemy shells were landing. Looking through the slit in the ramp one could see the smoke, wreckage, and carnage of the beach rapidly coming closer. The staccato rattling was soon recognized as machine gun bullets impacting as the craft threaded their way through the various lanes cleared by the shore engineers but which still were often lined with underwater obstacles and mines. Finally, with a last surge of power and a lurch that sent the unprepared hitting against the bulwarks, the craft grounded, and the ramps flew down spilling men, guns, and equipment on to the

hell that was the shore of France. Many say now that it was a good thing most were "green" troops, for many a veteran "froze" that day. The constant drilling at the ATC resulted in doing automatically what was supposed to be done, without stopping to think of what was being faced. Heavy seas and the fact that some craft hung up on underwater obstacles made it impossible to make a dry landing.

The companies landed in the following order:

Companies A and D	H plus 50 minutes
Company B	H plus 90 minutes
Company C	H plus 9 hours

The LCT of the forward battalion command group was heavily shelled as it approached the shore. Enemy artillery pierced the starboard side of the craft amidship, killing T/Sgt. Cook of Headquarters Detachment and seriously wounding Col. James. The engine room was flooded and the rudder hit, leaving the craft with its dead and wounded adrift and floating out to sea. Aided by the current, the boat drifted toward shore and finally, at about 1030 hours, beached itself under the protection of a steep cliff, where, under covering fire from the craft, the wounded were transferred to shore. Col. James was evacuated to England later that day in a hospital ship. Major Johnson (then Captain), being the senior officer ashore, took command of the assault echelon until the rear echelon arrived.

Company A, in support of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st Division, landed at Easy Red Beach. Several mortars and carts were carried away by the heavy seas. After a hard struggle, the equipment was rescued and the company remained on the beach the entire morning, subjected to devastating machine gun fire which made it impossible to move. The company commander, Captain Moundres, was severely wounded while making his way through the surf to the beach. First Lt. James P. Panas, who had already rescued a wounded doughboy from the water, ran back across the beach and, under heavy enemy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire, carried his wounded company commander ashore. Captain Moundres died as the result of his wounds, so Lt. Panas, being now the senior officer, took command of the company, reorganized the platoons, and got them safely off the beach into firing positions along the slope of the

bluff. For his leadership and gallantry in action, Lt. Panas was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. The only enlisted man lost by A Company on the beach was Pvt. George Baumgartner who was killed when an enemy artillery shell exploded near him. Pvt. Kidwell distinguished himself by retrieving several men being carried away by the rising water, giving them first aid in complete disregard for his personal safety and in spite of a wound he himself had suffered. Kidwell was later awarded the DSC for his gallantry and self-sacrifice.

After the infantry had broken through the beach defenses, the platoons took up positions by a tank trap in a field about 500 yards in from the beach. The enemy had direct observation on these positions and subjected the company to a severe shelling.

B Company's mission was to land on Dog Green Beach and provide direct support for the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry. Because the water obstacles had not been cleared and the beach was under heavy mortar, small arms, and antillery fire, the control boat ordered the wave to land, instead, on Easy Green, the left flank of Omaha Beach. As the boats were running along parallel to the beach, about 1,000 yards offshore, two of the LCVPs were hit and disabled by artillery. Despite an extremely heavy sea and the continual harrassing fire from enemy machine guns and other direct-fire weapons, all personnel and equipment were safely transferred to an empty LCT. At approximately 0930 hours the entire wave was safely beached. Here the company was reorganized and moved inland about 100 yards.

At this time only a small section of the beach was held by American troops, and enemy fire was still inflicting heavy casualties. It was not until late in the afternoon that part of the company was able to move to a bluff overlooking the beach and fire its first mission. The first round was fired by Sgt. Florio's squad at 1700 hours at a machine gun nest in the woods near St. Laurent-sur-Mer. Later in the evening it was found that nine men and two officers were missing; otherwise the company was intact. It was learned later that Lt. Walton, Cpl. Grob, and Pvt. Skaeski died of wounds received on the beach.

In order to accomplish its mission, the company was forced to advance through one of the uncleared mine fields found everywhere about the beach. During this move Pfc. Rone was injured by an anti-personnel mine, and later died.

The wave containing C Company's LCVPs bore in towards the beach on schedule, but since the infantry was still pinned down within a few yards of the water, the control boat moved them back to sea, where they rendezvoused. Another attempt was made at 1000 hours, and still another at 1200 hours, the latter being met by machine gun fire as it reached the beach. As a last measure the wave moved down the beach to the right of Dog Red, where a landing was successfully completed at 1500 hours, under heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The platoons, separately attached to battalions of the 16th Infantry, 1st Division, moved along the beach to their sector and initially set up 200 yards, inland. Mines and sniper fire were ever-present dangers and again the medics distinguished themselves when Sgt. Linnea Freda worked for hours treating and evacuating wounded with complete disregard for his own safety. He was later awarded the Silver Star.

At 0720, D Company's craft beached on Easy Green in support of the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry, under an incessant hail of machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. Of necessity the boat teams were landed in water up to their waists, and the precaution that had been taken to attach inflated life belts to the carts proved a wise one. Machine gun bullets ripped into the belts on several of the carts, however, deflating them and causing the carts to sink. Sgt. Raymond Nicoli, T/5 Felice Savino, Pvt. McLaren, and Pvt. Benton L. Porter were wounded while rescuing this equipment and refused medical aid until this was accomplished. These men were justly awarded the DSC for their bravery. The preceding wave of infantry were lying only a few yards from the water, pinned down by the fire raking the beach. Lt. Mohrfeld, platoon leader, 2nd platoon, was hit within a few minutes by machine gun fire and died shortly thereafter. Lt. Costello assumed command of the platoon and, knowing that to linger on the beach was certain death, reorganized the squads and infiltrated them off the beach amidst the heavy fire impacting there. Lt. Costello later received the Silver Star for his gallantry. Captain Gaffney, company commander, was instantly killed when the craft in which he was riding struck a mine. Lt. Marshall, platoon leader, 1st platoon, took over command. The bravery of the medics in taking care of the wounded under fire was again proven by T/5's White and Marrin.

Number four mortar of the 1st platoon, Sgt. Miller's squad, fired two rounds of HE, from the initial landing place, at a machine gun

emplacement 500 yards away. Lt. Sabbione directed the fire from the mortar position. Although the target was at too close a range to hit, it is believed that these were the first rounds of the battalion fired on the continent of Europe.

C Company changed positions three times after the initial landing on Easy Green. One of these movements involved a hand-carry of all equipment across a waist-deep, muddy marsh under fire. At 2200 hours the company moved northwest along a sea wall 800 yards inland through les Moulins to St. Laurent-sur-Mer, arriving at 2400 hours. Here the company dug-in for the night and concealed its equipment.

All the assault vehicles of A Company were landed safely later that day, and those of C and D Companies were also landed with the loss of only one jeep apiece. B Company was unfortunate enough to have one of the vehicle personnel killed and two others and an officer wounded. Only one B Company jeep was landed, although another was later salvaged: all other vehicles were lost.

The next day A Company passed through Colleville-sur-Mer and made slow but certain gains, supporting the infantry whenever called upon. On D plus 3 the company was detached from the 16th Infantry, 1st Division, and attached to the 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry, 2nd Division.

The nights were still cold, strange, and restless; the tension was felt by everyone. The sight of new units passing on the road gave everyone a sense of exhilaration.

The trek inland was slow and exhausting. C Company moved through Colleville-sur-Mer and St. Honorine des Pertes, still supporting the 1st Division. This company fired its first rounds on D plus 2 at enemy positions near Fosseer Sancy. On D plus 3 the attachment was changed to the 2nd Division. At this time Lt. Robert Mann and his platoon accomplished a magnificent feat. Under enemy observation and sniper fire, Lt. Mann led his platoon down a steep hill, over an open field, and across a creek, in order to furnish the infantry with the close support it so badly needed. It was necessary to wade the creek and hand-carry all equipment. The doughs were so happy to have the 4.2s that they lent a helping hand and later saw that the platoon was supplied with rations.

By June 10 the town of Trevieres was finally cleared, after being subjected to a heavy shelling by this company. On June 12 an OP party, consisting of Lt. Mann, Cpl. Roach, and Pfc. Jones and

Harris, accompanying an assault company, was pinned down for two hours and then overrun by a strong German counterattack. During this engagement the popular Lt. Mann was killed, Roach and Jones captured, and Harris luckily managed to escape. Two days later Roach escaped, but Jones remained a prisoner until the Allied armies overran Germany. Lt. Mann was awarded the Bronze Star posthumously for gallantry in action, leadership, and courage.

June 14 (D plus 8) found C Company in position near Les Aieres facing Hill 192, when the enemy repulsed an attack by the 2nd Division to take the hill.

On June 9, B Company, seriously handicapped by the loss of its vehicles, acquired two 6 x 6 trucks from the field artillery. The acquisition of these vehicles solved the immediate transportation difficulties. At the time, B Company was supporting the 5th Ranger Battalion in an attack to clear out the coast fortifications. Elements of the 29th Division attacked St. Marguerite d'Elle on June 12, with preparation fires from B Company in conjunction with the artillery. On June 13 the company moved to Couvains and was registered in for the first time by an artillery observation plane. By this time the artillery had come to know and respect the power of the 4.2 mortar, particularly because of the better support it could give the infantry in the hedgerow terrain. After having been reattached to the 116th Infantry, B Company assisted in the attack on Bretel Woods. The attack lasted two days, with the fanatic resistance ending on June 14. The company fired a total of 560 rounds of HE and 174 rounds of WP during the course of this operation—a record which stood for several weeks.

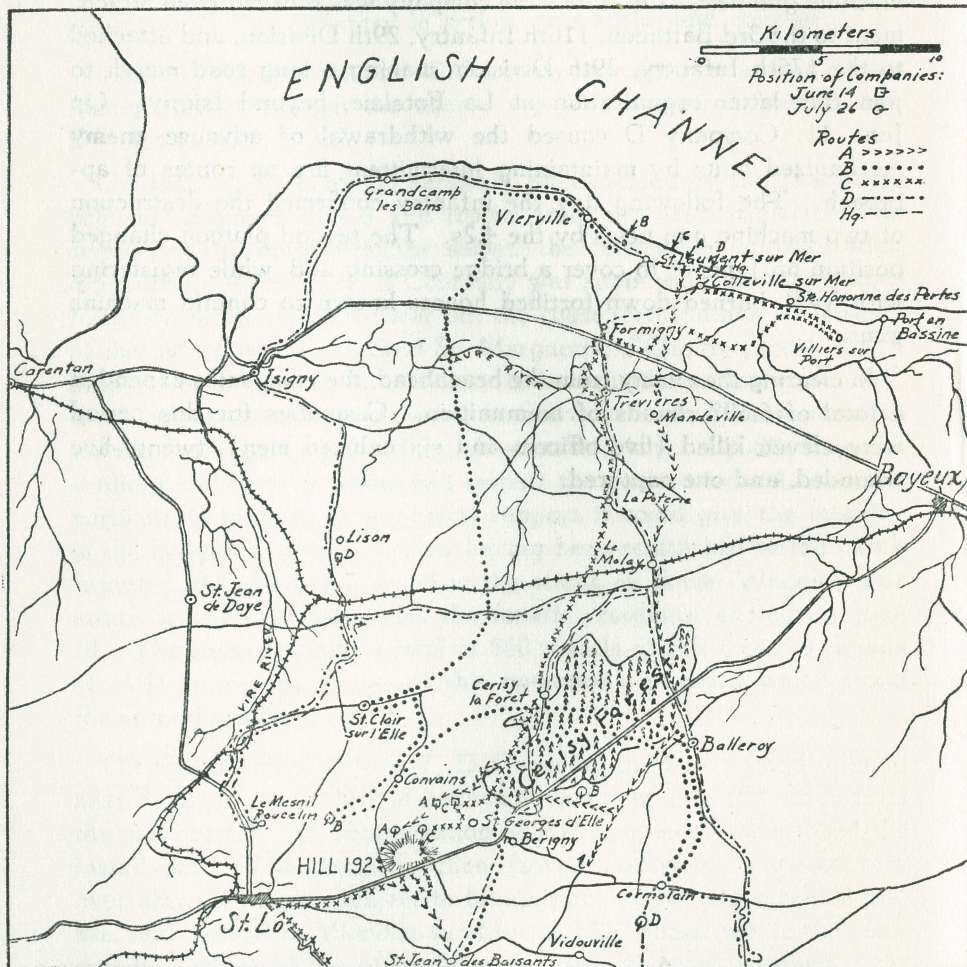
On the morning of June 7, D Company fired its second mission near St. Laurent-sur-Mer at a machine gun nest only 800 yards from the gun position. A concentration of HE completely neutralized the installation. The company then moved northwest, cross-country over difficult terrain, subject to intermittent sniper and machine gun fire, and arrived at Vierville-sur-Mer at 1600 hours, where the commanding officer of the 116th Infantry, 29th Division, assigned it the task of providing security fire.

It was here that the company was subjected to one of the heaviest shellings it ever experienced. Several batteries of enemy 150mm artillery, firing from the vicinity of Pont de Hoe, pounded the center of town and the road leading to the beach. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the regimental OP group and on a field artillery

battalion coming from the beach. An ammunition dump was blown up, scattering small arms ammunition in all directions. This action caused a withdrawal from the town along the highway.

At 0530 hours, on June 8, D Company aided in the bloody attack on Grand Champs les Bains and was credited with another enemy machine gun nest. On June 9 the company was relieved from attachment to the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry, 29th Division, and attached to the 175th Infantry, 29th Division, making a long road march to join this latter organization at La Fotelaie, beyond Isigny. On June 11, Company D caused the withdrawal of advance enemy mechanized units by maintaining intermittent fire on routes of approach. The following day the infantry confirmed the destruction of two machine gun nests by the 4.2s. The second platoon changed position on June 14 to cover a bridge crossing and, while registering with WP, burned down fortified houses known to contain machine guns.

In clearing the enemy from the beachhead, the companies expended a total of 6,807 rounds of ammunition. Casualties for this period were eleven killed (five officers and six enlisted men), twenty-five wounded, and one captured.



VII.

THE BATTLE OF THE HEDGEROWS

The long, slow, bloody battle of the hedgerows, which finally brought the infantry to Hill 192 and St. Lo, lasted from June 14, when the beachhead was secured, to the 26th of July, when the attack from Hill 192 to St. Lo was launched. By this time the Germans had built up sufficient strength to halt V Corps' advance for a while. Progress was measured by hedgerows, and this period of fighting was probably the most bitter of the entire European campaign.

Counterattacks were heavy, fierce, and numerous in the sectors of all companies between the dates of June 14 and July 26. The units to which some of the companies were attached were confronted with picked paratroop units, but these suffered such extremely heavy casualties from American mortar and artillery fire that one division with two-thirds of its strength casualties, had to be replaced.

Since this was essentially a dairy country, many cattle were killed, and in the hot June and July sun the odor soon became almost unbearable. The natives sold cider or a highly volatile brand of poison called "Calvados," and often provided a chicken or eggs (albeit unwittingly once or twice).

The rear echelon of the battalion embarked in two Liberty ships on June 14 from England and dropped anchor about two and a half miles off Omaha Beach the following day. During the night Jerry planes came over and bombed. The AA guns on each ship, and from shore installations, put up a tremendous barrage of flak, and fragments falling on the decks sounded like an ominous hailstorm. Contact was established on June 16 with the advance CP, and the rear echelon moved inland near Trevieres, France, where it remained for almost five weeks. Mess and ammo trucks were dispatched to the companies soon after arrival.

Nightly schedules of harassing fire were almost a certainty for A Company during this period. It was here that the phrase "Who is harassing whom?" was born. Souvenir hunting began about this time, despite the fact that all companies were almost continuously under fire of some sort. During one such barrage, A Company's Pvt. Bill Kaminsky jumped into what he believed to be a foxhole, but which turned out to be a straddle trench, much to his discomfort. This company was often in one position for many days at a time waiting for the infantry to take the stubbornly defended hedgerows before moving forward. Hardly a day passed that HE or WP missions were not fired.

On June 16, the regimental commander of the 9th Infantry commended the company commander of A Company for the effectiveness of a smokescreen which the company had laid in support of the crossing of the La Droine River. On this date also, the regimental commander of the 116th Infantry instructed his battalion commanders to call on the 4.2s as much as possible for close support because they could get twice the fire of the artillery out in the same amount of time.

At the beginning of this period, June 16, C Company, while supporting the 2nd Infantry Division, went into a static position facing Hill 192. This was a long high ridge, held by the Germans, which blocked the Allied advance along the all important St. Lo-Bayeux highway. From this hill, the enemy had excellent observation and pounded the troops facing them incessantly with artillery and mortars. Counterattacks in this sector were heavy and fierce during this period and C Company did much to break them up by firing WP and HE. The company was credited with stopping several of these attacks unassisted.

During June 15 and June 16, D Company did considerable effective firing in the vicinity of Moon-Sur-Elle. A series of enemy strong points consisting of a road block, a fortified house, and heavy machine guns south of the town were holding up the advance of the 175th Infantry, 29th Division. These positions were so well concealed by the terrain and foliage that the forward observer and his party, in order to observe and pin point the fire, took a squad of infantry as security and infiltrated 200 yards ahead of the infantry outpost to within 45 yards of the enemy; they were so close, in fact, that they could hear the enemy talking. After the registration was completed the enemy started throwing hand grenades at the party, so they withdrew to high ground and covered the area with mortar fire. The infantry, taking advantage of this concentrated shelling, moved in as the fire was lifted and succeeded in securing the ground.

D Company had an opportunity to learn the effect of its firing firsthand on June 17. An infantry patrol reconnoitering the town of La Meauffe was badly cut up by enemy fire coming from emplacements and buildings near the edge of town. Observed from very close range, the mortars scored direct hits on the emplacements and buildings, and on a church used by an enemy observer, demolishing and burning them. Immediately on "cease fire," four of the enemy surrendered, and upon interrogation by the infantry S-3 they stated that the shells landed directly in the emplacements, killing twenty-

seven that they saw. The WP had a terrific effect on the morale of the troops, causing them to evacuate the town. On this date three members of a forward observation party were killed by direct fire from enemy artillery. They were 2nd Lt. Giles B. Harris, Cpl. Thomas H. Ward, and Pvt. John J. Knott.

First Army orders were received on June 17 which listed the 81st Chemical Battalion as one of the units eligible for unit citation for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in the initial landing on the coast of France.

On June 18 and June 19, after the many days of shuttling and hand-hauling, the companies received the remainder of their vehicles with great cheer. About this time, men began to be sent back to the battalion rear for two-day rests and cleanups. Badly-needed replacement officers and men joined the companies at this time.

Pvt. Domenic Sanna of D Company was killed on June 18, when two jeeps, carrying up the company's first batch of mail and a load of ammunition, took a wrong turn and ran into a strong enemy party. Both jeeps had to be abandoned, but several Germans were killed and wounded in the fight.

To D Company the name "88 alley" has a particular significance. On June 19, while attached to the 175th Infantry, 29th Division, the company moved up to the vicinity of Le Mesnil-Roulexin to effect the relief of the 115th Infantry which had been cut off by the enemy. The FO party had left the night before with an infantry patrol and at 0230 hours, as one platoon moved up with the infantry, the route of approach was shelled incessantly. German dead lined the roads and hedgerows where a bicycle company had been ambushed by the 115th, but before the night ended there were many American dead there also. Miraculously the mortar men escaped death, but shells were landing so close that several ear drums were broken. A smoke mission was fired from this advanced position, with the infantry moving in under cover of the screen to take the town that day.

On June 19 Lts. Andrew Z. Baker, Company C, Charles S. Gardner and Francis Fisher, Company A, were wounded by artillery fire while at the observation post; all by one shellburst. Lt. Fisher had only joined the company about five hours before.

B Company, attached to the 29th Division, fired a highly successful smoke mission on June 20, west of Couvains, to cover the withdrawal of friendly tanks. The following day a twenty-five minute concentration from its mortars was credited with stopping a company

of enemy infantry attacking up a draw near the gun position. It was confirmed by the infantry that B Company had definitely knocked out an 88 and killed over twenty Germans on this day.

On the 29th of June, the S-3 of the 115th Infantry to which B Company was attached informed Captain Levy that prisoners had told interrogators they had come to dread the devastating effects of the heavy mortars. The next day the commanding officer of the 175th Infantry issued instructions that all targets within range of the 4.2s be assigned to them. This decision was prompted by reports from more prisoners taken by the 175th regarding the heavy casualties inflicted on their personnel by the heavy mortars, and also by the comparative weakness of artillery in the hedgerow terrain.

By now the 3rd Armored Division had opened its drive along the roads leading to St. Lo. On being detached from the 29th Division, the commanding officer of B Company was presented with the Bronze Star for the meritorious manner in which his company had carried out the support of the various combat teams of the division.

On July 1, D Company was relieved from attachment to the 197th Field Artillery Battalion, 30th Division, XIX Corps, and left La Fotelaie. It then travelled thirty-two miles across the front to take up positions near Caumont where it was attached to the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Division, V Corps. This sector was the foremost point on the Allied front at the time, sticking out like a finger into enemy territory and receiving fire from both flanks and front. The company took up positions behind a hill which quickly and justly earned the name "Purple Heart Hill." Despite the defilade, Jerry constantly sought to shell the position with fire from high angle artillery, mortars, and "screaming meemies." During one such barrage T/5 Fix was killed and T/5 White was wounded while attempting to give him first aid.

On the Fourth of July, at exactly 1200 hours, all companies fired one round from each gun as a part of the great Independence Day Shoot along the whole front. D Company also celebrated the Fourth of July by knocking out an entire platoon of German mortars. That night, at the Caumont "hot spot," D Company's sector was subjected to a strong counterattack, preceded by an artillery, mortar, and Nebelwerfer-preparation. The "Fighting First," supported by the 4.2s and other weapons, managed to beat Jerry off, despite the terrific shelling. Thanks to deep foxholes and overhead cover the casualties were few.

By July 7, most of the companies had made a big advance in centralizing control of their firing through the use of Fire Direction Centers. Company A's FDC was almost put out of existence several days later when a direct hit was made on the dugout it was occupying, closing up the entrance and scattering equipment and personnel. Several casualties were inflicted on the company at this time.

The great attack on Hill 192, the gateway to St. Lo, was begun by the 2nd Division on the 11th of July. The mortars of this battalion pounded the hill and adjacent environs with a total of 4,832 rounds. C Company alone pumped out 3,195 rounds in 14 hours and company A fired more than 500 rounds. Intelligence later reported that WP concentrations were so heavy that the enemy was forced to don their gas masks for protection against the acrid smoke.

C Company began firing at 0540 hours and fired almost continuously throughout the day. Probably the outstanding achievement was the smokescreen laid to prevent German observation on the important village of St. Georges D'Elle. The screen, maintained for almost the entire day, was considered by those who observed it, to be a model for the offensive employment of a smokescreen. HE, used to blast strong points and enemy personnel, did a magnificent job in keeping the enemy from forming for counterattacks. Considerable counterbattery fire was received in the mortar position during the operation.

The 19th Field Artillery Battalion, 5th Division, relieved the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion, 1st Division, on July 13 at Caumont, but D Company remained at the hot spot in support of this new unit, which had never been committed. The following day Pfc. Robert Hoerter was seriously wounded and T/5 Leonard Topley and Pvt. George Jelush were wounded slightly on Purple Heart Hill. Several direct hits on the dugouts used as an OP buried Lt. Costello, Cpl. George New, and Pvt. Ramirez under a mass of logs, sandbags, and debris. All miraculously escaped injury.

This company left Caumont on July 22, and took up positions at Courmolain, attached to the 50th Field Artillery Battalion, 5th Division, where it fired several missions in the vicinity of La Vacqurie and burned down the town of Bieville, an enemy strong point. It remained there until July 26, when the British took over that sector.

Many observers rave about their "dream shots." Captain Panas often talked about his, which occurred while registering on a typical red-roofed Normandy farmhouse, on the south side of the St. Lo

road, during July 24. The A Company commander placed a shell on the roof of the house, and to check the lay of the guns fired another round. The second round went through the hole in the roof made by the previous shell, and exploded inside!

On July 25, all in the vicinity watched in amazement the all-out bombing of St. Lo, as wave after wave of Allied bombers pounded the city for hours. Then came the long awaited breakthrough at St. Lo, just to C Company's right flank. The next day, July 26, the 2nd Division jumped off from Hill 192, with the 4.2s closely following, firing at every opportunity.

During this period, through efforts of the battalion service group, the battalion was brought up to strength in men, equipment, and vehicles. Although M6 propellant was critical, the companies were kept well supplied. The great amount of breakage of mortar parts did not seriously interfere with the firing, because of the rapidity of repair and replacement of these needed parts by headquarters service personnel. The battalion fired a total of 26,874 rounds by the close of this period.

The Silver Star for gallantry in action on D-Day was awarded, during this period, to the following-named officers and enlisted men:

CAPTAIN W. JOHNSON.....	Bn. Hq.
LT. CHRISTOPHER H. COSTELLO.....	D Company
T/4 CHARLES R. DYKENS.....	A "
CPL. RAYMOND D. LITTLE.....	A "
PFC. HOYT D. ANDERSON.....	A "
T/5 KENNETH L. WHITE.....	Med. Det.

And the Bronze Star to:

LT. JAMES P. PANAS.....	A Company
LT. JOHN F. RIDDLE.....	Bn. Hq.

for meritorious achievement on D-Day.

