

1945

The 108th AAA Group invaded Fortress Europe 27 June 1944

Bernard Reidler

United States Army

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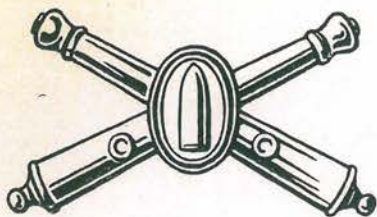
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THE 108TH AAA GROUP

★ *Normandy*

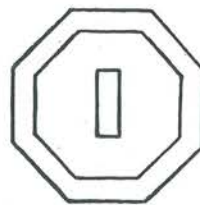
★ *Northern France*

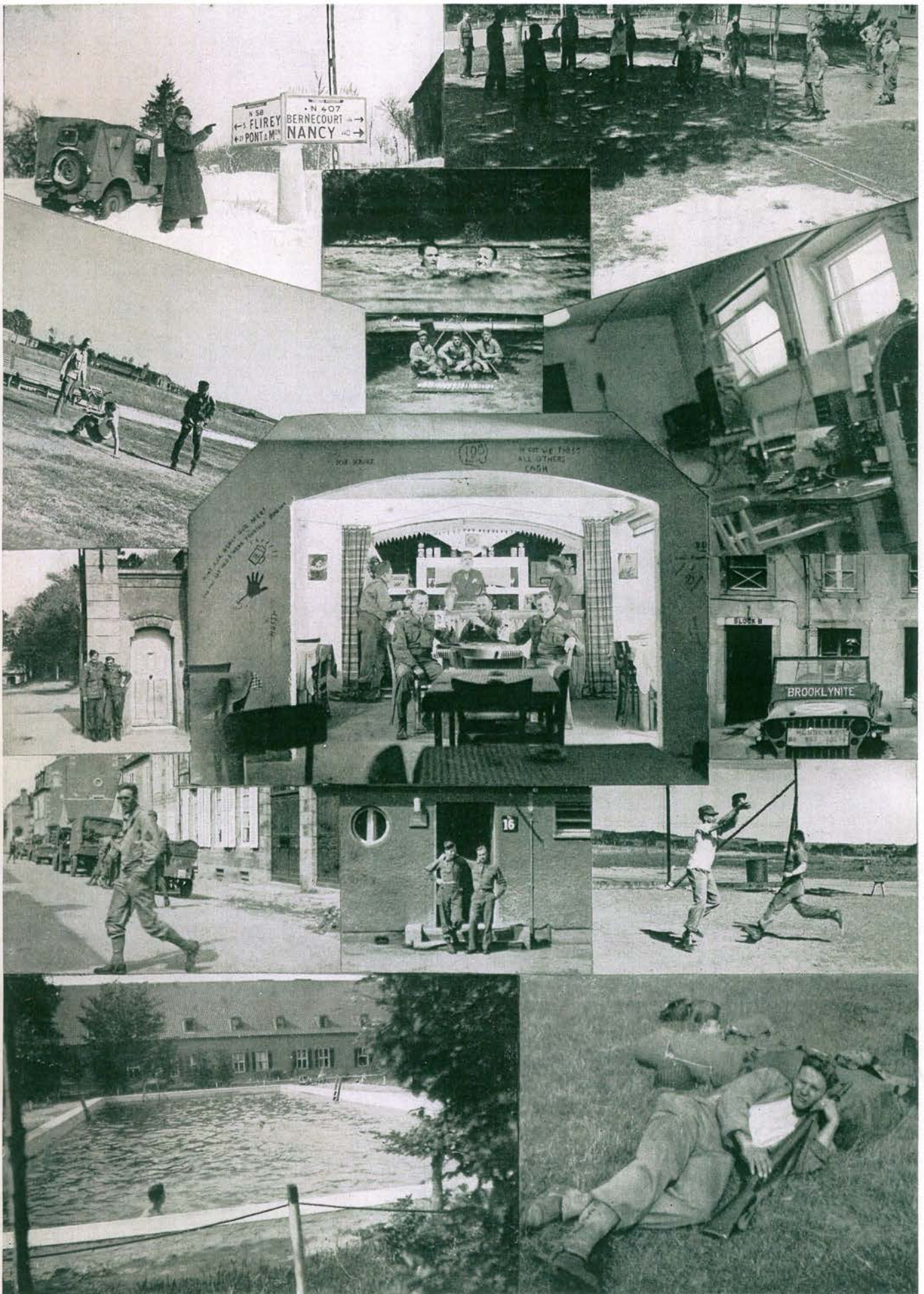
Rhineland ★

Central Europe



INVADED FORTRESS EUROPE 27 JUNE 1944





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Editor	Bernard Reidler
Asst Editor	Milton E. Bergstrom
Photographer	Frank Chiovitti
Asst Photographer	Bernard Reidler
Advisor	Frank Chiovitti

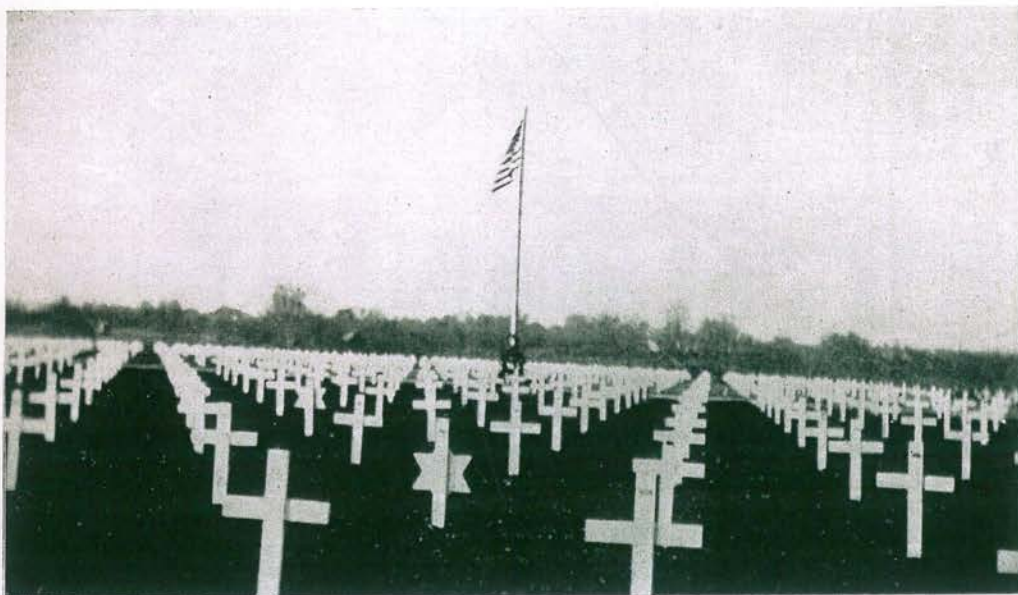


Headquarters and Headquarters Battery 108th Antiaircraft Artillery Group, a new organization in the annals of United States military history, has had a rich and important part in the successful prosecution of this Second Great War just ended. Activated 1 March 1942 at Camp Davis, North Carolina, as Headquarters and Headquarters Battery 514th Coast Artillery (Antiaircraft) the Group had had the responsibility for providing demonstration, instruction and maintenance personnel for the Antiaircraft School and Antiaircraft Board until October 1943. During this period the unit participated in the training of the majority of officers, officer candidates and enlisted specialists now serving with antiaircraft artillery units in the field. It was one of the first Groups to enter Normandy after D-Day and organized the initial Antiaircraft defenses of the important port of Cherbourg, our first real harbor port. Following that the Group organized and operated the Antiaircraft defenses of the ports of Morlaix and Rouen and provided Antiaircraft protection for airfields and installations in the vicinity of Rheims, Verdun and Metz. It protected the airfields used by paratroopers when the final great push across the Rhine was launched on

26 March 1945. V E Day found us engaged in the disarmament of German Flak. Thus it will be noted that the Group has had responsibilities involving all phases of military operations from the training of troops and the testing of new weapons for the ultimate defeat of our Nazi enemy to the disarming of that enemy after his defeat. No defense maintained by this Group was ever surprised, nor did any objective, while defended by it, suffer damage by enemy air attack. Every member may feel a justifiable pride in belonging to such an organization as Headquarters Battery 108th Antiaircraft Artillery Group.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. D. Mitchell", with a stylized, sweeping flourish extending from the bottom left of the signature.

J. D. MITCHELL
Colonel CAC
Commanding



PASSAGE FOR HOME . . . "PAID IN FULL"

As your book goes to press our chances of going home have improved tremendously. Changes in point scores, reduction of age limit and the elimination of jobs previously considered "essential" have fanned the embers of hope to a stronger and brighter flame. No man in the unit ever doubted for a moment that he would return to the United States. We all knew . . . either consciously or instinctively . . . that our passage home had been booked and paid for a long time ago . . . by The Men Beneath the Crosses. The price they paid was our guarantee of a swift and safe return to a country unmarked by war and a people secure from the horror and suffering caused by this cancer of civilization.

Either individually or collectively we can never repay The Men Beneath the Crosses. It would be presumptuous . . . if not a gross impertinence . . . to "dedicate" this book to them. We can only humbly and gratefully acknowledge our debt and resolve sincerely . . . each in our own mind . . . "That these dead shall not have died in vain." That the country and the people for whose safety and future they "paid in full" will firmly and courageously carry out, now and in the ages to come, the principles and ideals for which Americans have died since the birth of The Republic.

Perhaps The Men Beneath the Crosses will accept this resolve as a very small partial payment on the debt we owe them.

OFFICERS CALL

Colonel	John D. Mitchell	Commanding
Lt Colonel	C. Forrest Wilson	Executive
Major	William E. Austin Jr.	Supply Officer
Major	Macon G. Stroud	Intelligence
Captain	Gordon E. Areen	Adjutant
Captain	Frank Chiovitti	Battery Commander
Captain	James H. Froelich	Intelligence
Captain	Oliver W. Wagner	Plans & Training
Captain	Richard J. Weader	Communications
1st Lt	Maynard Z. Wertz	Information Education
1st Lt	George K. Stevenson III	Plans & Training
2d Lt	Robert O. Bennett	Special Service



"Count"

Lt Col C. Forrest Wilson
U. S. Army



"Du"

William E. Austin, Jr.
Roanoke, Virginia



"Stump"

Macon G. Stroud
Roanoke, Virginia

"GE"

Gordon E. Areen
Chicago, Illinois



"Frank"

Frank Chiovitti
Denver, Colorado



"Happy Jim"

James H. Froelich
Puyallup, Washington



"Ollie"

Oliver W. Wagner
Belleville, Illinois

"Snoaky"

Richard J. Weader
Harrisburg, Pa.



Maynard Z. Wertz
Philadelphia, Pa.



"Stevey"

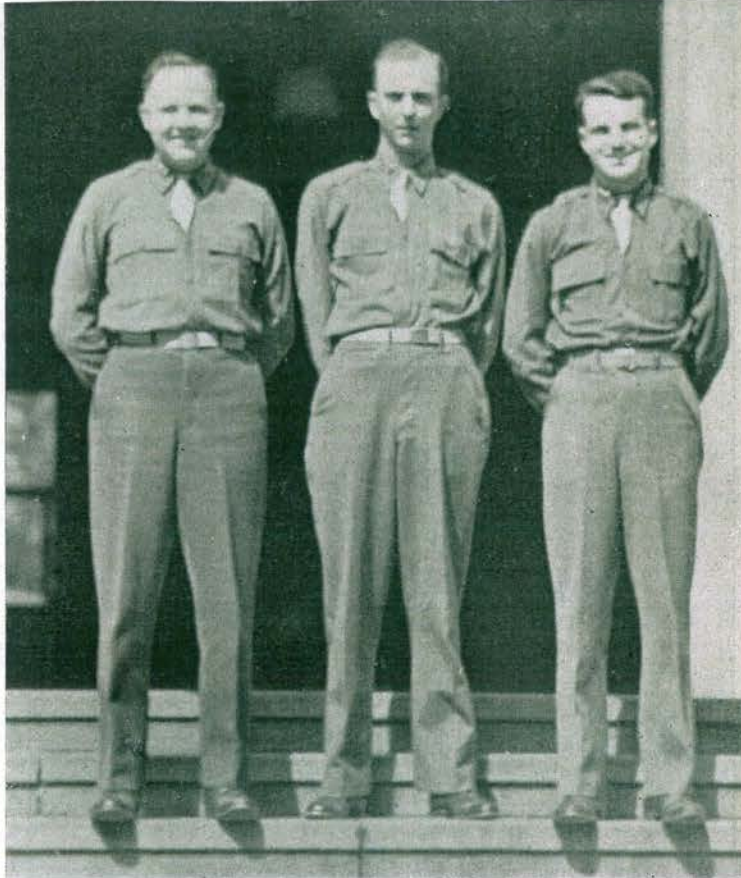
George K. Stevenson III
Pittsburg, Pa.



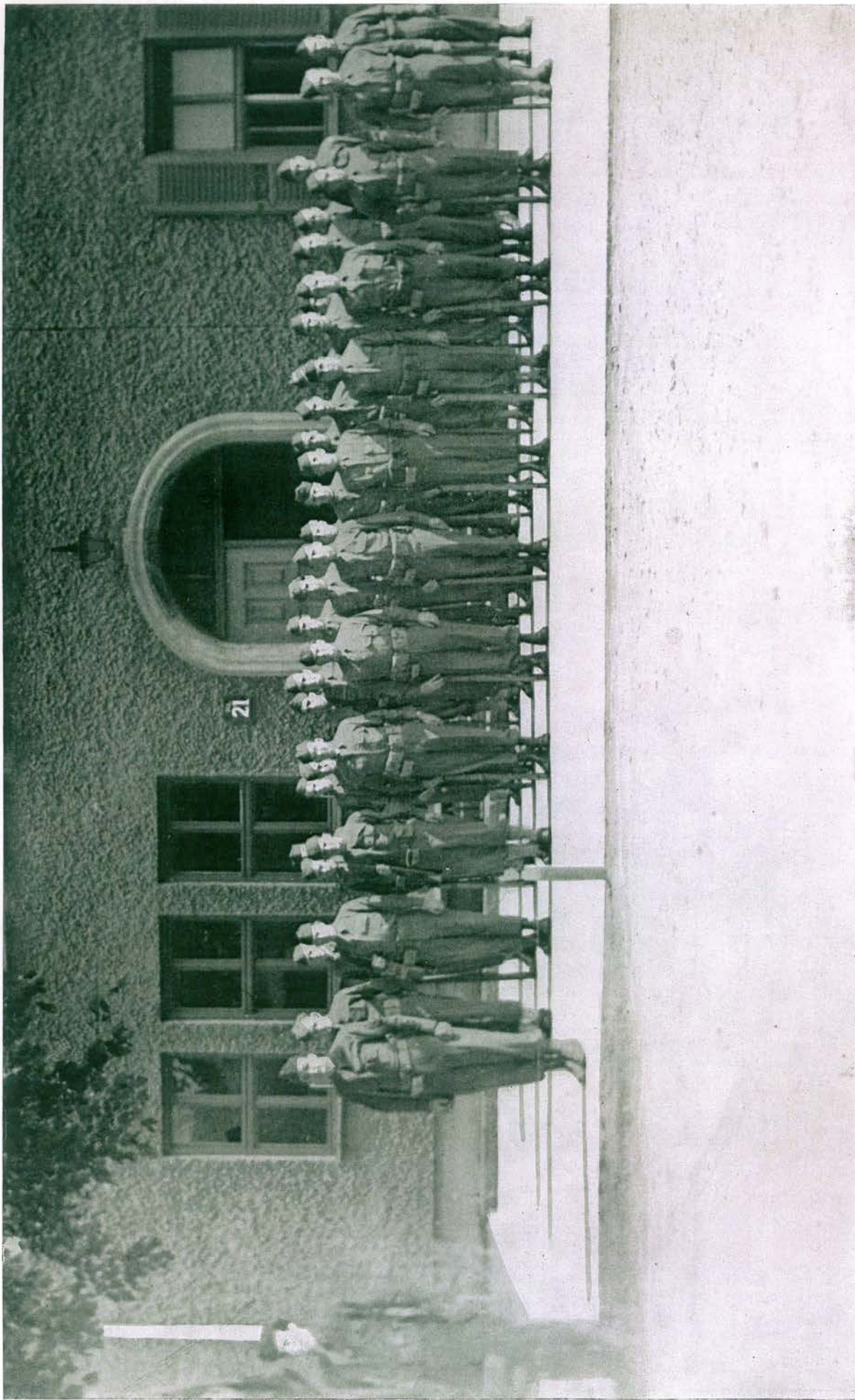
"Bab"

Robert O. Bennett
Salem, Ohio

David B. Scoular
William A. Hendrix, Jr.
Charles M. Waldrop, Jr.



Leo V. Hayes



HEADQUARTERS BATTERY

AMERICA TO ENGLAND

Men were piling out the train into the cold snappy air. They were tired disheveled looking men who bore the marks of having been on a crowded train for 36 hours. As the officers and non-coms began shouting orders, the chaos and excitement mounted and the weariness crept into the background. Finally we formed a semblance of a formation and, loaded to the teeth, turned toward our area. Will we ever forget the climb up that long hill, cramped muscles from the ride crying their protest at every step.

Considering the brevity of our stay at Camp Shanks, the position has many memories. Most of them are concerned with last minute lectures, medical examinations, show down inspections, and a general last minute check of anything and everything; but there is one memory that we will all always cherish — our last pass. Most of us couldn't spend it at home and with that possibility out of the question, what better place than New York City.

For security reasons the army could not allow more than fifty percent of the battery off the post at a time, so that half of us had Christmas Eve and the other half Christmas Day. Mine came on the Eve and the memory gets a little vague after eleven.

Two days later we were on the Christian Huuygens. All sixty of us and our equipment jammed into a room 20 by 35, the floor space of which was taken by four tables running the entire length of the enclosure. Thirteen days we endured indescribable monotony, were seasick, got used to the stench of human bodies packed in like sardines with poor bathing facilities, and listened to "Attensi — Attensi, garbage may now be thrown overboard," or "Attensi — Attensi, submarine off the starboard side." Whatever the announcement the inevitable "Attensi — Attensi" always preceded it and for months afterwards that was the favorite joke of lots of us as we entered a room or when we wanted some one to listen to what we had to say.

On the twelfth day we sighted the coast of Scotland, and steamed up the Firth of Clyde. The following morning at 3:30 we left the gaunt little ship and boarded a train. The popular rumor concerning our destination was London, but late that night sixty travel weary men arrived at Blandford Forum to be stationed there.

There wasn't much to occupy our time at Blandford. We had a training schedule which consisted chiefly of aircraft recognition with the function of booby traps and mines thrown in. Our chief interest became passes to Bournemouth and fortyeights to London. The single lads of the outfits decided that the English lassies were bearable while the married men tried the British mild and bitters and contented themselves with dances at the Red Cross Club

and parties at the Hotel Merville. The latter eventually became the off duty headquarters of the whole group.

It was there that we lost one of the finest and fairest men that ever lived, Colonel Douglas Eaton Morrison. Affectionately called "Froggie," he had



guided us through our training in the States and had become the symbol of fair play. We all loved him as a gentleman, friend, and commanding officer. Never will we forget his individual interest in every man nor his chats with the battery which were a necessary part of his weekly schedule. There diviticolosis, which he

had been holding off for some time finally caught up with him and much against his will, he was ordered back to the states.

Time wore on. Wait Wait! Wait! Would we land on D-Day? What Army would we be with? What kind of a mission would we have? Those were the questions that were running through everyone's mind. The rumors came fast and furious, the tension mounted, and we began preparing for what was to come in earnest. The vehicles were checked and rechecked and the long tedious process of waterproofing began. All passes and leaves were cancelled. We could not go more than twenty miles from our home station.

We saw the beaches of the southern coast lined with every conceivable type of equipment. Still we wondered and waited. Then it came D-Day, between two and three in the morning. We were awakened by the might roar of thousands of planes as they headed for the coast of France.

The invasion of France had begun, we were alerted for movement. We spent the next few days with our ears glued to the radio for the latest news. The rumors were getting worse as time wore on. On June 17th we left Blandford Camp for the staging area which was situated just outside of South Hampton, our P.O.E. Twenty-four hours later with stomachs full of 10 in 1 rations we were aboard the "Enoch Train," a liberty ship bound for the beaches of France.

CHERBOURG

John lay there looking up at the dirty white ceiling above him, as he rocked gently in a third tier canvas bunk with each swell of the mighty English Channel. He wondered vaguely just what was waiting for him on the coast of France. The news didn't sound too good. Maybe the Germans would be strafing the beaches when we landed.

John wasn't the only one thinking that day. We all were, every member of the 108th. The food was terrible and the monotony worse. The interminable waiting was what was unnerving most of us. Many of us that we could endure the Germans in all their wrath, if we could only get off that stinking tub.

Ten days we lay at anchor before we were finally put ashore on June 27, 1944. Utah Beach was cleared of any enemy with the exception of a gang of German prisoners that were marching wearily back inland. — We were in France.

The first night found us bivouacked outside of the demolished town of St Mere Eglise and all night the sound of the heavy guns of artillery pounded in our ears. Several times during the night "ninety's" in the area next to us fired volleys of shots, but we never heard the planes. On numerous occasions rifle shots rang out clearly in the night and those of us that were walking guard felt prickles run up and down our spines and instinctively tightened our fingers around the stocks of our guns. Was this war? It was. At dawn we crawled out of our sleeping bags and got a chance to survey the area that only a day before had been the scene of the bloodiest of battles. We were warned not to wander far



from the area; that straggling Germans were still being seen and that mines and booby traps were everywhere. That morning we saw our first dead men delivered unto God by the murders of war. American and German, they were everywhere.

Our advance party had, the day before, gone on into Cherbourg which by then we all knew to be our position. By 10:30 we

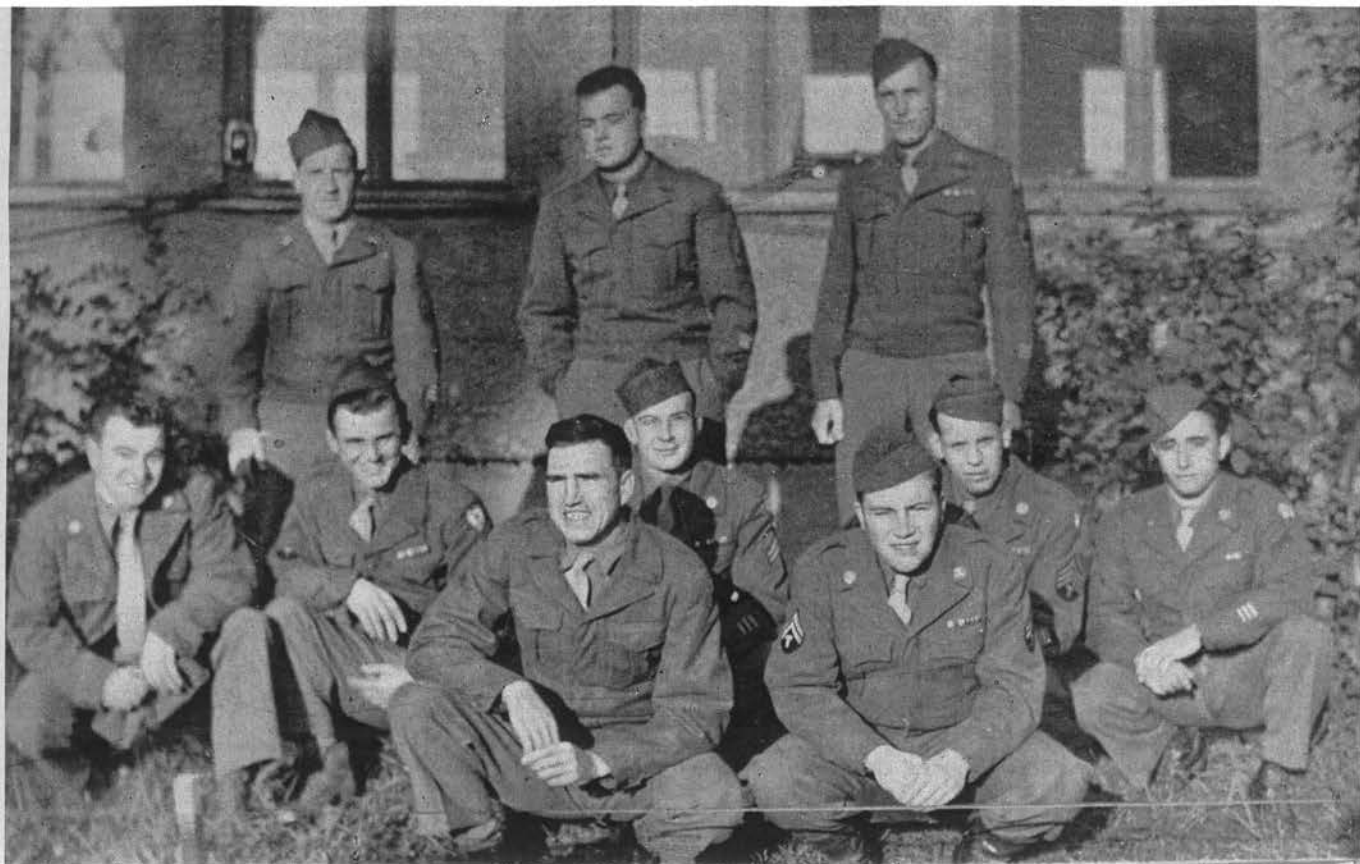
had the "come ahead" signal and were in convoy and on our way. We got our first look at total destruction in the form of whole towns, when we passed through the rubble of Monteburg and Valognes. I say rubble because they were both literally leveled. Just outside Valognes the jeep of the advance party arrived and informed us that Cherbourg was still the scene of much fighting. The Infantry had passed on in body, but had left a regiment to clean up fanatical groups of Nazis who were still holding out in isolated areas. We spent that night in an apple orchard.

The following morning we rode into the fortress of Cherbourg. The city itself had been cleared of all organized resistance, but snipers were still very much there. Surrounding the great port were a number of forts strategically placed in the harbor and still occupied by the Germans. Consequently they were being relentlessly bombed from the air and shelled from the shore. A week passed; the dead were picked up off the streets, the streets themselves were cleared of rubble, and the people began to come back to what fate and war had left of their homes. Cherbourg began to take on the appearance of war-torn normalcy. The continued digging out of charred bodies from the ruins of buildings and the stench of death as one passed their bomb made graves were a constant reminder of what went on only a few days before.

By that time we were well established and our battalions were all in, set up, and operating, though as yet no Brigade had arrived on the scene. We had organized an AAAIS Board which consisted of having radio and telephone contact with every gun site of every battery of all battalions. Another vital aspect of the system was an early warning board. The early warning crew was stationed back at the beach. Everyone had long hours, but the tension kept us from minding too much for awhile. We were also used to tumbling out of bed at all hours of the night for air-raids and running to our respective positions.



We discovered that the French drank Cognac and something called "Calvados", the ingredients of which to this day are still subject of much debate, and we quickly followed suite. A month passed — six weeks — Cherbourg had become a seething center of activity. The streets of the city were jammed day and night with convoys loaded with supplies for the front which was rapidly moving away. As they fought on and away the importance of the mission dwindled till one day we were no longer needed and Cherbourg became just another position.



HEADQUARTERS BATTERY SECTION

Top Row, left to right; S/Sgt John W. Campbell, 1st Sgt Hugh T. Graham Jr.,
S/Sgt Milton E. Bergstrom.

Second Row; Pfc Pasquale Cicerelli, Tec 4 Joseph L. Bina, Cpl Lester A. Sasada,
Tec 4 Harold E. Doak, Pfc Frank A. Tassallo.

Front Row; Pvt Charles R. Cuntz, Tec 5 Lester W. Carr.



"Hughie"

Hugh T. Graham Jr.
New York, City, N. Y.



"Bergy"

Milton E. Bergstrom
Enderlin, N. D.

"Wally"

Charles Egber
Washington, D. C.



"Hank"

Henry O. Johnson
Muskogee, Okla.



"Okie"

Harold E. Doak
Caribou, Maine

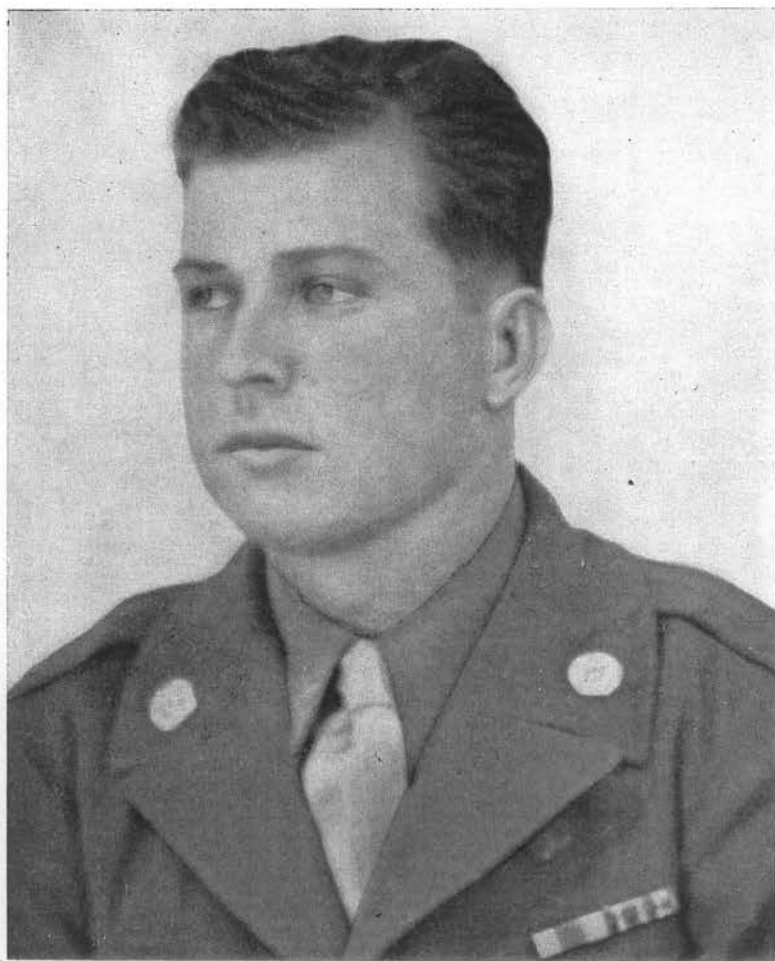


"Les"

Lester A. Sasada
Fon du Lac, Wisc.

"Rudy"

Anthony F. Finizio
Brooklyn, New York



"Hankie"

Henry S. Gutowski
Boston, Mass.



"Kiddie"

Lester W. Carr
Detroit, Mich.



"Pat"

Pasquale Cicerelli
Providence, R. I.

"Short Stuff"

John W. Campbell
Bangor, Maine



"Joe"

Joseph L. Bina
Boston, Mass.



MOTOR POOL SECTION

Top Row, left to right; Pfc Jack M. Million, Pfc George M. La Plume, Pfc Russell L. Schoff, Tec 5 Andrew Dansak, Pfc Walter E. Strauss, Tec 4 Arthur I. Lye.

Front Row; Pvt Robinson Cook Jr., Pfc John A. Simpson, Sgt Frank C. Merkel, Sgt Clarence A. Vogt, Tec 5 Thomas F. Lindsay.



"Pap"

Arthur I. Lye
Danvers, Minn.



"Gopher"

Thomas F. Lindsay
Stewartville, Minn.

"Dutch"

Frank C. Merkel
East Greenville, Pa.



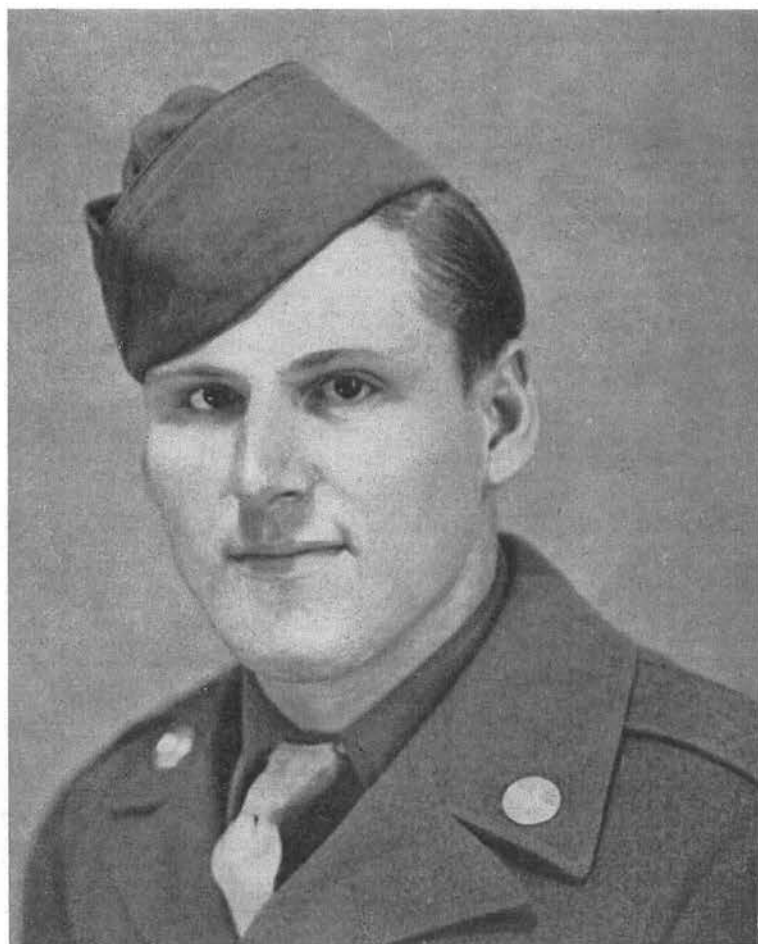
"Mike"

Clarence A. Vogt
Canton, Ohio



"Snuffy"

Karl M. Espenshade
West Fairview, Pa.

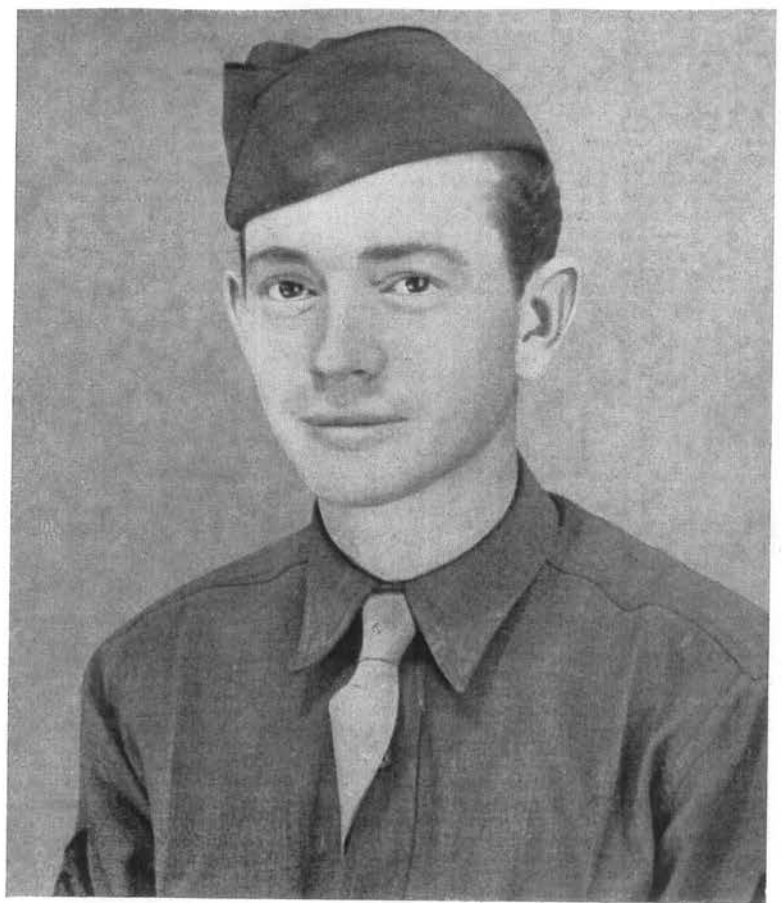


"Swannie Lou"

George M. La Plume
Boston, Mass.

"Red"

James B. Morell
Mascot, Tenn.



"Big Rebel"

Hoyt P. Broom
Kershaw, S. C.



"Sea Biscuit"

John W. Sobieski
Long Island City, N. Y.

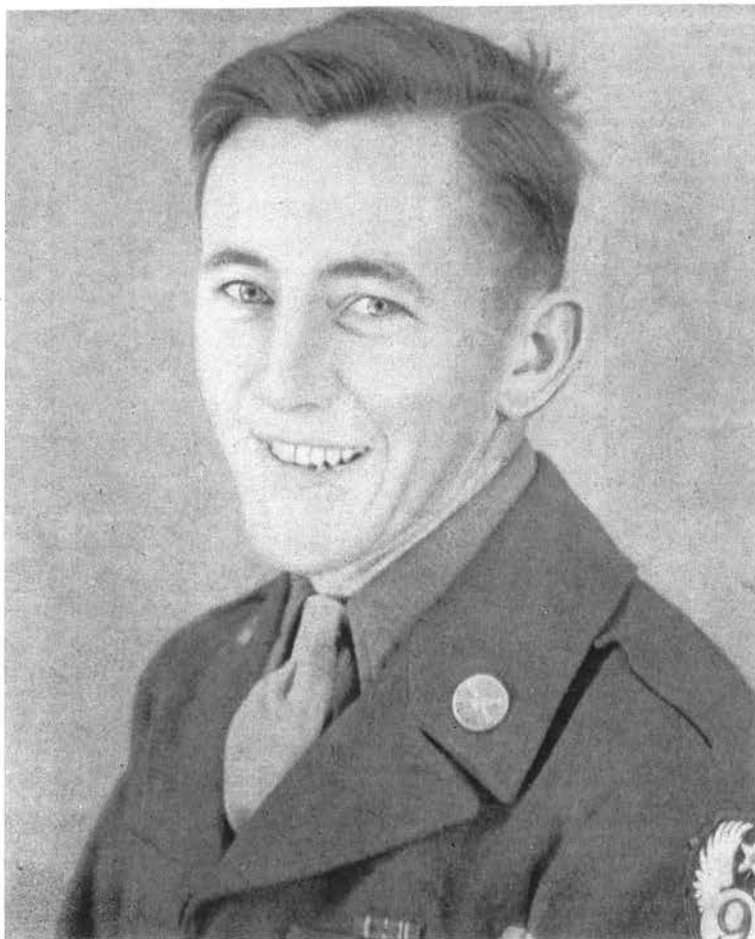


"Dixie"

Clarence R. Howell
Roanoke, Virginia

"C-47"

John A. Simpson
Boston, Mass.



"Sin"

Philip J. Sinn
Sacramento, Calif.

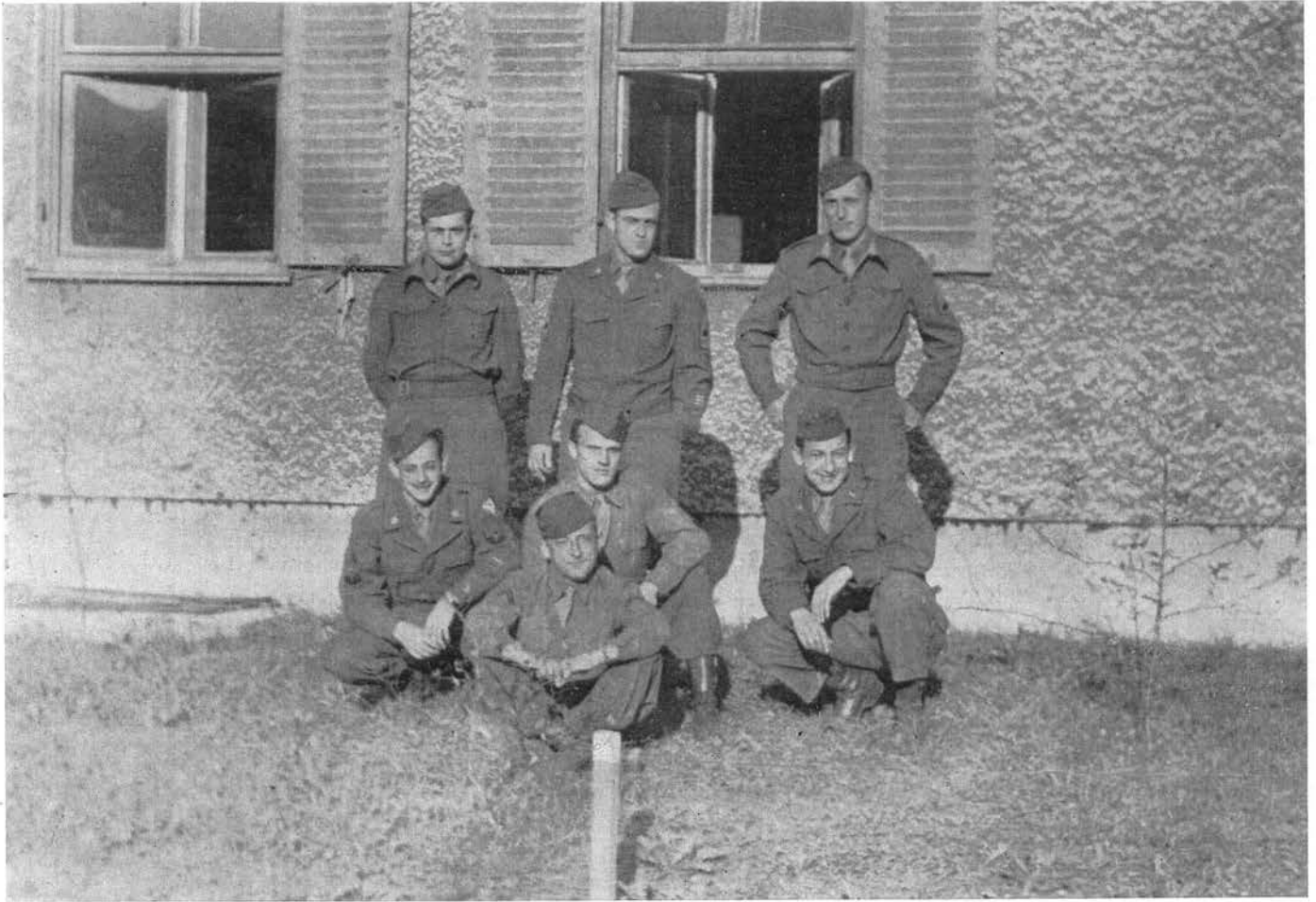
RENNES

To the men of the 108th AAA Group Rennes will be remembered as the whole of France which contained both eggs and wines. Prior to our arrival at Rennes an egg was something, that is a real fresh egg, which you read about in the Stars and Stripes and which people back home had so much of that they did not know what to do with them. We pitched camp in an open field in Rennes in a miserable holocaust of rain and it continued to rain the entire period of four days that we were there. That did not deter the children, however, from attempting to sell their wares. Our entire bivouac area looked more like a circus for children than it did an army encampment. No matter where you went or what you did there were also a few of the scrawny French children trying to sell you an egg, a bottle of wine, tomatoes or onions for a "Cigarette pour Papa." The men were quite liberal with their cigarettes in those days and by the time evening came each man had more rations and food in his own pup tent than we had in the store room of the kitchen.

We lived in pup tents in Rennes for four days with no particular assignment, just taking things easy awaiting orders. For most of the men it was a grand picnic. There was always the excuse to be unshaven — the water was not hot enough. As for clean clothes that was a futile attempt — we were really inaugurated into our baptism of French mud. We also learned of the insatiable curiosity of the French. They followed us no matter where we went, observing our every little action — even to our outside latrines if necessary.

It was actually with a sigh of relief, however, that we packed up and moved on again upon receipt of "March Order." In Rennes we did leave a part of the outfit behind us — some who cannot be replaced. It was there that our Chaplains and their assistants were transferred. It was there too that we lost Col Hennesy and Major Fisher and gained Col Mitchell and Major Austin.





ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPLY SECTION

Top Row, left to right; T/Sgt Marvin Shuster, M/Sgt Robert J. Mullin,
S/Sgt Milton E. Bergstrom.

Second Row; Tec 4 Bernard Reidler, Tec 4 Merwin W. Kirk, Pfc Judson Schuman.

Front Row; Pcf Wesley A. Kamke.

"Chas"

Charles W. Rose Jr.
Philadelphia, Pa.



"Snake"

Robert J. Mullin
Washington, D. C.



"Hot Paap"

Marvin Shuster
Brooklyn, N. Y.



"Bernie"

Bernard Reidler
Bayonne, New Jersey

"Cooaner"

Clifford F. Kent
Cos Cob, Conn.



"Banker"

John F. Allingham
Los Angeles, Calif.



"Radar"

James W. Estabrook
Boston, Mass.



"Rip"

Wesley A. Kamke
Merrill, Wisc.

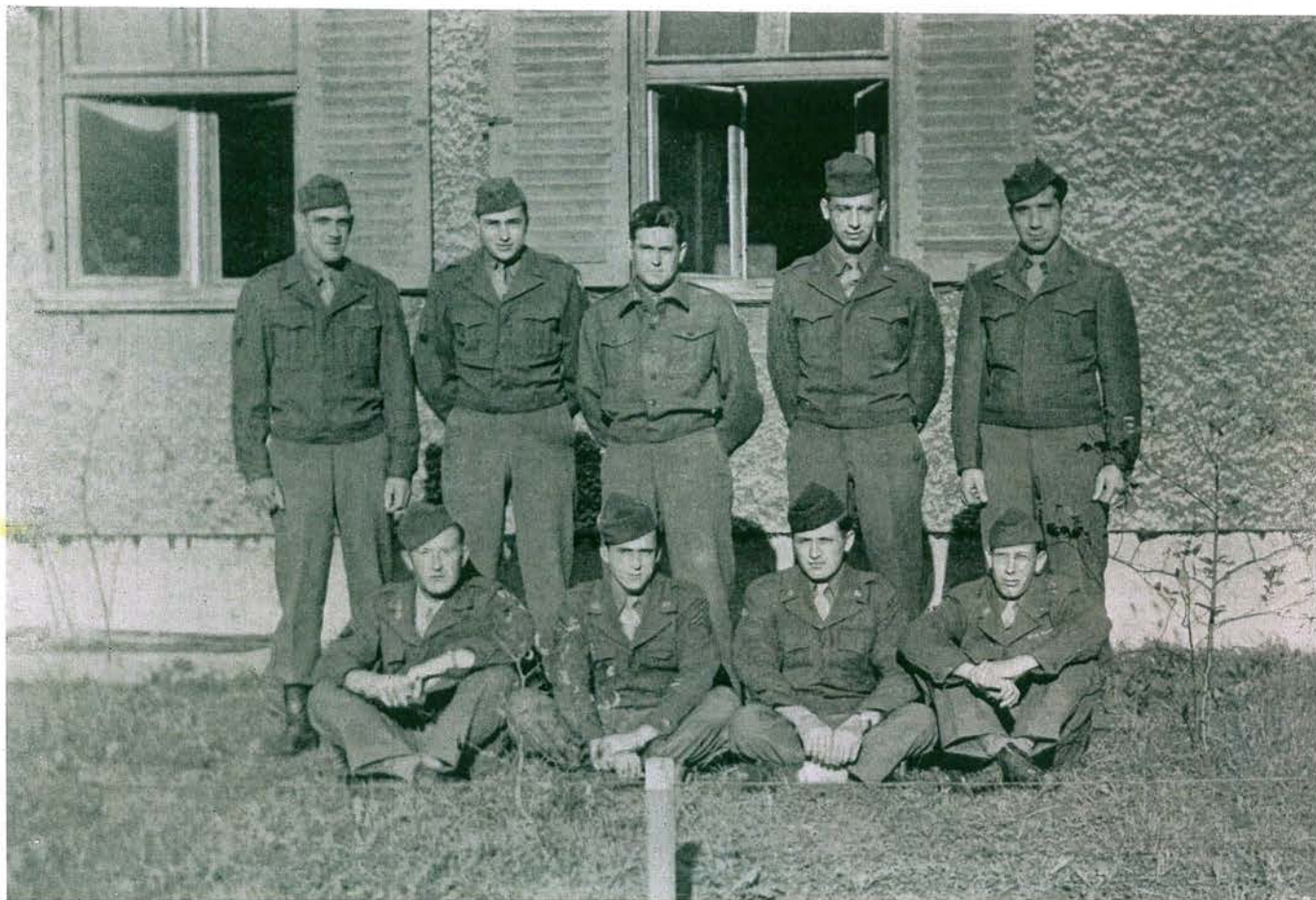
MORLAIX

We drove up a winding road to the top of the hill where we were to make our home while at Morlaix. It is often said that first impressions are lasting, but in this particular case it was not true. From all appearances the place was run-down, and the barracks dilapidated. We bedded down for the night, most of us sleeping on the floor, four and five to a small room. The next morning



we were told that we were to move to the rear of the large Chateau that overlooked the valley. It was beyond expectation. A miniature Shangri-La. The enlisted men's living quarters consisted of a long building with a wide corridor running the entire length with rooms off both sides. Most of the rooms were large and airy with many overlooking the valley below. The entire building was surrounded with rows of various shades of beautifully cultivated roses and scarlet geraniums. Below on the hillside was an apple orchard with the ripe fruit falling from the heavy laden branches. The scent of ripe apples, mixed with that of the roses, filled the air twenty-four hours a day. A little path led from the rear of the barracks down a wooded slope to a small spring house. The trickling stream that flowed slowly down the hillside, over the moss covered rocks made it an ideal spot for relaxing. It was always cool and quiet, and the stillness was broken only by the jingle of a cow bell in the distance.

Our assignment was to guard the large railroad bridge that crossed the City of Morlaix. The city itself was old and quaint with outdoor market places filled with gaily dressed women selling their trinkets and laces making it most attractive. Along the river bank lined with tall spreading trees, one could see the small children playing with their boats and young couple strolling hand in hand along the gravel paths. It was as though the shadow of war, guided by some unseen hand, had passed quickly and quietly over this city leaving all the beauty and loveliness untouched. Since Morlaix we have traveled far and wide, but I am certain that during the busy working hours of the day our thoughts return now and then to that peaceful little spot on the hill overlooking the valley below.



INTELLIGENCE, PLANS & TRAINING SECTION

Top Row, left to right; Tec 5 Mark R. Batten, Tec 5 Joseph S. Chasin,
M/Sgt William C. Street, T/Sgt Samuel D. Miller, Cpl Albert V. Spadaro.

Front Row; Tec 5 Clifford F. Kent, Cpl James W. Estabrook, Tec 4 Calvin
L. Polito, Pfc Robert S. Lambert.

"Sam"

Samuel D. Miller
Bethlehem, Pa.



"Uncle Louie"

Louis A. Zavitovsky
Milwaukee, Wisc.



"Freddie"

Fred R. Hadwin Jr.
Detroit, Mich.



"Li'l Willie"

William C. Street
Montgomery, Ala.

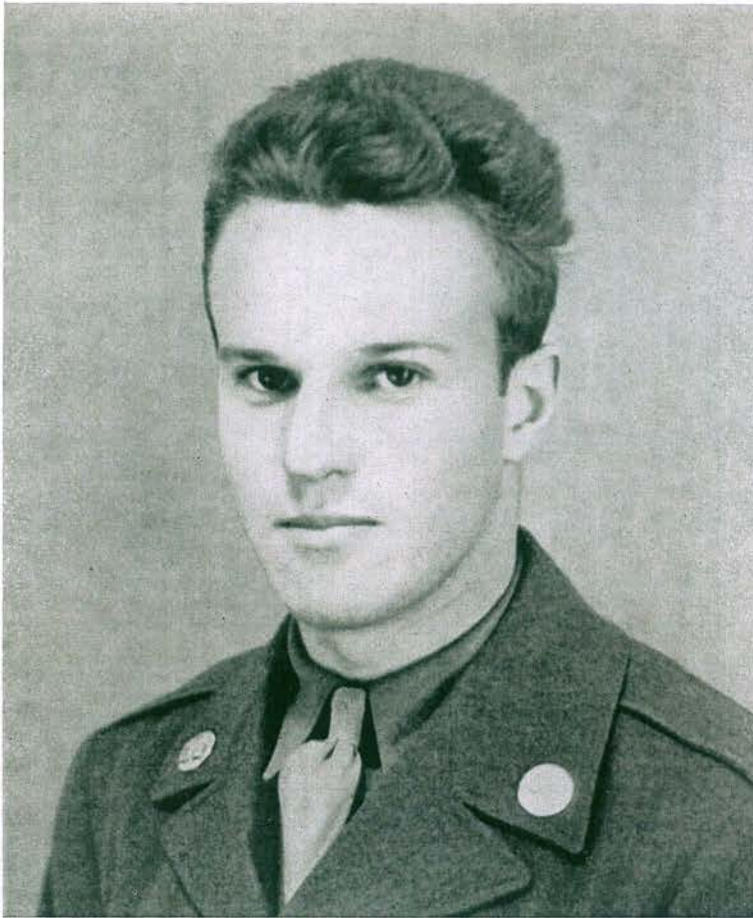
"Brit"

Francis W. Brittain
Portsmouth, Va.



"Blacky"

Calvin L. Polito
Walston, Pa.



"Mush"

Merwin W. Kirk
Bronx, New York

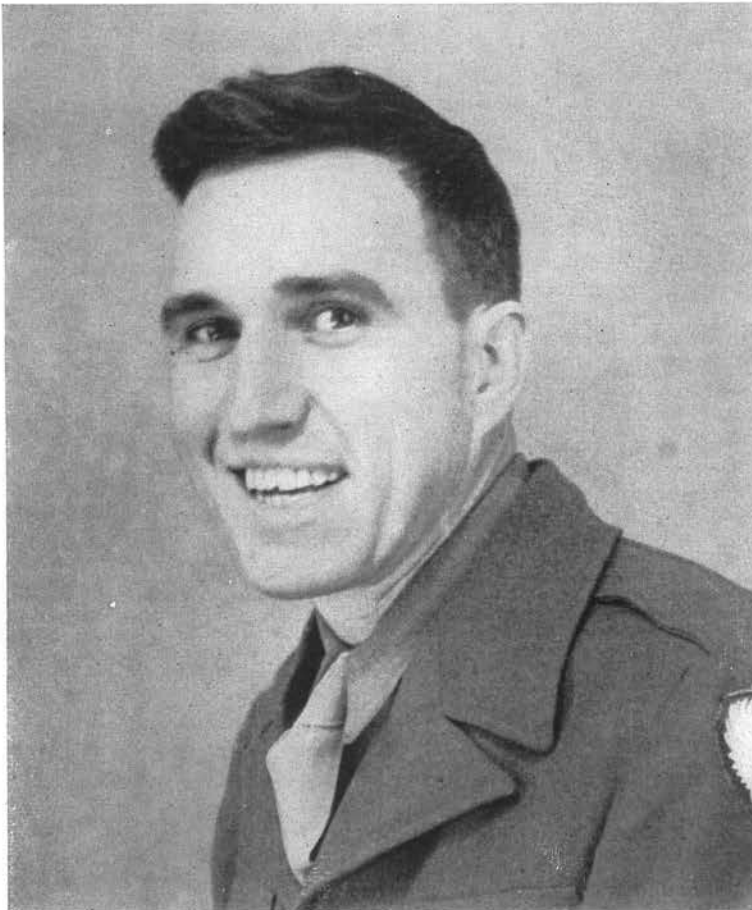


"Spaduek"

Albert V. Spadaro
Boston, Mass.

"The Old Man"

Robert S. Lambert
Boston, Mass.

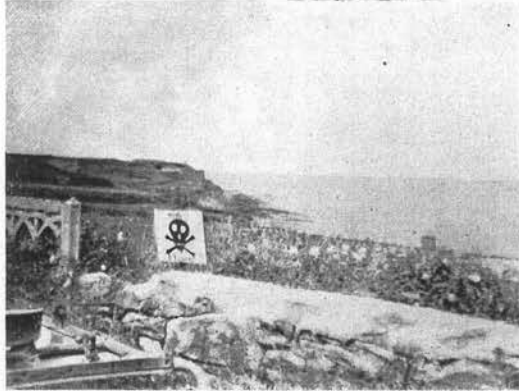


"Charlie"

Charles R. Cuntz
Ladue, Mo.

ROUEN

The day was October 10, 1944, damp and cold, a thin drizzle was falling lightly on the cobbled stone streets of Rouen, one of the larger and more beautiful cities of France. A heavily laden jeep slid to a stop on the wet pavement in front of the Town Major's office. The advance party of the 108th AAA Group had arrived to be the first contingent of stationary American troops to occupy that city. A day later the main body appeared on the scene and the group was quickly set up in an abandoned orphanage situated at the Northeast end of the town. A week later found us on the other end of the city in a little outskirt village called Canteleau. There in Chateau Moderne we stayed a longer time than in any other position during our period of overseas duty since leaving England. It was consequently there that many of us established friendships and contacts which we prize above all the rest.



Our mission was to protect the port of Rouen into which every day flowed countless tons of supplies for the fighting men at the front. It was therefore necessary that we know what these units were doing day and night. Not just their Headquarters, but from their Battery Command Posts right down to every gun site. The most effective way to do this was by an Operation Room. Hence we established one and the work required to operate it kept the majority of our personnel busy a good part of the time. Never-the-less, there was still ample time for fun and we had lots of it.

There were dances made possible largely through the efforts of a Frenchman, George Gaines and his family. A native of the village, he naturally knew all the inhabitants and always had our parties jammed with the prettiest and the homeliest that Canteleau had to offer.

Perhaps one of the reasons Rouen holds warm and fond memories for most of us is that we were there throughout the holiday seasons and regardless of one's whereabouts, Christmas somehow manages to creep into the spirit of things where it belongs. The Christmas holidays were climaxed by our huge New Year's Eve dance. The army was getting ready to change any plans that some of us might have had for the future along about that time and a week later we were on our way to the Metz area.

If there was any skepticism among some of the boys about our popularity and the sincerity of our individual friendships, it was certainly dissolved on the day of our departure. In the face of a blinding snow storm the streets of the tiny village were lined with people waving goodbye. They were in the doorways — hanging out of the windows — the 108th was leaving.





COMMUNICATIONS SECTION

Tow Row, left to right; Tec 5 Robert W. Ray, Tec 5 Harlan E. Bateman, Tec 4 Oscar V. Nicholson, Tec 5 Donald T. Cameron, Tec 5 Eldon H. Schierbeck, S/Sgt Andrew J. Neenan.

Front Row; Tec 4 Sylvester Adkins, Pfc Gust A. Fedrizzi, Cpl Clifford K. Murray, Tec 4 Stanislaw Sarnacky, Tec 5 Andrew Dansak, S/Sgt William A. Ehmann.



"Matt"

Henry E. Mattice
Schoharie, N. Y.

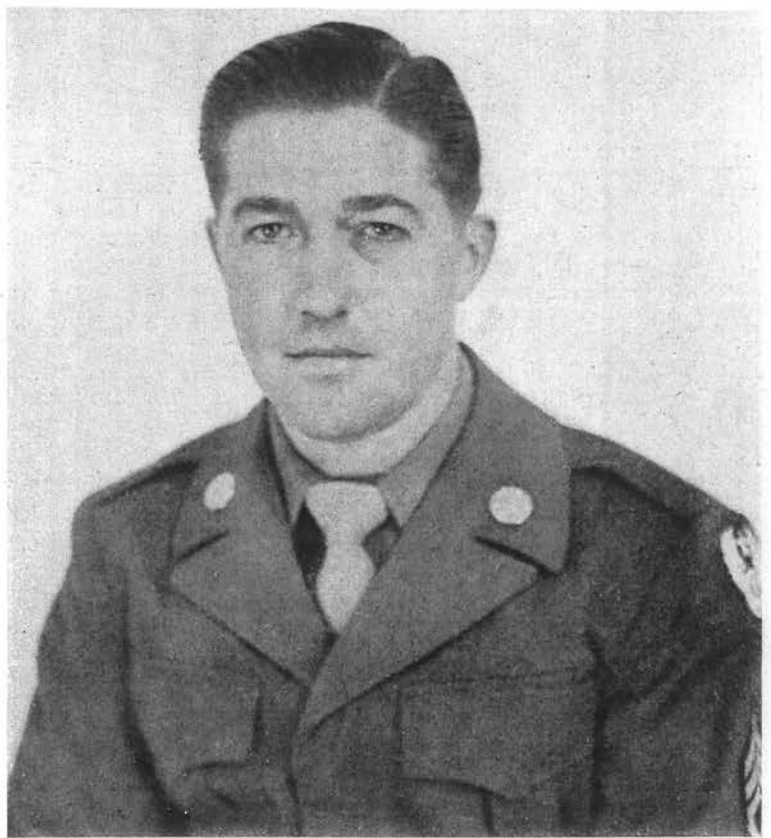


"G. I."

Kenneth R. Dull
Lancaster, Pa.

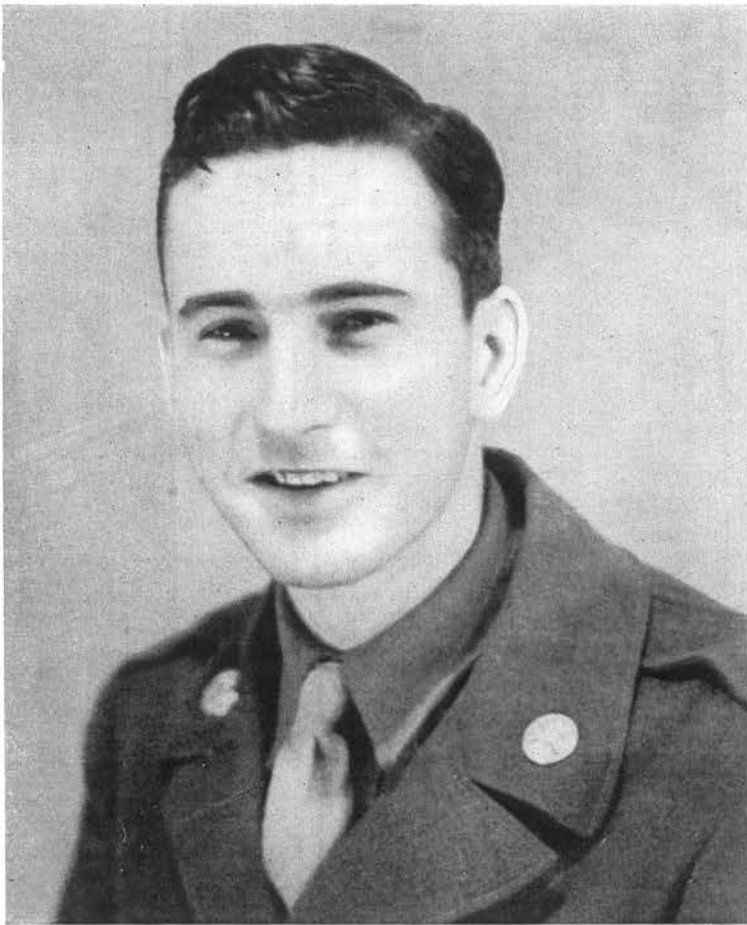
"Bill"

William A. Ehmann
Rochester, N. Y.



"Andy"

Andrew J. Neenan
Utica, New York



"Buddy"

Sylvester Adkins
Catlettsburg, Ky.



"Nick"

Oscar V. Nicholson
San Jose, Calif.

"Sterna"

Stanislaw Sarnacky
Springfield, Mass.



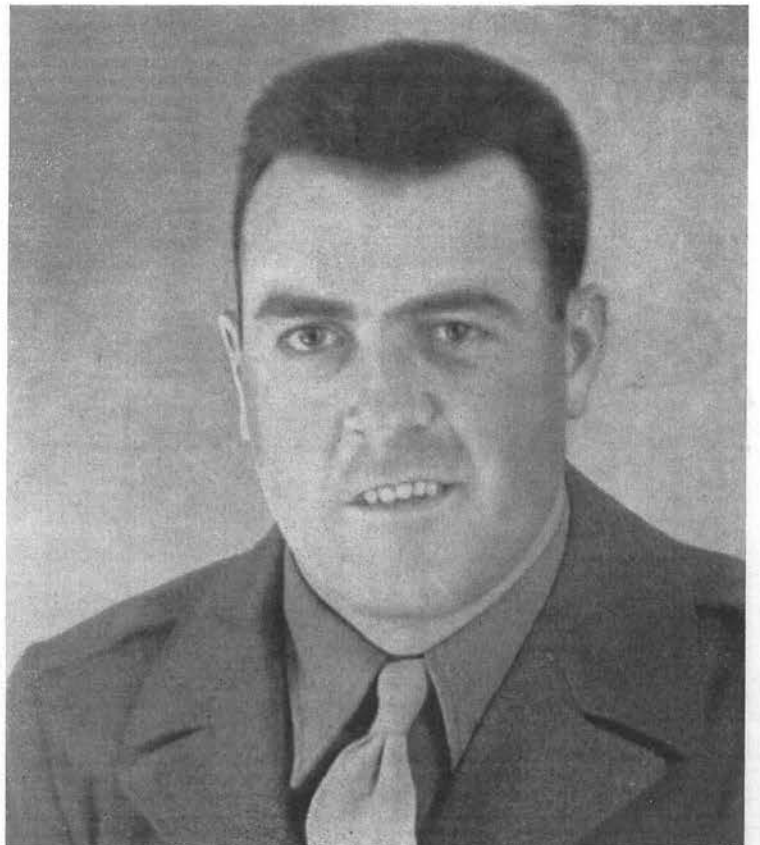
"Vitamin"

Clifford F. Murray
Akron, Ohio



"Eppy"

Donald H. Epperson
Hamilton, Ohio



"Chuck"

John S. Chisholm
Boston, Mass.

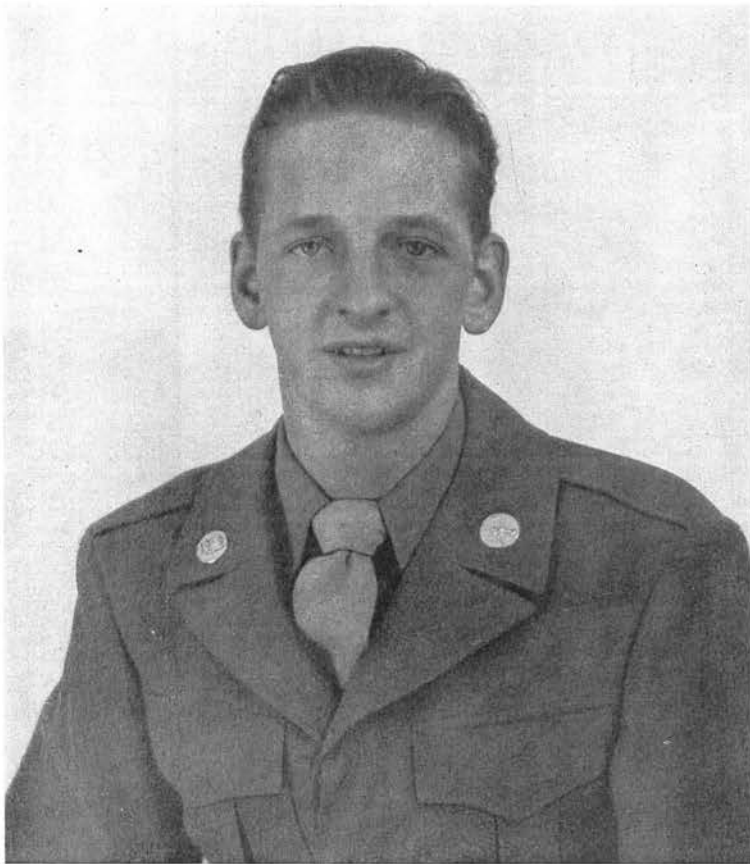
"Danny"

Andrew Dansak
Port Vue, Pa.



"Gus"

Gust A. Fedrizzi
Detroit, Mich.



"Cookie"

Robinson Cook Jr.
Portland, Maine.



William V. Shutes
Sharon, Pa.

CONFLANS, NOVEANT TO RHEIMS

Conflans and Noveant. Cold, wasn't it?

It was a sad day in January when we clambered into our trucks and started the long eastward trek across France. The snow was deep and getting deeper. Underneath was a treacherous layer of ice and a freezing temperature was in the air. It took three days of slipping and sliding, of dodging skidding tanks, of hasty bonfires at the stops, and, of course, always the freezing cold. Long before we got there, all of us had decided that Metz and any region even remotely connected with Metz was no place for us.

The first location was at Conflans in an old French Post partially occupied by a Third Army Replacement Depot. We were all crowded into two rooms. "Crowded" is the word. Do you remember shivering out the mess line with two or three inches of ice on the floor? And stading at the tables, holding your mess gear steady until it had melted enough ice to form a depression into which the gear would fit without sliding off the table? And buttering bread with your gloves on? And chopping up the beds to keep a fire going in the small stove?

About ten days later we moved to Noveant on the Moselle River south of Metz where we set up in a chateau. And it was still cold. Our mission was the protection of a number of fighter strips stretching from near Nancy to Metz and Verdun. And always the cold. Stamping feet and slapping fingers to prevent freezing; children eating out of garbage cans; pushing trucks for miles through the snow; Marabella; standing guard numbed to the bones; French children running barefooted through the snow to our air raid shelter; wearing all the clothes you owned and still not enough; the Red Cross girls and their first doughnuts; rooms choked with smoke; going to bed at seven PM to get warm; that was Noveant.

Came the big thaw and orders to move to Rheims. It seemed like returning to civilization. Our mission here was the defense of the vast supply depots surrounding Rheims and of bomber fields and airborne assembly areas covering the regions between Soissons, Chalons and Laon. The Command Post was in the Piper-Heidsiek Champagne plant. Underground were miles and miles of tunnels, carved from limestone and now used for the aging of champagne. The men were quartered on the second floor of the warehouse where the wines were processed and bottled.

Rheims was an interesting city in many respects. There is an old but beautiful cathedral, a market place and ruins of buildings mark the days of the ancient Romans. The vast endless champagne cellars had been excavated by those ambitious conquerors centuries ago. On the hills behind us were the trenches and fortifications that marked the forward penetration of the Germans in World War I. But as always with GI's, refreshments were of paramount importance and no one seemed to lack for an adequate quantity of champagne.

Rheims must also be remembered by a lucky few who drew furloughs and

48 hour passes, the first any of us had had in over a year. There was ice cream occasionally, many excellent meals and a vigorous volley ball league with everyone taking extreme pleasure in defeating the Officers' team. And showers



downtown every day. It was here that S/Sgt Campbell acquired a tiny bundle of fur which was quickly adapted as the Battery mascot and appropriately named "Champagne." Nor can we forget "Suzie" whose quickly acquired knowledge of English consisted of all, and only, the wrong words. Late in our stay an Allied Forces Club was opened a few blocks away and rapidly became the social center of the 108th boys.

Although we were safe and comfortable, most of us were restless and anxious to move again. When word came that we were moving to Germany, there were many willing hands to perform the innumerable tasks. We had spent ten months in France and were ready to see another country; to learn another tongue; to witness the mastering of the "Master Race"; to come another step closer to home.

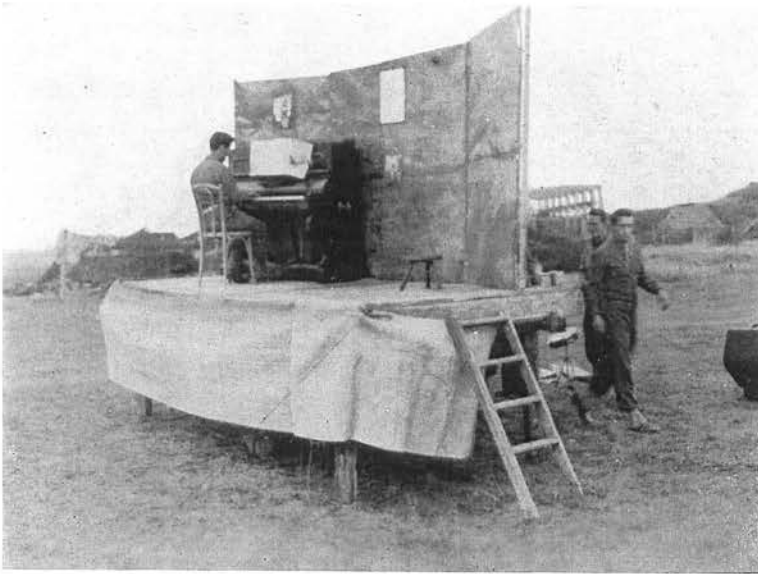




CHIEFS OF SECTIONS

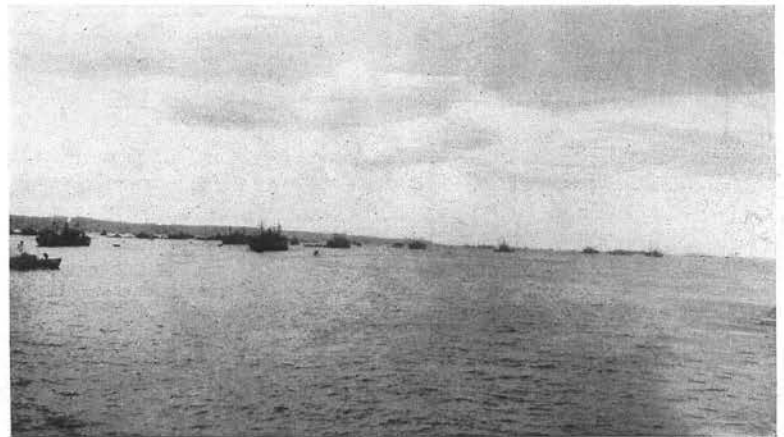
Top Row, left to right; M/Sgt William C. Street, M/Sgt Robert J. Mullin,
T/Sgt Samuel D. Miller, T/Sgt Marvin Shuster

Front Row; S/Sgt William A. Ehmann, T/Sgt Andrew J. Neenan,
S/Sgt Milton E. Bergstrom.



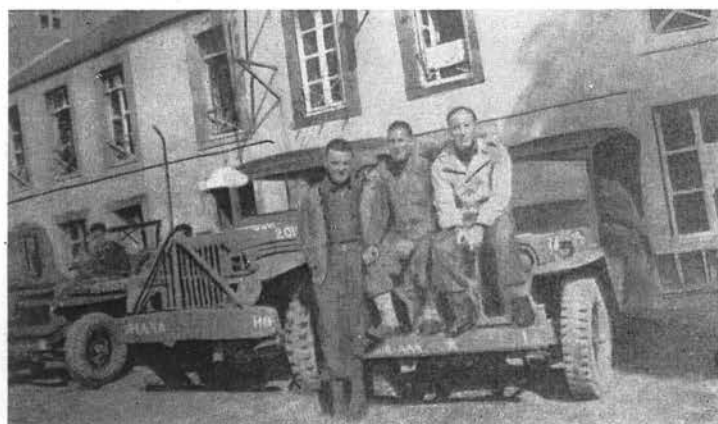
Just before
the show

The Beach
as we landed



Cherbourg,
the
seething
Metropolis

The first I & E Class



Cherbourg

A sure hit



Good for a ringer

GERMANY

After two days of arduous driving and an overnight bivouac at Kaiserslautern, the Group arrived at Dillingen, Germany on May 3, 1945. Dillingen was to be the location of the 108th AAA Group Headquarters for the Disarmament Mission it had been previously assigned. This was to change in the near future; but being unaware of future plans, the boys busied themselves with the primary task of setting up living quarters and preparing the offices for operations.

Special Service — on the ball as usual — located a small theater in town, at which place we viewed the very best cinemas. That is, the best films of six months previous to the date at which the "Ack-Ack" boys saw them. That was to be expected. There was a war being won. Things were much better after VE Day. The films were only five and a half months old then. All in all — the efforts of Special Service were appreciated by all the fellows and that was their primary objective.

The predominant difference noted in Germany was the people themselves. There were no smiles to greet us as there had been in France and the other liberated countries. The people looked as though they had been eating sour pickles steadily for two weeks previous to our arrival. Their attitude was sullen; but their defeat had not made them one bit less arrogant. They were — for the most part — well dressed and clean. The effects of war were not as marked on the German people as it had been on the liberated countries. That is the people only. Munich is a nice city. Both buildings.



After many false reports and rumors, the day finally became official. VE Day was announced as May 8th 1945. That in no way lessened the task of the 108th. The job was still before them and there was much to be done. Equally important was the announcement of the "point system" and "critical score." The most common question for the coming months was to be, "How many

points do you have?" A lot of midnight oil, pencils, and paper was consumed in the computation of point scores. From that day on, anyone with less than the required number of points for discharge, was considered a "rookie" comparable only to the type that exists the first week after induction.

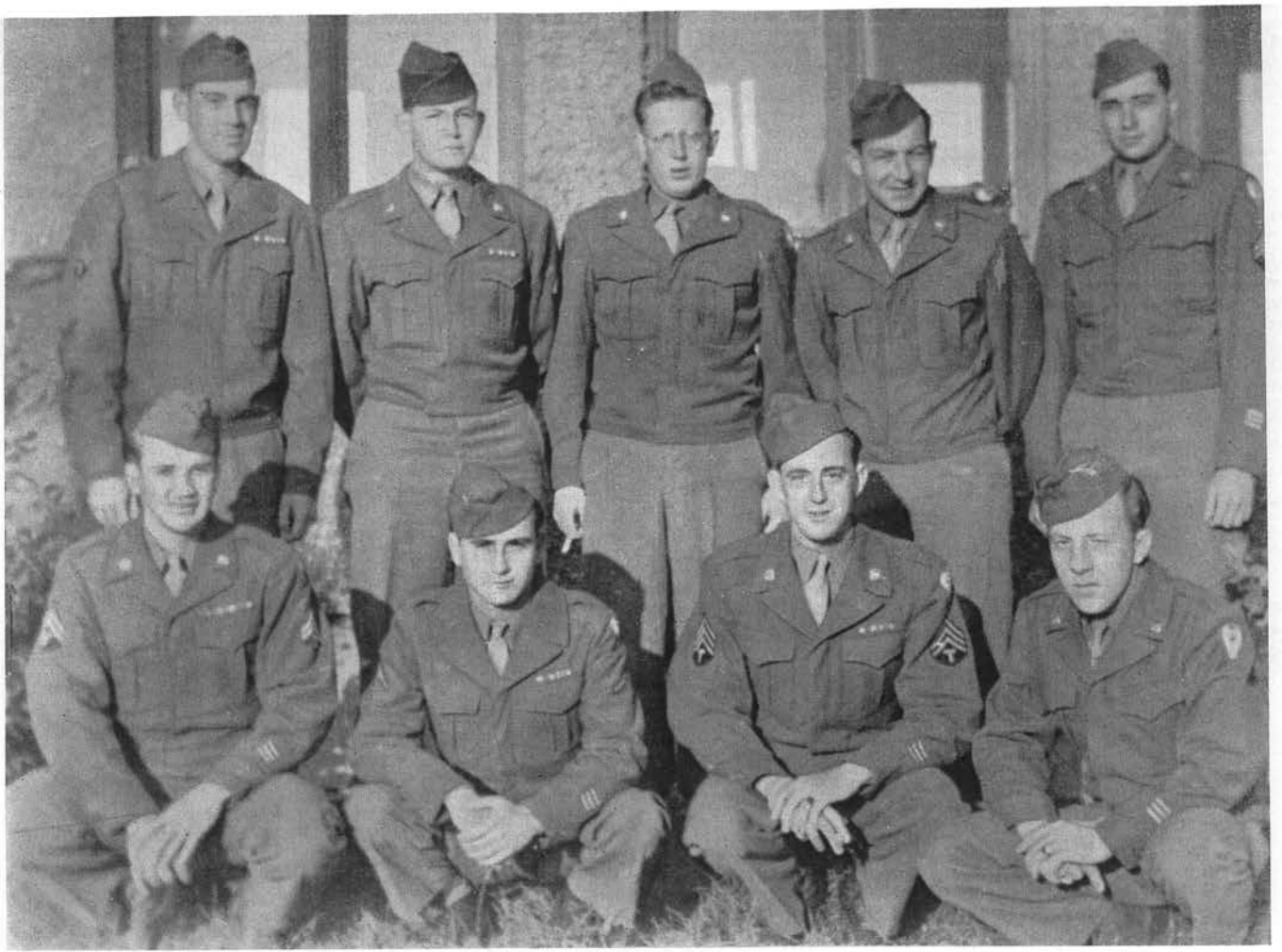
On 16 May 1945, Dillingen became just another place to which the Group had been. To facilitate operations, the Headquarters was moved to Kaufbeuren, Germany. The advance party had taken great pains to have the living quarters in tip-top shape by the time the main body arrived. The quarters were former Luftwaffe Barracks that were really the last thing in army barracks. It could readily be seen that Germany had no intentions of forgetting about war in the very near future. The quarters substantiated that sort of reasoning. They were constructed substantially — complete with air raid shelters, showers and most of the things a normal G. I. dreams about in the way of army quarters.

One cannot help but marvel at the fertility of the soil, the picturesque scenery and the vastness of the woodlands in Southern Germany. Hitler and his gang constantly used "Lebensraum" (living room) as the main reason for his wanton attacks on the defenseless small countries of Europe. Whether it was stupidity of the German people, or the well directed Propaganda machine that led the people to disaster, is not very hard to determine. Judging from the ingenuity of German scientists and the methods employed in warfare, it would be foolish to class the people as being stupid.

The Summer of 1945 passed rapidly in Kaufbeuren. The disarmament program was rapidly coming to a close. Among the more important uncoverings by the Group, was a guided Rocket produced by German scientists. It employed the use of infra-red rays from the plane being attacked, to guide it to its target. Actually, the target was the magnet of its own destruction. The scrap-piles became higher. The targets fewer. The 108th AAA Group was successfully completing another mission, hoping that it would be the final one.

Between swimming, fishing, movies and athletics the constant undertone could be heard. "How many points do you have?" Do you think our fourth battle star will come through? It was the subject of conversation twenty-four hours a day. Some of the men who had been with the Group since its activation left for re-deployment. Their absence only caused more heated discussions on the point system. It was interesting to note the accuracy with which each man told about where he had been. Before VE Day it used to be, "Yeah! I've been there a couple of days." After VE Day it would sound something like this, when the same question was asked. "I was in the theater from February 16th at 8:30 in the morning until April 10th at 3:30 in the afternoon. The exactness was astounding.

At the writing of this book, the Group was still stationed in Kaufbeuren, Germany. With every letter received the inevitable question is asked, "When are you coming home?" That one is a little beyond us; but no matter when we are discharged or where we may happen to live in the good old U. S. A., we will never forget our days in Germany and the acquaintances we have made. The friends we have made in Group will never be forgotten. War itself is not a pleasant thing; but the comradeship obtained under adverse conditions is the finest to be had.



REINFORCEMENTS

Top Row, left to right; Tec 5 Mark R. Batten, Tec 5 Robert W. Ray, Tec 5 Donald T. Cameron, Pfc Judson Schuman, Tec 5 Joseph S. Chasin.

Front Row; Tec 5 Eldon H. Schierbeck, Pfc Jack M. Million,
Tec 4 Joseph Webb Jr., Pvt Blakely F. Conaway.

Autographs

Autographs

Ms. Army, 108th anti-aircraft artillery group
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