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1st Field Artillery Battalion

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RANDY'S RAMBLINGS

The Story of the 241st Field Artillery Battalion
from 20 August 1942—20 August 1945.

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Randy Matriculates

The 241st Field Artillery Battalion was activated at Camp White, Oregon, on 20 August 1942 under the leadership of Major R. A. Broberg. Camp White is located in the Agate Desert which is eight miles North of Medford, Oregon. In the early days we were under the command of Major General *Gerhardt* who was the Commanding General of the 91st Infantry Division. Soon orders were changed and we went under the 1st Headquarters Special Troops IX Corps.

We received our first fillers early in September from the Fort Sill Reception Center. They were just a few days from civilian life and the majority of them came from Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arkansas. In the middle of September Major Diehl became our new Battalion Commander.

October brought us more fillers and these men came from Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. Our training proceeded satisfactorily and before long we were firing 37 mm guns on the range. A few weeks later we were firing our 105 mm Howitzers.

In November a continuous rainy season set in with a fog that was thick, cold and penetrating. This caused our sick call to become high and made our training difficult.

Our first motor march was made to Cave Junction, Oregon where the Battalion stayed over night and we discovered the difficulties in maintaining proper march discipline.

During the latter part of December we received orders to move to IX Corps Artillery Firing Center at Yakima, Washington. Our stay was to be nine weeks in duration. Property was turned in and baggage gathered and on 11 January 1943 we left our barracks in Camp White. Our first day of Motor marching brought us to Roseburg where we stayed overnight. The second night we reached Camp Adair, the third night was spent at Bonne-

ville Dam and on the 14th of January we reached our destination. We started housekeeping in pyramidal tents that were heated with M-1 stoves.

In Yakima the Battalion started to train as a unit and we manuevered from "Sqaws Tip" to "Sela Gulch". The "Punch Bowl", "Peas Ranch", "Sela Buttes" and "Hog Ranch Butte", became familiar words to all of us. Our hike from "Rattlesnake Gulch" to Camp brought puffs and moans from many men. There was an acute shortage of fuel and an over abundance of mutton for chow. The city of Yakima showed us hospitality. Snow covered the ground during our stay in Yakima and temperature ranged from freezing to 16 below zero.

In the last weeks of February we sent our first cadre to the 273rd FA Bn., which was stationed at Camp Beale, California. A few days after the cadre left we received orders to move to Camp Beale, California. However, the orders were rapidly changed and on the 25th of February we left via two trains for Fort Sill, Oklahoma. This move brought joy and cheers from many of the

men who live in or near Oklahoma. It was rumored that we would become school troops for the Field Artillery School.

We arrived at Fort Sill on the 3rd of March and were quartered in pyramidal tents. Snow was on the ground and biting, penetrating cold was in the air. We were assigned to the 422nd FA Group under Col. Frank C. Mellon. During the next twelve months both officers and men were often occupied continuously twelve to fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. Standards were high and inspections were frequent. Our gun crews became very proficient and fast.

We participated in all types of school problems and demonstrations, Such as RSOP's, UF's and OF's. Firing points in North Arbuckle, South Arbuckle, Signal Mountain, McKenzie Hill Area, Blue Beaver, and Wild Life Refuge, were very familiar scenes to us. Our Saturday afternoon antitank demonstrations were a high light.

Now to reminisce—Remember the nights we spent by MB-4 massing fires? The puff range?

The Buffalo barbecue? The Pompous puff range baron?

Then the great day came and the unit changed station by motor march to Camp Howze, Texas, on 9 March 1944. There we under went a feverish period of taking AGF Tests, tests in First Aid, Personnel Hygiene, Malaria Control, Battle Field indoctrination courses, dental survey, and we had to fill all the squares with crosses that made up our progress chart. The packing, crating and marking of equipment was quite an ordeal. However, we survived Camp Howze and Gainsville, Texas, and on 21 June 1944 we left Camp Howze by train for Camp Shanks, New York. We arrived on the 24th of June and spent a week in final preparation for overseas movement.

Randy Takes His First Boat Ride

The star of our Blue Banner Continental Tour came on the second of July. The battalion as early as June 30th had boarded the good ship, "Thomas H. Barry", a former luxury liner on the Cuban mail run. We had been accorded the doubtful honor of being "labor" battalion for the journey with such responsibilities as police and sanitation, kitchen police, guard duty, and the like. As it turned out, the duties we were assigned, worked somewhat to our advantage. They acted as an effective antidote to sea-sickness by occupying otherwise indolent minds and allowing us up on deck more than mere passengers were inclined to be allowed. So approximately at 0300 hours, July 2, 1944, the "Thomas H. Barry" plowed serenely away from its Staten Island home and aboard was the 241st Field Artillery Battalion, its head held high and its heart full. We did not know to what we were going. We could only hope and pray for guidance, and yet we were confident that the

training and experience of the past two years would stand us in good stead.

Life aboard the flagship of the fifty-vessel-convoy soon fell into a not unpleasant routine. Meals were served twice daily to the sea-legged, as painlessly as possible under the crowded circumstances. Crap, Poker, and Pitch and other assorted card games occupied every gangway, hatch, and hold. Boat Drill annoyed us on a few occasions. A ship variety show, to which the 241st contributed, was organized and executed several times a day in several places on the ship, culminating in an all-out review for the officers on the 9th day of the journey. The daily routine was ceremoniously and liberally punctuated by various announcements over the public address system. The "garbage detail" was particularly favored by the above.

But it was with no regret that we lined the decks to watch the purple hills of the Firth of Clyde glide past as we slipped into our moorings at Gourock, Scotland on the eve of July 13th. We were offi-

cially greeted by notables of the RAF and the British Army and then were informed debarkation would not take place till the following day. So it was the 14th of July that the 241st set foot for the first time on foreign ground. The first leg of our journey to the unknown had been completed.

A night train ride brought us to Llantarnam, Wales, where the advance party met us and guided us to our temporary home. The camp at Llantarnam was nothing luxurious, but we comforted ourselves with the thought that perhaps it would facilitate adjustment to the harder combat conditions. How easily comforted we were then! The month we spent at Llantarnam was hurried and full. Never had we had so much to do and so little time in which to do it. All the organizational equipment we had so gaily left behind in Howze had to be redrawn, stencilled, and prepared for overseas movement. Coupled with these urgent requirements was a meager training schedule, firing problems on the artillery range, retreat formations, anxious mental condition caused by the slowness of the

mail system, and a not unwarranted feeling that we would never get to France before the war was over. Our social activities were limited to the local pubs which closed early because they ran out of bitters, or a nightly foray into Newport, Monmouthshire, a few miles away, where we might play the lover or the lout, depending on how we felt. There were a few fortunate members of the battalion who managed to slip away on some trumped-up detail and who consequently were able to dabble socially in such a lively spot as Birmingham. But for the most part, the 241st hurried and scurried at Llantarnam, absorbing after hours some of the English charm and customs. An exhibition cricket match was even staged for our enlightenment, and though completely unimpressed by the gentlemanly restraint of the game, we proceeded to whip the exhibitionists at a round.

The month passed very quickly. We had learned we were part of General Patton's new Third Army, but our mission was still unknown. On August 12th, movement was imminent. Most of our equipment

had been drawn and the few items we were lacking we managed to "borrow" from our sister battalion, the 242d who had deferred movement for another week. On August 15th, at an early hour, we loaded up and headed for the Southampton staging area. "B" Battery was fortunate in being shipped the following day on an LST, but it was not until the 18th that the remainder of the battalion climbed aboard the Liberty Ship, S. S. Phillip A. Thomas, and sailed for Normandy. Happily the journey was short, and on the 20th of August, we debarked at Utah Beach and were immediately spirited to Area "B" of the nearby transient camp. There we met "B" Battery, and there we bivouaced for the night. The second leg of our journey was completed. What lay ahead we still did not know.

Randy Goes Into Battle

The Battle of Northern France was already well under way when the 241st hit the continent. Therefore, the first two days were spent in trying to run down the front lines. After one night in the transient camp, we convoyed through typical Normandy monsoon weather to Landean. Two nights there and an early morning march order brought us to Auneau on August 23rd. It was as of that day that the 241st became operational, attached to XX Corps, with whom we remained for a year. The battle lines were still nebulous, and we seemed no nearer combat than at Utah Beach. Here and there were grim reminders of the devastating battles for Normandy, the hedgerows pocked and pitted, field wire dangling from forlorn trees or telephone poles, and on our journey we had passed through several towns, or rather shells of towns, which had been the scene of historic struggles six weeks before, Carentan, St. Lo, Avranches. From Auneau we moved to Milly under control of the 193rd F.A.

Group. In position near Villa St. Jaques, on the 25th of August, 1216 hours, the first round to be fired by the 241st went "on the way". The action was concerned with the capture of Fountenblau, and the target was enemy personnel in the open. We were then relieved from attachment to the 193rd F.A. Group and placed under Combat Team Control, 2d. Combat Team, 2d. Infantry Regiment, 5th Infantry Division. The chase across France began in earnest. From Misy-sur-Yonne we displaced to Courtesant and entered action for the capture of Reims. We were hauling doughboys of the 3rd Battalion, 2d Infantry. We continued to move, halting occasionally along the side of the road to allow the Infantry to clear small pockets of resistance in front of us. Reims fell on the 30th of August and having spent two days in its vicinity, we moved into bivouac near Charpentry. Verdun was the next objective, and it fell easily on the 3rd of September. We went into position east of there on the 4th of September to protect the bridgehead across the Meuse River. Operations began for the

capture of Metz, and here we ran into our first real fight. In position near St. Marcel, we were engaged in heavy action around Verneville, Grave-lotte, and Metz. From the 7th until the 14th the situation became quite static. Finally, we moved down near Gorze reinforcing the fires of the 50th Field Artillery Battalion. On the 18th we crossed the Moselle River and went into position near Lorry and Mardigny. It was about this time that the Allied offensive bogged down for lack of gasoline and ammunition. For ten days the battle swirled around Metz, and the 241st was subjected to considerable hostile counterbattery fire. But for every round that came in, four went out.

On the 29th of September, we were relieved from attachment to the 5th Infantry Division and moved to Herborn, Luxembourg, under control of the 83rd Infantry Division. The situation seemed static and opposition limited to patrol activity. We settled down with a sigh of relief to compose ourselves after the Metz holacost. We were sadly mistaken if we thought all was quiet, for on the 7th of

October, the Battalion C. P. was shelled and the staff rather depleted. Col. Diehl and Major Holman, the S-3, were evacuated for wounds subsequently. On the following day, "C" and "B" Batteries got a similar dose, and we hastily displaced to alternate positions. Major John S. Hughes became battalion commander, the post he continued to hold until after the war was over. On the 12th of October, we moved out of Luxembourg and back into France where we took up positions along the Moselle near Elange. These we were destined to hold for three weeks.

RANDY BECOMES A VETERAN

We went into direct support of Task Force Polk (3rd Cavalry Group reinforced). Our ammunition allowance was drastically cut and in order to render support, two provisional batteries were organized to fire 10 cm French guns from Groupe Fortifie de Guertrange, part of the Maginot system. Effective fire was given and in recognition of this achievement, Major Hughes later recieved the Legion of Merit. The fort life proved to be entertaining for the men involved. They amused themselves by placing C Ration cans with holes in them on the noses of the shells and firing them that way. It caused the projectile to give an unearthly scream in flight and must have been most demoralizing to the enemy. During this whole period our howitzers were never fired except in the case of one or two pieces which were delegated to shoot propaganda leaflets into enemy lines across the river.

On election day, November 7th, the battalion

moved and prepared to support the 90th Infantry Division in the all out attack across the Moselle. On the 9th of November, 0300 hours, we opened fire. An unfortunate accident, a muzzle burst, knocked out one section of Charlie Battery, but otherwise considering the activity of the sector, the battalion came out with flying colors. We continued in support of the 90th Division bridgehead until the 14th when we reverted to the control of Task Force Polk. On the night of November 16—17, we displaced across the Moselle by echelon and occupied positions in the vicinity of Hunting. We continued to support the advance of the Cavalry, occupying positions near Rustroff and Merschweiler. On the 20th of November, a provisional gun platoon crossed the border into Germany and fired their first rounds at 1400 hours, making the 241st the first artillery unit in the Third Army to fire from German soil.

On the 24th, our mission was again changed to reinforcing fires for the 90th Division. We took up positions in Flastroff and then Dieserdorferhof,

Germany, on the 29th. We almost got into trouble there. Moderate enemy artillery and mortar fire made things lively. The end of the month found us supporting the steady advance of the 90th Infantry Division towards the Saar River.

On the 4th of December, we moved into Itzbach, a small town not 2000 yards from the Saar River. We were subjected frequently to heavy enemy artillery and small arms fire. On the 8th of December, we were put in direct support of the 359th Infantry Regiment in place of the organic artillery battalion, the 915th, who remained in position considerably to our north to create a diversionary attack. The 90th Division attacked across the Saar and into Dillingen. We suffered considerable losses in our forward observer parties, but effective supporting fires were rendered. Lt. Griggs and Lt. Kelly both received Silver Stars for gallantry in action at Dillingen. Both had remained at their posts and directed devastating fire on fanatical enemy tank-supported counterattacks, turning them back in time to save our own infantry positions. These awards were

made at a ceremony in Itzbach by Brig. General Bixby, CG of the 90th Division Artillery. On the 21st of December, the 90th withdrew from its bridgehead across the Saar and took up defensive positions to counter any enemy effort from the north. It was at this time that the enemy was making such excellent progress in his Ardennes offensive, and XX Corps was forced to pull in its fingers before they were burned. So on the 22d of December, we took up defensive positions at Biringen where we remained until the end of February. With Christmas we had the traditional blanket of snow, and mild celebrations were held in each battery, including a turkey dinner complete. Home seemed so far away then.

RANDY FIGHTS ON

The 4th of January gave us a new assignment. The 90th Division was pulled out and sent up to the Battle of the Bulge, and our old friends and comrades in arms, the 3rd Cavalry Group, took over the defensive line. It was a quiet sector, although gun crews got little rest. Harrassing missions proved equally harrassing to us. By the end of January our positions had assumed an air of permanency, and we began to congratulate ourselves on our good fortune in being able to spend a severe winter in comparative comfort. There was a certain anxiety over the enemy's intentions. A counterattack seemed plausible and as we had a 17000 yard front to cover, our anxiety was not misplaced. However, as it turned out, the enemy had neither the will nor the means to push through our sector.

On February 28th, the 3rd Cavalry Group was pulled out and sent to join the main XX Corps effort to our north. We followed shortly after,

going into position temporarily in Wellingen. On the 5th of March, we moved northeast across the Saar River through demolished Trier, and took up positions in the town of Irsch. Here again we rejoined the Cavalry. On the 6th, the Germans counterattacked and caused us considerable trouble. They had been able to infiltrate to a point within 400 yards of our positions and upset our breakfast with inaccurate small arms fire. Things became more serious when an artillery observer succeeded in adjusting fire on us. We continued to shoot back and with the aid of some light tanks repulsed the counterattack. We displaced then to new positions in the vicinity of Olewig, just outside Trier. There we remained in direct support of the Cavalry for several days and advanced as they did, rendering them invaluable support, breaking up determined enemy counterattacks and neutralizing areas with effective preparations preceding limited objective attacks by the Cavalry. The 3rd Cavalry Group was relieved by the 16th Cavalry Group on the 18th of March. We continued in support of

them. The enemy, completely outflanked, suddenly cracked wide open and then began the merry chase across the Saar Palatinate to the Rhine. The 241st on several occasions moved into towns ahead of the Cavalry. During the period of March 20—23, we fired no rounds. We were sent to a rest area at Oberweiler, and after being threatened with M. P. duty, found ourselves on the road again in hot pursuit of the enemy. We were attached to the 204th Field Artillery Group, and on the night of March 30th, we crossed the Rhine River at Mainz carrying with us doughs of the 65th Infantry Division. Our combat days were numbered then, only we did not know it. On April 1st, Easter Sunday, we were again put in direct support of the 3rd Cavalry Group. The enemy had managed to form a defensive line along the Fulda River. By April 3rd, this had been broken and the offensive was again rolling along. We went back to the 204th F.A. Group and the 65th Division, and after sitting a few days in Grandenborn without firing a round, we moved to Vetteroda and into support of

the 80th Infantry Division. We continued to move displacing generally twice a day. On the 11th of April, we were north and west of the city of Erfurt engaged in operations for its capture. On the 13th, our combat days on the continent ended. We were relieved of our primary mission and assigned as line of communication troops. We had a total of 236 continuous days on the line, with the exception of those three days of "rest" at the end of March. We had fought well and hard and earned a reputation for dependability and efficiency. We could afford to be proud of our accomplishments, and we were.

RANDY RETIRES FROM COMBAT DUTY

From the 14th of April until the 20th, the battalion busied itself in its new task. Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, Service, and "C" were in Erfurt aiding in the government of the city. The staff revelled in its luxurious hotel headquarters and as there were no complaints from the other batteries, we may assume everyone was satisfied. "B" Battery established a military government and guarded lines of communication in Gotha, as did "A" Battery in Mülhausen. Those days were truly the fattest we had ever experienced. This was the beginning of the policy of spreading the 241st all over the map. On the 22d, although our mission remained the same, we moved southeast, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery going to the vicinity of Freienfels, "A" and Service Batteries to Hollfeld, "B" to Waischenfeld and "C" to Trokau. Our mission was always the same, guarding warehouses, medical trains, prison and displaced persons camps, but we continued to follow the line

of advance of the Third Army, generally south and east through Regensburg, Passau, and as far east as Linz, Austria. Col. Hughes was appointed CO Line of Communications XX Corps. The 241st Provisional Group was formed, consisting of us and the 58th Armored Field Artillery Battalion. Col. Hughes was Group Commander, and Major Clifford took over our battalion. Our routine during this period was one we will long remember with a pleasant glow. There were so many guard posts that we all enjoyed a measure of independence and un-army like freedom. We lived well, always in the most comfortable house we could find. We could say we were really living off the fat of the land, and Germany was still surprisingly fat.

VE Day found each battery miles apart from each other. "C" was in Linz, Austria, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery in Ruhstorf, Service in Hartkirchen, "B" in Neuburg, and "A" in Straubing. Major Holeman whom we had lost way back in Luxembourg, rejoined us and was immediately whisked up to Group with Col.

Hughes. The end of the war came as sort of an anti-climax. For almost a month we had been spectators rather than participants, and we could see the end drawing inevitably nearer. However, not a few toasts were drunk to seeing the old war out.

Headquarters and Service moved to Schärding, Austria, towards the end of May. Our leisurely life continued until the 9th of June when the battalion picked up its skirts and trundled down to the vicinity of Munich. The Provisional Group had been dissolved and we were no longer working directly for XX Corps, but had been reattached to the 204th F.A. Group. Col. Hughes rejoined us, but only momentarily. He soon went to XX Corps and has since been permanently assigned there. Other changes in personnel have altered the face of the 241st, as high point men went out and low point men came in, but the spirit has not been altered. What lies ahead of us now we do not know, but whatever it is we know we can and will take it in our stride. It is impossible to attribute the

success of this battalion to any one individual. To our CO's of course we owe much for their vision, initiative, and leadership, but also to the men, whose spirit is the spirit of the 241st goes a lion's share of the credit. We have come a long way since August 20, 1942 and no one knows how much further we have yet to go. No, the story of the 241st is not finished yet, but it will end as gloriously as it began.