

BATTERY HISTORY

A BATTERY

494th ARMORED ARTILLERY BATTALION

This account of the history of A Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of the Twelfth Armored Division is dedicated to the memories of Calvin M. Cauley, Homer D. Wilks and Thomas Maher who were fatally wounded in the war against nazism in France and Germany. May they ever be remembered in the minds of all who knew them as men who died for that which they believed was right.

Training Days

Camp Campbell, Kentucky...Camp Barkeley, Texas

The history of A Battery, 494th Armored Artillery Battalion dates back to July of 1942. At that time the cadre of Able Battery was being formed in several army camps in the eastern half of the United States, such as Pine Camp, New York, Camp Polk, Louisiana, Fort Knox, Kentucky, Fort Riley, Kansas and Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

By 16 August 1942 the first members of Able's cadre had arrived at Camp Campbell, Kentucky where the 12th Armored Division was to be formed, activated and trained. The cadremen assigned were: Cadre Officers: Col. Hartman, Bn. CO., 1st Lt. Samuel B. Magruder, BC, Lt. Thomas E. Brassell, Lt. Young, Lt. Cunningham and Lt. Mal Bellaires. Enlisted Cadre: 1st Sgt. John W. Vincent, S/Sgt. Jesse M. Braswell, S/Sgt. Urban J. Clukey, mess sgt, Cpl. Joseph Stankunas, clerk, Sgt. Ralph W. Pledger, small arms sgt, Cpl. Emmett C. Privett, wireman, Cpl. Lawrence E. Burgess, cook, Pvt. Charles L. Chapman, cook, Pvts. William E. Brinley, Tony Arena, Jr., Silvio A. Pastena, basics, S/Sgt. Donato L. Kuizzi, supply sgt, T/4 Edwin W. Horlacher, T/4 Daniel Pinto, cook, S/Sgt. Thomas E. Dodd, Sgt. Dominick R. Buccola, Sgt. Stanley Krasnowitz, T/4 Junior E. Woods.

The first weeks at Camp Campbell for the cadre were spent constructing new sidewalks and cleaning mud out of the newly constructed barracks. Much work was needed on the battery and battalion areas as Camp Campbell was a new camp still under construction and had no walks or any beautification of any sort. By 15 September 1942, the day of activation for the 12th Armored Division, the three artillery battalions, the 493rd, 494th and 495th, had been assigned their permanent living quarters. On the day of the division's activation, the Kentucky weather took an unexpected change and became hot, causing many men to collapse from heat exhaustion during the ceremonies.

From 15 September on until the first recruit arrived in Able Battery, the cadre was engrossed in more training. It was drill, drill and drill some more with classes and more classes, always with more beautification of the battery area thrown in for good measure.

Personnel changes came with a new supply sergeant, S/Sgt. Ryan, transferred from Headquarters Battery and to make matters worse, a new 1st Sgt., Truxton K. Clement, came to the battery.

The Able Battery cadremen were now in shape to receive the new recruits that would soon come dragging into camp. The first to arrive in November 1942 was Pvt. Walter Mursewick, soon to be followed in the next few hours and days by the rest of the new men. The cadre had been trained and instructed until they lived and slept in cadence. They began to become mean and they were anxiously awaiting the new recruits so they could take it all out all their miseries on them.

Basic training now started in earnest for the new redlegs of A Battery, consisting of calisthenics, close-order drill, manual of arms, driving instruction, KP, guard duty and learning the General Orders, small arms instruction and machinegun

instruction. Added to this was area beautification, building more walks, planting grass and hauling rocks for accents. December was a big time for the cadre for it meant furloughs home.

Then came the New Year 1943 and the first M-7 Self-propelled 105 millimeter Howitzer Gun Carriage, nicknamed "The Priest" because of its pulpit turret.

With the arrival of the M-7s came a new way of redleg life. The "Cannoneer's Hop" was now introduced to the new cannoneers. The "Hop" consisted of never-ending instruction in the service of the howitzer and its carriage. (See Cannoneers Hop) It also meant the beginning of A Battery Regulation Standard Operating Procedure (RSOP) including overnight field problems, Battery and battalion road marches.

During this time, job experimenting was on-going, placing men in the jobs they were best suited for in the battery. Placement of officers saw Captain Magruder, Battery Commander, Lt. Brassell as Battery Executive Officer, Lt. Young as Recon Officer and Lt. Spitzberg as Motor Officer. When jobs and ratings were given it was these enlisted men who were chosen to lead the battery: Sgts Buccola, Krasnowitz, Kolan, Guertin, Luizzi and Griffin became Chiefs of Section, Ryan, Supply Sgt., Clukey, Mess Sgt., Braswell, Motor Sgt., Dodd, Radio Sgt., Porter, Recon Sgt., T/4 Woods, Artillery Mechanic and Pledger, Small Arms Sgt.

More recruits arrived and A Battery soon consisted of 174 men, which by March 1943 was cut back to 124 men.

In March A Battery fired the 105 mm howitzers for the first time. The Battery Executive Officer and the Gun Section Sergeants were getting the crews ready for the gunnery tests. When the tests were taken, Cpl. Jeremiah O'Neil of Number Four gun section passed with flying colors, getting the highest score of all gunners in the three artillery battalions. Also in March, Porter, Haney and Luizzi were sent to Officers Candidate School.

April, May and June 1943 were probably the hardest of the early training months.

In early April, working under combat conditions, Able Battery went on a field problem. With a full complement of howitzers and vehicles, slightly handicapped by a shortage of personnel, the battery was a combat unit on the march. The fun started when while the convoy was still in march order on the road. The order, "Fire Mission" came over the radio and the battery pulled off the road and went into firing position. Following SOP and Gas Instruction, a perimeter was set up and gas discipline was enforced. It proved to be a good idea, for a few minutes later the position was dive-bombed and gassed by a plane that flew over the position. In later discussion it was agreed by all personnel that the plane would have been shot down.

This problem, as was intended, gave Able personnel a better concept of real combat. The faults pointed out by battery officers can be corrected by following the battery SOP. On the whole, Able Battery gave a good account of itself and the men enjoyed the experience.

During this period Physical Efficiency Tests were held throughout the Division. Able Battery placed third highest in the tests in the Division. In the four mile forced march Able took first place, covering the ground in 42 minutes flat. For the battery's

good showing in the hike and tests, Able personnel received a day off, or rather, they got the afternoon off to get back in shape for the next day of training. Some of Able's more stalwart souls, that is, the ones who could still walk, took off for town, namely, Clarksville, Hopkinsville or Princeton.

The men of A Battery were also introduced to the infiltration course. This course, conceived by the devil himself, the men found, was crawling on one's stomach a hundred or more yards through obstacles and barbed wire under a hail of machinegun fire just overhead. The only casualty was Andrew Horn who was hit by a piece of dirt. After the first few yards some of the men were seen gingerly feeling their posteriors and not to see if they were hit!

In June, Lt. Young transferred to the Army Air Corps and Lt. Thomas Walsh made his appearance in the battery.

Lt. Walsh made his first job the organization of what he called "The Rangers." The men who took part in the mild exercise were Keith Stinger, Samuel Eveland, Howard Nelson, John Marsh, Andrew Horn and Ray Plummer. June also saw Able firing small arms including carbines, rifles, pistols and tommy-guns.

1 July 1943 came and A Battery knew that they would not get the 4th of July off. Hellcat Camp was in the offing, a division-wide two-week field problem. From the 4th to the 17th of July Able endured Hellcat Camp. Hellcat Camp was an experience of all the things that might arise in actual combat, including the rain and mud. While there the division was given the mission of attacking fortified positions. The drivers of all vehicles were taken over a driving course. There were also instructional courses on booby traps, on how to find them and avoid them. Courses on how to dig in for a concealed position and the art of camouflage. After spending two weeks at Hellcat Camp Able returned to garrison, much the wiser for the experiences they had.

There was no rest after Hellcat Camp as the Division brass had cooked up another deal by the time Able returned home. This time it was crossing a river on a pontoon bridge. This was followed by Able Battery firing in direct support of the division tankers, the purpose being to get the tankers used to having their own shells bursting around them.

In August 1943 Captain Magruder was transferred to 20th Corps and Lt. Thomas E. Brassell was placed as Battery Commander. By this time the ugly rumor of maneuvers in Tennessee was making the rounds of the battery latrines and at the end of the month Able knew the next few months would be spent maneuvering around the Tennessee hills. 2 September 1943 saw Camp Campbell being deserted by the Able Battery and the 12th Armored Division as the division took off for maneuvers. It was not an easy operation as there were many things to do before leaving. The biggest headache of all was the final area policing and cleaning just before leaving. Able's area was policed, policed and policed again until not a twig or grain of tobacco could be found.

Testing for the Army Specialized Training Program had been on-going in the division and Cpl. Hanson left for A.S.T.P. from the battery. Griffen and Wenzel left for the Army Air Corps.

The march to the maneuver area was made at night but the people of Clarksville turned out and were lining the streets to see the division off. The maneuvers lasted eight weeks from 6 September to 1 November 1943 and many of the men promised to be good garrison soldiers when they got back to garrison. There were weekend passes to Nashville, Tennessee though and plenty of Cook's Beer in the field PX's plus open air movies were shown to the troops. It was rough but an excellent combat learning experience for the men of Able. Rain was an undeniable foe for the battery and it's vehicles. It was also tough on Gen. Carlos Brewer whose peep got stuck in the mud and also blew a tire after getting out. Worst was the fact that the peep had no tire iron aboard.

After the end of maneuvers the Hellcat News offered free cartons of cigarettes for funny stories about maneuver experiences. The Hellcat News also announced in the 12 November 1943 issue that the division was to be reorganized into battle-rigged units which feature offensive power with the elimination of regiments. The division artillery would go through no change.

Hellcats were told that the 12th Armored Division would be moved to Camp Barkeley, Texas near the city of Abilene, Texas in November. Came 14 November 1943 and Able Battery entrained at Alexander, Tennessee for the move. It took two days for the trip, arriving on 17 November. The men of Able felt mighty sad upon looking at their new surroundings, bleak and desolate compared to the ones they just left. They had left two-story white-painted barracks and now looked at plywood shacks sitting on the sand to be their new homes. The shacks housed 19 men and sand blew in through the loose doors and windows. It took a lot of hard work to get the area in living condition. Resigned to their fate, the men of Able settled down to more training and inspections. Again, furloughs were given and everyone wanted to take off first.

Weekly night maneuvers began with a minimum of four hours night training on either Monday or Wednesday night for all units of the division. Training includes night driving, night scouting and patrolling, night infiltration and raiding. Hellcats also are crawling through the night infiltration course. Able Hellcats were also sent to Fort Bliss, Texas to participate in ground to air training on the .50 caliber machine gun and includes instructions, dry running and day and night firing. There is no room for this training at Camp Barkeley.

In March 1944 seven new men came to A Battery: Kenneth Bradstreet, Eldred Heald, James Lamkin, Jr., Alfred Reiser, Patrick Reynolds, Milton Franks and Barnett Abromovich. They came to Able from the Army Specialized Training Program which had just been closed by the Army. They were sent to an artillery provisional battery before joining Able to see if they had been trained in basics.

The next few months were spent mostly in the field on problems, battery RSOP, AGF tests, infiltration courses, small arms ranges and service practice, preparing for the day Able would go overseas.

It was in April that Pvt. William Presnell had his first harrowing experience since he received his driver's permit. During a night movement on highway 158, a vehicle coming in the opposite direction at a high rate of speed, careened off Bill's half-track and continued on it's course until it smacked into a second half-track

driven by T/5 Clarence Ernest. Clarence has just returned from the Armored School in Fort Knox.

S/Sgt. Robert "Sam" Glassmoyer and his Recon section have been highly recommended by 1st Sgt. Clement while out on the recent field problem.

A letter was received and read at retreat from Captain Magruder who is now stationed in England.

T/5 Emmett A. Boyd was married 26 April to Marie Darlette of Los Angeles, California.

May saw Lt. Brassell attending school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, leaving Lt. Walsh in command. The section Chiefs became air-minded at a recent RSOP when they took to the air in the "Grasshopper" liaison planes to observe camouflage and firing positions. Taking part were Sgts. Buccola, Kolan, Krasnowitz, French, O'Keefe and Cpl. Keeling. Cpl. Robert Miller attended and graduated from gas school.

The third week in May also saw A Battery participating in a first time in the history of the division exercise when actual artillery fire was used in support of tank and infantry advances in training exercises. The battery directed time fire in front of the 43rd Tank Bn. As a safety precaution the fire was directed higher than the usual 20 yards above the ground. The next day a rolling barrage was laid down 300 yards in front of the 17th AIB as they advanced three-quarters of a mile to their objective.

June saw Able adopting a couple of mascot pooches named Natural and Futar. After proving themselves field soldiers last week they are bucking for stripes. A wrestling match between Pfc. Henry Moritko and Pvt. Everett Barr was declared a draw. Pvt. Donald Hollenbaugh, Able's champion eater, is searching for some sort of extra ration carrier to be used on field problems. Pfc. Norbert Bartz is finding a half-track more comfortable than the hurricane deck of a bucking bronco after participating in the local Sheriff's Posse Rodeo. Chief A Battery chigger bearers are Pvts. Alfred Trousel and Frank Serra. Cpl. Robert Miller missed the last field problem. He was home on furlough getting married. S/Sgt. Glassmoyer's Recon crew captured a couple rattlesnakes.

July's password in Able was "Beautification." Taking part were exterior decorators Paul Jarvis, George Matz and John Cheefetz. Landscapers were Keith Stinger, Jerry O'Neil and George Gildea. Dayroom decorators were Edwin Horlacher, Stanley Krasnowitz, and Millard Keeling. Kitchen beautifiers were Dominick Buccola, Norbert Bartz, Pat Reynolds and Joseph Lutz.

July also sent Able Battery to Camp Bowie for maneuvers with the 13th Armored Division to iron out all the weak spots in the 12th Armored's make-up. The marches to Camp Bowie and back were as dusty and dirty rides as Able would ever take. T/5 Wiley was lost to the battery due to injuries suffered while at Bowie.

It wasn't far into August that the future of Able Battery was published and the way it read was "P.O.E." It came just one year and eleven months after the first men came to A Battery and lacking not too many days of being two years from the date of activation. Anticipation of things to come ran high as A Battery prepared for movement overseas and the reason for all of our training.