

Helpmate Ready

the After Action Reports of the 284th Field  
Artillery Battalion during World War II

June 14, 2001

*Dedicated to those brave comrades who accompanied us to the far shores and who gave their lives that the principles of free peoples might continue to live.*

## *Foreword*

As a lieutenant colonel of Field Artillery in 1944, it was my great privilege to be assigned to command the 284th Field Artillery Battalion through the period of travel to Europe and combat across Germany. Never in my experience, have I worked with a group of men who gave so unstintingly of their energies, and in some case of their lives, to provide the infantry in front of them with ready and accurate artillery fire. There is no way of estimating the number of infantrymen who returned to this country after the war as a direct result of the fire which the 284th Field Artillery Battalion so accurately laid down in front of them. That the battalion did perform its mission with valor and gallantry is attested by the fine commendations received from some of the hard-fighting units which the battalion supported. I consider that I was honored in the fact that I was permitted to command this unit throughout the trying days of 1944 and 1945. The fondest memories of my career will ever remain those days of association with the men of Helpmate.

Horace L. Sanders  
Colonel, Artillery  
United States Army.



# *Prologue*

The long line of trucks ground its way slowly along the muddy road with grimy, tired artillerymen sprawled on the loads, sleeping as men sleep when they have known continuous days and nights of tending the guns. Slowly the column drew away from one truck towing a howitzer. Greater and greater grew the gap until finally the driver pulled over as far as he dared on the slippery road and cut the switch. Growling deeply, the following trucks pulled slowly by and continued on their way.

As the long line of vehicles finally edged by the stalled vehicle, the last two, a truck and a command car, pulled alongside. From these vehicles came men with mechanics tools, the hood of the truck went up and heads went deep into the cavern of the engine compartment. For several minutes the work went steadily on, conversation was in monosyllables as the experts in diagnosing the ills of mechanical monsters performed their work.

Finally one man raised his head and spoke to the driver, "Ok. Try it now, Mac."

The starter growled and the engine sprang to life. The hood went down and the mechanics returned to their vehicles. Slowly, the great truck pulled away from the roadside and ground its way forward toward the battle ahead.

The sergeant in the command car turned to the driver and said, "That one's on its way. Helpmate must be ready."

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Far to the rear, along a lonely stretch of French road, six muddy trucks and trailers slowed to a stop alongside the piles of 105mm shells stacked beside the pockmarked, beaten-up road. Warily, the sergeant in charge of the convoy trudged back to the man in charge of the piles of ammunition. A loading detail appeared from nowhere and slowly, but steadily, the loads on the trucks increased.

Finally, all six trucks and trailers were loaded. The sergeant walked back along the line of trucks, arousing the drivers with, "Come on, you guys. They're waiting for us up front."

Back in his own truck, he turned to the driver and said, "We're loaded. Let's roll. Helpmate must be ready."

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The jeep slewed badly as it made the turn in the narrow road, barely missing going into the quagmire called a ditch. A three-day-bearded figure in a torn GI mackinaw plodded slowly behind, dragging the black line of telephone wire over into the ditch, cursing the icy rain which made footing precarious and praying that the tanks would stay off the the road where that vital black ribbon was laid. Slowly the team of jeep and man proceeded toward the shell-torn farmhouse where the battery command post was located. Turning in at the road to the house, the team continued around to the rear where the switchboard was located. Wordlessly, the lineman made is connection to the board and then plugged in for a test of the circuit. "Line test. Gimme a ring. OK. Helpmate's ready."

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Slowly, one after another, the four big trucks towing the 105mm howitzers edged their way across the ditch and into the snow-covered field. It was long past midnight and most of the cannoneers, huddled on the trucks, were deep in the sleep of men who had gone for several days without rest. One by one, the great, ponderous vehicles followed the plodding figures of the chiefs of section along the edge of the field until each had reached its selected position. As the prime movers slowed to a halt, the cannoneers came cursing to the ground and quickly, without a wasted motion, the khaki monsters with the long round tubes were prepared for action.

Quietly, with an inspiring air of capability, the battery executive gave the commands which laid the four howitzers on the base point and prepared them for action. The last final command rang quietly across the snowy field, "Record base deflection. Fall out. Recorder, report Helpmate laid and ready to fire."

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The buzzer of the field telephone erupted into a fury of sound. The major, slumped over the field table, raised his head and reached for the handset. It was a motion expressive of fatigue, yet it was not slow. "Fire direction."

The, raising his voice so that the shadowy figures at the candle-lit field tables ranged about the room could hear, he repeated the message coming in from the division artillery fire direction center, "Fire mission. Infantry counterattack. Concentration 107. 100 left. 100 short. 5 rounds. Time on target. Three minutes from – now. Roger."

New life in his tones, he gave rapid instructions to the draftsmen plotting the target and to the computers waiting their data from the draftsmen. Smoothly, efficiently as machines, the draftsmen sounded off the basic data. Steadily, the computers snapped out firing data over the telephone lines connecting them with the firing batteries where all was activity now.

Then, the pause, the data had gone to the guns, the crews were laying their pieces as directed, shells were being slammed home into the waiting howitzers,

breechblocks were clanging shut. But wait, still another voice from the shadows of the fire direction center, "What's the delay? Let's go; those doughboys are waiting. Message to executives: 'What is the delay?'"

The computer furthest from the speaker's position spoke quietly into his transmitter trying not to let the impatient one hear his voice, "Hey, rush it. The Old Man is on my —. Let's go."

The responses were rapid. "Able ready." "Baker ready." "Charlie ready."

The the major's report over the telephone to division artillery, "Helpmate ready."

Then another pause as watches were checked, and finally, "Fire." After that, the inevitable comment from the major, the battalion S-3, to the battalion commander, "Joe, you shouldn't get so impatient. We were ready first again anyway."

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"Helpmate Ready." Once again the mechanics, the drivers, the wiremen, the cannoneer, the fire direction men, the cooks, the aidmen, and all the rest of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion had contributed their share toward sixty rounds of artillery ammunition sent *c/o* forward in response to a request for fire from the infantry.





# Chapter 1

## The Birth of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion

The 284th Field Artillery Battalion was formally activated on 25 June, 1943, at Camp Rucker, Alabama. It was a new organization and, unlike many Regular Army or National Guard units which had existed [as “paper organizations”] prior to the war, was created without the benefit of earlier friendships between the men who were to become such close and steadfast buddies in combat.

Camp Rucker, the first home of the battalion, was an entirely new military reservation. It was built on an 82,000 acre reservation in the southeast corner of Alabama, about 26 miles from Dothan, a community of some 20,000 people. The reservation was well adapted to training. With streams, rolling country, open and wooded areas, it afforded the varied terrain necessary for the training of troops and was sufficiently large for artillery maneuvers. The broad plateau at its southern end made an excellent site for the cantonment barracks, while Lake Tholocco and its woods offered the same wholesome recreation to soldiers, in time of war that they had to civilians, in time of peace.

### The First Personnel

The first Commanding Officer was Lieutenant Colonel Francis C. Foster, a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., who had served in the Hawaiian Islands and the Panama Canal Zone as well as many posts in the United States. The officers who were originally assigned to the battalion came from four principal sources, the 76th Infantry Division, the 81st Infantry Division, the Replacement Training Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the Replacement Training Center at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Of the initial complement of officers [who were originally assigned to the battalion], thirteen continued with the battalion until the end of the war in Europe. Many others, originally assigned to the battalion, were later transferred to other units but their influence remained with the battalion throughout the war. [Still other officers, not of the original complement, joined the battalion and were on the rosters through the war.]

The original cadre of non-commissioned officers for the battalion returned

from duty overseas in the Hawaiian Department in March 1943 and came from the 249th, the 104th, and the 10th Field Artillery battalions of the 27th Infantry Division. Of these [original non-commissioned officers,] thirty-nine were to go on with the battalion through its wartime experiences. Forty-eight of that first cadre were later transferred to other units but they, like the officers, left their marks upon the battalion. Several other changes in the original complement were to occur before the unit had completed its training and was ready to go overseas.

### **The Cadre and the Fillers Arrive at Camp Rucker**

The cadre [for the battalion] reported at Camp Rucker early in June of 1943 and began their preparations for the reception of the balance of the men who were to be the first members of the battalion. They spent their early days at the new camp training for their new duties, doing kitchen police, doing guard duty, and improving the area by constructing board walks and repairing the barracks.

In July, the first of the fillers arrived from Camp Hood, Texas and Camp Clairbourne, Louisiana. These men had completed their basic training in Tank Destroyer units but had been reclassified as field artillerymen when it became evident that there was a pressing need for men to fill the artillery units. The training which they had received at Camp Hood and at Camp Clairbourne stood them in good stead when they assumed their places in the new battalion.

During August and September, the balance of the fillers arrived from Reception Centers at Camp Grant, Illinois; New Cumberland, Pennsylvania; Camp Lee, Virginia, and Fort Meade, Maryland. The recruits came from the states of Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts and New York. To most of these men, coming as they did from the northern states, the heat of Alabama was a new experience.

The inductees from Camp Grant arrived in style in Pullmans but even these accommodations contributed their share of soot and grime. Not so fortunate were the men who came from New Cumberland—they rode in baggage cars. It is reported that the only men to sleep comfortably during this trip were the ones who slept atop several occupied coffins.

Foremost in the minds of many of these men was the question as to why they had been assigned to a field artillery unit. Many believed that they should have been sent to different types of units because of their previous civilian qualifications. [Actually, their assignment was the result of requisitions standing before the classification officers at the various reception centers.] Thus began their first introduction to the mystery of the ages—the Army classification system.

# Chapter 2

## Basic Training

The inductees, the majority of whom had never had any previous military training, started their soldiering at “Tar Paper Village”. With the exception of a few, the recruits were civilians who had left their jobs or who had just finished high school. For the first few days, much of the time was devoted to the issue of clothing and equipment and to familiarizing themselves with the camp itself. The change from home life to that of a soldier was one of the most severe adjustments facing the new soldier. This included living with forty or fifty men in one barrack, eating with a hundred or more men in messhall, and showering with ten or twelve in facilities which were adequate for five or six. However, all of these inconveniences vanished after a few weeks as the men gradually became adjusted to the daily military duties.

Soon after his arrival, the recruit was exposed to the first of his contacts with his new battery commander. He was called in for the highly important interview which would result in his assignment to duty within the battery. To the man, this was very critical because it would determine whether he would be a truck driver, a cannoneer, an instrument operator, a telephone operator, or any of the other myriad military specialities which must be performed. In most instances, this was the first time that these new soldiers had reported to an officer. Many were the questions which went through their minds as they left the orderly room—had he taken the right number of steps as he entered, had he saluted properly, had he made the proper exit? World-shaking consequences hung in the balance.

Of course, as in all military units, the first instruction was in dismounted drill. Starting with elementary commands such as “Fall In”, “Attention”, “At Ease”, “Rest”, “Right Face” and “Left Face”, the officers and non-commissioned officers soon had the inductees looking like soldiers, not perfect but passable. In those early days some one could always be depended upon to face right when the command was given for a face to the left. Later on, came such intricate commands as “To the Rear, March” and the various column movements. The new soldiers were off to a good start and soon the batteries began to look like military units. Who can forget those days?

Then came the first days of kitchen police (KP to the initiated). To the men who had confined their efforts in that field to helping Mom with the dishes after supper of fighting with a sister as to who would dry them, the tremendous piles of dirty dishes, pots and pans were staggering. It seemed as though there were enough to last a week. And, of course, after the job was done, or so it seemed, the Mess Sergeant would inevitably come around and with (and always politely), "So, Johnny, you think you are finished. Well, let's see. You try it again. AND THIS TIME, get the grease off." By six or seven o'clock in the evening, beds looked pretty good even though they weren't Beauty-rest mattresses or the beds back home. Six o'clock in the morning had come early and it had been a long day. The only comforting thought was that, according to the First Sergeant's roster, duty would not come up again for a couple of weeks.

Along with the first trick of KP came the first guard duty. Prior to guard-mount, the members of the guard detail could be found shining shoes to a mirror-like finish and dressing in their best uniforms. The ten General Orders had to be memorized and what a task that was. The competition was keen because the result of the inspection was the selection of the Colonel's orderly with a week-end pass to the lucky man. For those who didn't make orderly, there were the tours on post, two hours on, and four hours off. Between reliefs, the hours flew like minutes and it seemed that, before the men who had just been relieved had fallen asleep, the Corporal of the Guard was around shaking them by the shoulder to rout them out for another tour.

After the first few weeks, during which all men received the same basic training, assignments to the various sections of the batteries were made. These assignments were the result of the early interviews with the battery commander. After assignment to sections, life began to take on a new interest and it was at this time that the new soldier learned to work with other men of his section and battery. It was here that the foundation was laid for the later cooperation on the battlefield. It was here that the seeds were planted which were to develop into combat reliance between buddies and the interdependence which was to be so important in the later life-and-death activities. In the newly formed unit, it was here that the first indications of ability as leaders began to make themselves evident. As training progressed, the future leaders of the battalion began to show themselves and it was these men who later aided so materially in establishing the records made by the unit.

With the advent of unit training came the first overnight problems. Early in training, the new men were shown how to make up a bedroll and how to pitch a shelter tent with one other soldier. Then came the announcement that the early teachings along this line would be put into practice. To say that the first night's sleep was scanty is to be guilty of gross understatement. Those bunks in barracks certainly looked good after those first over-nights. How different it all was to be just one year later.

The training of all men went on at a steady pace and the batteries moved inexorably toward the day when they would be prepared for combat. Later events were to prove the value of that training. It might be well to pause here for a moment and relate the training techniques use in one small segment of the

battalion; it may also be amusing to those who do not recall those techniques with too vivid a personal recollection. The small segment referred to was that group of men who were to take such a large part later in causing the morning reports of the batteries to list many men as, "wounded in action" rather than "died of wounds," the Medical Detachment.

the training of that detachment was anything but orthodox, at least in its early application, but it did produce results. From private to colonel, onlookers frowned upon the methods used by the medics to learn surgery technique. The program started when one of the members suggested a bit of "cutting" on cats or dogs which might wander into the dispensary (Ed. note: the word "wander" has various meaning.). This idea was ruled out as being cruel to animals. However, since some of the medics apparently did not class themselves as animals, a germ of an idea was planted and rapidly took form. Five of the medics were enthusiastic about doing a bit of cutting on each other so Captain (Dig-em-deep) Kittell, not to be outdone, joined and made it a sextet. All of the group (whose Good reason was under a cloud as far as the rest of the battalion was concerned at that time) bear scars to prove that good surgeons are born, not made.

## **The End Of Basic Training**

Keeping pace with the medics, although by more orthodox methods, the battalion plugged doggedly on through its basic training. Gun-swabbing suddenly took on a new purpose when it became necessary to do it after having fired the howitzers. All of the many and devious specialities required of the modern soldier were perfected and the routine smooth functioning, which was to characterize the battalion in combat, was developed. Everything from gunnery, survey, communications, truck driving, motor maintenance to field sanitation was done and done again, and then again for good measure. The things which had been new, and the actions which had been awkward to the recruits of a few months ago, were becoming habitual. So ended the basic training period and the battalion moved into the testing phase of its training.



# Chapter 3

## The MTP Tests and Unit Training

Upon completion of the basic training phase in the development of the battalion, it was necessary that the quality of the previous training to be determined. The War Department directed that this be accomplished through a series of tests called Mobilization Training Program Tests. These tests were directed at individual proficiency as well as unit proficiency. First, came a complete personal layout inspection with shelter tents pitched and equipment displayed on the ground. After this, the inspecting team moved on to a very careful scrutiny of the unit equipment, the howitzers, radio sets, wire equipment, engineer equipment, small arms, vehicles, and everything else which a field artillery battalion has in the way of tools

In addition to the inspection of individual and unit equipment, there was the inspection of the individual soldiers. The testing officers from Corps Headquarters moved down the lines asking questions about military courtesy, intelligence, first aid, and other general subjects of basic training. It was during the inspection of Headquarters Battery that one of the inspecting officers asked a certain soldier, a former section hand on the Pennsylvania Railroad, what his job was. The unexpected answer, "Sir, I am the G.F.U. of the battery," left the inspecting officer so perplexed that all that he could say was, "Next soldier."

Another future hero, this time in "A" Battery, crashed through with a prompt answer to the question, "Who is the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy?" by singing out in resounding tones, "Captain Conway, sir." The extra duty which that earned convinced the soldier that Captain Conway had not yet reached those heights of command.

After the personal testing of the men of the battalion, there were tests in dismounted drill and in the handling of and nomenclature of small arms. After all of these tests had been scored, it was announced that the testing team had placed a big stamp of approval upon the battalion. The unit had passed the test without a single unsatisfactory mark; on the contrary, it had scored several excellent marks.

With the MTP test behind it, the battalion moved on in its training cycle to begin its unit training. Here the stress was upon the development of the

team. Frequent field exercises were held in which the selection of position, field sanitation, concealment and camouflage were emphasized. It meant full-time living in the field in order to adapt the soldier to outdoor conditions. Throughout this phase of the training, the work on the specialists continued. It was this specialized training which developed the men from freshman to graduates as cannoneers, drivers, mechanics, cooks and survey or instrument men.

Through this period, men were given the privilege of regular passes and the granting of furloughs began. Many soldiers were thereby able to return to their homes for the first time since induction. Some men were even fortunate enough to spend the Christmas holidays at home with their families. Those who had to remain in camp will long remember the New Year's Eve dance in the town of Andalusia. They called the fire water "White Lightning" and it certainly had a thunderous effect.

The battalion, throughout this period, was preparing to take the next series of tests. This involved innumerable practice runs called RSOP's—reconnaissance, selection and occupation of position. The tests were to be the final evaluation of the ability of the new soldiers as artillerymen. Three tests in firing accuracy, maneuverability, speed of delivery of fire, and survey had been designed to give the higher headquarters [responsible for the training of the battalion] an index as to further needs in training. The covered all phases of operations on the battlefield, from those in which the battalion acted alone, to those which it acted as one of several units, in support of infantry in the attack.

After several weeks of RSOPs and field exercises, the battalion was ready for the tests and the Corps team of inspecting officers moved in. Along with the tactical tests, the team made inspections of the camp area and personnel records. The preparations for the inspection of the camp area will long remain in the memories of the men who prepared for them. G-I parties were the order of the day (or night). G-I parties were not as inviting as they may sound; tickets of admission consisted of mops, scrub brushes, and plenty of water. The ticket to leave (and they were required) was a spotless floor, a shining kitchen, and a perfectly arranged barracks.

The physical tests which were given as a part of the administrative tests will not be forgotten by the men of the 284th as they seemed to have a definite association with tired and aching muscles. These test consisted of a 300 yard dash, push-ups, burpees, a zip-zag race, a pick-a-back race and a four-mile forced march. Only one battery of the battalion was required to take the physical test and "A" Battery was designated to carry the reputation of the entire battalion. After the four-mile march (or run, as some called it), the points were totaled and it was determined that the 284th was up to the required standard in physical development. "A" Battery was a group of tired soldiers that night, but not too tired to join in the big beer party which celebrated the fact that the battalion was one step closer to being a combat unit.

In quick order, the battalion took the tactical tests but it was to be several weeks before the results of the tests was to be made public. Eventually, it was announced that the battalion had passed the first of the three tests, but had



failed to qualify in the last two. Colonel Foster called a meeting of all officers and non-commissioned officers and informed them that the battalion would have another chance later to retake these tests.



# Chapter 4

## The Tennessee Maneuvers

With the cycle of leaves and furloughs completed, rumors of maneuvers began to trickle into the battalion. To most of the men, the prospect of maneuvers was not inviting; it was January of 1944 and winter had just begun. At first, reports were that the battalion would go to the Tennessee area but later contradictory rumors had it that the Tennessee area was to be closed in a few weeks. More hearsay had the battalion leaving for Florida to begin amphibious training. Still more of the same had the battalion sweating out the sunny climes of California on desert maneuvers. Finally, all rumors were stilled by the definite news that the battalion would move out sometime in February for the Tennessee maneuver area.

As soon as official orders were received, preparations for the move to the maneuver area began. The first step was the verification that all authorized equipment was on hand. A series of show-down inspections revealed the shortages and the battalion supply personnel requisitioned and issued the needed items. The issue of an extra blanket brought the first misgivings as to the cold weather which would be encountered in the Tennessee area.

On the 25th of February, 1944, the battalion vacated barracks in Camp Rucker and went into bivouac near Gate Number 1. This move was made in order to permit details to return to the barracks and complete the police of the vacated area. The clean-up job lasted all day and evening found the men ready for their last passes to the neighboring towns. To some of the men, it was a final goodbye to WAC sweethearts and girl friends.

Five o'clock of the morning of the 26th of February the battalion headed for Fort McClellan, the first stop on the long march. The route led through the scenic and picturesque mountains of the southern Alleghenies. That evening the column arrived at Fort McClellan and, thanks to the excellent work of the advance detail, moved smoothly into the barracks area. There the men spent the last night, of many to come sheltered in buildings.

Early morning found the trucks rolling again in the direction of Tennessee. By late afternoon, it was evident that the maneuver area was close at hand. Along the highway, all types of Army vehicles, guns, and equipment were passed;

in the nearby fields, GIs were shaving, washing, and bathing. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion knew that its turn had come. At 3:30 p.m., 27 February, 1944, the battalion closed in the “readiness area” in the vicinity of Murphreesboro, Tennessee.

At midnight of the day of arrival, the first tactical phase of the maneuvers commenced, to last for six days. “Tactical” meant camouflage and slit trenches, of fox holes, for every man (credit was given for digging until a rock was found). The maneuver forces were divided into the traditional Red and Blue opposing armies. The 284th became a part of the Blue force and remained such until the end of the maneuvers. Blue cloth bands around the helmets identified the battalion.

Low, near freezing temperatures, rain and extremely muddy conditions were prevalent throughout the entire period. Ironically, it was not until the men of the battalion had gone with wet feet for so long that they had become accustomed to that condition (and had begun to grow webs between their toes) that the supply of rubber arctics materialized.

During the tactical phase, no fires of any kind were permitted for the combatant troops. The umpires, of course, had fires and, on the least excuse, the fighting troops swarmed around them to soak up a little heat before returning to their freezing state. The local civilian population frequently took pity on the unhappy soldiers and invited them into their homes to escape the bitter cold.

The tactical exercises consisted principally of occupying positions to support attacks by Blue infantry or tanks. Blank cartridges and bags of flour made up the ammunition supply. A vivid imagination was a primary requirement for all personnel—jeeps were tanks if properly marked, gassed areas were marked by yellow flags, mine fields were marked by purple flags, and knocked-out positions were marked by a black flag. Counter-intelligence measures required that all unit markings be removed from the vehicles of the battalion. (It was odd that that was not the rule of the day after fighting was “for keeps” in Europe.)

The end of a phase usually came on a Friday or Saturday, after which the battalion was sent to an assembly area for a rest and to prepare for the next phase which began at midnight the following Sunday. In the rest areas, men were given an opportunity to wash clothes, clean equipment and write letters. Passes were generously given and each day two convoys would leave for the nearest towns with loads of men on pass. Nashville, Murphreesboro, Lebanon and Gallatin were among the towns on the pass list. It was on these passes that telephone calls were made to mothers, wives and sweethearts of the men of the 284th. For those who did not go on pass, there was an abundance of PX rations in the battery areas. As darkness came, many of them gathered around campfires and sang until the early hours of the morning.

During the second week of maneuvers, it was assumed that the battalion was exposed to a malaria attack and all personnel were required to wear headnets. Of all times to wear headnets, the middle of a particularly severe Tennessee winter seemed to be the least proper. Instead of fighting mosquitoes the problem was snowflakes. the little, light, fluffy missiles clung, melted, and froze to become an integral part of the headnet. It was with a great relief that the men of the

battalion shed those headnets after three days and nights of misery.

During the latter part of the maneuvers, the first changes were made in the officer personnel of the battalion. Captain Conway went to Headquarters Battery to become battery commander and communication officer. Captain Williams went to Service Battery to become battery commander and Battalion S-4 and Lieutenants Shick and Sontag became acting battery commanders of 'batteries "A" and "B". Three new lieutenants joined the battalion during the maneuvers, Lieutenants Ruschmeyer, Davis and Cawthon.

Early in March, Captain Merrill and Lieutenant Ruschmeyer, with a small party of enlisted men, left the maneuver area to go to Fort Riley, Kansas. As the battalion advance detail they were to make arrangements for the arrival of the battalion in its new home. The end of the maneuvers was in sight and finally, to the intense relief of all the troops participating in the exercises, came the message by radio and telephone, "Maneuvers are over." This was Thursday morning, 23 March, 1944.

This ended the first maneuvers on a grand scale for the nine month old field artillery battalion. The battalion had reaped a fine harvest of experiences, but they had given the battalion almost everything except the bullets of actual warfare. Lessons had been learned which garrison life could never teach. Men had been drawn closer together and team work and cooperation had been developed. The going had been tough at times—driving blackout over twisting Tennessee roads, laying and servicing wire in the night and the mud, wading in the middle of a cold night to go forward to man a desolate observation post, swinging the into action, when the call came for fire to support the infantry or the tanks; these were the things which the green battalion had learned during the wet, cold weeks in Tennessee.

Freezing weather, rain and sleet had made conditions seem almost unbearable; but it was here that the strong, the rough, and the ready grew to be battle fighters and learned to make the best of everything. The men of the batteries had formed naturally into small groups of team-mates, the men who worked best together. Sharing tents, keeping warm by the same candle flame, sleeping between the same wet or dry blankets, and splitting K-rations developed many partnerships which were later carried into battle. The leaders, who had developed in the Tennessee maneuvers, became the leaders of the batteries in the later actions in France and Germany. The maneuvers in Tennessee, with their hardships, were the testing ground and the training ground where were laid the habits and traits which were to carry the battalion on to a glorious battle history across thousands of miles of Atlantic Ocean.



# Chapter 5

## Artillerymen on Cavalry Hills

Preparations for the move to Fort Riley, Kansas, were made at an assembly area near Gallatin, Tennessee. All of Saturday and part of Sunday were used to clean equipment and vehicles. Special details were sent to the Gallatin station to load railroad cars in preparation for the forthcoming rail movement. About 2:00 P.M., on March 26th 1944, the battalion marched to the station and waited until evening to board the train. At 9:00 P.M., the train was clicking over the rails toward the new home of the men of the 284th.

It wasn't long after the departure from Gallatin that the porters appeared to make up the Pullman beds. Very few men had to be encouraged to turn in that night. Sleeping between white sheets just didn't feel proper, but it was wonderful. Morning came too soon, and all were reluctant to leave those beds, but the call to breakfast was too much to resist. After breakfast, there were the inevitable card games, many of which lasted until almost time for the batteries to detrain at Fort Riley. Those who did not spend their time at cards, read, rested, wrote letters, or just watched the scenery roll by.

On the 28th of March, the battalion detrained at Fort Riley. All batteries were met by guides from the advance party which had preceded them from the maneuver area, and were led to the new barracks area. This time it was merely a matter of bedding down in the barracks which the advance party had cleaned and laid out with beds, mattresses, and pillows. After the field conditions of the maneuver area, the barracks were a treat, with regulated heat, hot water for washing and showers, and all the other comforts of garrison life. The new post offered the men a fine service club, a nearby Post Exchange with ample supplies of beer, cokes, ice cream and milk shakes. At the main post, in addition to the WAC Detachment, other interests included the main PX, the library, the main theater, the soda bar, and last but not least, the NCO Club. It was at the NCO Club, where many men spent numerous evenings with WAC girl friends, that the yellow piping of the Cavalry soon lost favor to the red of the Artillery.

Soon after arrival at Fort Riley, the battalion suffered its first major loss of personnel. Prior to leaving Camp Rucker, it had been directed that the battalion select, and have ready for departure, a cadre to form a new field

artillery battalion. After arriving at Fort Riley, the cadre was ordered out. On April 13, 1944, Lieutenant Robert Feeney and eighty-four men departed from the 284th Field Artillery Battalion and reported to the 580th Field Artillery Battalion at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. Many of the men who departed had been on the original cadre to the 284th and they left many close friends behind. With them went the best wishes of all the men of the battalion.

While the battalion was at Fort Riley, one hundred and three replacements arrived from the replacement centers at Fort Sill, Fort Bragg, and Camp Roberts. Although many of these men remained with the battalion through combat, many were subsequently transferred out to reduce the resulting over-strength.

The real purpose of the move to Fort Riley was to give the battalion an opportunity to complete its training and to take again the Army Ground Force tests. Training was begun at once and RSOPs became the order of the day. At first, it was thought that the battalion would become "school troops" for the school at Fort Riley, but that proved not to be the case. With the beginning of the RSOPs, it became evident that the prime mission now was the passing of the AGF tests. After weeks of hard practice and continued effort, the operations of the battalion became automatic and when the test were finally taken, the battalion passed them with very creditable grades. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion was now ready for combat.

With the AGF test a thing of the past, the men and officers now turned their attention to the final polishing of their training. Every man completed his qualification in individual arms and transition battle courses. During day and night infiltration courses, they wormed their way on their bellies through mud and barbed wire, under streams of machine-gun bullets. They became proficient in throwing hand grenades and firing rifle grenades. The fired bazookas and they developed their pistol marksmanship. The firing batteries devoted much time to direct laying on moving targets, preparing for the day when Panzer tanks would be in the gunners' sights and the chips would be down in a game for keeps. Even the medics got in more training in marksmanship; hypodermic needles rattled and roared on the "Infirmery" range as final shots of typhoid and anti-tetanus serum were given.

When the POM (Preparation for Overseas Movement) had been met, final furloughs were granted. Everyone knew that these furloughs would be the last ones which would be given. In order to complete the list, fifty percent of the battalion were permitted to leave at one time. For those who were not of furlough, guard and KP details came "fast and furious". For the men, it meant guard at least every other day. For the non-coms it meant Charge-of-Quarters one day and guard the next two days.

Wives of many men returned to Fort Riley to spend the last few weeks with their men. The Guest House, located a short distance from the battalion area, offered five-day accommodations to visitors at nominal fees. The last month that the battalion was at Fort Riley, the Guest House was booked solidly with reservations. Many are the wives and sweethearts of the men of the 284th who will remember their stay at the Guest House at Fort Riley. For the several weeks



prior to the departure of the battalion, it was not uncommon to see two or three feminine guests at the messhalls at chow time.

An event of major importance to the battalion occurred on 28 May, 1944, when Lieutenant Colonel Foster, who had guided the destinies of the battalion from its activation, was relieved of command and ordered to Winter General Hospital at Topeka, Kansas. Later, Colonel Foster was taken off the combat list of the Army because of defective hearing and was stationed at the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Word was received that Lieutenant Colonel Horace L. Sanders, then a student at the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, would succeed Colonel Foster as Battalion Commander. During the interval between the relief of Colonel Foster and the arrival of Colonel Sanders, Major Ray E. Williams temporarily commanded the battalion.

Colonel Sanders arrived to take command of the battalion on 5 June, 1944, just nineteen days before the battalion left Fort Riley. He was a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, a member of the Regular Army, and proved to be an alert, aggressive, young leader who quietly completed the organization of the 284th into a compact unit. Colonel Sanders came to the battalion with a background of ten years service in the Army, occupying practically every officer job in the field artillery in grade. In addition, he had served in the capacity of instructor in artillery tactics at the Field Artillery School for a year before attending the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. When given his orders to assume command of the battalion, he was still a student and immediately departed without finishing the course at Leavenworth. He combined the best elements of the practical artillery-man with the latest military training afforded in the military service schools.

The change in commanding officers, often a disturbing element to the men and the new command, did not impair the 284th. The new battalion commander initiated a policy of keeping the officers and the men of the battalion informed as to the daily situation throughout the battle history of the battalion. He placed responsibility down through rank and file, encouraged and demanded of each man full responsibilities, and gave assistance only when it was needed. This development of the unit, fostered progressively in the final phases of training, in the overseas movement of the battalion, and in battle, was the foundation of the sturdy military showing of the 284th later in France and Germany.

Other important changes in the battalion officer list occurred just prior to the change in commanders. Major Robert W. Vahlberg, Executive Officer since the formation of the unit, developed an illness that transferred him from the battalion to Winter General Hospital and later, to another Field Artillery Battalion. Major Ray E. Williams, the S-3, became Executive Officer and Captain Charis R. Sparra, Assistant S-3 became S-3. With Captain Irving R. Merrill as S-2, Captain Richard B. Williams as S-4, Captain Stephen J. McPartland as Liaison Officer, Lieutenant Stanmore Cawthon as Assistant S-3, Lieutenant Frank V. Wright as Assistant S-2, and Captain Irving Kittell, as Battalion Surgeon, the staff was complete. This staff served with Colonel Sanders in

directing the destinies of the battalion from 5 June 1944 on. With only minor changes, it was still the same staff when the battalion battled it way across France, beyond the historic Moselle River, and into Germany.

At the time Colonel Sanders assumed command of the battalion, orders had already been received directing that the battalion be prepared to move to the Post of Embarkation about the twentieth of June. This was later postponed until the twenty-third but the intervening days left little time for final preparations. A series of inspections were held to determine shortages of equipment and special requisitions were submitted to the Post Quartermaster to bring the battalion up to its authorized allowances of personal and organizational equipment for the move. At this time, the battalion received its first issue of the new dufflebags, which it was to carry all the way into Austria. Together with the musette bag, the duffle bag was designed to carry the entire clothing issue of the soldier. The orders also specified that the battalion would move with "minimum essential equipment" which meant that, with the exception of individual arms and a few items of battery equipment, all other items had to be turned in to the Post Quartermaster. However, before this could be done, all equipment had to be thoroughly cleaned and this meant long hours of labor for all concerned. The day that the howitzers were towed away to be reissued to another unit was a hard one. Even though those howitzers had required many hours of work, and had demanded much care to keep them in condition, it was with a feeling of loss that the gun-squads saw their weapons taken away. An artilleryman without his cannon is like a fish out of water, and the battalion felt just that way.

On 10 June, 1944, the advance party left for parts then unknown. With the departure of Captain McPartland, Warrant Officer Stuteville, and Sergeant Mack, the movement of the 284th from Fort Riley became a matter of just a few days.

One afternoon, just after the departure of the advance party, the battalion marched to the group recreation hall to listen to the first talk by the new battalion commander. Colonel Sanders' speech marked him as a dynamic person and the type of leader whom the men wanted in combat. He stated what was expected of him and what he, in turn, expected of the battalion. The Colonel's promise of passing on information whenever possible, to the men won him immediate favor. Again, the battalion was informed that it was just a matter of waiting for orders to move. The Colonel warned the battalion against the dangers of loose talk concerning the move of the battalion and requested, not ordered, that all men refrain from discussing with *anyone* the fact that the battalion was about to depart. The Colonel later reported that the Group Commander had informed him that this secret was so well kept by the men of the battalion that, after the departure, people did not know that the 284th was no longer at Fort Riley. He has stated that that was his first realization of the value of complete confidence in the men of the battalion, and that it was a lesson that he carried through the rest of his service with the unit.

On the twenty-third of June, the final preparations for the movement of the battalion were carried out. Box-cars were loaded with duffle-bags and equipment and the barracks were vacated so that clean-up details could finish the work of

making them ready to turn over to the post authorities. Late in the afternoon, all batteries marched to the railroad siding to eat their last meal at Fort Riley from kitchen cars that had been spotted on the siding. They then returned to the battalion area to await the time to march to the entraining point. All that was left was to kill time until the order came to fall in and march away. Early evening found the officers engaged in a baseball game with the enlisted men. The men won but there was plenty of zip (and not a few errors) displayed by the Colonel, by Major Williams, and by Captain Kittell. Later in the evening, the wives, sweethearts, and girl friends bid their final adieus to the men of the 284th. The last farewells, the last cokes at the PX, and the last sights of Camp Funston were to be well remembered.

Shortly after eleven o'clock that evening, the Colonel gave the word to form the battalion. Each battery formed in column of fours and the battery commanders reported their batteries to the Colonel. The last command at Fort Riley was the Colonel's, "March your batteries to the train. Battery "A", Forward, March."

Thus ended the last evening at Fort Riley. It had been a pleasant evening, but one for sober thoughts. All of the officers and the men of the battalion knew that they were about to embark upon the greatest undertaking of their lives. They knew that many of them would not return from the long voyage that lay before them. As the batteries swung out of the battalion area and headed for the railroad siding where the cars were to stop, the Colonel stood at the side of the road and watched the 284th move silently by, with only the rhythmic "clump, clump, clump" of feet as the battalion closed another phase of its existence. He heard one of the First Sergeants sing out, "Cadence, Cadence, Cadence, COUNT." Then, as that battery started its, "One, Two, Three, Four, One, -, Two, -, Three, -, Four," he knew that all would be well and that, regardless of what was to come, the 284th would retain beneath its serious manner a feeling of spirit and lightness which would see it through.

The battalion marched to the siding and had a short wait while the train moved into position for the entraining. As the train drew to a stop, whistles shrilled and the long files of men began moving quietly into the cars. As each car was filled with its quota of men, the non-coms in charge reported back along the train to the Battalion Commander who was standing beside the last car. When the last report had been received, Colonel Sanders turned to Colonel Pyle, the Group Commander who had come down to see the battalion off, saluted, and said, "Sir, the 284th Field Artillery Battalion is loaded and ready to roll. We now pass from your command but we'll see you in combat. Good luck, sir." The Group Commander returned the salute of the Battalion Commander and Colonel Sanders swung up onto the steps of the last car. The whistle of the engine gave one shrill blast and the battalion was off on its way to the port of embarkation.



# Chapter 6

## Camp Shanks and the Long Ocean Voyage

At midnight, 23-24 June, the troop train carrying the 284th Field Artillery Battalion eased out of the siding at Fort Riley and headed eastward. The men of the battalion felt certain that the train was bound for the eastern seaboard but there was still some shadow of doubt. Too many stories had been passed around about troop trains which had started eastward, only to end up on the west coast. However, as state after state slid behind the moving train, the conviction grew that the movement was really to the east and a port of embarkation which would lead to Europe.

As the train rolled steadily onward, it passed through many towns and cities which were home to the officers and men of the battalion. So near and yet so far. Nobody was permitted to leave the train and messages to loved ones were strictly taboo because of the security requirements. However, coincidence did serve one man well. As the train pulled to a stop for servicing in a small town in Indiana, his wife was standing on the platform watching “just another troop train go through.” She did not know that the battalion had left Fort Riley; he did not know that she would be at the station. If she had not done as so many other Americans did in those historic days, make a trip to the station each day to wave Godspeed to the departing troops, both the wife and her soldier husband would have missed their last farewell.

At Meadville, Pennsylvania, the train halted for thirty minutes so that the battalion could be routed out for an exercise stop. Close order drill and calisthenics in the street entertained the populace and refreshed the troops. After the battalion had returned to the train, it resumed its journey toward the port of embarkation. Frequently, it was necessary for the troop train to wait at towns along the route for the tracks ahead to be cleared of other traffic. At every stop which was of more than a few minutes duration, the ladies of the local USO were present with their coffee and doughnuts, cigarettes and magazines. They will never know how much those little favors were appreciated by the men of the battalion.

At seven a.m. on the twenty-fifth of June, the train pulled into a siding and the order came to dismount. The battalion had arrived at Camp Shanks, New

York, one of the staging areas serving the New York Port of Embarkation. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion was going to Europe.

The battalion was formed in column and marched to the new barracks area. The buildings were of temporary construction and it was obvious that the stay was to be a short one. The accommodations were definitely not the same type as the battalion had lived in at Camp Rucker or Fort Riley. One large latrine served the entire battalion and the walls were liberally inscribed with the names and dates of units which had preceded the 284th. The dates indicated a very short stay at Shanks and that was welcome news. Now that the long journey had started, everybody wanted it to be over as soon as possible and delays were not the most welcome things in the world.

Mess was served in an enormous messhall which accommodated several battalions. The food was excellent and the menu included steaks, chicken, chops, cakes, pie and ice cream. Several wags of the battalion made remarks about the "condemned man" or the "fatted calf" but nobody turned down the food.

As soon as the battalion had been established in its area, the Colonel reported at post headquarters. There he was informed that certain processing must be accomplished before any of the battalion personnel would be permitted to go on pass to visit New York City. This information was relayed to the men of the battalion and everyone understood that delays in meeting the various schedules might mean that some of the men might not get that highly desirable pass. Before it was over, the 284th had established a new record for processing at Camp Shanks. It was reported that, six months later, the bulletin board in post headquarters still carried the name of the battalion and its record time of forty-seven hours. Needless to say, the battalion visited New York City.

Passes were for the period from five p.m. until reveille. One half of the unit went the first night and the other half the second night. To say that the 284th roamed far afield those nights is to be guilty of understatement. Some men when as far as Baltimore and Philadelphia for that last farewell; others went to the Bronx, to Brooklyn, or the Queens. Others, with no families in the immediate area, merely went to the city to see it for the last time. Sightseeing was the customary way of spending the early part of the night but the nightspots were the final destinations of a large portion of the men. The subway, ferry, bus and train trips back to camp were long and tiring but everyone made it back on time.

After the battalion had had two nights of passes, it was alerted for movement; it was confined to the camp; no mail could go out; no telephone calls could be made. That night, officers and men gathered at the service clubs for that last glass of homeside beer, a last soda, or a last hamburger. Early on the morning of the thirtieth, a special detail took the duffle bags of the Medical Detachment, Battery "A", and Service Battery to the train. There, they were spotted in the seats of the coaches as a method of assigning seats to the men of those batteries. Later that morning, the three units marched to the train and departed for the port. The next day, Headquarters, "B" and "C" Batteries repeated the performance.

Not a man of the battalion will forget that trip to the city. The train pulled

in at Weehawken Stations where the batteries detrained and marched to the waiting ferries. Gone was the smartness of a Fort Riley parade as the units marched aboard. The loads piled high on each man made it essential that the column stagger in unison in order to avoid collisions and upsets. After a trip across the river on the ferry, the batteries debarked at the end of a long pier. There, miles ahead, or so it seemed, at the shore end of the pier was the "Dominion Monarch" which was to be the home of the unit for several days. As each man stepped up to the end of the gangplank his name was checked on the shipping list and he staggered up the steep gangplank. At last, when all of the other names of the battalion had been called, one more individual stepped up to the desk and sounded off, "Sanders, Horace L." He got the same treatment, he staggered up the steep gangplank with his load of gear and then had to go down several ladders (stairways to the landlubbers) until he reached his billet. The battalion was loaded and ready to go. Unfortunately, at the last moment, Lieutenant Edward Vogel, the motor officer of "A" Battery was stricken with an attack of ulcers and had to be taken to the hospital. He never did rejoin the unit but was assigned to another artillery unit after he recovered.

At 2:00 a.m., under cover of darkness, the Dominion Monarch was escorted by river tugs toward the open sea. Later, it joined the convoy and the battalion was on its way to combat. The Dominion Monarch had previously been a luxury liner on the London-Melbourne run. It had been converted into a troopship and now carried five thousand soldiers in addition to a crew of twelve hundred British merchant seamen. It carried several different kinds of units on this trip, one Anti-Tank Battalion, one Anti-Aircraft Battalion, a Field Artillery Group, and a colored Quartermaster Battalion. The various administrative and police duties aboard the ship were assigned to the unit making up the passenger list. Service Battery drew the police detail and the cooks of "A" and "B" batteries drew the kitchen detail.

Feeding arrangements aboard the ship were a sure indication that it had never been intended to carry the numbers of men which it was carrying. The officers ate in the ship's dining room but there was not sufficient room to accommodate all of the batteries. The food was brought to each battery area by mess attendants in large cans where it was distributed to the men who ate from mess kits, seated at long tables. Because of the lack of exercise being taken by all personnel, there were only two meals per day. English cooks, assisted by the American kitchen details, prepared the food. It was a fortunate thing that "A" and "B" furnished some of the cooks, otherwise there would never have been enough salt in the food. Although Sergeant Larson and his crew did what they could to put in salt, they were unable to take the fish out of that menu. By the time that the voyage was over, the 284th had had its fill of fish.

Sleeping facilities consisted of hammocks strung over the tables or mattresses placed on the tables and the floor. Due to the strict blackout regulations, every porthole was tightly sealed and the only ventilation was through the ship's blowers. There were times when they were definitely inadequate. During the day, bedding was stacked in piles, and the tables were used for games, reading, or writing. After the second day at sea, a distribution was made of pocket

novels, chess and checker games, and other items to occupy the time. Living conditions were not of the best, but the men did not mind too much as long as they had something to read, and as long as the floor would stay level enough for them to do that reading.

After twelve days at sea, land was sighted—the northern shores of Ireland. Most of the convoy continued on, but the Dominion Monarch, and several other ships, turned into the beautiful River Clyde. Steaming up the Clyde was an unforgettable experience, off to the east were the romantic settings for the novels of Walter Scott, Loch Lomond, and all the other places the men of the battalion had read about in their study of English literature. After passing through the anti-submarine nets, the Monarch anchored in midstream and awaited her turn to discharge troops and cargo. Because of the fact that the convoy had made better time than had been expected, the rail transportation to move the battalion from Gurrock, Scotland, was not ready. After crossing the entire ocean, in constant danger of submarine attacks, and exposed to all the boredom of a long shipboard journey, the battalion had to stay aboard for two days “waiting for a train.”

On the morning of 14 July, 1944, the battalion debarked from the ship and marched to the waiting train. For practically all the battalion, that was the first sight of an English train, with its short cars, with the side door to each compartment, and the long corridor along the side of the car. The locomotive was a scale model of the giant which had taken the battalion to Camp Shanks, but everyone was amazed to find the train rolling along at fifty and sixty miles per hour during the trip south. A short halt at Salisbury afforded a chance to get coffee and doughnuts from the Red Cross girls and gave the men their first glimpses of English Tommies, WRENS, and WAAFs. At 10:30 p.m., the train arrived at Pontypool, Wales where the batteries entrucked for the short trip to Camp Llanover Park No. 1, Monmouthshire, Wales, which was to be its home for a few weeks. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion was officially overseas.



# Chapter 7

## England and Preparations for Combat

Camp Llanover Park had been a very old estate and part of the holdings of the late Lord Llanover. At the outbreak of hostilities, Lady Llanover had donated the use of the estate for the housing of troops. An interesting part of the estate was what was left of the old castle. The major portion of the castle had been torn down in an attempt to avoid a part of the heavy tax on large estates. However, the stables and servant quarters still remained in livable condition and was occupied by the battalion commander and the staff. The rest of the battalion was quartered in Nissen huts scattered about the estate. These huts were a very elementary type of housing, consisting essentially of a large half-cylinder of corrugated iron with doors at each end and windows cut into the sides. Each one housed twenty men who slept on straw sacks on crude wooden bunks. Two or three low-wattage bulbs provided light inside the huts, but since double daylight savings time was in effect in England, there was little need for electric lights. The messhalls were larger Nissen huts, complete with tables and benches. Bathing facilities were inadequate, but were acceptable to the men of the battalion who were fast becoming accustomed to doing without the comforts of home.

After the initial housekeeping routines had been established, drill was resumed and efforts were directed toward reconditioning the battalion physically after the long ocean voyage. The most pressing problem, however, was that of equipment. The battalion had come across the ocean with minimum essential equipment. It had no combat equipment whatsoever. That equipment had been shipped to England months earlier and was now stored in depots scattered throughout the length and the breadth of the island. As soon as necessary arrangements could be made, supply details were sent off to the various depots to draw all classes of equipment needed to put the battalion back into condition to enter the war. All of the items were received in shipment condition, which meant that cosmoline covered most of it and special packing covered the rest. Many hours were spent in making howitzers, radio sets, instruments and other kinds of material ready to use. As soon as vehicles could be drawn, it was necessary to mount brackets to carry the extra gasoline cans which would be needed

in France. Seeming miles of strap-iron were shaped and welded and bolted to trucks, jeeps and command cars. The motor maintenance section of the Service Battery established an assembly line technique for equipping the vehicles of the battalion. Without the long hours of work done by the men of that section, the batteries would have crossed the channel with gas cans inside the vehicles, taking up valuable room.

The training went on apace with the supply functions. Firing batteries sent gun crews to a nearby artillery range, Sennybridge, for service practice on 155mm howitzers. Battalion officers observed fire and got their hands back in the business of adjusting the artillery fire. After this familiarization firing with the large caliber guns, attention was devoted to getting the 105s ready to calibrate. Six rounds per gun gave an initial calibration and they were then redistributed among the firing batteries so that each one had guns with the same general characteristics. The last step in preparing the howitzers for action was to stencil on each gun the name which it was to bear throughout the war.

Communications personnel were worked to the maximum in getting ready for the particular type of combat, which the battalion was about to enter. New radio procedure and to be learned until it was automatic. New wire equipment had to be readied for use on the continent. Every man had to be specially trained in the many security measures which were to be used as soon as the battalion had crossed the Channel. For the communications personnel of all batteries, it was drill, drill, drill until every man was capable of serving in two or three different positions. It was specialization carried to the very extreme.

Fire direction center personnel under the control of Captain Sparra and Lieutenant Wright drilled continuously on technique until each man could be rotated into every job of the fire direction center. After that, teams were picked so that every man was doing the job which he could do best and speed was emphasized. Every battery was required to provide a certain number of men who trained to take over the functions of the Fire Direction Center in each battery in the event of emergency. How well this training was to pay its dividends is attested by the records which the battalion was to establish later in combat.

Every department of each battery received particular attention as the 284th prepared for its eventual mission into combat. SOPs were developed to cover each type of operation which could be foreseen at this time. It was here that the Battalion Commander and the Battery Commanders worked out their code systems which were to play such a big part in the operations of the battalion. Everything which could be foreseen was studied in detail, and each man was prepared for his eventual role in the fighting to come.

However, all was not work for the officers and men of the battalion. A liberal pass policy was initiated, and whenever possible, men were permitted to go to the neighboring towns. The only criteria imposed was that each man must be able to do his full share of work the next day and no man was to get into any kind of trouble which would reflect upon the reputation of the battalion. After the receipt of a few vehicles, convoys were dispatched daily to various areas of England and Wales to permit the men to see as much of the country as possible. The closest town was Abergavenny, a typical Welch town with several public

houses or pubs (taverns to Americans) and two “fish and chips” stores. Beer, bitters, ale, stout and hard liquor were served in most pubs. It was a new experience for the battalion to drink beer which had not been chilled, but some of the men actually came to enjoy it. (That merely proves the versatility of the men of the 284th.) Other towns on the pass list were Usk, Cardiff, Newport and Cheltenham. Although the personnel of the battalion didn't always meet and get to know the best of the English girls, they did get to know a lot of them. The motor parks were always a beehive of buzzing as the men prepared to return to camp and tales of the exploits of the evening were exchanged before entrucking. Many so-called authorities have stated that the men of the battalion really talked a good evening and there was some question as to whether or not the actual events bore out the tall tales which were told.

Training and the preparation of equipment continued at a steady pace and one afternoon in August, the Colonel assembled the entire battalion around the cement pool at Llanover Park. On this occasion, he discussed the tasks which lay ahead and the seriousness of the operations in which the battalion would soon be engaged. He stated that he did not know when the battalion would go across the Channel but that the time was not far ahead. At that time, he hoped that there would still be time for one RSOP at Sennybridge in order to shake the battalion down for the coming events. From the manner in which the battalion received his talk, the Colonel knew that the men were ready to go. Even he little knew how soon that was to happen.

That night, after plans had been completed for the move to the range at Sennybridge, the Colonel received an urgent call for a meeting of the four battalion commanders at the Group command post. The Group Commander explained that a critical need for additional 105mm battalions had arisen on the continent and that one battalion from the group would move with forty-eight hours. He called for volunteers and stated that the unit selected would cannibalize all other units in the camp to obtain any items of equipment not already drawn. Realizing that his battalion was now at the peak of its preparation, and that any delay while equipment was drawn to replace any given to another unit, would deal a strong blow to the moral of the 284th, the Colonel decided that Sennybridge was out and announced, “Sir, the 284th is ready.” That was the first time in the European Theater that that expression was used, but it was not to be the last. The conference of battalion commanders was long that night as the five colonels discussed in detail the transfer of equipment and plans for the movement across the Channel.

The Battalion Commander did not return to the battalion area until well after midnight. He immediately called for the battery commanders and battalion staff officers. The officers, several of whom had already been asleep, assembled at the battalion command post where they were informed that the Sennybridge trip was off and that the RSOP in Europe would be under actual combat conditions. There would be no more practice runs. For security reasons, all officers present were cautioned that there would be no announcement of the change in plans until after the unit moved out in the morning.

## Southampton and the English Channel

Early on the morning of 11 August, the batteries of the 284th moved out through the gates of Llanover Park, turned to the right, and headed for Abergavenny and so almost everyone thought, Sennybridge. In Abergavenny, however, a turn to the right instead of to the left put the column on the road to Southampton instead of to Sennybridge. All day long the trucks moved slowly along the narrow English roads. Because of the enormous volume of traffic moving over those roads, a maximum speed of twenty-five miles per hour had been specified. The road march seemed interminable. Finally, late in the evening, guide from the billeting party which had been sent on ahead, met the column and let it into Camp C-5, RCRP No.5, the marshalling area for the post of Southampton. At this camp, the battalion slept under large tents for the last night in England. Here, the American Red Cross made a distribution of soap, razor blades, playing cards and candy or cigarettes. Early in the morning, the battalion was routed out again while final checks of the men were accomplished and cross-Channel shipping lists were made out. At 11:00 a.m., the column moved out under motorcycle escort to march through the city of Southampton to the docks. Everyone was intensely interested in the sights of this city which had taken such a terrific pounding from the German Luftwaffe for so long a time. At 2:00 p.m., the column closed in the dock area and all personnel were confined to the dock itself. Berthed at the piers were several Victory ships loading personnel and equipment. The thought uppermost in the minds of the officers and men of the battalion was, "Which one of these things is ours?"

Late in the afternoon, all personnel were required to turn in all English money in their possession; in place of it, they were issued French "invasion francs". Thus, within one month, the men of the battalion had changed their money from dollars into pounds and then into francs.

Loading began about 8:00 p.m. Each ship was combat-loaded; that is, with all equipment and the personnel to operate it on the same ship, loaded in the reverse order of the way that it was to come off when the far shore was reached. Three ships were used in loading the battalion. "A", "B", and Service Batteries embarked on the SS Oliver Wolcott; Headquarters Battery and the Medical Detachment embarked on the SS Mark Hopkins; and "C" Battery embarked on the SS Jeremiah O'Brien. That procedure was a complete mystery to everyone in the battalion and the only explanation seemed to be an attempt to avoid the loss of an entire battalion if a ship was lost. Foreseeing that there might be confusion on the far shore if all three ships did not discharge their loads on the same day, it was decided that the battalion staff would be split among the three ships. Accordingly, Major Williams sailed with the "C" Battery, Captain Sparra with the "A", "B", and Service Batteries, and Colonel Sanders with the Headquarters Battery and the Medics.

At 5:00 a.m., the convoy sailed from Southampton and began the dangerous crossing of the English Channel. Although everybody anticipated a rough crossing because of the reputation of the Channel for storms, the weather was fair and the sea remained calm. Aboard the Wolcott, the battalion suffered

its first losses; Privates Steffey and Croft of "A" Battery were wounded in the accidental discharge of a carbine and were transferred to a hospital ship as soon as the coast of France was reached.

On the evening of 13 August, 1944, the mainland of France was sighted and the 284th Field Artillery Battalion was ready to set foot on the soil of Normandy. It was D-day plus 68.



# Chapter 8

## From Normandy Beaches to the Moselle

As the ships of the convoy bearing the battalion slipped into the immense artificial harbor off the coast of Normandy, officers and men were impressed with the tremendous number of ships concentrated along that short stretch of coast. Boats—hundreds of them—as far as the eye could reach, all were there for one identical purpose. All of them were not on the surface, however. Scattered about in the roadstead were hulks of ships which had been brought from England and sunk to form the artificial harbor and others which had not survived the initial days of fighting. The ships bearing the battalion anchored just off Utah Beach, the beach made famous by the men who had died there sixty-eight days earlier gaining a foothold upon the continent of Europe. Indications of the fierce fighting which had taken place on the beach and along its exits were easily seen from the ships anchored offshore.

Early in the morning of 14 August, lighters and LCTs (Landing craft, tank) moved in alongside the Wolcott to take off the load of men and equipment. The men went over the side on landing nets, and crawled down into the waiting craft. The trucks went over the side in slings lowered from the booms of the ship. Lighters and the LCTs then made the trip in to the beach where they unloaded across the beach, lighters using small steel piers and the LCTs running up onto the beach and opening their doors to disgorge their cargo of men and vehicles. From the beach, the batteries were led to assigned assembly areas south of the beach exits.

Not so fortunate were the other two ships carrying the battalion. By the time that the lighters were ready to work the other ships, a storm had come up, making the seas too rough for the small craft to come alongside the Victory ships. High seas continued until the 17th of August when lightering was resumed and the rest of the battalion came ashore.

The first night that the entire battalion spent ashore in France was spent in the assembly area just in rear of Utah Beach, not far from the town of Ste. Mere Eglise, made famous by the airborne soldiers of the D-day invasion. Here, the men of the batteries saw the first evidence of the power of the landmines used by the enemy. In the center of one of the battery areas was the hulk

of an American ammunition truck which had run across a Teller mine, and had been destroyed. That night, few men slept; the newness of being in the combat zone was too strong. Later, the men of the 284th were to become accustomed to sleeping through anything but a direct hit; however, on those first few nights, not many men slept well. Because of the fact that they were all awake, practically every man of the battalion received his first introduction to "Bedcheck Charlie" that night. Bedcheck Charlie was a Nazi plane which made almost a nightly reconnaissance over the American lines, looking for targets. He flew high overhead, watching for a light to show on the ground but, needless to say, light discipline was excellent.

On 18 August, the battalion moved from the transient assembly area to the forward staging area in the vicinity of Landivy. On this march, the battalion passed through the area of the famous Saint Lo Breakthrough. The roads through the town of Carentan were still impassable and it was necessary to detour the town. The destruction had been terrific and repairs had not yet been made. Coutance, Granville and Avranches were similarly damaged. Buildings had been knocked down into the streets and cattle wandered aimlessly through the outskirts of the towns. The villagers were standing along the sides of the roads watching the American troops pouring forward toward the battle.

The roads were dusty and goggles made little or no difference. Men and equipment were covered by a deep film of dust before the column had progressed five miles. Shortly after noon, the battalion closed in the assembly area south of Landivy and settled down to await orders. While in the assembly area, the men had their first glimpse of the enemy they had come to destroy; several thousand prisoners of war passed the bivouac on their way to the POW camps. It was also in this area that the non-coms and the officers saw for the first time positions which had been occupied by an artillery battalion in combat. All of them were taken on a tour of a battalion area which had been occupied by the 915th Field Artillery Battalion of the 90th Infantry Division during the days immediately following the Saint Lo Breakthrough.

### **Through the Outpost Lines and Back**

On the afternoon of the 19th of August, orders were received which were to start the battalion off on what was probably the oddest introduction to combat experienced by an artillery battalion during the war. The events set in motion by these orders were to take up the next forty hours or so, and were to bring the battalion closer to actual close combat than it was to experience as a unit through the rest of combat in Europe.

About three o'clock, Colonel Sanders and Captain Sparra were called back to the assembly area headquarters to receive the orders for the battalion.

They returned in a short time and the Colonel immediately called for the battery commanders. It was at that meeting that he issued his first combat order of the war. The essence of the instructions were that the Colonel and Captain Sparra were to leave at once to report to the command post of the XX Corps Artillery which was located in Chartres. The battalion, under command



of the Battalion Executive, Major Williams, would march at 0600, 20 August, preceded by a route-marking party, to a rendezvous point near Courville, a town about fifteen miles west of Chartres. There the Colonel would meet the battalion with definite orders as to positions and missions. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion was out to catch up with the swiftly-moving war.

Colonel Sanders, Captain Sparra, Sergeant Alloway and Corporal Hunter left in the Colonel's command car as soon as the orders had been given. Their experience that evening was interesting and gave them their first encounter with the "fog of war". The orders required the Colonel to report to the XX Corps Artillery CP *in* the city of Chartres. However, nightfall caught them just short of Courville, still fifteen miles from Chartres, and the Colonel decided to stop off at the first CP they came to and stay there for the night, rather than go dashing about in the combat zone after dark. They did encounter a CP (command post) guard on the road and turned in to find out what unit was going to play host to them that night. Imagine their surprise to learn that they had accidentally stumbled onto the XX Corps Artillery CP and that, if they had gone on to Chartres, they would have found themselves right in the middle of the hot fight then going on for that city.

The next morning, after getting their orders, the Colonel and Captain Sparra left XX Corps Artillery CP and went in search of the CP of the 193rd Field Artillery Group to which the battalion was now attached. This CP they located near a small village called Gasville, just northeast of Chartres. There, the Colonel received orders to the effect that he was to meet the battalion and lead it to an assembly area near Gasville. However, the Group Commander stressed the fact that the group was then under orders to displace to the east and, *if the Group Commander did not meet the Colonel at the crossroad in Gasville when the battalion arrived, the 284th was to march through a succession of towns which the Group Commander designated until it caught up with the group.* The Colonel then left to go to meet the battalion at Courville as had been previously arranged.

Meanwhile, the battalion had departed the assembly area at Landivy as scheduled and had marched steadily across France. Meals had been eaten "on the fly", K-rations washed down with cider, which the French farm people had tossed into the trucks as the column went down the road. At about 1700, the column closed on the route-marking party which the Colonel had met and stopped. A new marker party was quickly assembled and the column started on for the Gasville assembly area. Upon arriving at the Gasville crossroad, *no representative of the group was there to meet the battalion* so the Battalion Commander ordered a thirty minute halt to eat another K-ration and to distribute new maps inasmuch as the battalion had marched completely off the maps which had been issued in Normandy.

The battalion reconnaissance party, including battery parties, left immediately ahead of the battalion column and traveling at thirty miles an hour while the battalion marched at twenty, gained a considerable distance on the main column. As the 284th moved eastward along the designated route, interesting sights of battle greeted the newcomers. Off to the right of the road, the men of

the 284th watched some American tanks engage in a spirited fight with a small German unit in some woods. Then the tank fight was behind the battalion and the numbers of American soldiers became fewer and fewer. The welcome from the French became more and more hysterical as the numbers of American soldiers decreased. The 284th did not realize it but it was off on a "liberation spree". As one town after another gave the battalion a tearful welcome, the Colonel became more and more concerned about the situation. Something had to be wrong. The definite orders had been to march along the specified route until met by the group; to turn back, was to risk having the unit branded as afraid of its shadow on its first day on the battlefield; to go forward, was to run the risk of a disaster. Finally, the Colonel decided that one more town was all that the battalion would pass through without gaining more definite information.

In that next town, Captain MacPartland located a Frenchwoman who could speak English and she was interrogated to find out where the Germans were. She was delighted to give us information about the enemy whom she hoped we would drive out of France that very night. As a matter of fact, she could almost point out the enemy to the Colonel. He learned from her that the German forces had withdrawn from that town to the next town, Etampes, fifteen kilometers away (nine short American miles). There, the enemy had a force estimated to be two Panzer Grenadier Regiments. More disturbing, however, was the fact that a heavy patrol, reinforced by tanks and self-propelled 88's would be along at any minute.

Things moved fast after that. The Colonel ordered Battery "A" to put two guns into action immediately to cover a turn-around by the battalion. The column looped out into a field and started its way westward with no qualms about turning its back on the enemy. That was no place for a brand new artillery outfit which was merely trying to find the war. Just after completing the turn-around maneuver, a messenger from group arrived and told the Colonel that the 284th was to return to the American lines and stay behind the infantry thereafter. The Colonel's "horse-drawn artillery vocabulary" came into full play as he told the group staff officer what he thought of the group staff. The battalion moved out at a brisk pace, heading for those outpost lines which were twenty-five miles away. The poor French people could not understand what had happened; they had been liberated and now they were being "de-liberated" and all by the same soldiers.

Just as darkness fell, it began to rain; it rained as only French skies can rain. Visibility was reduced to slightly more than the radiator of the vehicles and the rate of march was cut to a snail's pace. The Colonel led the column, hoping that he could get the vehicles in through the outpost line without having a trigger-happy infantryman decide to shoot first and challenge later. In the storm, the Colonel lost radio contact with the battalion but continued on until he reached the Gasville area. Then, to his utter chagrin and complete disgust, he found that all that he had behind him was the battalion reconnaissance and battery reconnaissance parties. With the coming of the storm, and the increase in tension on the drivers, the fatigue of the long march made itself felt. Major Williams, realizing that soon there might be a number of vehicles go into the

ditch, decided to pull the column off the road and spend the night. A field was selected east of Santeuil and the battalion went into “hedgehog” defensive positions. Next morning, at daybreak, the battalion started westward to rejoin the American forces. At Santeuil, the major put the battalion into defensive firing positions and the battalion sat down to wait for the war to catch up with them.

Shortly after daylight on the 21st of August, the advance guard of the 11th Infantry began its advance to the east from the area of Chartres. After a march of several miles, during which the advance guard carefully sought out the enemy and was alert to any possible ambush, the surprised infantrymen discovered the 284th casually awaiting their arrival. It has been reliably reported that there were many expressions of profane disgust by the doughboys who were later to become the favorites of the men of the battalion. Certain wits of the 284th promptly coined a new descriptive name for the unit, and some mail went out from the batteries with return addresses indicating that the writers were members of the “284th Artillery-Reconnaissance Battalion.”

So ended the first two days of action by the battalion.

The subject of names for the battalion now turns to the official name which the 284th was to bear throughout the war and one which became the watchword of every man who was ever carried on the rolls of the battalion. Upon arrival in Normandy, the new Third Army Signal Operating Instructions was distributed. From it, it was learned that the telephone code name for the 284th was “Helpmate.” The basic intent of telephone code names was to provide a semi-secret phonetic means of quickly identifying unit in telephone conversation. They had no relation to the mission of the unit; for example, XX Corps Artillery Headquarters was “Coffee”, the 5th Infantry Division was “Dynamite”, the 19th Field Artillery Battalion was “Dreamer”, and the 204th Field Artillery Group Headquarters was “Highpockets.” However, through the accident of Fate, the 284th was assigned a code name which typified the normal mission of a corps light artillery battalion and it came to signify the attitude and reputation of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion. From the firing of the first round, it became a matter of pride that the cry “Helpmate Ready” must lead all others as artillery battalions reported ready to fire a TOT (time on target) mission. From the first days of combat, the expression “Helpmate Ready” was to signify the willingness of the officers and men of the 284th to assume any burden and to undertake any task, however dangerous, in order to hasten the end of the war.

## **Montereau, Chateau Thierry, Verdun and Gorze**

After recovering from its unorthodox introduction to the battlefield, the battalion joined the column of the 193rd Field Artillery Group. On the evening of the 21st, firing positions were occupied just west of Sanville. No rounds were fired from these positions but a wild night wondering what was causing all of the indiscriminate carbine fire in the area of the 282nd Field Artillery Battalion, which was in position alongside the 284th. It was learned in the morning that the men of the 282nd had spent the night in combat with shadows. From that

experience, the men of the 284th took another valuable lesson—that indiscriminate firing by trigger-happy artillerymen would win no battles.

Late the next day, the battalion moved to Maisse, closing in an assembly area at 0045 hours, 23 August. On the move to Maisse, the column marched through the city of Etampes. At the outskirts of the city, all personnel saw the debris of battle, the wrecked vehicles, blood-soaked bandages, and for the first time, the German midget remote-controlled tank which carried only explosives and was directed toward the American positions where it was exploded by remote control. Here was seen indications of what the battalion would have run into two nights earlier if Lady Luck had not called off the excursion of the battalion beyond the American outpost line. From Maisse, the battalion moved to firing positions in the vicinity of Macherin, closing in the new area at approximately 2050 hours on the 23rd. So far, the battalion had tried mightily to get into the fight, but had not fired a round and had not as yet been fired upon. Those conditions were soon to change, however.

During the late afternoon of 24 August, the Battalion Commander, with the Battery Commanders, left the Macherin area to report to the 5th Infantry Division Artillery command post for orders. Instructions were obtained to the effect that the battalion was to reinforce the fires of the 46th Field Artillery Battalion which was the combat-team partner of the 10th Infantry regiment. The 10th Infantry was to attack across the Seine River at Montereau in order to open the way for the eastward drive of the Third Army in this particular sector. By the time that the reconnaissance party had arrived at the command post of the 46th Field Artillery Battalion, dusk had already fallen. Survey parties of the 46th, however, had already extended survey control into the general area which the battalion was to occupy. By the time that the Colonel had received enough information to start the reconnaissance for battery positions, night had arrived. The battery commanders had their first experience in organizing a combat position in complete darkness. It was a new, and entirely different, experience to huddle under a raincoat with a hooded flashlight to study maps and determine where each installation of batteries would go. This time it was a far greater enemy facing the officers and men of the battalion than the umpires who had checked on light discipline in the maneuver area. By midnight, all of the preliminary work in the position area had been completed and the reconnaissance parties awaited the arrival of the firing batteries.

At 0300 on the 25th, the batteries began their march from the Macherin area. The movement of the column was smoothly handled and finally, the waiting guides was trucks rolling ghostlike out of the moonlit fog. Fortunately, a full moon shown upon the fog and made it fairly easy to march along the narrow, winding French roads. By early morning, an hour or so before daylight, the 284th was in position for its first action of the war. From the vicinity of the village of Villecerf, the battalion was to fire only some 60 rounds at the enemy but it was the start. The first firing was the signal for most of the men in the battalion to hit their slit trenches; it was to be some little time before everyone was to be able to tell whether a round was “incoming mail” or was on the way out. However, despite the initial nervousness, the men of the battalion

established in the modest engagement the meaning of the report "Helpmate Ready."

It was here that the battalion took its first losses. Lieutenant Leon L. Lambach, the forward observer of Battery "A" was severely wounded and his assistant, Sergeant Vincent Manno, was slightly wounded. Lieutenant Lambach was evacuated to England and never did rejoin the battalion. Sergeant Manno was evacuated to the rear but returned later and eventually earned the Bronze Star for meritorious service and added an Oak Leaf cluster to his Purple Heart.

On the 25th of August, the battalion was relieved from attachment to the 193rd FA Group and was attached to the 5th Infantry Division. This was to be the beginning of a close association with the Red Diamond Division and one which was to end with the officers and men of the battalion feeling that they were an integral part of the division. Under the guidance of the 5th Division Artillery, the battalion was soon to receive its real baptism of fire and before its attachment was terminated, it was to be rated on of the best battalions in the XX Corps Artillery. However, such developments were still far in the future, and the battalion turned its hand to the mission of reinforcing the fires of the organic battalions of the 5th Infantry Division wherever needed.

Immediately upon begin attached to the division, orders were received to march to the vicinity of Fontainbleu to join the 19th Field Artillery Battalion in support of the 11th Infantry regiment. The battalion crossed the Seine River at the northern outskirts of Fontainbleu and took up firing positions just east of the river. Here 70 rounds were fired in support of a flank attack upon the city of Paris. From the position area, many were the glances sent northward, as the men of the battalion tried in vain to see some portion of the skyline of the famous city which they were by-passing.

On the 27th, the battalion moved out with the 11th RCT and assisted the 19th in carrying the men of the 11th Infantry regiment forward. Twice during the day the battalion occupied firing positions as the two artillery battalions leap-frogged each other in maintaining continuous potential artillery support for the 11th. However, no firing was required and the howitzers of the 284th remained silent. Late in the afternoon, the battalion was temporarily detached from the 5th Division and attached to the 90th Division. Again Lady Luck led the battalion by the hand. When the order was received, Colonel Sanders had already made a map reconnaissance for the next firing position. Colonel Payne, the CO of the 19th, decided that his battalion would occupy the position planned for the 284th. It was later reported that, shortly after the 19th had completed its occupation of position, a force of approximately 300 Germans opened fire upon the battalion with machine guns and small arms from a small woods midway between to battery positions. Several casualties were inflicted before the howitzers of the battalion forced the enemy to come out of the woods with their hands in the air. But for the intervention of the "Luck of Helpmate", the casualties would have been in the ranks of the 284th. However, by the time that this happened, the howitzers of Helpmate were rolling northward past Provins, toward Nangis, to join the 90th Infantry Division.

Early on the morning of 28 August, the battalion moved out in support of a battalion of infantry protecting the left flank of the 90th Division which was advancing in a northeasterly direction. By this time, in the dash across France, the Third Army had so far outstripped all of the other American units that the protection of both flanks was a problem which the Third Army had to solve itself. Accordingly, on the move of the 90th Division, the 3rd Battalion of the 357th Infantry was placed on the left flank of the division with a mission of protecting that flank. In order to give this flank guard adequate strength for its mission of protecting the column, the Division Commander placed a battalion of light artillery in direct support of this infantry battalion—hence, the 284th in the support role for a battalion of infantry.

The flank guard made rapid progress from Nangis, and by nightfall had reached a position approximately ten miles southwest of Chateau Thierry. Here the infantry battalion commander decided to halt his tired column for the night and the 284th went into position to be ready to fire supporting fires during the night if necessary. Before that could be completed, however, orders were received to move out at once to proceed to Chateau Thierry where the 7th Armored Division had secured a bridge intact over the river, but did not have the necessary forces to be left behind to protect it. The infantry battalion commander was exceedingly loath to rout out his tired doughboys for the additional move. Colonel Sanders felt just as sympathetic for the foot-soldiers and suggested that the 284th carry the infantry battalion “piggy-back” to its objective, providing that the infantry could provide the necessary security for the column. The suggestion was accepted with alacrity and the batteries moved forward to pick up their passengers. Probably at no time in the war did a column move with such a load on trucks; the additional passengers road anywhere they could get a handhold, on hoods, on bumpers, on the pieces and on the sides of vehicles. There was no interference from the enemy and, just at dark on 28 August, the column closed in Chateau Thierry without further incident.

Twenty-six years earlier, on this same ground, American troops had fought one of the decisive battles of World War I. In digging in for the night, many men uncovered debris from that earlier battle, pieces of rifles, shell fragments and helmets. Late that night, the Luftwaffe came back in an attempt to destroy the bridge which their ground elements had lost. Amid a hail of machine-gun fire, they swept in low to drop their bombs on the bridge. Luckily, their aim was poor and no damage was done to the bridge nor to the troops defending it. Nevertheless, the 284th had gone through its first aircraft attack.

The next day, the battalion moved forward by occupying successive firing positions in order to be ready to give instant artillery support in the event that the advancing infantry ran into opposition. However, it was not until late that afternoon, after the force had by-passed Fismes, and had arrived at the Aisne Canal at Pontavert, that there was any firing. Again the Germans had retreated and left a usable bridge in the path of the Third Army. Firing that evening consisted merely of registrations as the battalion prepared to protect the small bridgehead in the event that the enemy returned to attempt to destroy the bridge.

On 30 August, the battalion was attached again to the 5th Infantry Division and ordered to rejoin the division at Reims. Early in the afternoon, the column departed from the Pontavert area and marched through Reims to an assembly area in the vicinity of Taissy. The passage through Reims was a sight which the men of Helpmate will long remember. Fighting was still going on in the city as the Macquis routed German snipers from the houses along the route taken by the American columns. In the center of the town, the French requested that the Colonel halt the truck column long enough for them to place several large Nazi flags in the street for the trucks to run over. Some of the men reported that they saw a number of French women receiving the usual haircut given to those women who had been too free with their favors to the German troops while they occupied the city. By dark, the column had closed in the assembly area near Taissy, in an area adjacent to that of the 204th FA Group Headquarters, the last command under which the battalion had served before moving overseas.

At 0700, 31 August, the battalion left the Taissy area and moved to another assembly area near Beine, where it picked up 384 infantrymen of the 11th Infantry regiment. With these men aboard, the battalion moved out to the east. After passing through the French towns of Clermont and Ste. Menehould and the historic Argonne Forest, the column proceeded without incident to firing positions in the vicinity of Glorieux, a few miles west of Verdun. Here, the infantrymen were unloaded and proceeded to Verdun to assist in securing the bridgehead which the 7th Armored Division had secured earlier that evening. It is interesting to note here that the American forces barely missed capturing a group of seventeen senior German general officers, who had fled from the Hotel Bellevue in Verdun, only twenty minutes before the first American tank rolled across the bridge into Verdun. The 284th did no firing from the positions near Glorieux that night, but remained in a state of readiness to support the infantry who were mopping up in the city. However, by its presence, the battalion did materially assist in the capture of the city of Verdun and, accordingly, is listed among the units cited in the Golden Book of Verdun.

At noon, 1 September, the battalion moved through the city and occupied positions northeast of Verdun in a valley about one thousand yards southwest of the famous monument of Douamont. At 2300 hours that night the battalion came under its first real air attack, with a strong force of Luftwaffe seeking to hit the battalion, not a nearby bridge as in the Chateau Thierry attack. The initial onset of the attack was the dropping of flares to illuminate the positions. The majority of the men, with the exception of the guard, had bedded down for the night when the first bombs fell. Because of the fact that they had arrived in the area late at night, many men had not dug the customary slit trenches. With the whistle of the first bomb, entrenching tools immediately went into "short supply" and, before the attack was over, all men were securely underground. As Lieutenant Corridan, of Battery "C" reported, "If the men in my battery had dug two inches deeper, they could have been charged with desertion." Luckily, the casualty rate was not great—one man from "C" Battery, Frank Junko, and a man from the attached AAA platoon, were hospitalized and three others received minor wounds.

This enemy attack was the occasion of the worst scare that the Colonel had during the early days. He had remained in Verdun at the 11th RCT command post and, when the attack began, he immediately tried to contact the battalion by radio. After several unsuccessful attempts, Robert Pionke finally raised the battalion station. The message from the battalion came in the current code and after decoding read, "Battalion position under air attack. Sixty-five killed. Unknown number wounded." Then there was silence and Pionke could not raise the battalion position area station. The Colonel left Verdun with his command car traveling at breakneck speed, expecting to find a scene of carnage when he arrived at the position area. Much to his surprise, he found the command post personnel calmly bedding down again after the storm. Nobody could be found who had heard the message and the position area radio operators swore that they had not been on the air. The Colonel will never believe that some member of Helpmate was not pulling his leg that night. Whoever it was, they did succeed in sending him flying out of Verdun that night with visions of his battalion being practically wiped out. Fortunately, the sense of humor which pervaded all of Helpmate activities came to his rescue and he was able to laugh it off, albeit very relieved.

On 2 September, the battalion moved eastward and occupied positions in the vicinity of Fort du Rozelliers. Enemy planes appeared over the area again that night, dropped flares, and machine-gunned a portion of the area. No casualties were inflicted.

On 3 September, the battalion moved to firing positions in the vicinity of Ronvaux but no rounds were fired. The advance of the infantry to the east was rapid and the enemy was falling back without offering resistance. At 1800 hours, 5 September, the battalion again displaced forward, this time to positions in the vicinity of Ste. Hillaire and occupied firing positions. Only twenty rounds were expended from this position as the battalion conducted a registration to correct data obtained from the map. It was while the battalion was in position near Ste. Hillaire that the gasoline supply of the American Army was diverted to the British Army and Helpmate sat still from the 5th to the 7th of September with empty gasoline tanks. This vexing condition was not peculiar to the 284th alone.

Early on the morning of the 7th of September, the battalion moved out with the 11th RCT. The objective was the Moselle River and the mission was to secure a bridgehead across that river. About noon, the battalion was committed to action in a position about 1000 yards southeast of Buxierres in support of an attack by the 10th Infantry in the direction of Waville and Vaude-laineville. It was during this early fighting along the Moselle that the battalion lost temporarily the services of one of its liaison planes. Lieutenant Scoville and his observer, Lieutenant Ossefort, were both wounded by enemy ground fire while on a mission along the front lines. Lieutenant Scoville made a forced landing just in front of the lines of the 11th Infantry, and through the cooperation of the infantry, both officers were brought out and the plane towed to a defiladed position. Later, Lieutenant Bergeron went forward and flew the damaged plane from its exposed position back to the battalion air strip where it



was repaired. Both Lieutenants Scoville and Ossefort returned to the battalion and resumed their air operations.

At 1015, 8 September, the battalion displaced to positions in the vicinity of Gorze, to occupy the positions at Sainte Catherine's Farm which were to become so familiar to all of the battalion. It was on this move that the drivers of Helpmate made a lasting impression upon the drivers of the prime movers of two artillery battalions of the 5th Division Artillery. At 1000 hours, Brig. Gen. Vandever, the division artillery commander, ordered three light battalions forward into positions to support the crossing of the Moselle River at Dornot by the 11th Infantry. Through the perfect teamwork of all elements of the battalion, the firing batteries were on the road promptly. The Colonel had given a rendezvous point by radio to the Battery Commanders and to the Battalion Executive. Each element, the battery commanders and the firing battery columns, moved out quickly. The battery commanders met the Colonel in the battalion area, where he pointed out the areas to be occupied by each battery. Each battery commander had barely sufficient time to make his detailed selection of howitzer positions before the firing battery columns arrived at the rendezvous point where they were met by guides who conducted the trucks to the battery areas. The result was that every element of the battalion began moving at the same time and everything was ready for the slower moving elements when they arrived at the designated spot. However, Helpmate had to pass the exit roads where the organic battalion firing batteries were attempting to get on the road. The 284th was the first of the three battalions to get into positions and it is reported that one of the organic battalion commanders, in explaining why Helpmate beat his battalion forward, commented, "We would have been in position in time except that those damned drivers of the 284th wouldn't give us the right of way." The rejoinder was typical of the 284th, "Who ever heard of Helpmate giving way to another column when there was a fight brewing?"

Late in the afternoon of the 8th of September, the battalion received its first counter-battery fire and was forced to make its first morning report entry of "killed in action." Thirty rounds of German 88mm fire came into the positions of the three firing batteries but the only casualties suffered were in Battery "B". Pfc Milton J. Dempsey became the first man in the battalion to give his life and S/Sgt. Herbert Larson, T/5 Dominick C. Arsego and T/5 Richard A. Katz were wounded. All of the wounded were evacuated and, of them, Katz was the only one who returned to the battalion.



# Chapter 9

## Metz to Saarlautern

### The Moselle River Bridgeheads

The displacement of the battalion to the positions at Sainte Catherine's Farm on 8 September had been ordered by the division artillery commander in order to place the three light artillery battalions in the most favorable locations to support a crossing of the Moselle River by the 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry which had begun at 0600 hours that morning. From approximately 1100 hours that day until 2100 hours of the next day, Helpmate was to assist the 19th FA Battalion in its support of the infantrymen at Dornot.

The crossing at Dornot had been ordered by XX Corps in order to gain a foothold on the east bank of the Moselle River below Metz to enable the Third Army to continue its drive toward the Saar River. Lack of adequate maps handicapped the planning for the operation and little was known about the massive forts which the infantry was to come up against once they had crossed the river. The crossing was made under extreme difficulties inasmuch as the enemy held the commanding ground on the far side of the river and the crossing had to be made in daylight. The 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry took terrific losses in the operation and was ultimately ordered to return to the west bank of the river after another crossing was made further south and Arnaville on the 10th of September. The artillery support, furnished by the battalions assigned to that mission, was a considerable factor in the preservation of the lives of those men who were eventually returned to the west bank. A clear indication of the regard in which the infantrymen held the artillery was provided when the remnants of the 2nd Battalion straggled past the Helpmate positions on their way to the rear. Several of the men left the road and walked over to give the howitzers of Helpmate an affectionate pat which expressed more than words could ever convey. During the period of the action, Helpmate had fired over twelve hundred rounds of high explosive shell in support of the infantry.

The position at Sainte Catherine's Farm was to become home to Helpmate for a considerable period of time. The battalion command post, with that of the 19th, occupied part of the farm buildings. The firing batteries were located

in three fields directly north of the farm buildings and initially were excellent positions. Later, deluges of rain were to turn the area into separate quagmires, connected by axle-deep ruts, made by the ammunition trucks bringing the very essential shells for the howitzers. The Service Battery was located several miles to the west in the vicinity of Chambley but the ammunition and ration trucks, as well as other supply and maintenance vehicles, made almost daily trips to the forward battalion area.

Before the conclusion of the Dornot operation, another name was to be added to the list of men wounded in action. T/5 Norbert T. Obecny, Headquarters Battery, was wounded while laying wire to a forward observation post. His wound was treated in the battalion aid station and he was not evacuated from the battalion area.

At 2100 hours, 9 September, the battalion was relieved from attachment to the 19th and was attached to the 46th, another of the organic artillery battalions of the 5th Division. The 46th had a mission of supporting the 10th Infantry Regiment in its crossing of the Moselle River at Arnaville to the south of the Dornot area. From the 9th through the 18th of September, Helpmate fired over forty-seven hundred rounds from the Ste. Catherine's Farm positions. During this time, the 10th drove across the river at Arnaville and established a bridgehead, which was maintained and expanded, and later became the springboard from which the 5th Division was to launch the attack which resulted in the capture of the city of Metz. Initially, however, the fighting was severe throughout the area of Voisage Farm, Arry, Cote d'Faye and hill 396.

A fire at one of the piece positions of "C" Battery, on the 10th of September, added four more names to the growing list of men who were paying dearly for the ground which the 5th Division was taking. Before the fire had been extinguished, one hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition had exploded and the howitzer had been damaged. In an attempt to bring the fire under control before the smoke column would bring down German counter-battery fire, Major Ray E. Williams, the battalion executive, and a detail of men from "C" Battery, dashed in with buckets of water to put it out. Two rounds of ammunition had not yet exploded and had been overlooked. Just as the detail arrived at the piece, both rounds went off. That the four men were not killed can be attributed only to providence. Major Williams, Sgt. Clifford G. Cosler, Cpl. Joseph N. Mascha, and Pvt. William M. Hoskins were wounded, with Cpl. Mascha being the only one who was not evacuated.

At about 1700 hours on the 11th, "B" Battery added another name to its growing list of wounded. Cpl. John Forosisky was accidentally wounded in the foot by a round from a carbine and was evacuated to the rear.

On the 12th, at about 0400 hours, the German artillery treated the battalion to another dose of counter-battery fire which lasted approximately an hour. All positions received some fire but no casualties were suffered.

On the 17th, just before dark, the battalion was ordered to send an advance party across into the Arnaville bridgehead to prepare positions to be occupied by the battalion the next day. Captains Sparra and McPartland, accompanied by a small detail, reported to the battalion commander of the 46th and, under

his command, departed for the new position area. That night the skies of Lorraine opened and the rain came down in torrents. The party spent a wet night in slit trenches, while German artillery combed the entire bridgehead area. Shortly before noon, the officers and one guide per battery returned to lead the battalion into the new positions. At 1230 hours, Helpmate departed from the farm, crossed the Moselle River on a pontoon bridge, and went into position just east of the Metz highway and south of Voisage Farm, at the junction of the road, which wound down the hill from Arry. The new area was extremely restricted and, under ordinary circumstances, would have been rejected as a position for a single battery. However, the space situation was so critical in the bridgehead that the entire battalion was crowded into the small area. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion, by moving into the bridgehead when it did, became one of the first artillery battalions to occupy positions east of the Moselle River. The battalion command post was established in a small cluster of buildings about five hundred yards south of the firing batteries called LaLobe.

At 1700 hours on the 18th, Cpl. Joseph Molnar, Battery "B", was wounded while acting as radio operator on a forward observer team and was evacuated to the rear. Shortly thereafter, the battalion suffered its second man killed in action. At 1915 hours, the battalion area was shelled by German light artillery. Several rounds of that fire impacted in the area of Battery "A" and Cpl. James Wagner was killed. At the same time, Lieutenant Charles A. Davis and Pfc. Robert D. Wise, both of "A" Battery, were wounded but did not require evacuation.

On the 27th, the battalion again suffered casualties, although fortunately the wounds were not severe. Lieutenant Lewis E. Johnson and Pvt. John P. Flanagan, both of Headquarters Battery, were wounded, but did not require evacuation.

During the period from the 18th and the 30th of September, Helpmate fired almost four thousand rounds in support of operations to expand the bridgehead. The 5th Division lines extended from the Moselle River at Dornot, due east almost to the little village of Pournoy-le-Chetive, then straight south, passing about five hundred yards west of the town of Sillegny. In the initial drive, the 10th Infantry had tried valiantly to secure the two towns of Pournoy and Sillegny but reinforced German troops, supported by murderous artillery fire from the Metz forts, had driven them back. It was during the vicious fighting to extend the bridgehead that Helpmate again proved the meaning of its code name in another manner. The stated purpose of battalions of corps artillery was to reinforce the fires of the organic divisional artillery and accordingly, only one forward observer team was authorized in the T/O&E (tables, organization & equipment). However, because of the intensity of the fighting, the organic battalions were unable to provide all of the forward observation needed for proper support of the infantry. Helpmate was directed to furnish three teams and Helpmate did furnish three teams, although it meant improvising two team from among the officers and men who were needed for other tasks. The work of the officers and men who went forward with the infantry, and who adjusted fire on targets which were frequently only a few yards in front of their own positions,

was outstanding. The units of the 5th Division were loud in the praise of the work done by the men from Helpmate. Those men who went forward will long remember the towns of Marieulles, Pournoy and Sillegny.

At 1930 hours, on the 30th of September, the battalion displaced back to the positions in the vicinity of Sainte Catherine's Farm. The operations for the establishment of the bridgehead had been concluded and a strong perimeter had been set up. The 5th Division was about to turn its attention to Fort Driant and the 284th was needed back in the old area to assist with artillery fire. However, Helpmate was not to leave the bridgehead without paying another price for the damage which it had inflicted upon the enemy. Just prior to departure from the position area, several rounds of 150mm artillery fire from Fort Driant fell in the "B" Battery area. Sgt. William J. Street was wounded by a shell fragment and was evacuated to the rear. He never did rejoin the battalion again.

Helpmate ended the month of September back in its old positions at the Farm. It was now a fully qualified artillery unit and had done a competent job of supporting the infantry; it had fired over six thousand two hundred rounds. It had not gone unscathed, however; at this point in its history, two men had been killed and twenty-two wounded, several very seriously. Helpmate had come of age as a fighting team.

## Fort Driant

Helpmate had come of age as an artillery battalion at an opportune time, for the next two months were destined to be a very busy period. The first of October found the battalion command post back in the same underground vault at Sainte Catherine's Farm that it had occupied in September. The firing batteries were generally in the same firing positions they had occupied previously. Once again, the battalion was reinforcing the fires of the 19th Field Artillery Battalion, supporting the 11th Infantry Regiment. Now, however, the infantry and artillery units were part of a special task force, Task Force Warnock, created for the assault and capture of one of the strongest of the Metz forts.

Fort Driant, one of the most impregnable of the defenses surrounded the city, had been built originally in 1902 and had been improved and strengthened by both the French and the Germans. Located approximately five miles southwest of Metz, on high ground, it effectively dominated the Moselle valley south of the city and most of the casualties suffered by the battalion up to this time had been due to its cannon. Furthermore, by its strategic location it could interdict the roads from the west and southwest bearing traffic toward Metz. General George S. Patton, the Third Army commander, had decreed that Fort Driant must be taken before an all-out offensive against the city was launched.

The central fort was a massive structure of reinforced concrete, capable of deflecting the heaviest artillery shells and aerial bombs the United States forces could deliver against it. A band of barbed wire, sixty feet wide, surrounded the entire fort outside a dry moat, which, in places, was thirty feet deep. All avenues of approach were covered by mutually supporting machine gun embrasures, so sited that an assaulting force could not reach one without coming under fire

from another. The artillery weapons of the fort were located in domed cupolas which could be raised for firing and retracted when not in use. It was the most impregnable defensive position yet encountered by the men of the Red Diamond.

Once again, Helpmate was called upon to furnish forward observers to go out with the infantry. Throughout the entire operation, the battalion maintained two, and generally three, teams in actions all the time. The strain of providing so many observer teams was intense and many officers and men, who had never before performed such duties, were called upon to relieve the teams which had served so gallantly in the bridgehead operation just completed. That they did so well, was a credit to the excellence of training in the United States.

The task force launched its attack on 1 October and soon drove the German defenders back into the fort proper. Paying dearly for every foot of ground, the infantry gradually worked its way forward until a tenuous foothold was secured on one corner of the top of the fort. The action then resolved itself into a series of vicious battles between small groups and the forward observers were the only ones who could call down artillery fire where it was most needed.

The heroic service of the teams was not without its cost, however. On 3 October, Helpmate lost its third man killed in action. At about 2000 hours, T/4 George F. Marshall and Cpl. George B. Groff, both of Battery "C", were seriously wounded while on an observer mission. Groff's wounds proved to be fatal and he died on the battlefield; Marshall was evacuated to the rear and never did return to the battalion. The next day, PFC Matthew L. Kruchten, Battery "A", was also wounded while on another mission and was evacuated.

On 5 October, the battalion suffered its first missing-in-action losses. 2nd Lt. Jerrel W. Southern, on his first mission as a forward observer after joining the battalion, accompanied by Cpl. Henry E. Ceci and T/5 Robert F. White, all of Battery "B", moved out with an infantry platoon attacking across the top of the fort. Cut off by a strong German force, the entire American group was either killed or captured. Later, when the battalion had crossed the Rhine, it was learned that Ceci and White had been taken to a prisoner-of-war camp near Frankfurt and in April had been liberated. Lt. Southern was taken to a different POW camp and nothing was learned about his release.

During the period from 1 October to 5 October, Helpmate fired 6,458 rounds of artillery ammunition, with 2,189 of them going out on one day. The firing was fast and furious.

On the morning of 8 October, there occurred an event which was to result in the award of the first Silver Star to a member of the battalion. About midnight on 7-8 October, Cpl. Clarence F. Wilkinson, the Battery "B" agent, was called to the forward command post of Task Force Warnock. There, Colonel Sanders gave him a copy of the fire plan covering artillery support for an attack which was scheduled for daylight of the 8th and directed that he deliver it to the commander of the force on top of the fort. The Colonel impressed on Wilkinson the vital importance of getting that plan to the troops who were even then preparing for their forthcoming attack; it was essential that they know the schedule of artillery fires.

Wilkinson left the command post and made his way through the blackness of the night across the approaches to the fort. When he reached the outer moat, he was stopped by an American sentry who gave him instructions on how to reach the assault force command post. Following these instructions, he proceeded along the moat, passing a couple of places where other moats joined the one he was following. Finally, he spied a tiny gleam of light shining out from a door. The messenger walked up, pulled open the door and quickly jumped inside.

Much to his consternation, Wilkinson found that the room was peopled by German soldiers instead of the Americans he had expected to find. Outnumbered and lost, he might have surrendered and saved himself. The only thought that entered his mind, however, was that paper he was carrying, the artillery support plan for the attack which could not be called off at this late moment. To let that plan fall into the hands of the Germans would doom an unknown number of American soldiers to death. Out he dashed.

The Germans had been as much confused as Wilkinson for a moment and that gave him a seconds start. As he burst from the door and sprinted for the American lines, the Germans sprang to action, machine guns and rifles are quickly blazing away at the fleeing courier. Fortunately, a turn in the wall gave Wilkinson shelter at a critical moment and he continued his dash down the moat, toward the sentry who had given him his instructions. Just what Wilkinson said to that soldier is not recorded in the official annals of the United States Army. It is sufficient to know that the second set of instructions were adequate to permit him to deliver his paper to the proper destination.

It is interesting to note that the full story of what had transpired might never have come to light had Wilkinson not been so incensed over the manner in which he had been directed to that forward command post. Back at Task Force Warnock command post, his complaints about the stupidity of that sentry aroused the curiosity of the staff. Inquiry soon brought out the full story and it was not long before he was ordered back to Third Army command post to repeat his tale. The staff back there was very much interested in what he had to say about the interior of the fort. Inevitably the story came to the attention of General Patton himself and the Silver Star which was later awarded to Wilkinson was by the express direction of General Patton.

The attack for which Wilkinson nearly gave his life jumped off on time and, behind a murderous artillery preparation fired by over a dozen artillery battalions, the infantry plunged forward. The actual attack was shortlived, however, The artillery was unable to penetrate the reinforced concrete and the doughboys were pinned down by a terrific crossfire of machine guns. They had to withdraw. Their withdrawal terminated the last major effort to take Fort Driant. For several days, the assault force remained atop the fort, vainly seeking a weak point to permit entry into the bastion. Finally, on 13 October, the assault force was withdrawn from the top of the fort, Task Force Warnock was dissolved, and the attack against Fort Driant came to an end. General Patton directed that the fort be contained and by-passed, to later surrender when starvation and lack of ammunition made it impossible to hold out longer.

Thus ended an important episode in the history of Helpmate. The battalion



fired a total of 13,383 rounds during the period from the first to the thirteenth of October, its heaviest firing to date. The operation against Fort Driant had cost the battalion 1 killed, 3 wounded, and 3 missing-in-action. So far, Helpmate had sustained 3 killed, 24 wounded, and 3 missing-in-action since it had crossed the channel. One man had proved his heroism by gallantry in action, with the Silver Star to be awarded at a later date. One loss, not included in the narrative above, occurred just at the close of the Driant operation. Lt. Leo Murphy, Battery "B", who had served as an outstanding forward observer in critical actions from the time Helpmate entered combat, was lost to the battalion through extreme combat fatigue; he never did return to the unit. He is carried in the box-score of men wounded in action.

### **The Final Assault and Capture of Metz**

Following the Driant operation, the battalion remained in the Ste. Catherine's Farm position, supporting the realignment of elements of the 5th Infantry Division. On 14 October, PFC John E. Bemis, Headquarters Battery, was wounded by shell fragments and evacuated to the hospital; he later rejoined the battalion. Firing during the period was light and desultory, affording a well-earned opportunity to catch up on maintenance of equipment—and men.

On 22 October, the battalion was relieved of attachment to the 5th Infantry Division when the division was sent to the rear to assimilate replacements needed to bring it back up to combat strength. This was the first of a number of occasions when the battalion would see divisions come and go, sometimes to the rear for rest and sometimes to other missions, but Helpmate stayed on the line to deliver supporting fire to whatever unit had need for its help.

The 5th Division was relieved in the bridgehead by a portion of the 95th Infantry Division, the remainder of the 95th relieving the 90th Infantry Division immediately to the north of the 5th. This event brought to light an amusing reaction by the German intelligence. A dispatch from one of the higher German headquarters was intercepted and, from it, it was learned that the Germans had interpreted the appearance of the 95th Division on that front, to mean that the 5th and 90th Divisions had been so badly cut up by the German defenses, that Third Army had combined what was left of the two divisions into one unit, which was called the 95th. Needless to say, the enemy G-2 was considerably confounded when the Red Diamond appeared again later on in the fighting.

On 22 October, the battalion was attached to the 95th Division and moved back across the Moselle to the original positions at Purple Heart Crossroads, near Arry, with the CP back in LaLobe Duanne. Firing was light for the rest of the month as the 95th took its place in the bridgehead and organized its lines.

Reconnaissance for positions further to the east, beyond the Arry-Mariouilles ridge, was made on 30 October, in preparation for a shift of strength eastward, in order that an attack toward Metz could be delivered straight northward. Battalion and battery parties went forward to dig gun pits and complete the survey. The enemy reaction was immediate and costly. Artillery fire from

the forts in the vicinity of Verny drove the work parties to shelter in Mardigny, but not before Pvt Everest A. Maskell, Battery "C", had been killed.

During the shelling, Pvt. Frank P. Iori, Battery "C", observed an engineer soldier wounded and lying in an exposed spot. Although wounded himself, Iori dragged the wounded man to the protection of nearby buildings while shells were still raining down in the area. For this act of heroism, Iori was awarded the Silver Star at a ceremony after he returned to the battalion from the hospital.

The heavy shelling made it readily apparent that artillery positions in the vicinity of Mardigny were impractical until the forts surrounding Metz had been reduced. Helpmate continued to fire from its positions near LaLobe.

The 5th Infantry Division returned to the lines on 1 November and the battalion was once again attached to the Red Diamond. On this occasion, official word was slow in reaching the battalion and the 11th Infantry arrived as began relieving the soldiers of the 95th before orders were received. The first indication of the change was a telephone call from one of the firing batteries to the battalion command post to the effect that "Dusty is marching up the road toward Arry. Here we go again." Helpmate was, once more, back in the fold of its favorite infantry division.

The first the days of November were spent in preparing for the coming attack on Metz. Although official word as to the date of the attack was not divulged, it was apparent to all that the infantry was positioning itself for a final massive assault on the fortress city. Firing during the period consisted principally of defensive fires as the infantry adjusted its lines. It was during this time that Helpmate made its first acquaintance with the firing of propaganda leaflets. To the gun crews of the 284th, whose prime purpose in life was the destruction of the enemy and the shortening of the war, the shooting of "spit-balls" was a new and unwelcome experience—no vengeance for the loss of comrades could be extracted by showering the enemy with pieces of paper. But—leaflet shoots were ordered so Helpmate shot them.

On 7 November, the officers received their first briefing on the coming attack. The next day all officers and senior non-commissioned officers, of the battalion, were called back to an area near Pagny-sur-Moselle, for an assembly to hear a pre-attack talk by the Army Commander. For practically all the men, it was their first personal contact with General George S. Patton, the dramatic, dynamic leader of the Third Army. His words, couched in strong soldier-to-soldier terms, sent everyone back to the position area firmly resolved that Helpmate would do its utmost to destroy the enemy and go on to the Rhine.

The 8th of November also added another name to the steadily growing list of men who were paying the price on the battlefield. Pvt. Robert G. Hewelt, Battery "A", was wounded and evacuated, but returned to the battalion at a later date.

The attack on Metz began with an early morning preparation by the artillery. For almost thirty minutes prior to the jump-off time, every cannon in the corps pounded the German lines in carefully planned and detailed schedules of fires. From the line of contact forward, every known, or suspected, enemy installation received its share of steel and high explosive in a deadly holocaust of fire. The

effectiveness of this artillery fire was readily apparent later when the advance of the lines permitted an evaluation of the preparatory firing. Destroyed enemy artillery weapons, machine guns, and mortars were found in great profusion all across the front.

The infantry attack went forward steadily. The 11th Infantry of the 5th Division attacked straight north from the Arnaville bridgehead area, while the 2nd and 10th Infantry Regiments swung wide to the east, and then drove toward the city from the southeast. Casualties were high among the infantry units as the stubborn Germans fell back upon the fortified defenses of the city. Progress was slow and Helpmate did its part in assisting the infantry to advance.

Nature turned its favors upon the German defenders just after the attack was launched. A torrential downpour rained down upon the entire Moselle watershed and the river soon began to rise. By dawn of the second day of the attack, the river was at flood stage. The bridge at Arnaville was torn away and the only access to the area east of the river and north of Nancy was the bridge at Pont-a-Mousson which now carried all of the supply effort for the attacking troops. For a time, there was a serious question as to whether or not that bridge would stand. For several hours, the floor of the bridge was under water and traffic crawled at a snail's pace. Just east of the bridge, a platoon of anti-aircraft guns was completely submerged with only the muzzles of the guns showing above the water. In the battalion position area, the rising floodwaters were watched with anxious eyes as Helpmate wondered in Mother Nature would do what the Germans had been trying to do for weeks—drive the guns of Helpmate from their positions.

Despite concern over the flood and without regard for the weather, the battalion continued to deliver supporting fires for the infantry. On 11 November, the 25,000th round was fired by the second section of Battery "A". Sgt. Wilton Leigh, the chief of section, Cpl. Theron Smith, the gunner, and Pvts. Michael Natisin and Harry J. Dannerman had the honor of serving the piece for that historic round.

On 14 November, it appeared as though Helpmate was about to change and support another regiment of the 5th Division. Reconnaissance parties were sent to the area of the 10th Infantry and positions were selected which would permit the battalion to reinforce the fires of the 46th Field Artillery Battalion.

This prospect was not very appealing to the men of Helpmate; for over six weeks the 11th Infantry had been the primary concern of the battalion. But, the battalion was ready to go where ordered. The change did not reach fruition, however. At the last minute, it was decided that the 284th would remain with the 19th F.A. Battalion, in support of the 11th Infantry. Helpmate breathed a sigh of relief.

By the 15th, the attack had progressed far enough to make it possible for the howitzers to be moved forward. Positions in the vicinity of Pournoy-les-Chetive and Coin-les-Cuvry were selected and, by nightfall, the batteries were in the new positions, with the command post in Coin. Enroute to the new area, the column passed through the towns of Lorry, Sillegny, Coin-sur-Seille and Pournoy-les-Chetive, which had been targets for so long. The cannoneers

had an excellent opportunity to see the results of their handiwork and, for many, it was a revelation to see what they had done to the hostile area.

The attack had been making slow and costly progress since its beginning. The 11th Infantry fought its way almost inch by inch across Frescaty Airport; the 2nd and 10th Infantry fought their way up from the southeast and, but 20 November, had succeeded in cutting the main road running eastward from Metz toward the Saar River. Metz was doomed and its fall was only a matter of time.

On the 21st, advance elements of the 11th Infantry penetrated deep into the city and by nightfall, the mighty bastion, which had never before been taken by assault, was in American hands. The Americans had done what no other army in history had been able to accomplish—and Helpmate had helped.

The fall of the city of Metz left a big question as to what the 284th would do next. Advance information indicated that the 5th Division would remain in the Metz area to contain the two Metz forts which had not yet surrendered—Forts Driant and Jeanne d'Arc. Tired after the long fight to take the fortress city, the men of Helpmate would have relished a few days of rest and inactivity. That was not to be. The battalion was relieved of its long attachment to the Red Diamond and returned to the command of the 193rd Field Artillery Group. On the 23rd, the battalion made preparations for a move to the east but the day passed with no orders to start the guns out on the road.

Thanksgiving Day of 1944 fell on the 24th. The usual holiday dinner was prepared and thoroughly enjoyed by everyone but the day was not one of rest. Reconnaissance parties worked in a new area east of Metz, taking time only to return to the battery areas for the long awaited feast. In the battery areas, every man was busily engaged in doing maintenance work, which had long been deferred during the attack. The only acknowledgment that this day was the traditional American holiday, lay in the excellent meal and the moment which was devoted to prayers of thanksgiving, that the living were still alive and to pray for the souls of the men who had given their lives so far in the bloody struggle.

Hardly had the big meal been digested when Helpmate was on the move again. The 95th Division had moved out to the east, heading for the Saar River. The 284th moved with it, reinforcing the fires of the 358th Field Artillery Battalion. Nightfall of 24 November found the battalion in positions in the vicinity of Servigny-les-Raville, but no firing was required. On the 25th, the guns were in position in the vicinity of Halling-les-Boulay, where over 200 rounds were fired, in support of the 378th Infantry. Coume was the next area to be used for positions by the battalion moved to Dalem without firing. Light firing was done from the Dalem area before the unit moved about 1450 hours to advanced positions in the eastern outskirts of Berweiler.

Arriving at Berweiler in midafternoon, Helpmate went immediately to work. The 378th Infantry was heavily engaged with German units defending their national border and, for the first time, shells from Helpmate were bursting within the Third Reich. Because of the hilly terrain, the only artillery positions available were located just outside the village, between the village and the line

of contact. Helpmate went into position and soon found itself in a very sticky situation.

Just at dusk, the men of Helpmate were surprised to see the infantry pulling back past the artillery area, moving into Berweiller. On being questioned, the infantry battalion commander announced that he was moving his men back into the village for protection from the severe cold; he announced further that he had no concern for the security of the artillery units. However, the announcement by Colonel Sanders that he must, accordingly, move the guns of Helpmate out and go into position further to the rear brought loud and violent protests from the infantrymen—artillery support was vital to holding that town. It soon became evident that the 284th would have to take care of itself if it was going to stay in position to take care of the infantry. Moreover, leaving the infantry without artillery support was not in the Helpmate code of ethics—Helpmate would take care of itself.

The battalion was quickly organized for close-in defense. Patrols were stationed on the flanks of the batteries. All guns were laid for minimum-range fire with fuzes cut for muzzle bursts. Each howitzer was required to keep one round loaded at all time with one cannoneer on duty at the piece, ready to pull the lanyard if anything moved out in front of that howitzer. It was quite apparent that even a rabbit hopping across the front of the battalion might have started a real battle. Colonel Sanders reported that it was with high relish that he warned the infantry battalion commander to keep his men away from in front of Helpmate—that they'd be just as dead from an American shell as they would from a German shell.

That night was one of the longest that the battalion had endured. Those men who could sleep, slept with one ear attuned to the least sound. Although it was fully expected that German patrols would seek out the infantry to determine the cause of the unprecedented withdrawal, the night passed quietly. Dawn came on schedule and the infantry returned to its positions ahead of the artillery area. Helpmate had spent the night protecting the sleep of the doughboys. Later, the battalion commander was awarded the Bronze Star for that night's work, a symbol of the devotion to duty of every man who served on those positions that night.

It was while the battalion was in the Berweiller positions that recognition was given to Helpmate for its part in the liberation of France from the Nazi armies. On 2 December, the CO, 193rd F.A. Group, ordered Colonel Sanders and S/Sgt. Roy A. Roeser, Battery "C", to report to a French chateau near the group command post. There, the French liaison officer with the Third U.S Army presented to them, along with representatives from other artillery battalions, the French Croix de Guerre. This constituted the second recognition of the work of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion; a short time earlier notification had been received that the name of the battalion was now inscribed in the Golden Book of The City of Verdun as a tribute to the action of Helpmate in liberating Verdun. The officers and men of the battalion were informed that the Golden Book lists only those units which had, in all previous wars, participated in major action in and around Verdun; thus, Helpmate joined the heros of the AEF who

had fought at Verdun in World War I.

The battalion remained in position at Berweiller until 4 December, when it moved forward behind the infantry and occupied positions in Picard overlooking the Saar River, in the vicinity of Saarlautern.

The 95th Division had been able to secure a tenuous foothold across the river, in the city of Saarlautern, and another one, south of the city, in the suburb of Entdorf. The fighting here was characterized by a viciousness and stubbornness not previously met by the American troops on the part of the front; the Germans were now defending their homeland and they were determined to make every foot of ground as costly as possible for the invaders. Almost every building in Saarlautern was mined and booby-trapped; American casualties were high. Forward observers from Helpmate were continually on the line with the infantry and frequently call for fire on houses fifty or sixty yards in advance of their own positions.

The stubborn defense in the city of Saarlautern forced the 95th Division to attempt a flanking movement through the suburb of Entdorf. A small bridgehead was established almost under the machine gun embrasures of the Siegfried Line bunkers on the east bank of the Saar. Troops crossing the river had to use a single footbridge which was under direct fire all the time. Infantry casualties were high and deeds of valor were frequent. Lt. Mario G. Stollo, a Helpmate forward observer, was later awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action in plunging, fully loaded with combat gear, into the turbulent Saar River, to rescue an infantry sergeant, who had been knocked from the narrow footbridge.

During the period that the battalion occupied the Picard positions, over 12,700 rounds of artillery fire were delivered by the guns of Helpmate in support of the operation. It was from these positions that the fourth section of Battery "B" fired the 50,000th round from the 284th since it had entered combat. The honor of firing that round went to Cpl. Brazell, Pfc. Brock, Pfc. Walker, and Pvt. Eastwood.

On 16 December the battalion was relieved of attachment to the 193rd Field Artillery Group and once again, for the first time in actual combat, came under the command of the 204th Field Artillery Group. Thus, many thousand miles to the eastward, the old command relationships, which had existed on the cavalry plains at Fort Riley, were resumed. For old times sake, Colonel C. C. Pyle, the Group Commander, threatened to come down and make the command inspection, which he had been forced to defer when the battalion had moved out from Fort Riley. His jocular threat was not to be carried out, however; that attachment lasted less than twenty-four hours.

On 17 October<sup>1</sup> the 5th Infantry Division, long Helpmate's companion, returned to the line at Saarlautern, relieving the 95th Division in that area, where the 284th had been firing so heavily. XX Corps Artillery headquarters, in tribute to the fine teamwork which had been developed between the battalion and units of the 5th, immediately attached the 284th to the Red Diamond. Colonel Sanders tells the the story of visiting one of the pieces in Battery "B"

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<sup>1</sup>This must be a typo, should be December.

and noting two big chalk marks on the parapet in front of the gun. Just as he entered the pit, a fire mission came in and the tube swung swiftly over to point between the two marks. As it stopped its traverse, the gun crew reacted violently; men shouted and served the piece with an obvious increase in enthusiasm. The round went home into the chamber with a thud and the breach slammed shut; the howitzer roared and bucked in recoil but before the tube had returned to battery, another round was loaded and ready to go. The change in pace was so marked that the colonel couldn't help but ask what had happened. The reply by the chief of section was a classic, "Colonel, when that tube goes between those two marks, we are shooting for the Red Diamond again." The Colonel understood.

That attachment to the 5th Division was to be short-lived and it was to be the last time that Helpmate would fire for the 5th. At noon, 20 December, the battalion commander was back at the 5th Division Artillery command post to report to the Divarty Commander. That had barely been accomplished when new orders arrived. The Germans, under von Rundstedt, had started the massive counterattack in Belgium and Luxembourg, which has come to be known as "The Battle of the Bulge." Driving through the Ardennes Forest, they had made a deep penetration into the American lines. The Third Army was now in the process of executing a tremendous turning movement to the left. Instead of attacking eastward against the Saar River defenses, the Army would now attack northward, west of the Moselle River, against the southern shoulder of the German salient. The 5th Infantry Division, as well as the 90th Division, was to move from the Saarlautern front to Luxembourg at once. The 95th Division would take up a holding action, covering that part of the line previously held by the 95th, the 5th and part of the 90th. That part of the 90th sector not held by the 95th would be held by the 3rd Armored Cavalry Group.

The battalion commanders' conclusion that, since the 284th was now attached to the 5th Division, Helpmate would go with the Red Diamond, was rudely shattered. There was nothing in the order to indicate that the 284th was to move. Colonel Sanders called XX Corps Artillery command post and requested permission to accompany the 5th. This was denied. But, in the denial, came a high compliment for Helpmate. General Slack, the Corps Artillery Commander, told Colonel Sanders that the corps had made a special point of keeping the 284th, that Helpmate would be the last artillery battalion to leave the corps, if corps artillery had anything to say about it. Thus, Helpmate was reaping the results of the reputation it had established in the corps. It was with a feeling of extreme regret that the men of Helpmate watched the Red Diamond pull out and leave them behind.

The battalion was again attached to the 95th Division, but that combat assignment was doomed to be short-lived. index95th Division At 1530 hours, on 21 December, the battalion was attached to the 5th Field Artillery Group, an assignment which was to last for several months and one which would see Helpmate perform one of the most glorious combat missions of its history.

## The Saar-Moselle Triangle

Initial orders from the 5th Field Artillery Group required the battalion and battery reconnaissance parties, with two howitzers, to report to the 5th Group command post in Ritzing without delay. Accordingly, the advance echelon of the battalion moved out at 1730 hours on the 21st, followed immediately by a route marking party to mark the route for the remainder of the battalion. It was a cold, dark, miserable trip; rain which turned into sleet began to fall shortly after departure. Progress was slow because of poor maps and lack of familiarity with the area. The constant danger of a wrong turn worried the entire party because the route lay parallel to the front, now lightly held by American forces; to make a wrong turn might have led the column into the German lines—and Helpmate had had enough of being behind the German lines. It was almost midnight before the colonel reported to Colonel J. E. Theimer, the commanding officer of the 5th Field Artillery Group.

Positions had already been selected by the group staff for the two howitzers traveling with the recon party. For the rest of the night the two howitzer crews spent their time roving from one position to another, firing a few rounds from each and then moving again. The object was to make the Germans believe that there had been no change in the artillery picture. In fact, two battalions of artillery had been pulled out to go to Luxembourg and the two guns from Battery “B” had to create the impression that there had been no change.

The initial plan had been for the remainder of the battalion to commence its march to the new area at 1900 hours. Another battalion, 282nd, was to occupy positions near Picard and was to take over the fires of the 284th so that there would be no break in the fire support for the 95th Division. However, enemy counterbattery fire hit the 282nd as it was moving into position and it was unable to take over its mission on time. The guns of Helpmate were already out of position when an urgent call for fire came from the infantry. The Germans had launched a strong counterattack against the bridgehead in Saarlautern just as the 95th was relieving the 5th Division. There was no other artillery which could answer that call for fire. True to its reputation, the guns of Helpmate went back into position and, for several hours, fired at targets in front of the Saarlautern bridgehead. The column was  $6\frac{1}{2}$  hours late in departing the Picard area for its move to the new positions.

The road march to the Ritzing area was probably the most difficult march the battalion had ever made. The delay had created confusion in the road clearances necessary to move the battalion across the routes used by the two infantry divisions. The downpour of rain and sleet turned the roads into quagmires; trucks slid into ditches and some nearly went into deep ravines along the way. Visibility was reduced to a scant few yards. To complicate matters, the route marking party ran out of markers before the destination was reached. It was dawn of bleak, rainy, sleety 22nd of December before the first of the column reached the Ritzing area. The initial report from the battalion executive to the battalion commander indicated that the battalion was well-scattered between Picard and Ritzing.



At noon on the 22nd, reconnaissance parties again moved out ahead of the battalion to reconnoiter positions in the vicinity of Apach, France, and Perl, Germany. The battalion was to spend many weeks astride the Franco-German border. At 1700 hours, the battalion moved by echelon into the advanced positions. That occupation of position went without incident but it was another full day before all elements, which had been scattered during the previous night, were to reach their proper destinations.

Helpmate was now on a mission of direct artillery support for the 3rd Armored Cavalry Group. The 284th and a battalion of self-propelled 155mm howitzers were the sole artillery support for the two cavalry squadrons making up the 3rd Group. The cavalrymen were spread thinly along a twenty-mile sector of the front vacated by the divisions which had pulled out to go fight the Battle of the Bulge. The front lines were generally along a portion of the famous Siegfried Line known as the Saar-Moselle switch line, a fortified line which extended from the main Siegfried Line along the Saar over to the Moselle River.

The war had surged across this area at least twice in the late fall of 1944 and both sides had used minefields liberally in their defensive actions. The cavalry, thinly spread as they were, depended heavily on mines to protect their outposts. The consequence was that the front was very heavily mined and not all of the minefields were recorded. Actually this area was one of the most heavily mined areas in Europe. It did have an advantage—the cavalrymen ate lots of beef as cattle wandered into the minefields and became casualties, even though the recovery of the carcasses was a hazardous operation.

The situation in the Ardennes gave serious concern to the American force on the east side of the Moselle River. Famous Bastogne was only about fifty miles in a north-north-west direction from Apach and, at times, the men of the 284th could hear the rumble of battle from that area. Information from the new front was scanty and men of the battalion listened avidly to the daily news reports given over the BBC radio network.

Mother Nature was assisting the Germans at this point and severe weather prevented the Allied air forces from hitting the enemy rear areas to slow their supply actions. Anxious eyes scanned the heavens each day, men hoping for a break in the weather which would permit the planes to fly and bring the air support which was so badly needed to the northwest. Finally, one bright, cold morning the weather did break and the sky was criss-crossed with vapor trails as the bombers of the Eighth Air Force and the RAF carried their bomb loads to targets behind the German lines. For several days, the sky was filled with those trails, a most welcome sight.

Positive area reconnaissance was the order of the day now. Battalion and battery reconnaissance parties were out every day from dawn to dark locating and surveying alternate battery sites. Gradually a network of carefully located gun positions was built up by Helpmate and the battalion achieved a capability to move quickly in any direction except vertically. This information was to prove invaluable later when other artillery battalions moved into the area. However, for the moment the object was to make it possible for the batteries to move to other positions in case they were shelled out of any one area—a strong possibility

which was continually in everyone's mind.

At this time, the battalion command post and one firing battery were located in Apach, one firing battery was in Perl, and the third was in Ober-Perl. Service Battery and the ammunition train were located in Haute-Sierck, about eight thousand yards south of Apach. In all cases, it was possible to billet the entire battalion in houses adjacent to the firing positions and some relief from the severe winter weather was secured.

Firing during this period was purely defensive in character, with a 300 or 400 round expenditure being normal for any one day. Forward observers had given way in favor of fixed battalion observation posts so the forward observers, who had seen such heavy action in the months previous, were able to get some well-earned rest. The majority of the fire missions were fired by aerial observers and the "Helpmate Air Force" was in action every day that the weather permitted.

It was during this period that the battalion commander and Lieutenant Scoville had a real scare. They were up adjusting fire when a strong wind came up from the south. Slowly the plane drifted northward, the cavalry outposts passed beneath, then the German outposts. It began to look as though the next landing for that plane would be behind the enemy lines. Major Sparra's message to the battalion commander, "Hey, Boss, write to me from Stalag Nine!" spurred Scoville into one last final maneuver and he put the little plane into a steep dive which gained enough speed to beat the wind and carried the plane behind the cavalry lines. Needless to say, they were both more careful in the future.

Air activity over the sector occupied by the battalion was not restricted to the liaison planes of the 284th, however. Allied high-performance planes flew several strafing runs over elements in the vicinity. The initial assumption that they were enemy planes soon was disproved and a strong suspicion existed that they were friendly planes who were disoriented. Identification panels notwithstanding, the attacks continued and word was passed to the AAA (anti-aircraft artillery) units to shoot first and ask questions later. One attack was countered by such heavy anti-aircraft fire, from the platoon attached to the battalion, that one plane was seen to disappear in the direction of Luxembourg trailing smoke, a probable hit.

Christmas came and went for the battalion. Comparatively snug in their billets, everyone enjoyed a fine Christmas dinner; the United States Army did a fine job in getting the extra rations up to the troops on schedule. Observers along the line in the battalion and battery observation posts were relieved in time to get back to their batteries for the feast. The day was not without its sadness, however, as thoughts of everyone turned to loved ones at home and many wondered if they would ever see them again.

The war was not all sadness and nostalgia, though. The schoolhouse housing the command post had a fine auditorium and it was used constantly for movies and USO shows. Two USO-Camp shows put in an appearance and to say that they were enthusiastically received is to be guilty of understatement. Mickey Rooney visited the battalion with his jeep show and made a big hit with everyone. Probably the greatest factor of all of this entertainment was the

sight of American girls once more. That is, girls not in uniform; the Red Cross doughnut wagons with their brave and selfless young ladies had been visiting the battalion since September. The doughnut wagons made many trips to the area where Helpmate straddled the Franco-German border and one truck, in particular, named the City of Oakland, remained constant in its devotion to the morale of the battalion.

The battalion closed out 1944 with no further losses after arriving in the Apach area. However, on January 3rd, Pvt. Edward L. McDuffie, Service Battery, was fatally wounded in a souvenir pistol accident in his billet at Petite-Hettange.

The 3rd Cavalry Group was relieved in the line on 9 January by the 94th Infantry Division. This division had just arrived in the Third Army area after spending the fall in the area around Brest, France. Helpmate, as part of the 5th Group, was assigned a mission of general support for the 94th Division.

Activity in the area increased considerably with the arrival of the 94th. Probing attacks by the infantry were almost daily occurrences as the division settled into its portion of the line. Firing by Helpmate amounted to approximately four hundred rounds each day.

On 14 January, the Battalion Commander, in formal ceremonies, decorated Cpl. Clarence F. Wilkinson with the Silver Star, for gallantry in action at Fort Driant. He also awarded the Bronze Star to Major Charis R. Sparra, Captain Irving R. Merrill, Captain Marion L. Conway and Lieutenant James R. Barrentine.

On 18 January, a then-thought-to-be dangerous situation developed along the portion of the front occupied by the 94th Division. The enemy had been bringing Panzer units which had been badly chewed in the Battle of the Bulge into an area near Trassem, just north of the division sector, for rehabilitation and training. The Germans were badly in need of a diversion to reduce the pressure on the remnants of the von Rundstedt force which was now trying to extricate itself from the Ardennes area. Our forces captured documents which indicated that a massive attack by two Panzer divisions was about to be launched southward from Tasseem with the objective of recapturing Metz. With only the untried 94th Division before it, there was considerable concern that the attack might succeed and sizable forces of the Americans in the Saarlautern would be cut off. Plans were made to fall back in case of such an attack.

Positions were reconnoitered all the way back to Thionville. All excess personnel and vehicles were moved to intermediate positions several thousand yards to the rear, as the battalion prepared to fight a retrograde action in support of the division. On the 18th and 19th, apprehension was high as the command awaited the threatened attack. It never materialized. Finally, the elements which had moved to the rear returned to the Apach area.

On 17 January, Sergeant Gerald T. Corrigan, Battery "A", was wounded in counterbattery fire directed against the battery. On 18 January there occurred an incident which made the threatened enemy attack pale into insignificance,—the men of the battalion had ice cream for the first time since entering combat. Cpl. Wilkinson, of Fort Driant fame, on one of his courier runs, had discovered

a place in Luxembourg where ice cream could be obtained, provided the troops furnished the necessary chocolate. By various subterfuges not recognized by the ration system, the required chocolate was collected and Wilkinson departed. Much to the delight—and relief—of the entire battalion, he returned that same night with enough ice cream for each man in the battalion to have a taste at least. (Attempts to have him decorated for this event were unsuccessful.)

During the period 19-23 January, a series of limited objective attacks culminated in a battalion assault on heavily defended enemy positions in the vicinity of Tettingen, Butzdorf and Campholz Woods. It was here that Helpmate displayed the finesse and combat technique gained through long association with the Red Diamond. Assigned to reinforce the fires of the 356th Field Artillery Battalion, an organic unit, the 284th was called upon to furnish a number of forward observers. Once again, the highly competent 'first team' went out with the infantry, but under the control of the organic artillery battalion liaison officer. The attack made heavy going into Tettingen and infantry casualties were high. On reaching Tettingen, one company drove forward and secured a foothold in the next village of Butzdorf. As night fell, most of the battalion was in Tettingen and the single company was forward in Butzdorf. Strong enemy counterattacks soon cut through between the two villages and the forward company was isolated from its battalion.

Throughout the afternoon, the observers from Helpmate had been calling for the usual artillery support and the guns of the battalion had been delivering. As darkness approached, the observers from Helpmate began a series of registrations on various bushes and strategically located objects around their positions, preparing for the counterattacks which they knew were sure to come. None of the observers from the organic battalion had had the experience which the men of Helpmate had gained around Metz and none of them registered on key terrain features. As a matter of fact, the liaison officer opposed the registrations on the ground that ammunition was being wasted. Then, since the 284th observers still continued to register, he called his battalion commander to complain. The C.O. called Colonel Sanders and gave him a direct order to cease registering. The 284th complied, but it was an extreme coincidence that the observers had already gotten what they needed.

It was not long after dark that the expected counterattacks began. Waves of the enemy swarmed out of Campholz Woods, driving toward Tettingen and Butzdorf. At one point, an organic observer took the coming attack under fire while the Helpmate observer waited, ready to assist with the guns of the 284th at the appropriate time. The first rounds of the adjustment burst behind the oncoming Germans. The observer cut the range but the enemy were still ahead of the artillery shells when they arrived. The Helpmate observer called the FDS (fire direction center) and gave a concentration number and directed the firing to be at his command. The organic artillery was still firing behind the enemy, actually driving them onward better than their officers could do. Helpmate waited, the observer watching the attack. Then, just as the enemy reached his checkpoint, the observer yelled, "Fire"; twelve howitzers of Helpmate bucked and roared, as sixty rounds of high explosive went forward. The fire from the

284th hit the advancing Germans, dead on target; the counterattack stalled and stopped; the Germans withdrew to regroup and try again. Time and again that night, the value of checkpoint registrations was demonstrated. The crowning acknowledgment came when the organic battalion commander called Colonel Sanders and asked that Helpmate take over direct support of the infantry, that the organic battalion would fire any missions that the 284th requested. That night, the guns of Helpmate stayed hot and over eighteen hundred shells were sent against the Germans, a drastic inroad into the XX Corps ammunition reserve, but the infantry were still in Tettingen and Butzdorf when dawn came the next morning. Helpmate had helped keep them there.

On 24 January, Colonel Sanders was awarded the Bronze Star in ceremonies at 5th Group command post. This was official recognition for the action at Berweiller where the battalion had plugged a hole in the line while the infantry pulled back into warm billets.

On 28 January, the battalion displaced forward by echelon to positions in the vicinity of Besch. The departure from the warm billets in the Apach-Perl area was with very mixed feelings. From those positions, Helpmate had supported both cavalrymen and the infantry and had fired over 18,200 rounds in approximately five weeks.

At Besch, the same general missions were assigned—sometimes general support of the division, sometimes special reinforcing missions for one of the organic artillery battalions. Throughout the ensuing period, the division made a series of limited objective attacks to thoroughly indoctrinate the men of the division in the technique of operations against the fortified works which were soon to be encountered. The result was a gradual straightening of the lines and the securing of ground which would favor the coming offensive.

It was during this period that Helpmate lost one of the men who had been one of the first to depart from Fort Riley. On 13 February, Warrant Officer Stanley G. Stuteville, who had been on the advance detail from Riley, was evacuated from Service Battery because of illness and never did return to the battalion.

During the period from the 5th until the 10th of February, the program of limited objective attacks continued and Helpmate fired 4277 rounds in support. By the 10th, the line of contact ran from Nennig on the Moselle, through Tettingen, along the edge of Kampholz Woods, and southeastward through Oberleuken. The stage was set for the drive to the Saar.

On 19 February, the attack began. The 10th Armored Division returned to the area where it had fought during the fall of 1944 and struck due north along the high ground Perl-Borg-Oberleuken toward Trier. The 94th surged forward all along the line, turning slightly eastward toward Saarburg. By noon, the lines had moved sufficiently forward to permit the 284th to displace from the Besch area. It was on this move that Lady Luck led Battery "B" by the hand and averted a catastrophe of major proportions.

As soon as Sinz had been uncovered, the battalion reconnaissance party moved in to pick new battery positions. The colonel and the battery commanders found an excellent set of positions (so they thought) just forward of Sinz.

Battery "B" was assigned the middle area, with "C" ahead and "A" slightly to the rear. The field selected for "B" was snow-covered and hard-frozen; the prime movers could leave the road column, move across one side of the field, and then all four could turn left and proceed to the gun positions. Just as the colonel left the area, it started to rain. After he arrived in Sinz and was preparing to issue the order which would start the howitzers forward, he received a frantic radio call from Captain Ruschmeyer, asking him to return to the Battery "B" area. On the colonel's arrival, the BC pointed to the field that his battery was supposed to cross after it left the road. The rain was falling just hard enough to cause any spot where the ground had been disturbed to show a wet spot. There, showing clearly against the still white field, was a checkerboard of wet spots—a German minefield. Had the rain not started when it did, Battery "B" would most certainly have lost most, if not all, of its howitzers in that maze of Teller mines.

The battalion commander lost no time in selecting an entirely new set of positions for all batteries and, that night, Helpmate occupied positions in the vicinity of Tettingen.

On the 21st, the firing batteries moved successively to Faha and to Freudenberg. From the latter positions, the battalion fired in support of river crossing operations by the 94th Division in the vicinity of Saarburg. By the 23rd, elements of the division had secured a bridgehead on the far bank of the Saar River. During the attack, from 19 to 23 February, Helpmate had fired 4160 rounds in support of the infantry.

Losses during the period from the 1st to the 23rd of February were one man killed in action, three wounded in action and one officer lost through illness. On 9 February, Sergeant Emilio J. Punto, Headquarters Battery, was wounded slightly but was not evacuated from the battalion. On the 11th, "C" Battery area was heavily shelled by German artillery; PFC Walter A. Uminsky was instantly killed in this shelling and became the seventh member of the battalion to lose his life in the war. Cpl. Donald P. Ghena was wounded in the same shelling and was evacuated from the battalion; he did not return to the rolls. On that same day, Sgt. Warren C. Ellis, of Battery "A", was wounded in the face while on a forward observer mission; he was not evacuated but remained with his battery.

In summary, Helpmate, since moving from the Apach-Perl positions, had fired slightly over 13,000 rounds of ammunition, had lost one man killed in action and three wounded in action, and had assisted the 94th Infantry Division in driving the Germans back almost ten miles to the Saar River. Helpmate had clearly demonstrated its capability. The men of Helpmate did not know it then, but the battalion now stood on the threshold of its most valorous and gallant action of the war.

### **Zerf-Oberzerf and Hamm**

The next eleven days were destined to constitute the most glorious and heroic period of Helpmate's combat history. Teamed with the rough, tough, capable

5th Ranger Battalion, the 284th was to play a major role in the breakout from the Saar River bridgehead at Saarburg and Serrig. In the memories of the Rangers who returned from that operation, it is known as the Battle of Zerf-Oberzerf; in the memories of the men of Helpmate, one name stands out—Hamm.

The 23rd of February found the battalion in position in the vicinity of Freudenberg, supporting the efforts of the 94th Division to expand its bridgehead on the east bank of the Saar River. Two and a half days of bitter fighting had produced little in the way of an advance. The infantry found itself opposed by a determined force of the enemy, strongly protected by a system of well-concealed bunkers. Mutually supporting defenses, on the high ground east of Serrig, defied the best efforts of the division to advance. The Third Army timetable for the advance to the Rhine was being seriously jeopardized by the stalled attack. A solution had to be found, and—quickly.

Back at XX Corps command post, Lieutenant General Walton H. Walker found the solution. The 5th Ranger Battalion was directed to cross the Saar River under cover of darkness, cut through the German lines and seize the high ground in the vicinity of the village of Oberzerf. From that dominating terrain, the Rangers could cut the main road which ran from Zerf to Irsch, the main supply route for the defending force. The night of the 23rd was designated as the start of the operation.

The 284th was selected as the field artillery battalion to provide direct artillery support for the Ranger operation. The battalion was directed to send forward one liaison party and three forward observer teams to accompany the Ranger battalion. Helpmate remained attached to the 5th Field Artillery Group and arrangements were made whereby calls, for reinforcing fire, could go directly from the 284th to the other corps artillery battalions of the group. Additional support could be requested from the 94th Division Artillery, but its main interest would continue to be the bridgehead operation in which the division was still involved.

The directive on the attack was received in the battalion command post at midafternoon of the day that the crossing was to be achieved. Within a very short time, the liaison and forward observer teams left the battalion area to report to the Rangers at Taben, a village close to the Saar River crossing point. There the Rangers took their first casualties; enemy artillery fire killed several Rangers before the operation began.

The crossing of the Saar was accomplished soon after the moon had set. Moving quickly and quietly, the Rangers were able to penetrate the German lines undetected and headed for their objective. Although the Rangers received no casualties on the move toward Oberzerf, Helpmate was not so fortunate. A round of 88mm artillery fire passed within inches of the head of Lieutenant Harvey Osborne and struck T/4 Clyde M. Montag, killing Montag instantly.

The concussion of the shell passing so close to his head produced a severe case of shell shock on the part of Lieutenant Osborne and he was evacuated back across the river. Thus, before the operation had fairly begun, Helpmate had lost the services of one of its longest experienced forward observers, and a radio

operator, who had done heroic and valiant service since the early days in the Metz vicinity, had given his life.

Dawn came of the 24th, with the Rangers dug in on their objective. However, they were not on the hill initially decided upon in the planning conference. One arrival in the target area, the Ranger commander had discovered that there was another hill, about one thousand yards to the east, which would give them a better chance of cutting the Zerf-Irsch road. They moved to the second hill. This change in plans was to have a decided effect on Helpmate later in the operation, because the battalion was now firing at maximum range from its positions near Freudenberg.

The Ranger move was a complete surprise to the Germans. One story, from the men with the Rangers, concerns the German officer who walked into the area and was captured by the Rangers. He flatly refused to believe that these men were Americans, they were German troops in American uniforms preparing to infiltrate the American lines as so many of the enemy had done during the Battle of the Bulge. According to him, it was absolutely impossible that an American force could have reached a point so far behind the German lines, without fighting. The reports indicate that he did finally become convinced.

The reaction of the German command to the presence of the Rangers was violent, as had been expected. Shortly after daylight and the discovery of the Rangers, the enemy began a series of attacks intended to drive them off their commanding ground. These attacks were to continue for several days and involved the use of the German SS 6th Mountain Division, a fresh unit only recently arrived from duty in Norway. Repeated attacks of battalion strength were thrown against the Ranger perimeter. On at least one occasion, an attack penetrated the Ranger lines and continued on across the position and out the opposite side.

Helpmate's work began as soon as the enemy discovered that the Rangers were dug in in rear of their defensive positions. Fire missions began coming in from the forward observers and the Freudenburg area reverberated as the howitzers sent their shells screaming over the lines. It was obvious from the start that Helpmate, by itself, could not furnish all of the artillery support needed by the Rangers. The fire direction center of the 284th was soon calling upon the other battalions of corps artillery to assist and their response was a welcome addition to the fire power of the battalion. In general, Helpmate reserved to itself the task of following the commands of the forward observers, calling in the fires of the reinforcing artillery when a heavy volume of fire was needed. Longer range interdiction fires were normally passed to the other corps battalions in order to free Helpmate for close-in firing.

The requirement for close-in firing soon made it apparent that the Ranger move, to that further hill, had created problems for Helpmate. Many of the missions were at maximum range, where the probable error was so great, there was a constant worry that some of the shells would drop short into the Ranger position. Ever-mindful of the danger of killing or wounding Rangers with concentrations intended to kill the enemy, it became obvious that, if the 284th was to do its best job, new positions must be found closer to the Saar River.



Early on the 25th, reconnaissance parties went forward to locate advanced sites for the guns.

As the reconnaissance party went forward, it was found that, for about 2500 yards, the terrain was open and rolling. Battery positions could have been selected in that area, but the advantage in shortening the range was so slight that this was given up as being an inadequate solution to the problem. Forward of that area, the terrain was heavily forested with tall trees, so closely spaced, that it was impossible to locate sites which would provide the requisite fields of fire for the guns; engineer work to cut fields of fire was out of the question.

Approximately 6500 yards northeast of Freudenberg, the Saar River made a sharp, horseshoe-shaped bend, a deep salient into the enemy held area. Located in the bend was the village of Hamm, surrounded by cleared fields of farmland. If the 94th Division held the high bluffs on the outside of the horseshoe, on the east side of the Saar, positions in the vicinity of Hamm would be ideal. The use of that area would place Helpmate closer to the Rangers than any other battalion of artillery. The range would be cut approximately in half and the probable error would then be within acceptable limits for the close in fires, which the battalion must fire, if it was to properly protect the Rangers.

The vital question was whether or not friendly infantry held those bluffs across the river from Hamm. If so, Helpmate could move; if not, the firing batteries would be within small arms and mortar range of the Germans on the bluffs and the area would be untenable for artillery. Captain Irving R. Merrill, the battalion S-2, was sent to the nearest infantry command post to determine the infantry situation.

In due time, Captain Merrill reported to the battalion commander that the infantry had indicated that they did, in fact, hold the high ground outside the horseshoe bend. Helpmate could move. Colonel Sanders ordered the battalion forward by echelon and the necessary arrangements were made by the 5th Group to provide artillery support for the Rangers while Helpmate displaced. Shortly after noon, the batteries were in position and ready to fire from the Hamm positions.

It was not long after the battalion was settled in the Hamm area that the batteries began receiving small-arms and mortar fire. Captain Merrill, still at the infantry command post, was queried again. This time, he reported that the initial infantry report was in error—the Germans still held a portion of the bluff. The friendly infantry had a force of about three hundred Germans encircled on the bluff and in the ravine behind; they were confident that this pocket would soon be wiped out. Just at this time, a strong attack was launched against the Rangers and Helpmate was fully engaged in firing for the Rangers. This was no time to move back out of range of the Germans on the bluffs. Support for the encircled Americans at Oberzerf was vital; Colonel Sanders took a calculated risk—Helpmate would have to stay and ride out the incoming mortar shells until such a time as the infantry could reduce that pocket.

The afternoon and night of 25 February was a busy time for the men of the 284th. Attack after attack was launched by the enemy at the defensive position

on the hill at Oberzerf and the fire direction center at Hamm handled a steady stream of fire missions, some fired by the guns of the battalion, some passed on to other reinforcing artillery units. In the battery areas, the cannoneers dug in during every break in the fire missions. Soon, all of the howitzers were surrounded by parapets of dirt-filled ammunition boxes, as the men sought protection from the sporadic fire from the bluffs across the river.

In Hamm, at the aid station, Captain Kittell and his medics had their hands full, treating the men who were being wounded in the battery areas. Fortunately, most of the wounds were slight, although several were serious and the men had to be evacuated to the rear. In many cases, men who were slightly wounded and would normally have remained in the aid station, returned to their batteries in defiance of the doctor's orders, to help in serving the pieces. Helpmate was fighting hard.

Late in the afternoon of the 25th, there occurred an incident which was typical of the entire Ranger-Helpmate operation. In the fire direction center, the team responded to the electrifying call, "Fire Mission," from one of the base radio sets. Quickly the data went to the guns and the howitzers roared as a volley went forward to one of the observers numbered checkpoints. The sensing came back from the observer requesting fire for effect. The volleys went out. The next sensing indicated that the fire was right in where it was wanted, but that the guns should cut the range by one hundred yards. Again, guns roared. Again, a request to cut the range by one hundred yards.

On receiving the third range cut, Major Sparra hesitated and told the colonel that the observer was requesting fire right on his own position. The colonel decided that the observer knew what he was doing and directed that the guns give him what he was asking for. Again, a cut was requested and the FDC was told that the fire was falling right on the enemy attack. This happened several times more. Then, a new voice came on the radio, another observer was sensing. Repeatedly, he called for more fire, cutting the range each time. Finally, a completely flabbergasted Major Sparra reported to the colonel that now this observer was calling for fire on his own position. The colonel told him to fire as requested. Twice again, the observer cut the range. Finally, the second observer called for cease fire, the enemy was out of the position.

par Thoroughly mystified, Major Sparra called Captain McPartland, the liaison officer, on the radio to ask what was going on out there. The captain's reply thrilled the roomful of listening men as nothing else could have done. It was simple. The Germans launched a very strong attack against one side of the perimeter. The observer took it under fire and, but the range cuts, kept the shells bursting right in among the oncoming Germans. When he called for fire right on his position, the observer yelled to the Rangers when he got the report that the shells were on the way. All of the Americans slipped into their narrow slit-trenches and let the above-ground Germans absorb the shelling. In the artillery holocaust, the attack surged past the waiting Rangers, who then emerged from their slit-trenches and began shooting into the rear of the enemy line.

As the attack progressed across the American position, the second observer

picked up the artillery concentrations and carried the fire right out of the perimeter on the other side, keeping the shells falling amongst the enemy all the way. The slaughter was terrific; the enemy dead were piled in windrows all across the area. Firing furiously, Helpmate had practically annihilated an entire enemy battalion.

At another time, the action of the observers in calling for fire on their own positions would have excited the highest praise for heroism of an extraordinary degree. In the OberZerf-Hamm operation, heroism was commonplace. The ranks of the 5th Ranger Battalion and the 284th Artillery Battalion were packed solidly with heroes during those last few days of February of 1945.

Late in the morning of the 26th, it was the turn of the cannoneers to express the attitude of Helpmate. The 94th Division was not succeeding in its efforts to eliminate the pocket of Germans who were exacting a toll on the men in the firing batteries. Colonel Sanders began to entertain doubts as to his wisdom in taking the calculated risk of remaining at Hamm; the mounting list of men who had been wounded staggered him. He thought seriously of pulling the guns out of the Hamm positions and returning to Freudenburg, out of range of enemy small-arms and mortars, even though it might have resulted in a charge of cowardice on the battlefield. He was still trying to make up his mind when it came time for his daily morning visit to the howitzer pits.

Just as a shot in the dark, he opened the subject while talking to the men in the last section he visited. He cited the growing list of men who had been wounded in the gun sections. He finally posed a question—if one of them was the battalion commander, what would he do? The colonel has said repeatedly that the answer was the most clear enunciation of the spirit of Helpmate he had ever heard. A cannoneer, one with a bandage on his arm, gave the answer.

“Colonel, we’re here to shoot for the Rangers. As long as they are in trouble out there, we stay here shooting. To hell with the mortars.”

The colonel had his answer. Helpmate never did move to the rear.

The 284th never did move to the rear, but on the 27th, it was ordered by the 5th Group Commander to get out of Hamm, to cross the Saar River and take up positions in the vicinity of Serrig. In the period from the morning of the 24th of February until the 4th of March, over 8,000 rounds of artillery ammunition had been fired by the battalion.

On the night of the 4th–5th of March, a task force, from the 10th Armored Division, broke through to relieve the Rangers and the OberZerf-Hamm operation was over. The Rangers, those who were able, and the men of the 284th returned to the Serrig area. A relationship had been created between the two units that was to remain strong ever afterwards. To the Rangers, Helpmate had made it possible for the survivors to survive; to Helpmate, the Rangers were the toughest, roughest fighting force any army had ever seen.

An observer from XX Corps Artillery was with the task force of the 10th Armored Division which accomplished the relief of the Rangers. He stated later that he had never seen such a demonstration of the power of applied artillery fire. Enemy dead were piled in rows where they had been hit with artillery concentrations. The combined efforts of a battalion of Rangers and

the artillery had almost completely ruined the SS 6th Mountain Division as a fighting element of the German Army.

No report is available as to the number of Rangers who became casualties in that operation; however, it is a fact that the Oberzerf operation cost the 5th Rangers more men than their assault of the Omaha Beach during the Normandy Invasion.

Casualties in the 284th were the heaviest in the history of the battalion. The following is a list of the men who were officially listed as killed in action or wounded; it does not include the very considerable number who were slightly wounded and walked away from the aid station to return to their batteries to assist in the firing:

Date	in Name	Battery	Classification
February			
24	T/4 Clyde M. Montag	A	Killed in action
24	1st Lt. H. L. Osborne	A	Wounded–evacuated
25	Cpl. N. G. Gallas	B	Wounded–evacuated
26	T/5 George T. Popp	C	Wounded–duty
26	Pfc. C. J. Brownell	C	Wounded–duty
26	Pfc. J. R. Kowalski	C	Wounded–duty
26	Pfc. G. H. Hulton	C	Wounded–duty
26	Pfc. E. H. Gumprecht	A	Wounded–duty
26	T/Sgt. E. J. Punto	Hq	Wounded–duty
27	Pfc. James Polak	A	Wounded–died of wounds
27	Sgt. G. T. Corrigan	A	Wounded–evacuated
27	Cpl. D. M. LeDonne	A	Wounded–evacuated
27	Pvt. H. K. Sokolski	A	Wounded–evacuated
27	1st Lt. G. M. Ossefort	C	Wounded–evacuated
27	Sgt. W. P. Burrows	B	Wounded–evacuated
27	Pvt. R. E. Whalen	A	Wounded–duty
27	Pfc. W. G. Kniskern	A	Wounded–duty
27	Pfc. C. G. Lavicka	A	Wounded–duty
27	T/3 J. B. Summers	Med.	Wounded–duty

Thus, during this action, Helpmate lost 2 men killed in action or died of wounds suffered in action; 17 wounded, of whom 7 had to be evacuated with only a few ever returning to the battalion after hospitalization.

### From Hamm to the Rhine

After the action in support of the Rangers, the battalion immediately shifted to a mission of reinforcing the fires of the 301st F.A. Bn of the 94th Division. This change from one type of action to another, with no rest or time to reorganize and recoup, was typical of the entire history of the 284th—the codename “Helpmate” had been properly chosen by whomever assigned it. The battalion remained in positions in the vicinity of Serrig until 15 March, firing a total of 4,229 rounds in support of the infantry.

During this period, even though the primary attention of the battalion was

on support of the Rangers and the infantry of the 94th, time was taken to award decorations to individuals who had distinguished themselves in previous actions. On 3 March, the Battalion Commander presented Bronze Star awards to M/Sgt. Herbert J. Knoblauch and T/Sgt. Emilio J. Punto of Headquarters Battery, Sgt. Warren C. Ellis of "A" Battery, Cpl. Robert D. Beck of "B" Battery, and to Cpl. Thomas J. Rink and T/4 Geoffrey T. Raymer of "C" Battery. On 11 March, he again presented Bronze Star awards to Captains William W. Shick, Gerald F. Ruschmeyer, Paul M. Schmidt, and Richard B. Williams, to 1st Lieutenant John J. Koss, to 2nd Lieutenant Noel E. Alloway, and to T/5 John Panizzi of "C" Battery.

Just prior to the 15th of March, a shift of boundaries and a change in the alignment of divisions brought the 26th Infantry Division into the Serrig area. With that added power, the German defense east of the Saar began to collapse and the enemy started a pullout to the vicinity of the Rhine River, where a last-ditch stand was anticipated. Throughout his withdrawal, the enemy did his best to make the American advance as costly as possible. Progress was slow at times and rapid at others, with the enemy using every means at his disposal to slow the advance.

The move from the Saar River area began when "C" Battery displaced to the vicinity of Kalberborn about 1000 hours on the 14th, with the balance of the battalion moving that afternoon. Positions that night were in a forest of tall pines, where the effects of American artillery and aerial bombardment were readily available. The next morning, the battalion again displaced to positions in the vicinity of Britten. Again, the units were in an area of tall pines, well shattered by artillery fire. In this vicinity, the German retreat had been too rapid to permit them to evacuate their dead and there were many bodies of German soldiers throughout the area, mute testimony to the effectiveness of American artillery power.

On 17 March, the advance was rapid, with the battalion occupying positions successively at Bachen and at Oppen. A prime characteristic of these operations was the proof of how well Helpmate had mastered the field artillery mission to 'move, shoot, and communicate'. Despite the rapid movement, from several successive positions, Helpmate fired over 2,500 rounds in four days of movement. The proposition of dropping trails and shooting was well carried out by the gun crews of the battalion.

At 0800 hours on the 18th, the battalion shifted from support of the 26th Division to general support of the 80th Division. This relationship with the 80th was to continue for a large part of the battalion experience in World War II, although it did not ever equal the relationship which had pertained with the 5th Infantry Division. On the 18th, the mission became one of reinforcing the fires of the 313rd F.A. Battalion. Alternating in positions areas with the organic battalion, Helpmate chased rapidly across the enemy homeland, occupying positions at Krettnich, Selbach and Gudesweiler in one day. On 19 March, positions were occupied at Reitscheid, Britain, and Kusel.

It was at Kusel that Helpmate started picking up miscellaneous German vehicles for its own use. An ordnance plant near Kusel yielded an autobus

and several other vehicles. These were welcome additions to the authorized transportation, even though they did complicate the gasoline situation.

On 20 March, positions at Schwedelbach and Mehlingen were occupied but firing was very light. As a matter of fact, the advance for the past few days had been so rapid that Helpmate had only fired a total of 119 rounds, an almost unheard of lack of firing for the firing batteries.

On 21 March, the reinforcing mission with the 313rd came to an end and Helpmate, with the other units of the 5th Field Artillery Group, reverted to a mission of general support for the 80th Division. On 23 March, the entire 5th F.A. Group was relieved of its mission with the 80th and came back into Corps general support. Positions were occupied in the vicinity of Ungstein. The much needed rest time was fully occupied in maintenance and rehabilitation of equipment; the Rhine River was not far off and it was obvious that crossings would be made in the near future.

On 24 March, the battalion moved again without firing into positions in the vicinity of Kronenberg, Sulzhof and Reipolckirchen. [indexTown!Kronenberg](#) [indexTown!Sulzhof](#) [indexTown!Reipolckirchen](#) The next day, the 25th, was used again for maintenance and training.

It was early in the morning of 26 March, that Helpmate stood idly by and watched the awesome power of American airpower at work on a German column southeast of Kaiserslautern. A map study revealed that there was a road leading from somewhat southeast of Kaiserslautern, through a deep valley, to Bad Durkheim where it debouched on the Rhine Plain. It was impossible to see the actual ground action, but it was possible to watch the American aircraft as they attacked the enemy.

Early that morning, an aerial observer had spotted a German column, entering the deep valley near Kaiserslautern. Soon there were fighter-bombers over Bad Durkheim, where the road debouched onto the Rhine Plain; there were no exits from the valley short of Bad Dunkheim. With pinpoint accuracy, the bombers dropped several houses into the road right in the middle of town, very effectively blocking the road. Then, they withdrew to watch the rear of the German column. As soon as the entire column had entered the valley, they bombed a small village at the entrance to the valley and repeated their previous operation. The German column, consisting of two divisions of infantry, and artillery, with a tremendous amount of horse-drawn conveyance, was completely trapped in the valley. Then, the fighter-bombers began their attack. Flying a continuous loop, the aircraft arrived over the target-valley, dropped their bombs, made a strafing run, and raced back to their home airfields to reload. Then, the procedure began again. For several hours, that German column was helpless under the onslaught of American aircraft. By the time that air assault was completed, the entire German force of two divisions had been annihilated.

At approximately 1400 hours on 26 March, Helpmate was directed to displace forward onto the Rhine Plain northeast of Bad Durkheim. The route specified was the route taken by the German column; Helpmate saw the destruction wrought by the American aircraft. The American column, other units besides Helpmate were using the same route, was preceded by a platoon of

tanks with 'dozer' blades to clean a path through the debris. Never had the men of Helpmate seen such a picture of devastation—dead German soldiers, dead horses, wrecked vehicles, burning wagons, all were mixed in a dreadful mass of miscellaneous paraphernalia of war, and over it all was the awful stench of death.

By the time that Helpmate reached Bad Durkheim, the wrecked houses which had stopped the German column had been 'tank-dozed' out of the way and the 284th got its first view of the Rhine River. In the hazy distance to the east lay the city of Ludwugshaven and to the north of that, was the many-domed city of Worms. There lay the famous city where the Protestant religion was born, within the range of the guns of Helpmate. However, those guns were not to speak for some time and none of the shells which Helpmate carried ready for use went into the old city.

The position areas for the night of the 26th were in the vicinity of Horrweiler. It was while on reconnaissance for positions for his battery that Lieutenant Sontag almost was captured by a wandering band of German soldiers. As he walked through a vineyard, looking for suitable places for the howitzers, he was surprised to see several German soldiers suddenly rise out of a small ditch and demand his surrender. The situation was ridiculous in the extreme, the Germans were badly outnumbered, their main bodies having withdrawn across the Rhine River, and there was no place for them to take a prisoner. Lieut. Sontag could not get serious about the matter and, after laughingly telling the Germans to get going, he finished his reconnaissance. He later confessed that he had indulged in quite a bit of bravado in talking the enemy out of taking him along as a prisoner. No one seemed to know, after the incident, where the German soldiers disappeared to; they were apparently men of the units which had been trapped in the valley. Helpmate was not particularly interested in capturing any more of the enemy, especially men who were beyond the capability of doing damage to our forces.

On the 27th, the battalion moved to positions in the vicinity of Gonsenheim, a well-to-do suburb of Mainz. Here, the battalion fired its first rounds across the Rhine River. At this point, the battalion had a dual mission—direct support for the 16th Cavalry Group and general support to the 80th Division, reinforcing the fires of the 313rd F.A. Bn.

On 28 March, Helpmate moved forward to positions in the vicinity of Mombach, much closer to the Rhine. It was here that the men of the battalion learned that the Red Diamond, the 'River-crossingest division in the 3rd Army', had grabbed a foothold on the east bank of the Rhine River near Mainz. The 284th would have liked to have been in on that success of its favorite division, but since Fate decreed otherwise, Helpmate was till glad to have the 5th Division get that on its record.

On the 29th, the first elements of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion crossed the Rhine. On that date, Battery "C" was detached from battalion control and moved out with the 19th Cavalry Squadron, crossing the big river late that afternoon. The remainder of the battalion remained at Mombach, firing in support of elements across the river, but the firing was light, only 205 rounds being expended in three days.

On 30 March, Helpmate officially crossed the Rhine and was deep into the enemy's homeland. The Headquarters, two firing batteries and Service Battery went into position in the vicinity of Erbenheim and it was there that Helpmate learned that there were disadvantages to being a truck-drawn unit- most of the prime-movers were pulled away to haul infantry. However, they were not gone long and on the 31st were back in the batteries. On that same date, "C" Battery came back from its mission with the 19th Cavalry Squadron and Helpmate was back together again.

Action during the month of March had been light—after the Hamm operation ended—and consisted mainly of trying to catch up with the retreating enemy. March casualties consisted of Pvt. Bernon H. Morgan, wounded and evacuated, Pvt. Albert L. Gresham, wounded by returned to duty and S/Sgt. Roy A. Roeser, wounded while on an FO mission and evacuated.

The battalion received two commendations for earlier actions during the month of March. One was for action in the pursuit across France but the second, written on March 7th and received on 22 March, was for the action at Hamm. It was the second one which struck deepest into the hearts of the men of Helpmate. The 5th Ranger Battalion received a unit citation for their part in the Zerf-OberZerf operation and the Rangers insisted that Helpmate should have been cited also. However, the authorities at higher headquarters took no such action and the proud warriors of Helpmate took their satisfaction in their own knowledge that they had done exactly what was expected of them, they had helped to bring back safely a considerable number of Rangers.

## **Beyond the Rhine**

The crossing over the Rhine River was a dramatic experience for the officers and men of Helpmate. The approach to the long pontoon bridge stretching in a long arc over the river toward the far side, was with very mixed feelings. On each side of the river, infantry sharpshooters were stationed to shoot at any floating object on the surface of the famous river; a very present concern was the danger of floating mines loosed upstream by the enemy to take out the bridge. However, sharpshooters notwithstanding, everybody was worried about the possibility of that bridge parting in the middle and dropping personnel and vehicles into one of the deepest rivers in Europe. Fortunately, the bridge held.

Beyond the fact of the floating mine danger, it was an eery feeling to see the heavily loaded trucks and their howitzers moving across that bridge. Wherever the truck happened to be, the load caused the bridge to sink, sometimes almost enough for the water to reach the treads. After the truck had passed, the bridge rose to its normal position. Thus, as each truck proceeded across the bridge, it carried a stretch of sunken bridge with it. The result was a series of 'waves' as the column moved across. Few were the men who didn't worry that one of those waves would cause the bridge to part. Fortunately, the bridge held.

But, over and above the worries about the bridge, lay the realization that Helpmate was now crossing into the heartland of the enemy. The 284th would now face an enemy who was desperately making a final stand to protect his



hearth and family. Now, Helpmate would face an entire population whose only desire would be to see as many Americans dead as was possible. No longer would there be smiles and cheery waves from the civilians who had remained in the battle zone; now, there would be only scowls and hatred. Now, there would be guerrilla warfare to contend with, no longer would there be relative security in the rear areas, the battle area was Germany. Helpmate was the invader.

However, despite the feelings of apprehension, every man of the battalion realized that the war was now moving into its final stages. The German army no longer had the power to stop the over-whelming surge of American military might. All that was left was to finish the destruction of the Nazi military machine and to bring peace to a war-weary world. Knowledge of that fact was clearly demonstrated by Captain Conway from his command car when the Battalion Commander looked back to see how the column was faring. Standing in his car, Captain Conway raised his right hand, thumb touching his forefinger to make a round symbol, as he shouted, "This is it, Colonel, this is it." Helpmate was into the heartland.

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Helpmate celebrated Easter Sunday of 1945 at Erbenheim by holding outdoor church services and generally holding activity to a minimum. There was no firing, although the battalion was still part of the 5th Field Artillery Group with a mission of general support for the 80th Infantry Division. Late that afternoon, the battalion displaced to firing positions in the vicinity of Dissen. The route to Dissen was by way of the "autobahn", Hitler's famous roadnet, which the batteries entered at the Frankfurt entrance ramp. It was with interest that the men of Helpmate listened to the firing in the city of Frankfurt where the Red Diamond was encountering strong resistance from the German army.

Positions were occupied at Dissen late in the evening. Promptly, all units checked their anti-tank defenses because rumors reached the battalion that the Germans were running Tiger tanks off the end of their assembly line in the Kassel ordnance plant, filling them with fuel and ammunition, and sending them south to find Americans anywhere and to do as much damage as possible before they were knocked out or ran out of fuel. Up until that time, Helpmate had not seen any Tigers; all that the officers and men knew was that Helpmate had nothing in it equipment which would knock one out. Natural barriers to tank operations were of primary importance.

On the morning of the 2nd, the battalion commander and a small party set out to check each battery and make certain that utmost advantage was being taken of all natural tank barriers. Near Battery "C", while reconnoitering near the top of a small hill, the party encountered a small group of Germans and a short fire fight ensued. M/Sgt. Herbert J. Knoblaugh, Hq Battery, was seriously wounded and the recon party was forced to retire from the hill. At "C" Battery position the firing had been heard, and by the time that the

recon party reached the foot of the hill, a combat patrol had been formed and was on the way to reinforce. The cannoneers now had an opportunity to play the part of the doughboys they had been supporting for so long. Deploying like veteran infantrymen, they advanced up the hill and engaged the Germans in a fire fight. It was been facetiously reported that more small-arms ammunition was expended in that fight than was used during the Battle of the Bulge—and there were no casualties. M/Sgt. Knoblauch was brought down off the hill and sent to the aid station where he was evacuated from the battalion and did not return. The “C” Battery combat patrol drove the enemy over the hill and then, much to the surprise of all, came marching around the base of the hill with almost forty of the enemy with their hands in the air. It was then that Charley Battery learned that they had spent the night before within two hundred yards of the German force.

On 3 April, Helpmate moved northward toward Kassel and occupied positions in the vicinity of Rosengarten. Firing was light, only 196 rounds being fired that day. However, at about 1500 hours that afternoon a new mission came in. In addition to begin charged with reinforcing the fires of the 313rd F.A. Bn, Helpmate was not charged with direct support for its old friend, the 3rd Cavalry Group. The big trouble was that the 3rd was well beyond range from the present positions occupied by the battalion. The battalion recon party left early that evening to join the 3rd Cavalry Group and locate positions.

The trip to the 3rd Cavalry Group CP was a 'hairy' one, to quote several of the men who made the trip. At that time, the German Army was trying to avoid being trapped in the area just east of the Rhine River and the high command directed many small units to take off on their own and get far enough east so that the German Army could reorganize. The result was that the area between Rosengarten and the Rhine was alive with small groups of the enemy; it was truly “Indian Country” as the American pioneers used to call the Western Plains. The recon party made it to the 3rd Cavalry Group CP but the Commanding Officer, Colonel James E. Polk, ordered that from that time on, none of the Helpmate would move about on the battlefield without an escort from the cavalry. He said that the cavalry was more interested in fire support from Helpmate than it was in dead Helpmate heroes. The satisfying thing about it was that the rank and file of the cavalry group agreed with their commander, a fine testimonial to the relations existing between the 284th and their supported unit.

However, much the cavalry may have liked protecting the artillerymen, Helpmate was not too enthusiastic about the arrangement. Neither the Battalion Commander nor the Battery Commanders relished the requirement to clear with a cavalry lieutenant or sergeant before they could go to the top of a hill to look for a position. Comply, they did, though.

On 4 April, the firing batteries and the rest of the battalion displaced from Rosengarten to new positions in the vicinity of Dornberg. It was a new experience for the batteries to march with a platoon of tanks roaring alongside, to protect the column from any possible ambush by the enemy. There were no serious incidents although, in one case, a squad of self-propelled “quad-fifty

calibers" did drive out of their cover about thirty of the enemy who were laying in wait for the column. The cannoneers were impressed with the way those quad-fifties plowed the ground as the cavalry wiped out the enemy.

By noon, all batteries had closed in the new area and Helpmate was firing in support of its old friends in the 3rd and 43rd Cavalry Squadrons. By nightfall, 566 rounds had been fired in support.

From the 4th through the 8th, the mission in support of the 3rd Cavalry Group remained unchanged and the battalion displaced several times to keep up with the fast-moving tankers. Positions were occupied successively at Niedervellmar, Guxhagen and at Kammerbach.

It was at Kammerbach, on the 8th of April, that a historic period in Helpmate's war-service came to an end. The battalion was relieved from attachment to the 5th Field Artillery Group. For 129 days, the battalion had been attached to the group under the command of Colonel John E. Theimer. During that period, Helpmate had supported the combat efforts of four infantry divisions, one armored division, two cavalry groups, and the 5th Ranger Battalion. During the Hamm operation, while in support of the 5th Rangers, Helpmate, with the help of other artillery battalions, had almost wiped out the German SS 6th Mountain Division. During that period, Helpmate had lost several men killed in action, had had a considerable number wounded, wither on forward observer missions on while serving the guns. The 284th had moved from the banks of the Moselle River across many German rivers, including the mighty Rhine, to the vicinity of Kassel. It was a period during which the officers and men of the 284th had proved that they were an outstanding field artillery battalion, that they had carried out to the highest degree the finest traditions of the Field Artillery. Helpmate had been true to its codename.

With no change in its mission with the cavalry, Helpmate was now attached to the 416th Field Artillery Group and on 9 April it displaced to the vicinity of Bad Sooden. (It has been reported that some of the wives of the men of Helpmate were a little concerned about the situation when they learned that their men were in Bad Sooden. However, when it was explained that "Bad", in German meant bath and was not a term descriptive of the moral character of the town, they were satisfied.)

On 10 April, near Mulhausen, the battalion lost almost an entire liaison party. Several German aircraft, making a last-ditch suicide flight, strafed the column of the 3rd Cavalry Group and dropped fragmentation bombs. The column halted and personnel dispersed into the fields adjoining the road. One cluster of fragmentation bombs burst right over the 284th liaison party which was with the cavalymen. T/5 Patrick Walentkowski was killed, T/Sgt. Hyman Lubin, Cpl. Benjamin T. Borgman and T/5 Herbert L. Smith were all wounded and evacuated.

The loss of the liaison party was a severe blow to the morale of the entire battalion. It was clear that the enemy, although practically defeated, could still strike like a venomous snake. Further down the road, in Lankensalza, the battalion reconnaissance party came under a similar attack but no one was injured. Helpmate was alert from that point on.

On 10 April, the battalion occupied positions near Haisen and it was here that the mission with the 3rd Cavalry Group came to an end. The 3rd had received a new mission—to drive hard to the Danube River and secure crossings for the XX Corps. Because there would be numerous enemy groups moving about in the area to be covered, it was considered more appropriate that an armored field artillery battalion support the cavalry. So, once again, the men of Helpmate said farewell to the cavalymen with whom they had spent Christmas along the Moselle.

On 11 April, the battalion displaced to the vicinity of Walschleben in general support of the 76th Infantry Division. On the 12th, a considerable number of trucks were taken from the battalion to haul infantry and German POWs. Helpmate's combat role was temporarily suspended and a new mission of military government was received.

It was at Walschleben that a serious incident took a very amusing turn. Third U.S. Army had been having trouble with German civilians cutting telephone lines and interfering with the control of army units. General George S. Patton issued orders to the troops that any person found tampering with communications lines was to be shot on the spot and the body left to warn other civilians as to the fate to be expected if they got caught. Late in the afternoon of 12 April, a patrol of Helpmate reported back to the command post with a young German teenager who had been caught tampering with a telephone line. In spite of General Patton's orders, the men had been unable to bring themselves to execute the boy on the spot. Now the problem was dropped in the lap of the battalion commander. Strong measures had to be taken to impress the population, but summary execution was not to the colonel's liking either.

The a solution was suggested by one of the men at the CP. The young man was marched across the village square, in full view of the villagers, and out through the village gate beyond the town wall. Now, he was out of sight of the German civilians. There was a sudden burst of Tommy-gun fire into a fallen log. Then, very ostentatiously, the aid station jeep dashed out from the aid station and the boy was strapped on the litter and covered with a blanket. The jeep took off for the POW enclosure. The villagers thought that the orders of the Army Commander had been carried out. They were impressed.

As part of the investigation concerning the young man, the Battalion S-2 had made a very thorough inspection of the boy's home. There, a pistol, wrapped in an old sock, had been found in the chimney. A pistol in a town where the mayor had assured the battalion commander all weapons had been turned in. The colonel called for the mayor and laid down the law—all weapons would be turned in before dawn and an inspection would be made to insure that the orders were carried out. Strong measures would be taken if any more were found.

That night, the village of Walschleben was the scene of feverish activity. Lights burned late in many houses, lanterns were seen in many yards around the houses, many people were seen digging in flower gardens and in corners of the yards. The mayor was seen going from house to house all night long.

In the morning, the processions began. People came from all nooks and crannies of Walschleben, heading for the command post. They were carrying all

sorts of weapons. Anything which could, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered a weapon was on hand. There were rusty old cavalry sabers, there were shiny bayonets, there were extra-long kitchen knives. There were rusty handguns, there were flintlock rifles which had seen action in the Germanic wars a century before, some so rusted that you could not see through the bore. They had been hidden in the houses, they had been buried in the gardens. Wherever they had been, there were soon piles on the tables in the command post, the most useless collection of firearms and swords the world had ever seen. But, Walsleben was clean of weapons; the little drama with the teenager had impressed the people.

On 14 April, it seemed that Helpmate's role as a combat unit was about to come to an end. Orders were received relieving the battalion from XX Corps Artillery and attaching it to the 11th Armored Group for a mission of military government and line-of-communications security. This was a new role for Helpmate and the battalion was hard-pressed to carry out its new mission with the usual spirit and vigor. Accustomed to being in the thick of any battle, it was difficult to stand by a know that other units were still fighting.

In its new role, Helpmate shuttled personnel and equipment to new positions, with the few trucks remaining, after a large number had been pulled away to haul POWs. Battalion headquarters and Battery "B" moved to Eisenberg, Battery "C" went to Zeitz and Battery "A" went to Gera. Military government and the responsibility for law and order took the place of service of the piece and the adjustment of artillery fire. All three cities were occupied by the the 16th of April. The new mission only lasted until 20 April but it seemed like an eternity to the men of the 284th. It is interesting to note that this area which Helpmate governed immediately after the war is now a part of East Germany.

The return to combat status came on 21 April with the 284th once again being attached to XX Corps Artillery and to the 193rd F.A. Group. The mission was general support for the 65th Infantry Division from positions in the vicinity of Diepersdorf. On 22 April, the battalion moved to positions near Neumarkt. Firing was light on both days and consisted principally of registration.

At about midnight, 22-23 April, the colonel received a call from XX Corps Artillery. "Special mission for Helpmate. 259th Infantry Regiment is sending a battalion on a wide sweep around the flank to turn the enemy position and will make two German division retreat. You will provide artillery support. They move out at dawn. Get moving." That was the gist of the order from Corps. It was a compliment to Helpmate that Corps knew right were to turn for the experts in that kind of maneuver. Things began to happen in the 284th.

Within a couple of hours, the battalion staff was working with the infantry battalion staff, planning the disposition of artillery elements in the doughboy column. At dawn the task force, all motorized, moved out. Forward observers were with the advance guard, the Helpmate command group was with the infantry commander and firing batteries were disposed through the infantry column, ready to go into position alongside the road if anything developed. Only one fight came about but it was typical of the way Helpmate, now a seasoned

artillery unit, worked.

Near Schwarze, mortar rounds burst near the road and the crack of two 88-mm guns were heard. The command group ran to the top of a railroad embankment. Major Sparra spoke one code word into the radio microphone and, back along the column, "C" Battery streaked out into a field and the guns went into action.

Up on the embankment, the infantry commander turned to the colonel and asked, "Colonel, how long will it take to get some of your artillery into action?" Colonel Sanders looked back at Major Sparra who held up one finger to signify that one battery was ready. Just then, for howitzers boomed. Colonel Sanders looked at the infantry commander and said, "They're firing now." The liaison plane over head did a very quick adjustment and the other two firing batteries joined in the fire for effect. The two 88-s were knocked out. The enemy mortars pulled out and retreated. The entire operation was over in less time than it takes to tell the story. The next morning, then the 193rd Group commander came up to see how the action was going, the infantry commander was lavish in his praise for the speed with which the 284th had dispatched those two 88's. Helpmate took it in stride.

On 24 April, the battalion displaced to Endorf without firing and one the 25th the mission of the task force was declared a success and Helpmate was relieved of its mission and given another of general support of the 65th Infantry Division Artillery. The battalion moved with the division column and went into position in the vicinity of Saxberg, across the Danube from Regensburg. It was there that the battalion again fired for the cavalrymen of the 3rd Group.

The battalion had occupied positions in the vicinity of Saxberg, as a routine part of its mission, to support the 65th Division. The FDC was located in a small farmhouse about ten yards from a dirt road which led southward toward the Danube river, about three thousand yards ahead. indexRiver!Danube River Shortly, a cavalry scout car was seen dashing northward along that road. As it passed the farmhouse, the driver put on the brakes and, in a cloud of dust the car backed up until the turret was opposite the open window of the house. The lid of the turret opened and a lieutenant's head appeared, "Hey, Helpmate, can you guys give us some artillery support?"

Major Sparra came to the window and, much to his surprise, saw one of the officers of the outfit Helpmate had supported for so long during the winter. "Hell, yes," he drawled in his Texas drawl, "But, we have no observers with your people and we have no radio communication."

"That's easy, Major, we'll use my radio and you guys taught our guys to observe."

"Bring that car over to the window," replied Sparra. The scoutcar smashed through the fence and rolled up to the window. "Fire mission," said Sparra, alerting the firing batteries. The lieutenant rattled off a code name into the microphone of his radio, "Send your firing data. I found Helpmate and they will fire it for us." The data came in, the FDC translated it into fire commands and the guns boomed. Helpmate was shooting for the cavalrymen again. 318 rounds

were fired that afternoon, helping the cavalymen hold onto a small bridgehead they had grabbed across the Danube. Next day, the 65th Division poured its troops across, flanking Regensburg and forcing the Germans to retreat.

On 26 April, command in the 284th Field Artillery Battalion changed. Lieutenant Colonel Horace L. Sanders, who had brought the battalion to Europe and who had led it through all its combat up to that time, was transferred to XX Corps Artillery staff to become the Corps Artillery S-3. Major Charis R. Sparra was designated to command the battalion in his place. The colonel directed each battery commander to assemble those men who were available in some spot convenient to each battery and he went from battery to battery to say goodbye. He made it all right until he got to the last battery and then the emotional aspect of it got him; all he could say was, "So long, dammit, so long, you guys," and departed.

The battalion remained in the Saxberg positions until 28 April, firing 700 rounds in support of the bridgehead operations. At 1330 hours on the 28th, the battalion was relieved of its mission with the 65th Division and given a mission of general support for the 80th Infantry Division. That afternoon the unit displaced to positions in the vicinity of Peising without firing. On 30 April displacement was made to the vicinity of Forst where 27 rounds were fired.

On 1 May, the battalion displaced to Dingolfing and the firing was limited to registration only. The next day, there were two displacements—one to Loitersdorf and one to Gangkofen. Again firing was for registration only.

On 3 May, the battalion moved to position in the vicinity of Burghol without firing. On 4 May, a considerable number of trucks were dispatched to assist in moving the infantry of the 80th Division and the battalion remained in the Burghol positions without firing. This situation pertained through 7 May.

On 7 May, Helpmate, in common with all other elements of XX Corps Artillery received a "cease fire" order effective at 1201, 7 May. World War II was over in Europe; Germany had surrendered to the Allies.

Thus, on 7 May, ended two hundred and sixty continuous days of combat for the 284th Field Artillery Battalion, eight and two thirds months. The officers and men of the battalion had been true to the finest traditions of the Field Artillery and had exemplified in the highest degree what that telephone codename, so innocently assigned by a XX Corps staff officer, meant. Helpmate had not only been the telephone codename, it had been the way that the 284th had lived and operated for almost nine months. Several men had died, and many had been wounded, some very seriously, but the officers and men of the battalion had been true to their faith and uncounted numbers of infantry and cavalymen returned to this country after the war who might otherwise have been killed in that conflict.

For World War II, the ringing report, "Helpmate ready," had sounded for the last time.





## *Epilogue*

The 284th ended the war in Burghol and from that time on, all thoughts were directed toward that day when the American landmass would appear over the horizon. In company with all the others who had fought their way across France and Germany, the men of the 284th wanted to go home.

It was obvious, however, that there was work to be done in Europe before the army could sail for home. The defeated German army had to be disarmed and dispersed, the enormous number of displaced persons had to be cared for until they could be moved into their homelands, the defeated nation and to be governed until they could establish a stable government. The victorious army would have to perform these tasks, even at the cost of delaying the return. In addition, the war in the Pacific was still raging and there was a need for troops to be moved out there.

In order to move units and personnel from Europe to the United States in the most equitable fashion, the War Department devised a "point system" for determining the priority of movement home. Each unit and each officer and enlisted man was credited with a certain number of 'points' for such things as length of time spent overseas, the number of days in combat, the number of major campaigns participated in, and a variety of things like that. High point units and high point individuals would probably go home first; low point units stood a good chance of going directly to the Pacific. The major topic of conversation was the number of points credited to each individual.

None of the units in Europe were homogeneous insofar as points were concerned. Some had highpoint men serving alongside men with few points. Obviously, this had to be changed. The solution to the problem was the transfer of men between units to achieve a similarity of point credits. Accordingly, a general shuffling of personnel was ordered. Low point men were transferred out of high point units and high point men from low point units were transferred into them. The overall result was a breakup of units.

In addition, certain units were designated to stay longer in Europe to perform the military government functions mentioned above. It would be months before some of those units would get their orders to sail for home. These units had to be filled with low point men. Unit designations now meant little. An artillery unit might have more infantrymen or quartermasters than it had artillerymen.

Thus it was that, as V-E Day receded further in to history, the complexion of the 284th changed. By the time that it was the turn of the 284th to sail for

home it was to have only a few of the men who had fought their way across France and Germany together on its rolls. Many of the men of Helpmate come home with other units, some with infantry, some with quartermasters, some with medical units.

So it can be truthfully said that the saga of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion, "Helpmate Ready", ended on V-E Day. The 284th stayed on for several months, but Helpmate ceased to exist.

But the 284th had work to do. This story will not spend much time on what was done after V-E Day. There will be only a broad-brush treatment of the chores which the battalion was required to accomplish.

From Burghol, the battalion moved back into the Munich area where it was to spend several months. In the summer of '45, the 284th ran a large internment camp in the "Racetrack", where thousands of Hungarian troops, now POWs, were processed and shipped back to their homeland. There was a period when parts of the battalion were stationed at Dachau, the infamous Nazi concentration camp. There was a period when the battalion was billeted in a former SS troop camp south of Munich.

Through it all, the 284th, at least those who remained of Helpmate, sought to retain its identity as a proud field artillery battalion. It can be said that the officers and men who remained did an outstanding job of that. Finally, the 284th got its orders to sail for home. The battalion sailed from Camp Lucky Strike, Antwerp on Dec. 10th, 1945 and arrived in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on Jan 8th 1946 where the unit was officially inactivated. The 284th Field Artillery Battalion had done its job in an outstanding manner. It was with regret that the officers and men saw their colors, which had followed through training in Camp Rucker, Alabama, Tennessee Maneuvers and Fort Riley, Kansas, and, in combat across Europe, retire to the depot where all unit colors are stored.

Editorial Note: It should be of interest to all men who served with Helpmate to know that, when the Department of the Army selected units for the expansion incident to the fighting in Korea, the 284th Field Artillery Battalion was one of those selected. There is no way of knowing what motivated the Department of the Army to choose the 284th as one of those units but the possibility exists that one of the reasons was the superior combat record established by the men of Helpmate. Thus, another generation of men carried the same colors but it is highly unlikely that some Signal Officer in the faroff command gave them the telephone codename of "Helpmate."

## Recapitulation

The 284th Field Artillery Battalion spent eight and two-third months in combat. Like practically all corps artillery units, Helpmate was never pulled out of the line for rest and rehabilitation, or to assimilate replacements, as were many of the units which the battalion supported. Divisions came and divisions went, boundaries were shifted, units were changed, but generally the corps artillery units remained where they were until a change in the situation permitted them

to displace forward. Just so with Helpmate. The list of units which Helpmate supported is a large list; in some cases Helpmate was with the supported units for a considerable period of time. The list is as follows:

5th Infantry Division	from 25 Aug 44	until 27 Aug 44
	30 Aug 44	22 Oct 44
	2 Nov 44	22 Nov 44
	17 Dec 44	21 Dec 44
26th Infantry Division	7 Mar 45	18 Mar 45
65th Infantry Division	21 Apr 45	29 Apr 45
76th Infantry Division	11 Apr 45	14 Apr 45
80th Infantry Division	18 Mar 45	21 Mar 45
	27 Mar 45	3 Apr 45
	29 Apr 45	7 May 45
90th Infantry Division	27 Aug 44	30 Aug 44
94th Infantry Division	9 Jan 45	23 Feb 45
	5 Mar 45	7 Mar 45
95th Infantry Division	22 Oct 44	2 Nov 44
	22 Nov 44	17 Dec 44
	21 Dec 44	21 Dec 44
10th Armored Division	24 Jan 45	27 Jan 45
3rd Armored Cavalry Group	22 Dec 44	9 Jan 45
	3 Apr 45	11 Apr 45
	26 Apr 45	28 Apr 45
16th Armored Cavalry Group	27 Mar 45	40 Mar 45
11th Armored Group	14 Apr 45	21 Apr 45
5th Ranger Battalion	23 Feb 45	5 Mar 45

During this period, Helpmate fired over 98,500 rounds in support of these units. It is significant to note that not once was Helpmate ever charged with firing a round short and having it land amongst our own infantry—a record Helpmate points to with pride.

## losses

The artillery support, which Helpmate rendered to the supported units, was not without cost, however. While casualties in artillery units seldom approach in number those of the infantry units, and casualties among corps artillery units are generally less than those in divisional artillery units, the 284th did pay a high price for the support it gave. Thus, through its efforts, many infantrymen returned to their homes after the war but because of those efforts, many of the following men did not return to their own homes. The men who are listed below are the true heroes of the war.

## Killed

This list gives the names of the men who were killed in action, died as result of wounds received in action, or died as a result of accidental gunshot. It is

recognized that there may be even more men who died as a result of combat but the after-action report lists only those who died while under battalion control. The dates given are as close as records can report at this time.

Pfc Milton J. Dempsey	Battery "B"	8 Sep 44
Pfc P. J. Garman	Battery "B"	12 Dec 44
Cpl George B. Groff	Battery "C"	3 Oct 44
Pvt Everest A. Maskell	Battery "C"	30 Oct 44
Pvt Edward L. McDuffie	Svc Battery	3 Jan 45
T/4 Clyde J. Montag	Battery "A"	25 Feb 45
Pfc James Polak	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
Pfc Walter A. Uminski	Battery "C"	11 Feb 45
Cpl James Wagner	Battery "A"	18 Sep 44
T/5 Patrick Walentowski	Hq Battery	10 Apr 45

### Wounded

This list of men wounded in action is a large list; however, it should be pointed out that it, in no way, contains the names of all men in the battalion who were wounded in action. Time and time again men were wounded in action and, after treatment by battery aidmen or at the battalion aid station, returned to their units before proper records could be established. This, then, must be considered to be a partial list; many more men carry scars today whose names are not here included.

T/5 Dominic C. Arsego	Battery "B"	8 Sep 44
Cpl Benjamin T. Borgman	Hq Battery	10 Apr 45
Pfc Charles J. Brownell	Battery "C"	26 Feb 45
Sgt William P. Burrows	Battery "C"	27 Feb 45
Sgt Clifford G. Cosler	Battery "C"	10 Sep 44
Sgt Gerald T. Corrigan	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
Lieut Charles A. Davis	Battery "A"	18 Feb 44
S/Sgt Felix S. Drone	Battery "C"	20 Dec 44
Sgt Warren C. Ellis	Battery "A"	11 Feb 45
Pvt John P. Flanagan	Hq Battery	27 Sep 44
S/Sgt Robert J. Foley	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
Cpl John Forsisky	Battery "B"	11 Sep 44
Cpl Nicholas G. Gallas	Battery "B"	25 Feb 45
Cpl Donald P. Ghena	Battery "C"	11 Feb 45
Pvt Albert L. Grisham	Battery "A"	3 Mar 45
Pfc Edwin H. Gumprecht	Battery "A"	26 Feb 45
Pvt Robert G. Hewelt	Battery "A"	8 Nov 44
Pvt William M. Hoskins	Battery "C"	10 Sep 44
Pfc George C. Hulton	Battery "C"	26 Feb 45
Pvt Frank P. Iori	Battery "C"	30 Oct 44

Lieut Lewis E. Johnson	Hq Battery	27 Sep 44
Pvt Frank Junko	Battery "C"	1 Sep 44
T/5 Richard A. Katz	Battery "B"	8 Sep 44
Pfc Wilbur G. Kniskern	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
M/Sgt Herbert J. Knoblauch	Hq Battery	2 Apr 45
Pfc Jerome R. Kowalski	Battery "C"	26 Feb 45
Pfc Matthew L. Kruchten	Battery "A"	4 Oct 44
Lieut Leon L. Lambach	Battery "A"	25 Aug 44
S/Sgt Herbert L. Larsen	Battery "B"	8 Sep 44
Pfc Charles G. Lavicka	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
Cpl Dominic M. LeDonne	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
T/Sgt Hyman Lubin	Hq Battery	10 Apr 45
S/Sgt Vincent Manno	Battery "A"	25 Aug 44
T/4 George F. Marshall	Battery "C"	3 Oct 44
Cpl Joseph N. Mascha	Battery "C"	10 Sep 44
Cpl Joseph Molnar	Battery "B"	18 Sep 44
Pvt Bernon H. Morgan		3 Mar 45
T/5 Norbert T. Obecny	Hq Battery	9 Sep 44
Lieut Harvey L. Osboren	Battery "A"	25 Feb 45
Lieut George M. Ossefort	Battery "C"	7 Sep 44
Lieut George M. Ossefort	Battery "C"	27 Feb 45
T/5 George T. Popp	Battery "C"	26 Feb 45
T/Sgt Emilio J. Punto	Hq Battery	9 Feb 45
T/Sgt Emilio J. Punto	Hq Battery	26 Feb 45
Pfc C. Reiss	Battery "C"	17 Dec 44
S/Sgt Roy A. Roeser	Battery "C"	15 Mar 45
Lieut Albert W. Scoville	Hq Battery	7 Sep 44
T/5 Herbert L. Smith	Hq Battery	10 Apr 45
Pvt Harry H. Sokolski	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
Sgt William J. Street	Battery "B"	30 Sep 44
Lieut Mario G. Strollo	Battery "B"	18 Dec 44
T/3 John B. Summers	Med. Det.	27 Feb 45
Pvt Robert E. Whalen	Battery "A"	27 Feb 45
Major Ray E. Williams	Hq Battery	10 Sep 44
Pfc Robert D. Wise	Battery "A"	18 Sep 44

### Missing in Action

All of Helpmate's losses did not pass through medical channels; three men were captured and carried on the rolls as missing in action. They were captured at Fort Driant on October '44 and all were released after the war had ended. They were:

Lieut Jerrel W. Southern	Battery "B"	8 Sep 44
Cpl Henry E. Ceci	Battery "B"	8 Sep 44

Pvt Robert I. White Battery "B" 8 Sep 44

The story of Helpmate is replete with incidents of heroism and self-sacrifice. Some of those incidents have been recognized through the award of medals for gallantry in action and for specific courage on the battlefield. On the other hand, many instances went unreported and unrewarded. It may be said that those cases which were recognized reflected the spirit of the officers and men of the 284th, a spirit of selflessness and devotion to duty, which led men to perform above and beyond their normal capability. Thus, the entire battalion can take pride in the following list of awards which were made during combat. It should be noted that this list is compiled from the after-action reports submitted during combat; those reports were no longer required after 7 May (V-E Day) and, therefore, there may have been more awards than are here listed.

### Silver Star

S/Sgt Robert J. Foley	Battery "A"	4 May 45
Pvt Frank P. Iori	Battery "C"	4 Feb 45
T/4 Harvey J. Juneau	Battery "B"	7 May 45
Capt. Stephen J. MacPartland	Hq Battery	27 Feb 45
Lieut George M. Ossefort	Battery "C"	7 May 45
Lieut John E. Poindexter	Battery "B"	7 May 45
Lt. Col H. L. Sanders	Hq Battery	27 Feb 45
Major C. R. Sparra	Hq Battery	7 May 45
Lieut Mario G. Strollo	Battery "B"	4 Feb 45
Cpl Clarence Wilkinson	Battery "B"	14 Jan 45

### Bronze Star

Lieut Noel E. Alloway	Hq Battery	11 Mar 45
Lieut James R. Barrentine	Battery "B"	14 Jan 45
Pvt Russell L. Bassett	Battery "B"	4 Feb 45
Cpl Robert D. Beck	Battery "B"	3 Mar 45
S/Sgt Thomas R. Benedict	Battery "C"	4 May 45
Cpl Stanley T. Chmura	Svc Battery	4 Feb 45
Capt Marion L. Conway	Hq Battery	14 Jan 45
Pfc Thomas A. Dubbs	Battery "C"	Apr 45
Sgt Warren C. Ellis	Battery "A"	3 Mar 45
T/Sgt Arthur J. Fancher	Hq Battery	Apr 45
Cpl J. E. Gale	Battery "A"	4 Feb 45
S/Sgt Donald T. Grogan	Svc Battery	4 May 45
T/5 Richard B. Houlihan	Battery "C"	Apr 45

Lieut Harry E. Hudson	Battery "A"	4 Feb 45
Lieut Lewis E. Johnson	Battery "C"	4 Feb 45
Cpl Arvedeg Keurjian	Hq Battery	4 May 45
M/Sgt Herbert J. Knoblauch	Hq Battery	4 Mar 45
Lieut John J. Koss	Battery "C"	11 Mar 45
Pvt Matthew L. Kruchten	Battery "A"	4 Feb 45
Pvt Matthew L. Kruchten	Battery "A"	Apr 45
T/5 Clarence T. Lady	Battery "B"	4 Feb 45
S/Sgt Vincent Manno	Battery "A"	12 Feb 45
Cpl Joseph N. Mascha	Battery "C"	Apr 45
Capt Irving R. Merrill	Hq Battery	14 Jan 45
T/5 Joseph C. Miller	Hq Battery	4 May 45
Cpl Joseph P. Molnar	Battery "B"	4 Feb 45
Lieut Leo M. Murphy	Battery "B"	4 Feb 45
Lieut Harvey L. Osborne	Battery "A"	4 Feb 45
T/5 John Panizzi	Battery "C"	11 Mar 45
S/Sgt Ronnie S. Polson	Med Det	Apr 45
T/Sgt Emilio J. Punto	Hq Battery	3 Mar 45
T/4 Geoffrey T. Raymer	Battery "C"	3 Mar 45
Cpl Thomas J. Rink	Battery "C"	3 Mar 45
S/Sgt Roy A. Roeser	Battery "C"	4 Feb 45
Capt Gerald F. Ruschmeyer	Battery "B"	11 Mar 45
Lt Col H. L. Sanders	Hq Battery	24 Jan 45
T/5 Raymond L. Sanders	Svc Battery	4 May 45
Capt Paul M. Schmidt	Battery "C"	11 Mar 45
Capt William W. Schick	Battery "A"	11 Mar 45
Major C. R. Sparra	Hq Battery	14 Jan 45
T/5 William L. Stepanek	Battery "A"	4 Feb 45
Pfc Frank L. Waszak	Battery "B"	4 Feb 45
Capt Richard B. Williams	Svc Battery	11 Mar 45
Pvt Phillip T. Ziegler	Battery "A"	4 Feb 45

## Air Medal

A very large factor in the success achieved by the 284th Field Artillery Battalion can be credited to the battalion Air Section. From the arrival of the battalion at Llanover Castle, Abergavenny, Wales, until the final stages of the war in Germany, the liaison planes of the Air Section were overhead. They flew whenever the weather conditions permitted and often when conditions should not have permitted. The speed with which Helpmate could bring fire upon enemy targets was, in a large measure, due to the excellent work of the men of the Air Section. Without the Air Section, Helpmate would not have done as good a job as it did. Unfortunately, the after-action reports from which the record of awards is derived, fail to adequately report all of the awards of the Air Medal and the Oak Leaf Clusters to the members of the Air Section. Rather than present a known-to-be inadequate list of these awards, the report will list only the names

of the men who earned the Air Medal. They are:



Lieut Leo E. Bergeron      Lieut Albert W. Scoville  
 Lieut Stanmore Cawthon    Lieut Henry L. Rowan

Considering the amount of time which these men spent in the air, adjusting the fires of the battalion, it is a certainty that all of them did qualify for several Oak Leaf Clusters to the Air Medal.

### **French Croix de Guerre**

After the liberation of France, the French government desired to recognize the units which had participated in that liberation. In the hectic state of affairs then existing, it was difficult to quickly establish the identity of the combat units which had been involved. The French government accordingly requested that Third Army designate the commanders and one non-commissioned officer of battalion-size combat units which had fought to liberate France to receive the French Croix de Guerre as a token of the French gratitude to the men of the battalion. On 2 Dec 44, the medal was presented to

Lt Col H.L. Sanders    Hq Battery  
 S/Sgt Roy A. Roeser    Battery "C"

Although the above two members of Helpmate are the ones who wear the medal, the decoration belongs to all the officers and men of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion.

### **Battlefield Promotions**

During combat, one of the most serious problems is the replacement of losses, losses of every category—deaths, wounds, capture, illness, etc. The replacement of officer losses is a particularly vexing part of the overall problem because the new replacement must step into a position of command and, without knowing the personalities and capabilities of the men he must lead, he may make mistakes which can cost the lives of some of the men under him. In World War II, the system of battlefield promotion served to alleviate this problem to a great degree. Through this system, a noncommissioned officer who had served well could be promoted to officer grade and remain in that same unit.

This system worked well but it put a tremendous load on the newly-commissioned officer. Suddenly lifted out of the ranks, he had to put aside the personal friendships he had formed as an nco (non-commissioned officer) and assume an unbiased attitude toward all enlisted men. In some cases, newly-commissioned officers were never able to rise above their former nco status and became a liability rather than an asset to their unit. In Helpmate's case, the men who were promoted on the battlefield served magnificently; Helpmate was fortunate.

Three men were recommended for battlefield promotion. Two of them were actually commissioned; they were:

Second Lieutenant Noel E. Alloway, formerly the Battalion Sergeant Major.

Second Lieutenant Henry L. Rowan, formerly Staff Sergeant in the Air Section.

The third noncommissioned officer to be recommended was Staff Sergeant Roy A. Roeser, of Battery "C". The recommendation was approved and instructions were received to administer the oath of office to make him a Second Lieutenant on 9 April 1945. Unfortunately, Sergeant Roeser had been wounded on 15 March 1945 and had been evacuated. It was impossible to administer the oath of office and the papers had to be returned.

And so, at last, the history of Helpmate has been written. True, time not only dims the memory, but makes unavailable much factual information and pictures that we would have liked to have included. While war itself could never be accused of being amusing, there were also incidents of humor, dozens of them, that would have spiced up the reading. At the expense of being dull, to the casual reader, but certainly not to any man of Helpmate, the account of the travels and exploits of the 284th Field Artillery Battalion of World War II are completely factual.

Brig. Gen. H. L. Sanders, USA Ret.

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