

The FIELD ARTILLERY JOURNAL



JULY 1946



LIBERTY ON THE
AUCTION BLOCK

... page 388

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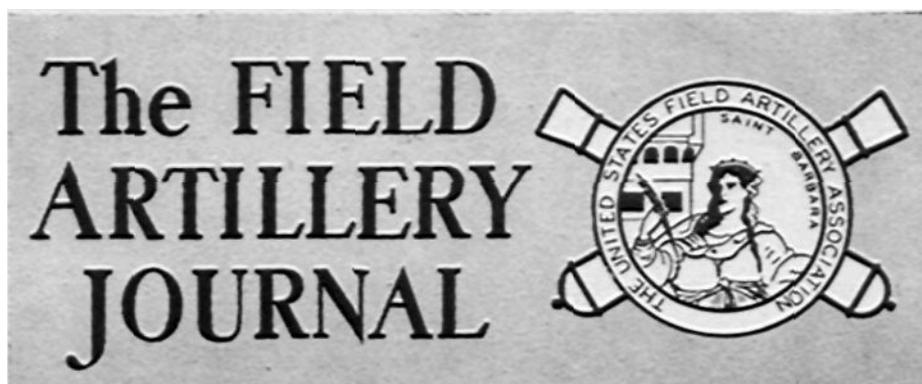
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- Cover: Proudly, the colors of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion of the 82nd Airborne Division march by in the Army Day Parade in Washington, D. C., on 6 April 1946. Picture by Sgt. Ric Bersin. Hq. AGF.
- Frontispiece: Self-propelled artillery, old and new.

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COLONEL DEVERE ARMSTRONG

Editor

MAJOR ROBERT F. COCKLIN
Associate Editor

LENNA PEDIGO
Business Manager

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FIFTH WHEEL

The story of an "extra" outfit in the 11th Airborne Division that paid off when the chips were down in combat.

By Col. Douglass P. Quandt,
GSC.*

THERE ARE FIVE BATTERIES in a parachute artillery battalion: a headquarters battery, three howitzer batteries of four 75 pack howitzers each, and the "extra" battery—the antiaircraft-antitank battery.

I do not propose here to try to explain how such a battery came into being, or why it was included in a parachute artillery battalion. My sole purpose in writing this is to tell of how one AA-AT Battery — D Battery of the 457th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion of the 11th Airborne Division — shook off the stigma of being the "fifth wheel" and firmly established its own *raison d'être* when the chips were down in combat.

Gliderless Gliders. During training, when the other batteries were making their battery jumps, the AT half of D Battery loaded and lashed their 37's in "mockups," since no gliders were available. As the training progressed to the "battalion jump" stage, the AT half of D Battery also took over the battalion guard, KP, and latrine orderly duties. In the combined training phase, there was no place for D Battery to go. The glider combat team had its own AT platoon and the "purist" parachute combat team snubbed D Battery as glider riders without gliders. Every glider that could be spared for the parachute combat team was utilized for badly needed transportation. The morale of the battery slowly declined. The men were

*Chief of Staff, 11th Airborne Division. Col. Quandt commanded the 457th Prcht FA Bn for approximately 18 months. He left the battalion in July '44 to become G-3 of the Division. In November '45, Colonel Quandt was advanced to his present assignment as Division Chief of Staff.



jumpers, but they couldn't jump. And even if the antitank guns could jump, the AA-AT Bn would get the jobs.

Brighter Days. The division commander generally used two or more of the 75mm howitzers as assault cannon with each regimental combat team. These guns accompanied the advance elements of the infantry and destroyed road blocks, machine gun nests, or other strong points delaying the advance. The job was an exciting one, even in maneuvers, and was eagerly sought by howitzer crews. The commanding general decided to obtain howitzers for D Battery, by hook or crook, and assign them the assault mission permanently, thus maintaining complete 12-gun artillery battalions. The artillery commander was ordered to train D Battery for this duty.

D Battery was delighted. They begged and "borrowed" howitzers for training. Their intensive training in 37mm direct laying (there had been nothing else to do for many months) stood them in good stead when they got their howitzers. In no time, four crackerjack howitzer crews were available. With the addition of ten feet of W110 wire stolen here and fifteen feet borrowed there, a salvaged telephone or two, and a couple of megaphones from Charlotte, North Carolina, enough communication equipment was rounded up to organize the crews into a battery. A battery jump was made, with all weapons accompanying the men to the ground. Morale soared. The men began to act as though they really had a purpose in life. They did well in battery service practice, and finally—oh great day—marched out with the rest of the battalion to service practice. It must be admitted that the personnel of other outfits occupied OP's in front of D Battery's gun position with some hesitancy. At the end of the practice, however, D Battery had earned a permanent place in the firing battalion. Shortly thereafter they were presented with four howitzers of their own, and soon departed for the Southwest Pacific.

Doughboy's Delight. There being no cannon company in an airborne division, D Battery became the substitute. At one time in New Guinea, no infantry battalion went on a mission without at least a section of D Battery attached.



Normal employment was to attach a platoon to each assault regiment.

In the training stage, infantry commanders usually placed the howitzers at the rear of the main body during the approach march. Then, when the head of the column became engaged, the gun was called forward. The difficulty of passing the howitzer through the column and through jungle growth, and the attention attracted by the piece as it occupied position, led to the decision to place the howitzer with the support of the advance guard. The wisdom of this decision was later confirmed many times in combat.

The battery had been trained to carry out its assault mission with or without prime movers, but without jeeps to tow the howitzers, it was extremely difficult to keep pace with the infantry. Only the AT half of the battery was assigned to

assault duty; the remainder continued to man anti-aircraft machine guns. It was decided that whenever prime movers could not be made available (as in a jump without gliders) the machine gun portion of the battery would abandon its armament and form relief crews for towing the howitzers by hand.

The constant and close association with the infantry in New Guinea had its advantages. The infantry grew accustomed to having the howitzers up front, and eventually accepted them so wholeheartedly as to volunteer free advice on the different methods of towing. Incidentally, after the first employment of the howitzers in combat, the infantry provided volunteer relief towing crews!

Prime Movers Sink. On the 31st of January 1945, the division made an

amphibious landing at Nasugbu (sixty-five miles south of Manila) with the mission of proceeding rapidly inland and, if tactical conditions warranted, to attack Manila from the south and make contact with Sixth Army forces approaching the city from the north. Between the landing beaches and the high Tagaytay Ridge overlooking Manila, the Japanese had established a strong defensive position across the highway in the defile formed by Mount Carilao on the north and Mount Batulao on the South. The landing strength of the division was slightly over 6,000 men, including all the service troops necessary to establish, maintain, and operate a port. The strength of the Japanese south of Manila was around 50,000. To avoid being driven into the sea, it was imperative that the division advance to

Manila with all possible haste and establish some contact with friendly forces. This required the fastest possible penetration of the Batulao-Carilao position.

All four guns of D Battery were ordered to accompany the leading regiment (188th Infantry). Frankly, the joy the men felt at being given the mission was somewhat diminished when, during landing, they watched their prime movers sink out of sight below the gentle waves.

Pay-Off. The division commenced its march inland and upland (afoot) and shortly after midnight struck the first dug-in position. Jap machine guns enfiladed the route of advance and threw lead all over the place, while mortars dropped their hollow-cracking shells

into our troops. Time after time the howitzers went into position in place and fired at machine gun nests, strong points, and caves. It would be unfair to the gloriously fighting men of the two infantry regiments and artillery battalions to give the impression that the assault cannon of D Battery blasted the hole in the Batulao-Carilao line through which the remainder of the division poured. Indeed, the rapid disruption of the Jap forces defending this line is attributable to so many factors beyond the scope of this account that I can only mention the artillery-infantry assault, supported closely by tactical aircraft, which played the largest part in the whole scheme. The direct fire of D Battery's guns unquestionably contributed to the success of the assault, and as a result of their work the battery was awarded the Presidential Citation for heroism.

After the breakthrough, and the vertical envelopment of the Jap position by the jump on Tagaytay Ridge, the division proceeded in calculated haste to Manila and occupied the now famous 65-mile-long, 100-yard-wide beachhead. Through surprise and rapid annihilation of outposts, penetration into Manila was effected to a position across the Paranaque River Bridge. Here the division came up against the Genko Line, a position of mutually supporting solid concrete and dirt pillboxes some 6,000 yards deep, and about 4 miles across. The guns of D Battery were again employed to shoot at the pillboxes, but, alas, these fortifications proved too thick and formidable for their 75mm ammunition. It was necessary for the infantry to assault each one in turn, and the guns were brought together and employed as a battery of the direct support battalion. By this time, the D Battery veterans passed easily from one role to another, either shooting from the hip in the front lines or methodically jerking the lanyard at the computer's command.

Another Boat Ride. D Battery was next removed from battalion control on the 23rd of February when the division raided the Los Banos Prison Camp to liberate some 2,100 allied internees. The story of the rescue has been told many times, but for those who haven't heard,



The picture above shows a section of D Battery, 457th Precht FA Bn, firing point blank at caves on hillside. The gun had been carried on foot, piece by piece, up a slick mountain trail. Below, a Filipino pack party brings ammunition up the side of a mountain near Lipa, Batanges, Luzon, P. I.



the operation went generally as follows. The camp was situated about 25 miles inside Jap territory, on the south shore of a body of shallow water called Laguna De Bay. We divided guerrilla estimates by ten and came up with the guess that about 8,000 Japs were within an hour's march from the camp. The division plan was to assemble during the night of the 22nd in the vicinity of a town called Calamba, and at seven on the morning of the 23rd, to launch a strong ground attack across the San Juan River. At the same time, a reinforced company would jump close to the camp and join the Division Ren Platoon at the camp (a position to which it was to infiltrate during the night), complete the job of knifing the Jap sentries, and organize the internees for rapid evacuation. At 0400 of that morning, an amphibious task force of one battalion of infantry (less the jumping company) and D Battery, mounted in amphibious tractors, entered the shallow waters of Laguna de Bay with all the quiet of a thousand subway trains. They steered a compass course (it was black as a coal mine after taps) for the beach opposite the camp. Well, you've heard the rest—how at 0700 a hundred and fifty paratroopers hit the silk, the amtracs hit the beach, and the first artillery concentration of the ground attack to the west echoed across the rice paddies. The Jap garrison died where it stood, some on guard and some taking calisthenics. All the internees were evacuated, with only one of them being wounded slightly. The resistance to the landing came from a lone hill overlooking the beach. D Battery descended from the amtracs, wheeled to the right, and plastered the hill until the last internee was loaded and had shoved off. It then gathered its guns, mounted its amtracs, and headed for the friendly shore. Rejoining its battalion, D Battery then moved with it to support the attack on Ternate.

By Hand to Peaks. Three months later, the division was preparing to attack and capture Mount Malepunyo, the last Jap stronghold in Southern Luzon. Meanwhile, since a company of tanks and a company of tank destroyers had been attached to the division, there was little need for employing the howitzers of D Battery in their assault

role. However, the cave positions of General Fujisige's last holdout were on the peaks of the mountain mass—inaccessible even to carabao, let alone tanks or tank destroyers. Consequently, the commander of the regiment making the main effort requested assault guns.

D Battery took its howitzers as far as they could go on wheels, disassembled them and carried the parts to the tops of three peaks which had been taken by the infantry, and from which the infantry was to jump off in the final attack. There they assembled their weapons and trained them on the next objective: Mt. Mataasna Bundoc, a subordinate of Mt. Malepunyo. From the positions, the guns could hit three sides of the mountain. Range was short (about 200 yards at the most) and the firing was done across the canyon between the peaks. Three forward observers, with SCR-609 communication to the guns, accompanied the infantry. One of them was from Kentucky, an extraordinarily cool and brave youngster, who was long on courage and short on rhetoric. On one occasion when his battery commander, who was concerned about the 2,400-foot uphill carry of ammunition, cautioned him to "go easy on area targets," back came the radio reply straight from deepest Kentucky, "That warn't no area target. Hit war a Jap!"

Stigma Forgotten. As the doughboys climbed up the sides of the mountain, D Battery blasted the caves they pointed out above them. So close did they follow the bursts that fragments nicked their shoulders as they climbed. Malepunyo is past history, now. One combat photography unit obtained striking moving pictures of one assault gun, both from the gun position and from the infantry lines, and the pictures have since appeared in the news reels at home. We used to conduct liaison plane tours over the mountain peaks so that visiting dignitaries could view the hundreds of Jap bodies on the slopes—mute testimony to the effectiveness of D Battery's last combat mission. Needless to remark, the appellation *Fifth Wheel* had long since been lost in a forgotten rice paddy along the road to victory.

BOOZERS BEWARE

NUMEROUS American artillerymen who were stationed in the south of England undoubtedly visited Winchester and viewed with interest the "Boozer's Stone" which stands in front of the cathedral. Young Thomas Thetcher's violent death in 1764 from "drinking small beer when hot" may still be meaningful, to some artillerymen, in this midsummer of 1946!

IN MEMORY OF THOMAS THETCHER

a Grenadier in North Regt. of Hants Militia who died of a violent Fever contracted by drinking Small Beer when hot the 12 of May 1764 Aged 26 Years

In grateful remembrance of whose universal good will towards his Comrades, this Stone is placed here at their expense as a small testimony of their regard and concern

Here sleeps in peace a Hampshire Grenadier Who caught his death by drinking cold small Beer

Soldiers be wise from his untimely fall And when you're hot drink Strong or none at all.

This memorial being decayed was restored by the Officers of the Garrison A.D. 1782

An honest Soldier never is forgot Whether he die by Musket or by Pot

This Stone was placed by the North Hants Militia when disembodied at Winchester On 26th April 1902 in consequence of the original Stone being destroyed

