

## CHAPTER 9

# AWAY FROM THE COMBAT TEAM

### ROVING ARTILLERY

AS the 442d Infantry Regiment and the 232d Engineers headed back for the shores of Italy, the 522d Field Artillery Battalion began the long trek up the Rhone Valley again. After a 600-mile motor march, the battalion immediately went into position at Kleinbittersdorf, on the east bank of the Saar River. From March 12 to March 21 the 522d supported the assault of the 63d Division on the Siegfried Line defenses south of St. Ingbert.

After the fall of Saarbrücken and a penetration by Third Army armor to the north, the Siegfried Line collapsed in the Seventh Army sector. The 522d, now supporting the 45th Division, moved to within one thousand yards of the west bank of the Rhine and fired in direct support of infantry crossings. The night of March 26 the battalion came under control of the 44th Division, which was then driving for Mannheim. Guns and crews rolled across the Rhine before dawn of March 27 and moved on until Mannheim came within range. Following the fall of the city, the travel-weary GIs again supported the 63d Division during the Neckar River crossing just prior to the occupation of Heidelberg.

The 522d pulled up stakes on April 1 and trav-

elled ninety miles due east into the 4th Division's sector. Here they were assigned to support the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop in a drive on Aub and Hemmersheim, where their fire forced the enemy to surrender and opened the way for the 4th Division's drive on Rothenburg.

April 26 saw the battalion in direct support of the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 12th Infantry in the Danube River crossing. Four days later an advance party on reconnaissance for new positions captured Morlbach without firing a shot, capturing fifty prisoners and liberating a number of French prisoners of war. From April 27 to April 30, the battalion displaced its guns fourteen times during the 4th Division's drive on Salzburg, Austria.

The last of well over 150,000 rounds the 522d Field Artillery fired in battle came out of the tubes on May 2. From that time, until the Battalion was returned to the United States in November 1945, the men were assigned to security missions around Donauworth, Austria. These missions consisted largely of setting up roadblocks and sentry posts for the apprehension of Nazis who were trying to disappear among the hordes of displaced persons wandering aimlessly about the country.

### D-DAY, SOUTHERN FRANCE

AFTER weeks of preparation, Antitank Company took to the air at 1630, August 15, 1944. Two hours later the pilots of the tow planes cut the gliders loose at 3000 feet, and the pilots began circling to land. The landing zones were considerably smaller than originally anticipated and the landings were rough. The gliders were forced to come in from all directions to find space. Ten men were injured in glider crashes, six seriously. One jeep and a trailer were wrecked.

The company's mission was to take up defensive positions in a rough triangle near le Muy and les Arcs, in support of the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment. From these positions they could stop the enemy from reinforcing his troops on the coast in time to meet the invasion of the sea-borne troops.

All platoons were ready to begin operations within an hour after the landings. They were able to move into position without opposition, but the first and third platoons were under considerable small-arms and artillery fire until the night of D plus 2, when the assault elements of the 36th Division pushed through.

The First Airborne Task Force was then assigned the mission of driving east as far as the Franco-Italian border to protect the right flank of the Seventh Army. The 517th got underway the morning of August 18, one platoon of Antitank Company being assigned to each battalion of the regiment to protect the flanks, inasmuch as the troops were widely dispersed. The advance was extremely rapid, the only resistance being scattered and confused.

Antitank Company was able to pick up several prisoners, mostly small groups of Germans hiding in houses along the route of advance.

Captain Louis A. Ferris, the company commander, led a patrol to Puget Sheniers on August 28 to determine whether or not fifteen paratroopers reported holding out in the town since D-Day were still there. The patrol came under heavy small-arms and mortar fire. One vehicle was badly damaged, but the men escaped unhurt. No contact was made with the paratroopers.

By the end of August the 517th Parachute Infantry had almost reached the Italian border. It encountered heavy fighting as the Germans began defending the high mountain peaks of the Maritime Alps east of Nice. The paratroopers took Col de Braus, the pass which overlooked the border town of Sospel, only after they had suffered heavy casualties. Other elements of the regiment seized Piera

Cava, a small ski resort high in the mountains. Opposite these positions were French border forts which the Germans had occupied and were defending. Antitank Company set up roadblocks at Col de Braus, Luceram, and Piera Cava. These blocks were all at principal road junctions or passes and received considerable enemy mortar and artillery fire. However, casualties were usually light, since the men were well dug into defensive positions.

No matter where they went, the men got a royal welcome. Allied troops were still few and far between on the French Riviera, so everyone made the most of his opportunities on passes to Nice.

On October 21, the company was relieved by the 552d Antitank Company (Separate). The platoons assembled and pulled back to Nice, where they stayed until the 24th. That afternoon, Antitank Company pulled out in convoy to rejoin the 442d Infantry in the Vosges Mountains.