

HEADQUARTERS  
601<sup>ST</sup> GUN BN (SM)  
APO 638, US ARMY

“Narrative History”

by

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This is the story of the “Six Hundred and First” an ack-ack outfit (90mm) that made a distinguished name for itself during the Blitz of Robot Bombs in World War Two. Originated as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 601<sup>st</sup> CA (AA) in February ’42 at Fort Bliss, Texas, the outfit moved to Philadelphia, Pa., in May ’42 where its three battalions operated until 31 August ’43 when they were redesignated, and the former 1<sup>st</sup> Bn became the 601<sup>st</sup> AAA Gun Bn (SM) operative 1 September ’43. As such, it carried out its mission of anti-aircraft with a fine record. However, our “History” really begins with POE time in early February ’44. The 601<sup>st</sup> was going overseas.

13 February ’44 – cold – dismal night – the last bunch of replacements joined us from Fort Eustis, Va. AARTC – fifteen hours by troop train – lined up in a foot of snow on frozen ground – a tired – bedraggled looking mess of men.

Ninety-two filed into our smoky-frigid-so called Day Room. Introductory talk by the battalion executive. The major – old soldier – tall-greyhaired-distinguished looking – and in that dimly lit room – the center of tired eyes. He introduced himself. “I”, he said, “am Major Whitaker, your Battalion Executive Officer” He paused -- looked slowly around the room ----“how many of you want to go overseas?” The answer – two men raised their hands. The major’s gimlet eyes blazed. “That” he said, “is just T.S.” – then he added “Because – every – one – of – you – is – going – over – and - very – damn – soon”. Silence – a couple of sighs – crestfallen looks on young faces – nervous dropping of eyes – shuffling of feet – the major continued - and in no uncertain terms – explained what happens to men who go “over the hill” at POE, or any other time. A kid voice stage whispered in a dark corner “Jeeze – aint he a tough old bird.”

It was eleven-thirty at night – the Salvation Sals had hot java and sinkers ready in the donut hut across the way – welcome news for those tired and hungry new men. Barracks were cold – dusty – the non-coms oppressively hardboiled and “hungover” – the newcomers not very impressed – they hit the sacks like dead men.

Six days to POE time – new men going overseas without furloughs? Not if First Sergeant Tom Doss could help it. He told the Hq battery commanders, Capt Harry E. Gilbert. The answer – gladdened many a downcast heart – seventy-two hours for anyone who could make it – they did.

Six days to POE time – madhouse of farewells – guys and gals – playmates and pals – “So long”. Dawn – 22 February – troop trains again – heading for our POE – GIs loaded down – combat equipment – candy – cigs – fruit – sandwiches – books – everything to make even a short ride pleasant – goodbye gifts from the citizens of Philly. Familiar panorama flashes by – the Delaware’s rippling waters – flatlands farms and fields – factories – homes of the Garden State. Camden – scene of many a gay time – brings a flood of memories as it slips all too swiftly by – and then at last – acres and acres of military barracks – Camp Kilmer.

Kilmer – room for a hundred thousand men – named for the poet – soldier of World War One – author of immortality – “Trees” – (remember – “I think that I shall never see – a poem as lovely as a tree – a tree whose hungry mount is pressed – against the earths sweet flowing breast – a tree that looks at God all day - lifts her leafy arms to pray. A tree who may in summer wear – a nest of robbins her hair – upon whose bosom snow has lain – who intimately lives with rain – poems are made by fools like me – but only God can make a tree” – Joyce Kilmer.

Final training in a big way – hikes – drills – all kinds of lectures – training films – abandon ship practice – train boarding exercise – obstacle courses – checking Final stripping for the medics – (“How do you feel, soldier? any complaints? O.K. – next?) last minute shots – and of course – miles and miles of “Latrinograms”. Sssshhhhh – the very latest – we’re going to Italy – China – Iceland – Africa the Argentine ---. Every time we saw the tape across the phone mouths at the PX – our time had come – for sure. But ---

It couldn’t happen – but it did. A Joe in Able Battery comes down with Scarlett Fever – the whole unit quarantined – ten days at least – unlucky Able – lucky rest of us. Able under guard – no passes – separate chow line – for ten long days. for the rest – twelve hours passes every day – precious hours – time for family – friends a last look – “crowd the hours, buddy” and – we did.

Time for other things too – we meet our new C.O. – last minute get acquainted gathering in one of Kilmer's many spacious auditoriums – Smooth – suave – Southern accented Lt Colonel Alex H. Shafer Jr. – Virginian – Richmond born – graduate of VPI, head instructor – 90 mm to officers at Fort Totten – confident voiced – “Proud to know you , men” – and we feel better knowing our top brass knows his stuff.

There's a Captain introduced – just back from the ETO with good – well – just advice. “Leave your money home, men. You can't possibly spend more than five or six dollars a month over there”. Humph – I'd like to meet that Captain now – discuss it pro and con – “Can't spend money overseas, Captain?” Ouch – we've thought about that captain many times since then – in London – Paris – Brussels – Antwerp – “Ah Captain, where were you?”

Chow lines – familiar forms of punishment – these at Kilmer topped 'em all – blocks long – six abreast – two hours through one sitting – food aplenty - and plenty good – but – when the last man reached the trays – he'd east a horse – and like it. Four thousand men some days – (I recall K.P.) – twelve thousand cups of coffee – I saw coffee snakes for weeks – drank them away with gallons of Bessie Bordon's liquid paradise – the last fresh milk we've seen. Milk?

The big moment arrives – hilarity suddenly disappears – the boys look sober – constrained. Officers snap commands – backs lift – and chins – proud swing as we march along – military music setting cadence – barracks to our last American trains. Nobody talking much – Hoboken – disinterested station – crowded ferry blacked out to prying eyes – the docks of New York – and – there they were – “Which one is ours – Elizabeth? or France?” Our hearts leap – long files of men through endless sheds – up steep stairways – sweating – climbing – past checkers – up the gangplank to the right – the veteran French liner – “Ile de France” – now under British banners – the long – sleek – greyhound – once mistress of the seas – Ile de France.

We remembered our training films – “stay by your bunks” and understood as thousands poured in hour after hour – heavily laden GIs - natty officers – pretty nurses – Red Cross workers – all day and night. Talk about sardines? Listen friend, a sardine's quarters in a nice, convenient can of cottonseed oil – is luxurious compared to ours. I wonder what will happened if a torpedo --? I stop wondering – no use going nertz, oh? But – others are wondering too. You can tell – they sit there on hard, steel bunks – five high – looking at feet – theirs – and others inches from the faces. Mixed emotions – the gamut of them all – fear – sorrow – excitement – non chalance – resignation – curiosity – awe-go-to-hell-devil-may-care attitudes – but – few are really happy. This much for all – we are aboard at last – and on our way.

We listen to oldtimers – comforting thoughts – a ship like this will go alone – no convoy could match her speed – she can outrun – out maneuver any sub – we can abandon ship in seconds – air sea patrols will watch us through the danger waters going out and coming in – we have Radar – man made magic that sees through fog – and night – and enemy planes. But many a guy of the 601<sup>st</sup> is wishing – for other places say “Neil Deighans back in Joisoy” – most anywhere but five decks down in that hugh steel hull. “Neil Doighans – hell. Gimme the Circle Inn. Gimme – well – just gimme”.

Forty-eight hours later – loading complete – we sail at dawn – the 13<sup>th</sup> (there it is again – that lucky 13) Lady Liberty slips past our portholes – the Outer Bay the open sea – the big ship begins her steady pitch and roll – and green faced GIs begin theirs – in another direction – towards the “heads” (seal slanguage for latrines) ah yes – dear me – already the mail – de mer is taking heavy toll – chow line is very short at noon. Did someone mention f-o-d-d? Oooooooooohhhhhhh-ooooooooppppssss.

First hours at sea – something to remember – our battalion assigned to ships security – manning ack ack guns and lookouts along with regular army AA and British gun crews – and – we are M.P.s as well.

Long rolling swells change to short chop – high winds blowing – scudding gray clouds – threatening skies – more threatening seas – uncomfortable for seasick men and women – lucky for safety though – subs can not operate in high seas. Sunshine at last – forty-eight hours later – far horizons endless blue and green – sea legs come to grips with wabby stomachs – sea legs win – men on decks – women too – devouring first looks at the wide Atlantic – chatting – reading – playing cards (no gambling, of course, Oh my no.) or staring into space – wondering -----?

Chow time – “those holding cards for the first sitting – proceed to the messhall – do not block the passage ways – troops will move on the double” – chow lines longer with every meal – and WHAT meals – English food – English cooking – tasteless no seasoning – half cooked – served like slop – just plain louzy – a “Limey” boat and GIs begin their endless comparisons – not complimentary to our “Limey” pals either. Sea air makes young appetites keen – a hungry Yank will eat anything – they did.

MPs keep enlisted men in their proper places – officers have their sundeck space “starboard and port – just aft of the bridge, sir” I watch gallant gentle men squiring equally gallant ladies (nurses, WAC

officers, ARC) in good fun- from my Number One post on the Skippers Ladder. I wonder – how many will be going home someday – as gay as they go out to meet the enemy today? Gulls wheel and turn following the foaming trail – last picket boats fall astern – disappear – we are alone. It is us against Hitler’s subs for the next four days and nights.

Fifteen hundred miles of deadly “hide-and-peek” changing course and speed with every reported danger point – incoming radio is a steady stream of signals “enemy subs reported at...etc” one morning we are heading North the next due South. Routine settles down – divert the minds – kill the rumors if you can – “We’re going to Africa – to Greenland – to Iceland – to Russia – to Argentina – to –” Abandon ship drills daily – smooth as clockwork after the first confusion – and the Navy holds inspections too – for sanitation – fires thrills and chills – “All clear” – the enemy decided not to chance our heavy armament – deep sighs – back to the fun again – reading in bunks – some still seasick – wishing they would die-afraid they wouldn’t. A PX opens – a library too – things take on a normal GI tone – pranks – practical jokes – crapgames (“of course, just using matches, Sir, no money”) the hours pass.

The world behind – the world ahead – news from home and abroad – daily at 1700 hours – the voice – gruff - authoritative – scratchy – friendly – Colonel Allen – G-2 Third Army – Colonel Robert S. Allen – of the Washington Merry-Go-Round “Pierson and Allens”.

The GI show organized on board – former NBC star Larry Chamberlain – MCs. Volunteer talent from those aboard – some good – some bad – some nondiscript – all very welcome – enjoyed by everyone – they yell for more – and the single show becomes a twice daily affair – laughter is the order-of-the-day. Don Kerr joins Larry just to give him some old fashioned CBS competition. The jokes run riot – and risque – but – as we said – “laughter was the order of the day”.

Discipline aboard ship – fighter pilots found shooting craps with enlisted men – ha ha – officers on “sanitation details” – ha ha – but the pilots are swell eggs – they just laugh it off – and “sweep ‘em up, guess those pilots have to be gamblers, eh! English stewards in the clink – the Colonel boiling over – he eats a couple of rumps royal fashion – Limeys selling American food to hungry yanks – Christ – two and six for a sandwich – a buck fifty for ham and eggs – but GIs will pay for anything – they did – Colonel Shafer – ships Provost Marshall – lays down the law – the food improves – so do tempers.

Night – blackout aboard – woe to the man who lights a fag on open decks – dark promenades where great ladies once walked with princes of the land – now gay with GI songs – little gatherings here and there – recounting exploits of the past – barbershop quartets – bull sessions – oldtimers – talking of the good old days at Fort Bliss – of Juarez – old Mayheekoh – dames and drinks – and – Hell – you know what I mean.

Newcomers trying to look like oldtimers – laughing about their “rookie” days – veterans all now – facing the enemy – most of them scared stiff deep down inside – wondering – what’s ahead? Some of these men will know the easy roads – some will climb the hard way – some will know D-Day – some will die – some will leave their hopes and dreams – their lives or limbs – on far flung shores – some will be heroes – some cowards – but most of them – just good soldiers doing a hateful job against a hated enemy – ten thousand soldiers – going to war.

First landfall – afternoon of the Seventh day – great Sunderland Flying boats roar overhead – welcome eyes to warn of enemy approach and in the black of night – a tiny light – far off to starboard – Lands End – the coast of Ireland – and on the morrow – low green hills – shadows through fog and mist – the bonny banks of Scotland more planes very hour – heading North – then East into the Firth of Clyde – Scotland on one side – Ireland on the other – “Oh – you take the high road – and I’ll take the low road – and I’ll be in Scotland afore yeh” – there it is – off to portside – “Loch Lomand” – dream country, and what a lovely spot it is – or is it we’re just so damn glad to get there.

Harbor at last – the Clyde Banks – Greenoch and Guroch – bonny Scotland – British aircraft carriers – battleships – transports – submarines – destroyers – craft of every type and tonnage – anchored – steaming past – real beaughters zooming by – no class in A/1 this – but the read thing – no training film this – but English fighters – heroes of Dunkirk – the Battle of Britain – welcoming us to the British Isles – and a loudspeaker with an Oxford accent – “I want to welcome you Yanks on behalf of his Majesty’s government and people – we hope to make your comfortable as our rationing permits – you may find us a bit strange – not because we are cold natured or discourteous – but more reserved than you in America. We hope you will like us – etc. – etc. – etc.” Our mighty ship heaves too – the anchor plunges deep with a defiant roar – we thumb our nose to Hitler – so far – “Round One” is ours.

Greenoch – Gurroch – what pretty places they are – nestling in a jewel setting of low lying hills – story book picture from any Dickens novel – countless chimneys rise from gables roofs – quaint little church spires everywhere – tiny crosses watching over humble citizens – who have watched their Kyth and kin – the men of Scotland – go down to the sea for centuries – watched with pride the mightiest liners in the world sail gracefully by – product of their handiwork.

Debarkation next morning – fogbound farewell glance at the Ile de France – proud ocean queen – farewell – godspeed – and thanks for bringing us safely over those sub infested seas. Barges – lighters – take us ashore – a grimy rail station is brightened by a real Scottish welcome – kilted highlanders piping a real Scottish war skirl – weird sounds as we swing along to the trains – British Red Cross ladies with hot coffee – donuts – the cars so different – sidewise compartments – but the men are feeling fine – excited – the officers appropriately serious – we have arrived in the ETO. The train glides out – we settle down to see a new world a whole country – in twelve hours.

Scotland's neat farms and fertile fields – well kept fieldstone houses ivy clad – fat herds grazing on lush green lands – flash by our windows. So do cities – black with coaldust – filth of industry – dirty urchins crowding station streets to stare hungry eyes hollering – “Got any gum, chum?”

Dark – across the Scottish boarder into Wales – the men are tired – trained weary – three thousand miles in ten days – quite a journey with all the paraphernalia of war – but there it is at last “Ponty Poole” – a wayside station – truck convoys waiting – cautious blackout every where for the Luftwaffe rides the night skies – bumpy roads add to discomforts and crowded vehicles – to destination “Llanover Park” Nisson Huts – a hot meal waiting – duffel bags dumped helter skelter – men fall exhausted on hard bunks – new life beings – prepare for combat – soldiering takes on a serious note as they fall asleep.

That night – the Germans welcome us too – Jerry Bombers soar above us – twenty of them – strike like snakes at nearby Newport and Cardiff – then twenty more – we watch the tracers – hear their bombs – see the blasts – the ack ack reaching out – catches some of them – they fall in flames – this is war – and we are at last a part of it.

Battalion City was laid out at Llanover Park – former estate of the Viceroy of India – its centuries old castle an interesting landmark set in exquisitely landscaped gardens and fountain pools. Our sturdy little Nisson Huts make strange contrast to the artistic surroundings. Batteries prepare their streets – landscape the tine plots of ground around each one – neat rows of white stones dress the boundaries – form fancy designs in front on entrances – trick names set in sod – men hard at work – welcome any labor after the confinements of the long voyage – pride in outfits is strong – results good.

First experience with GI soap as “food” – the GIs have no respect for rank – midnight latrine excursions were madhouse escapades – the men are still looking for the sabateur who put that bar of laundry soap in the baked beans.

The guns arrive – brand new – and trucks – primes – jeeps – all the implements of ack ack war – cleanliness – sanitation – aircraft recognition – the enemy – the allies – everything we'll need when the time comes. There's a pretty good move on the post – a chapel – and PX. Easter Sunday – '44 another memorable milestone services in the chapel for all faiths – and passes to nearby Abergavonny – ancient Welsh town – our first acquaintance with “Mild or Bitter?” – and “It's five and twenty past ten, Gennelmen, may I 'ave your glawses?” – warm beer – ugh – gin and bitters – (very bitter) and dances too – town – and at the nearby Womans Land Army camp – (My Gawd, Mabel, but them Land Army dames were brutes) – plenty of fun – long walks over the rolling countrysides – trips to Newport – Cardiff – targets for many a Nazi airraid. Visits to mining towns – the deepest mines in the world – Ebbu Vale – miners homes – cockeyed on cockeyed hillsides – miners daughters miners pubs – salt of the earth – their beer like their hospitality – very palatable to yearning Yanks. yes – plenty of fun – but above it all – the serious business of preparing for war.

Our day comes at last – combat assignments – orders to move – and on 21 April '44 – 601<sup>st</sup> pulls out along the vast network of military highways spiderwebbing the British Isles – roads leading in one direction – towards the channel – towards D-Day – towards victory.

It's a good assignment – the White Cliffs of Dover no longer a song – they became reality as we set our guns along the fogbound rocks of Folkestone – and Hythe – near Dover. The men are excited – anxious – impatient for their first crack at the enemy – take care preparing the gunsights – digging in – revetting – and – they hadn't long to wait – as day after day – vast armadas of planes stream overhead – our bombers heading towards the enemy less than twenty miles away – and the enemy's striking at London – always London.

On clear days – the coast of France – Calais – very clear – we wondered if – Hitler might be over there – staring back at us – devining – where – when – would we strike? Great air battles raged overhead – the limping giants creeping home – afire – some plunge like flaming meteors into cold channel waters – air-sea rescue boats speed to their aid. Nazi ack ack thunders the air and shakes the ground at night – red puffs of fire – soaking our planes – distant fireworks – death for many victory for some – war.

Hitler is already talking about his “secret weapons” and D-Day is drawing near – you could feel it in the air – as the tempo of our bomber fleets increased hour by hour – day by day. All day and night the roar overhead – darken the sky – you felt the fever of war mounting everywhere. We were not aware but we

were to be an important part of all this – the allies answer to Hitler’s “Goebbel-gobbling” about “secret weapons” – we were a Task Force – Top Secret Task Force-Six-O-One – and for many days and nights to come – we’d battle Hitler’s V-bombs to a standstill to their defeat.

6 June 1944 – historic day – D-Day – and the day before – “alert” – “Stand by the guns” – we knew it had come at last. Long lines of ships and landing craft – strange looking barges end to end – heading South past Folkestone Point – southward through the shifting haze of natural and man made fog – the air umbrella blots out the sky – gliders by the thousands – airborne troops – we crossed our fingers for them. The scream of mighty shells from Germany batteries on Calais rip the air – burning ships dot the channel – a rising wind whips white caps – bad news for men who must fight their way ashore through any winds or waves. D-Day has come at last and we stand by for Nazi planes – those few that can be spared from Normandy Beach and dare to cross our field of fire.

Omaha Beach secure – the allies landed on the Continent of Europe – battles raging inland – and still we stood by – men impatient – itching to join our comrades over there. Cherbourg had been assaulted – Bayeux – Cain – Isigny – and then our call came . . . a very special call.

The night of 13 June 1944 – a strange craft appeared in the channel skies – two of them passed overhead – too foggy for identification – certainly not ours – they must be enemy. Rumors rampant everywhere – a new rocket plane – radio guided – without pilot – a flying projectile – what could it be. The 601<sup>st</sup> stood by.

16<sup>th</sup> June – another tiresome night – a siren moan rises and falls in angry cadence – “alert” – and our sacks barely warm – Hells Bells – this was getting monotonous – a guy might as well have been up all night.

Dark shadows stumble through the blacked out tent – shaded flashlights casting ghostly illusions through nature’s smoke screen – heavy channel fog - - -

Silent steeplechase – madly dashing AA men – gunners - plotters – ammo carriers cursing – sleepy growls as untied shoes slip in countless sheep droppings everywhere “Baaaaa, yourself – you G---D----- son-of-a-blacksheep”

Halfway to the C.P. I spy the Old Man – pause – together we scan clear skies above the mist – far out across the channel – a tiny speck of light – yellow light moving our way – from Calais to Dover – no more towards Folkestone – Hythe on our left-. Then faintly – a murmur – louder – throbbing – peculiar pulse like beat – the yellow light is larger – changing course again – now a shadow – a shadow with a blazing tail - a man made meteor – and it is coming our way – right over us now – fog swallows it and it roars by – a light – and sound – towards London.

The Captain looked at me – questioned – I shrug – “Ju 88 with one motor shot out” – impossible – well – mebbe? A voice sings out – the siren moans again – “Diver alarm” ---- “Dover Alarm”, We head for the C.P.

Our Nissan hut crowded smoky – tense – momentary confusion crystallizes into calm – precise plotting and command, control take over – plotting Sections and Communications coordinate – the skipper is calm – steady – “Guns check” – (“One – two – three – four”) “Machine Guns” (ditto the answer) “5 – 8 – 4” (“ready for action”) – “Tracker” (they’re set to) The mechanical eyes and care of the big 90s are synchronized.

The radio speaks again – the Oxford accent – “Dover alarm” – divah” – “Dover alarm – Divah” – GCR repeats – and we wonder “what the hell is a “divah”????”

The S-2Cpl is excited – yellow light crossing the channel at azimuth – plots start pouring across the boards – the hot loop is sizzling – the Captain speaks again – “Guns – stand by”.

Tracker Head and Radar sound off – “on target” – Range – azimuth – angular height – (we’re on the ball that night) – “No identification” IFF is positive – range again – “fourteen thousand – thirteen – twelve – eleven – ten ---

The B.C. sounds as if he’s ordering dinner at his favorite restaurant back home – “Commence – fire – ring”.

An infinitesimal – breathless space of time – then an ear shattering roar – four guns belch destruction – not alone – for countless others match our moves – the night air is splintered into a trillion parts – the C.P. shakes – dust fills the air as salvo after salvo blasts away. I am extra man that night and join the boys outside in the O.P. – to see – the greatest show on earth.

Chills and thrills play tag along my spine – the enemy aircraft is overhead – all Hell as broken loose along the coast – the White Cliffs of Dover are white no more – they’re crimson – gold – green – rose – flame – every color of the rainbow as every gun of every caliber opens up – American – British – Canadian – throwing the book at the intruder – a wall of incandescent steel – shrapnell whines along the revetments – I clamp my helmet – tight – crouch lower.

It’s a premature Fourth-of-July to end all Fourth-of-Julys – thousands of rounds of red – white – tracer and incendiary – arcs of fire streaming after the illusive target – and – the noise is terrific – sharp plan-plan of the Befors 40s – staccatto rattle of the Erlikens 20s – close knit bursts of 50s – the mighty roar of our 90s – and yes – some one is even firing an M-1 – mygmy throwing pebbles at a giant – but the enemy soars blissfully through the inferno – heading towards London – What kind of a man can that pilot be?

Suddenly – a beautiful, box-like burst of 90s brackets the foe – he wavers – falters – turns in a long curve – that mysterious yellow flame still blazing – streaming fire behind – down – down – but never reaching the ground – for the sky splits wide open – erupts a great, spreading, billowing orange-rod-rosebud of flame – one tremendous blast – then darkness – silence.

“Cease firing’ – (The Old Man will have coffee with his desert)” “Guns Rest” we wipe the sweat from our dusty brows – look at each other – the Skippers on the phone to GCR at Dover – “enemy destroyed you say?” No doubt of it – but – by whom – Naturally we think – hope – we can’t be sure – but – the Skipper grins in his quiet, assuring way.

“There’ll be no more sleep tonight, boys”, Nor for many, many nights to come – The voice again – with the Oxford accent – “Dover alarm – Divah Dover alarm – Divah”.

A tiny speck of light – yellowish – leaving Calais – the distant – outboard motorish throb.

Guns – stand – by The V-Is – the Robombs – were on their way.

That was 17 June 1944 – we were the first American Heavy Ack Ack Battalion to be credited officially with firing on the flying bombs – or “pilotless aircraft” first to be credited with “Cat A” kills – and they’ve been our special mission ever since – 18 – 19 – 20 – 21 – 22 – 23 – 24 – 25 – 26 – 27 --- the 27<sup>th</sup> – one of the “Great Days” in Ack Ack History -----

Let me quote here from an official commendation to qualify that statement – let me tell you especially about the last great night we fired on the Robombs in defense of England – a night that went down in history – monument and memorial to the Six Hundred and First – the following paper was presented to all men on the day of 8 August 1944 somewhere in Normandy – Every man has his copy – and we are justly proud of it. It is the story of June 27<sup>th</sup>.

“The commendation of Major General R.F.E. WHITAKER and Brigadier General LAMPEAU, British Army, and Col., Harry R. Pierce, American Army, for the magnificent firing on the nights of June 26 and 27, 1944 at Folkestone, England, is for the firing on flying bombs, which is in all probability one of the greatest demonstrations of 90 mm AA fire of this war .....

“..... commendation from Col. Harry E. Pierce, 2<sup>nd</sup> AAA Group . . . . . I wish to express to you and to your batteries concerned, my appreciation of the results of action on the early morning of 27 June 1944 which resulted in the destruction of 13 Pilotless Aircraft and a very high percentage of those that came over . . . etc . . . .”

And later in France the commendation from Brigadier General E.W. TIMBERLAKE, 49<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade . . . “The 601<sup>st</sup> AAA Gun Bn has been detached from the 49<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade. I accept this change of status with sincere regret, but realizing that my loss is some other commanders gain, I want to wish you good luck, good shooting and express my hope that we may serve again together. I am taking this opportunity to tell you personally, in black and white, that I am deeply gratefully for your loyal support of my policies, and for your aggressive action, resourceful leadership in making our AA defense of the Normandy Beachhead impregnable. You have performed every mission assigned to this Brigade in a superior manner, and have the inner satisfaction of knowing you have done a job well when the chips were down. . . .”

Yes – those were great days. But there were hundreds of other hectic days worth mentioning – if one could recall them all – the trips to London and Canterbury – ancient Saltwood Castle, Hythe – the great stone fort at Dover standing since the days of the Romans – the official exchanges of “guests” between the British and American ack ack units – supposed to favorably influence our relations (ahem) the romances with English girls – more “Mild and Bitter” – and the bitching about early closing hours for the pubs – narrow escapes from German shellfire in Dover and Folkestone – fights with friends and neighbors – mounting tension among all troops – especially the Canadians stationed there in Dover four long years –

twiddling their thumbs – waiting to avenge Dunkirk and Dieppe. There were the letters from home – “wonder if you’re in the fighting, dear – it’s so awful not to know”

14 June 1944 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Joseph A. Poirier and Cpl Odis L. Tacker of Dog Battery received orders “proceed at once to Southampton for the purpose of accompanying a shipment of high priority urgent “Red Ball” items to the continent.”

The shipment was top priority secret ammo to be guarded every minute day and night until delivered. The “Pozit” was needed at once. Lt Poirier and Cpl Tacker boarded Liberty Ship No. 252 the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> – arrived at Omaha Beach 5 pm that day. Hundreds of ships crowded this man made harbor – it was quiet until 11 pm that night – when Jerry pulled a raid – and hundreds of ack ack – mostly twenty mm from the ships – blasted away – two enemy planes went down in flames.

The first American airfield on the continent of Europe was already in operation along the hilltop rising above the beach. Morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> was spent unloading their precious cargo on “Easy-Green-East” section of the beach – the big lumbering Rhinos plowing away from ship to shore and back again. The famous floating docks were not yet in shape, but engineers got the urgent ammo ashore – then left Poirier and Tacker to figure out for themselves what to do with it. Lieutenant and Corporal dropped differences of rank and pitched in together – built shelters for themselves out of discarded ammo boxes – sheets of tin and other scraps of metal from D-Day’s destruction – protection against the flying shrapnel everywhere. Then – they took turns walking guard around their precious super-secret shipment. At no time up to then had they been given any intimation of their ultimate destination other than the “continent” – nor times – nor means of transportation – nor rations. It was a case “get the stuff there and get back – as best you can”.

Contact with the Port Authority brought delivery of the “Pozit” to ASP-507 the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>. They spent that night with one of the gun batteries attached to the 49<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade (B-Battery 110<sup>th</sup> AAA) in action on the beach. Firing was continuous day and night against enemy raiders and bombers, although the front lines had already moved several miles inland.

On the 18<sup>th</sup>, Tacker and Poirier reported to the Naval Officer in charge of Omaha for instructions. Offered a plane ride back – they refused on learning that all space was needed for wounded. An LST No 682 was leaving in thirty minutes (so they thought) – so with plenty of sweating they made it. Instead – she rode at anchor all that night – and all the next day too. 300 German PWs had been ordered on board – crowded into the big venter hold – and almost at that same moment – a very severe storm turned the channel into a frothing maelstrom tossing the LST like a rubber ball as it lay at anchor until the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Finally – Lt. S/G E.R. Hodges, USNR, ordered the craft to sea the morning of the twentieth.

It was a rough crossing, and the members of this small, exclusive and important mission were mighty damn glad to reach Southampton again. Here Lt Poirier called Beverage via civil and military phones, and transport was sent to bring them back to their outfit.

This incident is important to our history, not only because of the calm and efficient way in which Lt. Poirier and Cpl Tacker performed this dangerous and urgent mission, but because they were the first members of the 601<sup>st</sup> to actually land on France as part of the official Invasion of Europe.

The morning after the “Great Night of the 27<sup>th</sup>”, Able Battery received their orders for the crossing – the 29<sup>th</sup> found them at their staging area near Southampton where they were joined by other batteries of the 601<sup>st</sup> – the 30<sup>th</sup> at another still closer – and on 2 July 1944 Able was aboard an old converted channel steamer “The Channel Queen” – and bound for France. Cherbourg had fallen the day before, and none knew where the outfit was headed – nor their mission. Enemy subs were hot all over the channel – their E-Boats operating extensively – their planes looking for just such targets as ours. Had they known how important we were to be to their plans later on, they might have looked closer.

There were mixed emotions among the men – few slept that night – anchored in a dense fog, we could see no other part of our convoy – hung in space – silent – waiting. Most men sat up all night shooting the breeze – writing letters home – gambling. Huge sums of money changed hands in poker games all over the ship – more so because the men were unfamiliar with the 400 francs each had received of the Invasion Money just before boarding ship. Morning found us under way – part of an endless bridge of ships stretching as far as the eyes could see.

Able Battery of the 601<sup>st</sup> crossed the channel to Omaha.

Our first sight of Omaha – beachhead carved by Allied guts and skill – long line of freighters sunk bow to stern along the shore – breakwater against rough channel waves – dozens of wrecked landing craft of every type – victims of Nazi 88s and deadly German aim – bulldozers plowing up and down the sand clearing the wreckage – ducks – alligators – weasels – rhinos – all the strange conglomeration of wonderful loading and unloading craft and machinery – waddling up and down from ship to shore and

back again – trucks roaring up the hill and on to the fronts – endless flow of vital materials to fighting men – our flag flying bravely over the airstrip on the hill – the smell of dead men drifting over the water on the morning breeze – sound of guns booming a few miles away – planes racing overhead – ack ack gun firing – Omaha.

Noon – our LCT alongside – hoisted to deck level – we pile aboard – down to the water – we duck the flying spray as the blunt nose chugs sidewise against the current – like a mongrel dog running down street against the wind. Another LCT going parallel loses steerage – gear kaput – crashes into us – we almost capsize – tight moments and grates the bottom – we pore out on floating docks – a Naval officer speaks - “Leave your bags in a pile here and hit the shore” – we do – and what a mess – hundreds of bags to be sorted out later one by one – and yours is always at the bottom – when each man could have just as well carried his ashore with him – oh well – blame it on the navy.

Column of ducks to the right – single file – up the long – winding hill road – past blasted pillboxes where Germans died not soon enough – thousands of foxholes – and shell craters – mute evidence of the yard by yard fighting up that hill – and everywhere – K-ration boxes – empty butt packs – old ammo cases and cartridges discarded lifebelts – Kraut helmet full of holes – and some of ours likewise – broken guns – the refuse of war – long white lines marking fields still filled with mines – mines everywhere – and the men died clearing the very pathway up that hill we’re marching through in orderly style.

Small white crosses – row on row – hundreds of them – thousands of them – nearly five thousand in all – and nearby – long lines of dusky solders – digging – digging – digging - more graves as yet unfilled- waiting for those silent piles of human flesh that once were men – under the little shed – a PFC checks their tags – if any – makes a mark in his records – pulls the bloody sheet away from a gray young face – agony of death still etching terror in every line – covers it again – shut out forever and a day – sunlight – and the brotherhood of man – four soldiers – two ropes down into the hard dug earthen pit – “O.K., boys – shovel it in” – and I try to think – “He died to save this world too” – how many will remember? St. Laurent Sur Mere – United States Army Cemetery Number One – France.-----

Our bivouac that night – a cow pasture – (too bad cows never learned to use slit trenches) – K rations over tiny fires – or cold – it rains then moonlight and distant thunder – flames of man made lightning – the crack of nearby small arms – M-ls firing – machine guns too – rat-a-tat-tat shadows in the night – snipers about? Who can tell – the enemy is everywhere in Normandy.

Next day – 4<sup>th</sup> of July – we celebrate – I trade a chocolate bar for a canteen full of real cows milk – fresh from the cow – still warm – but never get a drink it – warned – “Tubercular” – just in time – we walk the area - hunt nearby fields for souvenir –my god – how those men must have fought – hedgerow by hedgerow – and each one at a price – The Germans left in a hurry – whole stacks of unused ammo by their 88s. – fields guns still pointing out to sea – deep dug C.P.s and trenches littered with Nazi official papers – reports – their rosters – letters from home – I get one Written only a few days before D-Day – from Bavaria – she write “My Darling I worry about you – how are you – do you eat well – have you enough clothes – do you miss me as I long for you – the nights are so lonely – and in the days – little Elsa asks for you – what can I say?” It is the same all over the world, I guess war is cruel – it is the little folk who suffer – the ones we leave behind.

On 5 July we move again – an area where the rest of the battalion will join us. Major Vernon L. Borum, Bn S-3 and Senior Officer of this Advanced Party, sets up his tent along a hedgerow where history was made only a few days before. In this little field a hundred yards square a bitter battle had raged. It took the Yanks two whole days to cross it – and stay on the other side. Death struck heavy here. CWO A.E. Fishkin lights his own fire – seems to enjoy field life even after twenty three years in the army. 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Goettsche orders Able to set up formal battery streets – dig latrines – each puptent for two its own foxhole for two – Ten-in-One rations are divided – each five men cook together over small fireplaces of ingenuous design – all lights dowsed at ten when the Boche start their nightly runs over our target area – we are spectators – without guns watching the drama unfold around us – will be glad when our 90s arrive so we can get into the shooting too.

The guards report small arms – sniper fire – sporadic all night – German rear guard elements filtering though on recon operations – anything that moves or flies after sundown it’s – shoot first – ask questions afterwards.

Long lines of trucks – vehicles of all kinds – guns – supplies roll by our area twenty four hours a day – the main road – Cain to Cherbourg – some of them turn into our field next day – with Headquarters – Baker – Charley and Dog Batteries – the guns arrive too – tempo picks up – reaches feverish pitch – the gangs all hear – let’s go 601<sup>st</sup>.

And across the dusty highway that runs to foot deep mud with any sign of rain American Field Hospital No 1 is doing a rushing business – a back road provides un-obstructed right of way for its continuous line

of ambulances – the casualties are pouring in as the battle for St. Lo gets under way – the smell of antiseptics drifts across the way – and of anesthetics – of putrid wounds – and of death.

12 July 1944 – we're all together again- ready for action – the convoy pulls out past the ruins of ST. Laurent sur mer – Coleville sur mer – and Able pulls into position guarding the famous beach itself – Omaha, From its hilltop perch over looking the channel – the bridge of ships stretched to horizon point – and on to Southampton – what a spot for the boys of Able Battery – ringside seat at history's biggest sideshow – with the main attractions just over the hill. The rest of the batteries are a few miles away forming a rough oblong protecting the airfields, gas dumps, and vital corners.

Jerry threw everything he had at the Normandy Beach those first few days – and the 601<sup>st</sup> was credited with seven Nazi planes – then the Germans kept as far away from our 90s as possible – threw what planes were left from pinched production at the forces smashing his lines – Patton started his first lighting end run – the first of his many “big breakthroughs” – battered their way through Avranches – turning the while tide of the war. Some of our men volunteered to help deliver the goods he needed to keep going – surround the Nazis – gas – gas – gas – and ammo the trucks rolled day and night – Patton rolled and the Nazis rolled back. The sound of artillery shook the ground for weeks – St. Lo fell – the fronts moved swiftly away from us – the sounds of war faded with them – Omaha changed from a seething terminus of supply and battlefield to a smoothly operating major port – our duties became routing – a few planes every night – bombing the British beachhead at Bayeaux just out of range of our guns – never venturing near enough to come within our deadly shooting – they'd had enough of us.

Time well spent in practice we'd need in winter months ahead – digging in – positions models of perfection – gun crews letter perfect – drills – plotting crews for any emergency – snazzy huts take puptent places – some with electric lights – hot and cold running pinup girls – high morale – softball teams – basketball with the nearby engineers unit – the ones who helped take that beach on D-plus-1 – playing where the battle had raged only a few weeks before. Souvenir hunts – swimming in the channel alongside the LSTs – while understanding officers look the other way – showers on board a ship when you could slip aboard unnoticed – hell a man's got to keep clean when he has a chance – later he may not have it.

Battle for Brest under way – August '44 – hard fought rumors that ack ack be used as field artillery. News from Anzio – tried there with high success – what they could do – we could too. Besides – the gun batteries had just completed Day Rooms – time to move – and Patton was staring at the Gates of Paris – The Red Cross had installed a nearby Donut Hut – good USO shows where now in our neighborhood – yes – time to move for sure. End of an eventful summer – the sweltering heat and drenching rains turned to warm Indian Summer – and the 601<sup>st</sup> was ready for anything.

2 September '44 – Paris fell as Patton swept around the beating heart of France – allowing General Jaques Le Clerg French Armored Division to “take their own home town” – brilliant psychological victory for the allies. Brest battled on – and we were ordered to move – secret orders – but everyone guessed – “Brest”. Advance party hits the road – Colonel Shafer with Major Borum – driven by T/5 Edward J. Wira. The will know “where” – inform us on the way.

The battle ruined towns sweep by – we're sure of it now – Isigny – Carentan – Periers – Coutances – Granville – Avranches where Patton almost got caught in the Nazi counter-attack – Mt. St. Michel lies offshore to our right as we pass through Pontorson – Dol and Dinan. Yes – it must be Brest. We halt for night bivouac just outside Dinan.

We sit around the fires that night – I think of ruined St. Lo – hell-on-earth – first concrete example of the fury of American artillery unleashed to all out destruction of the foe – St. Lo – ravished – rubble – smoking – shattered – shrunken shapeless St. Lo. – a small child staring with vacant eyes – ragged – dirty – hungry – an old man holding her small hand – the too young to know – and too old to care – before a sign in French and English saying “CITIZENS – YOU ARE LIBERATED” ----- c'est la guerre-----

The Colonel arrives – damn – orders changed – not Brest where we'd have seen some first rate action – maybe this is better – the slit trench top ranking rumor says “Paris”. We hit the nearby village pubs to quench thirsts long dry in Normandy calvados casualties are high – it makes a better fuel than drink.

The milestones of war pass by – the long trail to peace awinding before us – through village after village – blasted to the ground – roads strewn with burned skeletons of tanks and vehicles – ours and the enemy's. Behind us the cold stares of Normandy – too long well fed by Nazi warlords who knew someday we'd come and we would find – few friends. Ahead -----“Paris”-----

Inner France – here we were really welcome – crowds cheer as we pass by – and we threw them cigarettes – candy – rations – gum. They tossed flowers – handed us ripe tomatoes from their gardens – what little they could spare – wine from hidden cellars – the bitter “Seedar” of La France – and some girls – braver than the rest threw kisses – with their arms around the GIs necks.

Twenty miles from Versailles we bivouaced again, - one of the few times in this history when the entire battalion lined up together in one great military formation in combat. An - we were proud of our cooks - those long suffering Captains of the Kitchens - as the raced ahead of us each move - set up their field stoves - and when the tired convoys pulled in - - greeted us with hot meals every time. Next morning - hot breakfast - before we left again - they packed swiftly - passed us on the roads - set up again to be waiting for us when we pulled in at the other end. Fine soldiers - those cooks - salt of the earth - the best damn guys in our little world.

With Colonel Shafer and Major Whitaker leading now in their jeep driven this time by T/5 A.G. "Shorty Garelles, the 601<sup>st</sup> made their triumphal entry into Paris. This was a moment to remember all our lives - historic in its very fabric - at a time when Paris was itself writing another thrilling saga to its long history of war and revolution. The German garrison of Paris had surrendered seventy-two hours before - but fighting still raged throughout the city - snipers took their daily toll - FFI and armed gangs roamed the streets - and terror stricken Parisians kept behind looked doors at night. But in the day - they came out enmasse to welcome their American liberators as only Parisians can.

The long line of guns and cats, trucks and other vehicles making up the 601<sup>st</sup> rumbled past the great Palace of Versailles - along the rue de Paris and rue Grande across the Seine and left along the banks of this often called "River of Sorrows" where France's desperate so often left their dreams. The river on our left - the world famous Bois du Boulogne on our right - along the Quai de Boulogne and Quai de Boulogne and Quai dux Septembre - the Allee du Bord de Leau - then right along the Cascades by the famous race tracks - and General LeClerq's French tanks lined up under the trees of the lovely Bois De Boulogne with pretty girls climbing in and out of them inspecting the tanks - and their occupants. Pretty girls - beautiful queens of style in high heeled shoes - silk stockings- their gayest - most glamorous dresses - short skirts blowing in the breezes revealing well turned - ahhhh - - legs - such as we hadn't seen since the good old U.S.A. - and we stared - not from rudeness - but thrilled curiosity - a compliment to the women of Gay Paree - at their silk stockinged legs - pert chapeaus - smart costumes - smiles and laughter waving at us - blowing kisses - great crowds of them at every crossroads - clapping uproariously - screaming toasts at our big guns riding majestically past - the great "Cats" chugging along - truck after truck of smiling GIs - waving back to the girls throwing gum - cigarettes and good will - in all directions. "Vive La France".

Along the Allee de Longechamps - Place Neuilly - Avenue de la Grande Armee - and the Grand Palace. Then - just like the newsreels back home - there it was - Place de L'Etoile - and the Arc de Triomphe - splendid tribute to a great France - a France that almost passed into oblivion - that refused to die beneath the Boche's hated heel. Yes - there it was - Arc de Triomphe - and we Yanks passing in parade on to the Avenue des Champs Elysees - more cheering throngs - larger and larger as we near the heart of Paris - shouting "Victoire - victoire" - holding up their fingers in the sign of the "V" and GIs on the corners - from the 1<sup>st</sup> and third armies - on a moments rest furlough - waving champagne greetings to us as we pass them - mimicking the Parisians. Place de la Concorde - the Obelisque - and the once gorgeous Jardin des Tuileries - left along rue Royal - the Madeleine - and on to the world famous shopping centers - where Mainbocher created a name - Lilly Dache a mode - Paris models household bywords.

Somewhere along the Boulevard des Capucines - we passed Major Borum and Captain Mountain of Dog Battery, checking us for directions - standing there amidst the throngs. What a day to remember all your life - tell your grandchildren about - if you're lucky - Place de la Opera - scene of France cultural past - her musical and theatrical triumphs - Avenue des Italions - Grand Hotel - and on to Avenue Lafayette - straight as a arrow - past the Gare du Nord - great rail station - on out Avenue Jean Juares - where the various batteries split to take their individual positions protecting Paris against nazi air raids or counter attacks.

Able went to ancient Fort Rosny - at Rosny sue Bois - Baker to Bondy - Charley to Romaiville - and Dog just inside the city limits of Paris itself at Port de la Villette. Headquarters wound up at Pantin, a suburb of the Parisian East Side. All could view the skyline of the historic city from their guns.

We of the 601<sup>st</sup> remember the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 for many reasons - the triumphal entry - the reception of the Parisians - and the happy days that followed. This made Normandy worth while - for this you could understand the cemetery on the hill above Omaha - the thousands of white crosses - the dead gray faces etched with pain - the sacrifice. This was not the useless - empty vacuum of St. Lo - this was Liberation of a people - of friends from a tyrants grasp - of neighbors - of our allies in arms and peace.

Nine weeks in Paris - nine wonderful weeks - with little action from German planes - dress parade days again - inspections - training - passes every day - friends - romances - trips to Notre Dame - Red Cross dances - parties - movies - sight seeing tours - filling snapshot albums - souvenirs - and - the first V-2 explodes right over Able battery - its projectile lands near Headquarters - the parts are recovered - S-2 has a valuable exclusive item for GHQ.

For a Semi-Mobile outfit, the 601<sup>st</sup> sure got around. As one of the more recent replacements put it “Dat Mobile outfit I wuz wit in Afriky was nuttin to dis joint”. Just take a look at the record.

From the time we were officially operational in Normandy on 12 July 1944 until now (10 March 1945) the 601<sup>st</sup> had made seven major moves as a whole battalion, while the batteries themselves have doubled that figure. Digging in and out of positions is a job in the best of circumstances. but, digging those big nine ton 90s in and out of thick, cozy mud or solid frozen ground during seven months of Winter was a task for the best of men.

The communications section deserve much credit in these moves. Laying their wires to connect the four batteries with our headquarters and high echelons over terrain freshly blasted to hell by the swiftly advancing allied armies, and keeping them open through the mess and maze of tangled combat wires, in mined fields where one wrong step meant instant death, in the worst possible weather call for infinite patience, training, and native skill. But our communication men were ready long before the batteries moved into position – ready for the enemy at all times. And those moves were the victorious landmarks of our army’s thousand mile advance from Omaha to the Seigfried Line. Let’s trace those moves –

12 July ’44 – dug into the fertile fields of Normandy. Headquarters and Able Battery at Colleville – surmer; Bakers gun set down near St. Honoreine – des-pertes; Charley at Becquet; and Dog and Houlville; all of them a few miles from the first landing point of the Yanks on French soil, and just north of the British beachheads at Cain and Bayeaux. You could watch Jerry planes knocking hell out of the Tommys just outside our firing range, but those Nazis never came within our range after their first disastrous ventures. British ack ack would throw up thousands of rounds of 3.7 – their favorite “barrage fire” wall of steel for the German planes to run through. Which is just what the boche did most of the time – run through it. But those heinies had more respect for the absolute target accuracy of our firing and they never knowingly took a chance, although they kept up awake night after night by flying right up to our maximum firing range and then running for it – the other way. We chalked up seven planes in the first few days – and after that the Germans just naturally stayed away. It made us mad as hell to see them dropping their flares and illuminating bombs lighting up the whole British position, hearing their peculiar off-pitch motor sound, seeing the fireworks of tracers and English ack ack, and there we stood. Maybe it was a sort of left handed compliment to us, eh?

July – August – hot dry days of choking dust or the blinding extremes of torrential rain and resulting mud were spent ironing out the kinks, and developing new techniques. 3 September ’44 – Paris fallen and the whole battalion – over six hundred officer and enlisted men – ammo trucks – personnel vehicles – jeeps – the cats and their 90mm kittens – moved as far as Dinan – bivouaced that night – went on to Versailles the next day – another bivouac that night – and into position in Paris the next day. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 601<sup>st</sup> was operational again.

After nine weeks in Paris, the outfit headed for Belgium on 10 November ’44 as a part of the now famous, super-secret Antwerp X Command created to defy Hitler’s threat to “wipe Antwerp off the map with V-1s” The story of “Antwerp X – Unknown Quantity” deserves a place of itself. This section concerns the many and varied moves of the battalion in the ETO.

In Belgium, Headquarters found the village of Booischot, some twenty five miles from Antwerp, ideal for operations. Able plowed into the mud two and a half miles North of nearby Westmeerbeek; Baker slid to a stop a mile and a half North East of this town; and Charley skidded their guns into position one mile due North of the “meerbeek”; with Dog bogged down in a real doghouse – the mud of the little village’s former athletic field. Everyone had it plenty tough – the heavy guns and trucks sunk hub deep in the soft ground. The “Cats” moved into the rescue – got stuck themselves. Men used elbow grease – shovels – log levers – corduroy road tactics – rock bases for the guns – built by hand – water two feet down everywhere meant – sandbags – thousands and thousands of them – sandbag the revetments – the guns – the outriggers – the trails – to keep the big babies from “walking” all over the place everytime they fired. Wet pyramidal tents on a soggy ground – wet cots and blankets – wet clothes – wet shoes – no time to take ‘em off – just keep digging and filling and firing and freezing – re-orient and synchronize each time – back – breaking work – little sleep or rest – targets every few minutes – continuous streams of them as time went by – constantly on the “alert” – fighting every minute of the day and night.

Winter set in with a vengeance – frozen ground solved the mud problems for the moment – added torture to the daily tasks – as those wet articles now froze – especially the sandbags – the steel – guns so cold it “burnt” your hands – guard duty in the bonechilling fog and mist, sleet and snow, a miserable assignment at best – time to endure. Machine guns on the alert twenty four hours a day – enemy planes bombing Antwerp daily – ack ack units being strafed – enemy shell and ours landing in ack ack outfits far and wide – V-1s blowing farms – friends and neighbors to bits – suffering everywhere. V-1s knocked down by us – and others – endangering our lives more than anyone elses – but never reaching Hitler’s goal – 97% of them. Those 3% that got through – terrifying damage done. What might have happened if the others had reached their destination? But they never did - that’s history now.

December's breakthrough by the Germans in the Ardennes burst suddenly on a surprised allied command – and the world at large (or was it a surprise when all the chips were counted?) Von Rundstedt boasted “Paris by Christmas” and – he almost made it – until he ran into Bastogne. The 601<sup>st</sup> – prize ack ack unit of Antwerp X jointed every military face in the ETC in the challenge returned to Von Rundstedt – this was the big test – and on it hinged future success or failure. The 601<sup>st</sup> semimobile nemesis of the vaunted V-1s – coast artillery outfit – limited service out-fit-verage outfit – became – Infantry and anti-tank overnight. M-1 ammo long held but seldom used was issued every man – rifles cleaned and checked with extra care – grenades issued – platoons formed – field maneuvers begun – not practice – but in earnest – road blocks set up-90s emplaced for anti-armor operations along strategic roads – forward O.P.s set up and manned – guards doubled and tripped – the 601<sup>st</sup> was ready for anything; Paratroops reported – scouting parties sent out to round them up – “Combat Team B” formed – 2,000 infantrymen created overnight from the ack ack men of Antwerp X – 2,000 infantrymen armed to the teeth and capable of defending Antwerp against whatever Hitler had to offer.

But – the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne held at Bastogne – Patton delivered with his armor – C-47s flew impossible weather to keep them supplied – and – Von Rundstedt – lost – five full divisions – 155 tank – thousands of guns and vehicles. His lightning driver faltered – broke – ran pell mell – and the last real threat to our final victory on the Western Front was gone. The 601<sup>st</sup> – like so many others dropped back to normal – returned to their primary mission – V-bombs.

December – memorable month for the 601<sup>st</sup> – they'd operated as about every phase of the army – as ack ack – infantry – anti-tank – supply – engineers – transportation field artillery – just about the works. With volunteers on the road day and night highballing supplies to the front – the short handed batteries cheerfully bore their double duties – there was no letup in the steadily climbing percentage of buzzbombs destroyed. General Montgomery had asked 50% - General Armstrong had insisted on 100% - nothing less. It started at 70% - and never stopped climbing until at 97% Hitler quit.

Nazi S-2 soon realized they were wasting their V-1s in our direction – changed course – between Christmas and New Years Day – few crossed our guns – that meant moving again to meet their strategy. New Years Day – seven ME109s zipped over us in the early morning fog – not fifty feet off the ground – too fast for an “alert” bombed and strafed near Headquarters – kept right on going. Jerry still had a few his way of welcoming us to the New Year of 1945.

7 – 8 – 9 – January – the 601<sup>st</sup> moved. Able to Nylon – also Baker; Charley to Bevel; and Dog to Kijfboschen; with Hq at Nylon. Everyone of those thousands of sandbags – frozen solid as limestone rock – had to be torn out. Backs bent and picks broke as they tore loose – ground like concrete and guns bedded deep in it – tent stakes broke like matchsticks – misery – the men smiled – gritted teeth – laughed at nature and Hitler – licked them both. Day after day the V-1s poured across the skies of Antwerp X – day after day the 601<sup>st</sup> – and her fellow ack ack batteries knocked down more and more of them. Hitler tried everything – changed course – style – speed – direction – we met them all – moved right with him. 27 January '45 – dig 'em out and in again, boys. The boys at the front were having it tough – we weren't getting things the easy was either.

27 January 1945 – the whole battalion moved again – Headquarter to Cappellen; Able to Sontvloit; Baker in Krusineg; Charley at Oordonron; and Dog at Houvenan. This was the biggest month of all coming up – February '45 – when Hitler throw the works at Antwerp – everything he had in V-1s and V2s – all for his objective – or defeat. They came in singles – pairs – triplets – four at a clip – one after another tandem – solid rows – each at a different altitude – speed – direction – every deception possible for these pilotless aircraft. And – day and night we throw our big 90 shells at them – shot them down – exploded them in midair – knocked them off course – hour after hour until the smoking gun barrels had to be changed. Foiled again – the villian tried one last switch – and the 601<sup>st</sup> was two jumps ahead of him.

2 February – Charley went from Oorderen to Esschon, Belgium; Able, Baker and Dog moved on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March to Holland. This was big stuff – (so they thought) moving right up under the enemy's nose – where constant action could be expected – not only from V-1s – but from ground forces and field artillery of the enemy. Instead – all activity ceased in this theatre – as if Jerry had sensed his defeat and suddenly thrown in the sponge. A few V-1s were thrown in desperation an Antwerp from far away angles – and those failed too.

The three batteries in Holland moved back to Belgium under a new tactical command. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March Able set up in Schilde; Baker and Dog on the 26<sup>th</sup> to Wuestwezel and Nieuwmoor, Belgium respectively.

By Easter Sunday – the V-bombs were declared officially lickd – the big Rhine drive was a complete success, and the contribution of the Port of Antwerp officially recognized by the military and public press who bowed no little to the ack ack men of that command who had contributed so materially to that vital factor in our total war effort.

Few realized the importance of the job done by the 601<sup>st</sup> and her associated organization of anti-aircraft under Antwerp X (nicknamed because of the complete security blackout “Unknown Quantity X”) but all of those concerned know that with out their efforts – Antwerp would have been demolished as both a city and port. Had that happened – no small amount of the supplies necessary to the Western Front would have rendered impotent – delayed over other long routes of supply – and the war lengthened by many weeks and perhaps months.

I can think of no way to better express the opinion of the military command of Antwerp X, than to quote verbatim the official Commendation from the United States Commander.

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HEADQUARTERS  
FIFTIETH ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY BRIGADE

APO 508, US ARMY  
17 April 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation

To: The Commanding Officer, 601<sup>st</sup> AAA Gun Bn, APO 654, US Army

1. On the occasion of the separation of the 601<sup>st</sup> AAA gun Bn from this command, it gives me great pleasure to commend you, your officers, and the men for the outstanding efficiency, devotion to duty, and fortitude displayed by your entire Command during the entire period in this area.
2. Facing a problem, the solution of which was imperative, with almost no precedents to follow, and under conditions demanding the greatest initiative and livelihood, you, your officers and men have worked with tireless energy and skill and have accomplished the assignment in a manner which merits the highest praise. That this command has succeeded in its mission beyond all expectation is due in no small part to the efforts of your command.
3. It has not been possible for reasons of security for the world to know, up to this time, of the importance of our mission, and of the far reaching effects which its successful accomplishment and on the progress of our campaign against Germany. When this story is told, and your part of it is known, I am positive that our people will realize the fine part of 601<sup>st</sup> AAA Gun Bn played in the war.
4. My best wishes go with all of you, and the finest compliment I can pay you at this time is to express the hope that your accomplishments in the days to come will measure up to the outstanding work you have done while serving in Antwerp.

Goodbye -----and the very best of luck.

CLARE H. ARMSTRONG  
Brigadier General, USA

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24 April – the mission completed in Belgium, another alert – another mission – Able and Baker to Cherbourg; Charlie to Le Havre; dog to Marseilles for protection of the dock facilities of each of these great ports. Headquarters set up at Labbeville, a village 25 miles NE of Paris, to become the hub of our new widely dispersed batteries. But the real fireworks was over – the finish was near – The “Great Day” – 8 May 1945. After the celebration was over the big question – what next for the 601<sup>st</sup> – occupation or more battles in the Pacific. Perhaps some will go home – some to the Pacific – some to help occupy or police the lands they helped win. Whatever – wherever – the memory of their mission together in the European Theatre of Operations will ever remain a shining mark of work well done.

The 601<sup>st</sup> came to the ETO with a special mission and that mission was accomplished with high success – an enviable record of achievement for all officers and enlisted men of this battalion. We point with pride to that record and to the men who made it possible.

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FINALE

This summation is written in the States on 14 March, 1946, in order that a complete story may be available to all.

Early in June, 1945, the Battalion relieved the 495 AAA Gun Battalion and assumed its mission of disarmament of all German Flak. The Batteries were scattered in southeastern Germany, C being at Kennath near Bayreuth, B being near Amberg and A near Deggendorf. Hq. and D Batteries were at Worth A Donau. During this period, the Battalion worked under the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Disarmament Wing (Prov.) commanded by Col. Coates, the 31 AAA Brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. Chapin and the 17 AAA Group commanded by Col. Carl Adams.

During the early fall, redeployment took its toll, officers and men went out singly and in groups, the unit finally becoming practically a re Replacement Depot. On 18 November, 1945, the whole Battalion was moved to the Straubing Army Air Base (R-68)

Inactivation was completed during January 1946 at Hq. IX ADC, Bad Neustadt, Germany, by Captain Edward Eager.

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Copies of this narrative are available. If you will send addresses of officers or men to:

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they will be mailed to all concerned.