

VII. THE 165TH FIELD ARTILLERY BRIGADE

TRAINING IN FRANCE

A SHORT time before the arrival of the 90th Division in France, a decision had been made at general headquarters that artillery brigades which had already received experience at the front would be maintained in men and material, even if it were necessary to break up newly arriving units. There was a relative shortage both in motor equipment and in horses, due to the fact that shipments of men from America had been given priority by the Allied High Command as a result of the serious need for man-power revealed by the spring drives of the Germans. Thus it came about that the fate of the 90th Division's artillery was settled by the capricious changes of war, without the brigade being given an opportunity to demonstrate its capabilities.

Immediately upon its arrival in the training area in France, the brigade was called upon to make many sacrifices. There were demands for officers to fill requirements at the front as aeroplane and balloon observers. The necessity for suitable officer material took the oldest and most seasoned non-commissioned officers to Saumur. The camp to which the brigade had been assigned was a new one for American troops, although it had existed as a military site from the time of Napoleon and had been used for the training of colonial troops. No artillery range existed, no school facilities, and, indeed, there was nothing except some barracks lately occupied by Russian troops. Water and bathing facilities were at a premium, and the intense heat of midsummer in southern France drew heavily upon the endurance of the men. There was a general epidemic of Spanish influenza, which reduced the number of effectives available for duty. Many of the horses received by the light regiments died. In spite of its handicaps, the brigade prepared its own camp site, demolishing forests in the construction of an artillery range, and moved and reconstructed buildings to house the school established by the chief of artillery. In September the range was completed and sufficient material had been received for the regiments to begin final target practice to fit them for duty at the front.

The hardest blow the brigade had to face came late in September. But one week remained of the prescribed course of instruction, and every one looked forward to active service. However, at Camp Souge, a few kilometers on the other side of Bordeaux, was a brigade which entered the training area six days earlier than the 165th; and when that brigade received orders to move to the front, it was necessary for the 165th Brigade to turn over practically every animal that had been received.

Some hope was aroused when the brigade was moved to an area just north of Chaumont, where the American general headquarters was located. This movement began on October 6, brigade headquarters being established at Andelot. While in this area material for the howitzer regiment was finally received, and everything possible was done to prepare the brigade for action. A number of officers, including the brigade staff and many of the regimental staff, together with picked men, went to the front for periods of instruction. A reconnaissance of the sector held by the 90th Division was made with a view to moving into line with the least possible delay.

The last few days of October and the first eleven days of November were anxious and perplexing ones for the brigade. Orders for its movement to the front were given and halted, issued and changed, and changed again. Finally actual movement of the brigade to the Toul front was begun with the overland transportation in trucks of the main body of the 345th Field Artillery; and this unit, Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Clyde D. Parmelee in command, arrived in the 2d Army rear echelon on the day the armistice went into effect, while officers of brigade headquarters were at Woinville, headquarters of the

4th Corps of the 2d Army, awaiting the arrival of the full brigade. On November 16 orders were received to rejoin the 90th Division, and on the following day the train schedule from Andelot was announced. Three train-loads were detained at Dun-sur-Meuse and marched to the Stenay area, and that part of the 345th Field Artillery which had reached the Toul sector moved overland to rejoin their original division; but hard luck still hounded the heels of the brigade, and the shortage of rolling stock brought about a delay of more than a week. However, brigade P. C. was established at Mouzay on November 22, and the last units were assembled by November 28.

Brigadier-General Francis C. Marshall left the brigade on October 27, 1918, to take command of the 2d Infantry Brigade, 1st Division. Colonel R. S. Abernethy was in temporary command from October 29, 1918, to January 22, 1919. Brigadier-General Oliver L. Spaulding commanded the brigade from January 22, 1919, to February 4, 1919, when he was ordered to general headquarters as historical officer, and was succeeded by Brigadier-General Augustine McIntyre.

So closely associated with the artillery brigade was the 315th Ammunition Train that it was usually considered part of the brigade. On arriving in France, all the ammunition train, except Companies A and C of the Motor Battalion, joined the 165th Field Artillery Brigade at Camp Hunt. Companies A and C, under command of Captain Peter P. Rodes, were sent to St. Nazaire, where they remained until ordered to join the 90th Division in the training area.

No units of the Division saw longer or harder service than these two companies. From August 30 to September 8 they were attached to the 303d Ammunition Train (a part of the 153d Field Artillery Brigade, at that time attached to the 90th Division). Captain Rodes was attached to the G-1 office, and Captain Joe O. Wheeler commanded the companies. From September 8 to 11 they were attached to the 1st Corps Provisional Artillery Park and hauled ammunition in the Toul sector. When the 1st Corps Park moved to the Meuse-Argonne front the companies went with it and participated in the offensive there. When the artillery park was disbanded on October 27, Companies A and C joined the 90th Division.

In the meantime the remainder of the ammunition train had been in training with the 165th Field Artillery Brigade under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis V. Greer, and had suffered the same vicissitudes. After the signing of the armistice the entire train was united at Stenay, and was thereafter with the Division on its march into Germany and during its service with the Army of Occupation.