

XII

Chemnitz to Niederholzheim - CEASE FIRE! END OF MISSION!

The Division received a new mission and prepared to move to the south toward an alleged Redoubt in the Austrian Alps. Early on the morning of Apr. 18, movement began back to the west, then south to assembly areas in the Bamberg-Scheswitz area. On the 21st, the Division continued on to Nurnberg, and remained there until Apr. 28, maintaining law and order and protecting important installations.

With the movement of the Division southward the 314th left Herrenhaide at 1900 on Apr. 18, and after an all night march of some 203 miles, during which it was strafed without casualties or damage, arrived at Meedensdorf, northeast of Bamberg, at 1300 on the 19th. The route from Herrenhaide went west to Erfurt, then turned south passing through Arnstadt, Eisfeld, Coburg, Lichtenfels and Scheplitz. On the 21st the Battalion moved south another 41 miles to Nurnberg, and remained there until Apr. 28.

Many recall historic Nurnberg. The 314th went through a lot of cities, towns and villages, but Nurnberg was different from any of them.

The outer and newer part of the city was almost in complete ruin, with only shells of buildings still standing. The streets were blocked with large piles of rubble and bomb craters. In the heart of all this devastation was an inner city circled by a large, old stone wall with a wide moat around the outside. There were several entranceways through the wall. Bridges crossing the moat led to the inner city, which was like moving several hundred years back in time. This inner city, declared an historical area, had been somewhat spared in the bombings, and had sustained minimal damage. It is one of the few picturesque old medieval towns that have survived centuries of European wars. The town hall, church, museum, craftsmen guild halls all are relics of medieval times. Since the war all has been repaired and it still is a great tourist attraction.

Because the FDC had nothing to do while we were in Nurnberg, Capt. Richard Wilmer (Asst. S-3) went to visit and inspect the cathedral of St. Sebaldus, who, Dick said, was one of his ancestors. He found the cathedral was not too badly damaged.

Chet Rutkowski remembers: "We were held up in Nurnberg for several days and didn't have too much to do. To keep occupied, some of us went fishing with "C" rations and grenades. The fish would be killed by the explosion and on rising to the top would start to float downstream. In order not to lose them we would dive in and retrieve them. The German civilians must have thought we were crazy for sure. Although we 'caught' a nice mess of fish, no one wanted to clean them."

Chet goes on to say that: "We were quartered in a tenement on the third floor. The people who normally lived there had stored all of their good furniture and other possessions in the basement. The guys took a piano from the cellar and carried it up to our third floor area. Russell Simpson could play very well and we all enjoyed the music while we were there."

Stanley Stublewski (Sv Btry) has good reason to remember that area. "One night outside of Nurnberg, I was on guard duty patrolling the outer perimeter of an airfield, which was pock marked with numerous deep bomb craters. It was very dark and I could see nothing, even though I was straining my eyes to the fullest. The best I could do was to listen intently for any noises. Suddenly I fell into one of the bomb craters. It was half full of water and had very steep sides. I yelled 'Corporal of the Guard, Post No. 2'. When he came to my aid, he could not see where I was and he nearly fell into the crater with me. I was a mess. All wet, muddy, and frightened, I was relieved of duty but the next morning I went back. This time I could see that the water in the hole was chest high."

On Apr. 28, the Division was ordered to pass through the Danube River bridgehead of the 65th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Regensburg, and proceed rapidly to the south following the advance of the 13th Armored Division. Movement from Nurnberg began at once, and by Apr. 30, the 80th had reached the north bank of the Isar River.

Leaving Nurnberg on Apr. 28, the 314th travelled southeasterly some 71 miles through Hemau, Etterzhausen and Regensburg to a rendezvous area at Grass, and on the 29th continued south 40 miles passing through Ober Isling, Traubling, Ragelstadt, Aughausen and Hainsbach, to Krottenthal. On the 30th the Battalion first displaced about 5 miles to Langthal then moved on another 3 miles to firing positions at Moosthening.

Like March, April was spent mainly in marches through Germany. These moves totalled some 599 miles. During the period 4,426 rounds were fired.

"Not long after we had left the Nurnberg area," says Frank Budjoso, "we were in a small German town and I was walking around looking at things and thinking how the architecture of the houses and other buildings differed from that at home. Very few people were on the streets. Then, the first jet plane I had ever seen, a German jet, flew over at a fairly low altitude and the noise was frightening. There was a little boy and girl, about four or five years old, playing in a nearby yard and they started to cry. I went over and put my arms around them and they clung tightly to my legs. As the plane made a second pass, I led them down a few steps that led to the basement door of the house. I gave them some candy and in German told them not to cry, that everything would be all right. The plane did not return so I took the children, who had stopped crying, back up the steps into the yard. I don't know where they went after that but I was glad that I had been there to comfort them and felt like I had done my Boy Scout duty for the day."

Hubert Kenyon recalls: "When the Division was chasing the 6th German Army as it retreated toward the Austrian Alps, we spent many hours in the air relaying messages from one ground station to another. I was getting low on

gas and the Air Section was on the move far to the rear with "Hq" Btry. I landed near a road that was jammed bumper to bumper with truck loads of infantry and begged a couple of cans of gas. One of the infantrymen asked if I would take him for a plane ride, which I did and dropped him off a few miles up the road."

Tom Haynie recalls: "There was a man in the Gun Section, Anton Habriga (B Btry), who would always seem to be able to find some kind of musical instrument with which to entertain us. He was quite talented. He was also very mechanically inclined for several times he found a broken radio and made it work well enough for us to listen to civilian programs."

The 314th began the month of May with the batteries in position on the north bank of the Isar River at Moosthening, to support the 318th's crossing of the Isar at Dingolfing.

On May 2 the Battalion resumed the march for about 9 miles and went into a rendezvous at Griesbach, then proceeded to Warth, then on to Thann, then Heisprecht, and finally to a rendezvous position just north of Huldessen.

That day should stick in everyone's memory, not just because there were five different marches in one day, a record for the Battalion, but primarily because of the last stretch of road. It was a veritable sea of mud and the adjoining fields proved to be poorly disguised swamps incapable of permitting the passage of heavily laden gun and ammunition trucks. Truck after truck became bogged down and it was necessary to winch them from the mire. Personnel on trucks were forced to dismount and virtually make a road at some spots and at others to add their manpower to that of the winch in extricating the stuck vehicles. Late in the evening, the road being absolutely impassable, orders were issued to bed down for the night.

The next morning, daylight permitted reconnaissance for an alternate route and the Battalion moved nine miles to a rendezvous area near Reut. Two trucks and howitzers of "B" Btry, together with the maintenance vehicle, two vehicles of the supporting AA platoon, one three quarter ton radio truck and one jeep remained behind because of mechanical problems. While personnel of these vehicles were involved in repair work, an enemy plane appeared over the area and was quickly engaged by the AA men and successfully destroyed. Shortly thereafter the vehicles resumed the march under the direction of Capt. Richard Wilmer (Asst. S-3).

From the rendezvous area at Reut, the Battalion moved 19 miles into firing positions in the vicinity of Irting, in support of the 318th which was holding the bridgehead across the Inn River at Braunau. What turned out to be the final shot of the war for the 314th was fired on this day, May 3, by "C" Btry at 1700.

There had been a false report on Apr. 27, that the war was over. Prompted perhaps by the German unconditional surrender in Italy on May 2, another premature report circulated on the afternoon of the 3rd and was joyfully received by the Battalion.

Francis Neighly has good reason to remember that day. He was nearly squashed. "I was on my way from the CP to the gun battery to tell Capt. Boston that we had heard the war was over. When I gave the Captain the news he said 'It can't be over. We have a fire mission and you come in here and tell me stuff like that. Get out of here! I won't believe it until I get the word over the radio.' Dejected, I went out and down the steep bank to the road. Just then the Captain came bursting out and jumped off the top of the bank right down on top of me. 'The war is over', he shouted, 'The war is over. Word just came over the radio.'"

Henry Moyer (C Btry) recalls that: "I had been out laying wire, and when I got back to the Battery everyone was cheering and yelling."

On May 4, the Battalion left Irking and at 2300 crossed the Inn River into Austria. After a march of some six miles, it went into a rendezvous area at St. Peter, where it remained until the 7th.

During May the Division exploited its bridgehead across the Isar River at Dingolfing and for the next seven days pursued the enemy southward into the Austrian Alps. Motorized, it seized crossings of the Vils River on May 2, crossed the Inn River into Austria the next day and on the 4th captured the cities of Volklabruk and Schwanenstadt. On the 5th it reached the Enns River, the designated restraining line between US and Russian troops. Patrols crossed the river and pushed 15 miles to the east without contacting any Russian forces.

On May 6 the 71st Infantry Division relieved the 80th along the Enns River. The 80th had orders to push the pursuit to the south. Task Force Smythe, formed for this purpose, jumped off that afternoon and reached Micheldorf without opposition. On the 7th, the Task Force advanced rapidly, encountering scattered enemy resistance and demolitions. Late in the morning the German Commander, Gen. Maj. Soeth surrendered all forces north and west of the Enns River (approximately 20,000 troops) to Gen. McBride. Almost simultaneously word was received of the German surrender and the 80th was ordered to take no further offensive action. According to a newspaper report at the time, "The 80th was the last unit in full contact with the enemy . . . The last shot on the western front was fired by Task Force Smythe of the 80th Division." The next day (May 8) Gen. der Panzer Truppe Black surrendered the 6th German Army (approximately 102,000 troops) to Gen. McBride at Garsten, Austria.

Sebastian Giugno, (Sv Btry) almost became the last casualty. Several days before the war ended he was standing in the rain on a truck and accidentally touched a wire leading from "Sv" Btry's captured generator, was knocked right off the truck, and was carried unconscious to the medics. Fortunately, he was back in a few days. However, he was not sure what had happened to him.

At 0800 on May 7, the 314th moved southward some 57 miles to an assembly area at Niederholzheim. Shortly thereafter official word was received the war in the ETO was over. The Battalion remained at this location until May 21.

On VE Day (May 8, 1945), the 314th had completed 308 days in the ETO, 30 of which were spent in England and Wales and enroute to the continent. From the time of its landing on Utah Beach on August 6, 1944, the Battalion was on the line continuously for 210 days, had a short rest of ten days, then went back on the line for another 58 days, bringing the total of combat days to 268. In all, the Battalion marched a total of 2,558.6 miles through France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria and participated in four campaigns: Northern France, The Ardennes, The Rhine Valley and Central Europe. A total of 2,409 missions were fired with an expenditure of 100,604 rounds of ammunition. The Battalion's first round was fired on Aug. 10, 1944, near Chemnes, France, and the last, by "C" Btry at 1700, May 3, 1945, in the vicinity of Braunau, Austria.

"I (John Beard) don't recall what we did, if anything, when we received the official word that the war was finally over because we had been expecting it. But an incident, just after we settled in at Niederholzheim, has stuck in my memory. From there we could see the snow covered Alps off in the distance and I was fascinated. I asked Dick Schalliol if they were the Tyrol and he said he didn't know. I believe the shock of his not knowing the answer is what has stored this permanently in my memory bank. In the three years or so that I had known the Major, whenever I had occasion to ask him anything on any subject he always seemed to have a ready reply."

John also says: "A few days after we arrived at Neiderholzheim I rode down to the concentration camp that, as I recall, was near the resort town of Ebensee on the Traun See. I had not seen Buchenwald or any of the other concentration camps the Division had liberated, but from what I saw then and heard later, this one was just the same only much smaller. At the time I was told that the camp was primarily for clerical personnel - rabbis, priests, ministers, etc. If so, it was obvious their bodies reacted the same to starvation, torture and disease as their lay brothers. Those who were up and about were little more than skeletons in striped pajama-like uniforms. It turned you stomach. And although the place was being cleaned up rapidly and the inmates cared for, the stench was unbelievable. One of the doctors with whom I spoke said that all personnel there, doctors, nurses, medics, etc., only worked three hours at a time. After the three hours they would go up to the lake (Traun See) and would ride around in a boat for a while to help clear the smell out of their noses. Then they would return for another three hour shift."

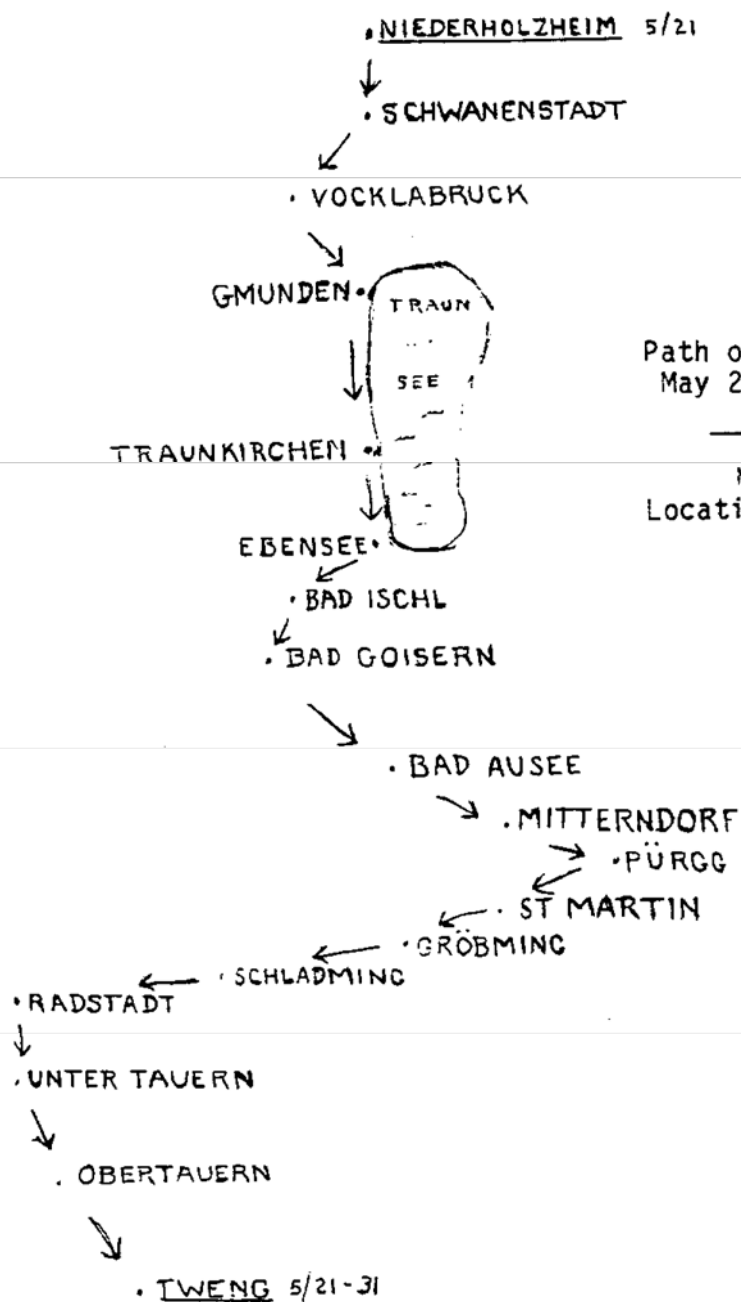
Niederholzheim offered a place for relaxation and recuperation in the balmy spring weather and also the opportunity to present many of the long overdue awards and decorations earned by many of the 314th men during combat.

Col. Minahan has a post-war story regarding Niederholzheim: "Several years ago when I was skiing at Boyne Mountain, Michigan, I was having a drink at the bar with one of the Austrian ski instructors who indicated he had a wide range of talents other than skiing. I asked him where in Austria he came from. His answer, 'A place no American ever heard of.' 'Try me,' I said. 'What you Americans call a podunk-Niederholzheim.' I said, 'Oohyah -- 3km north of Schwanenstadt.' He almost fell off the bar stool. 'I never expected an American to know about Niederholzheim -- it's not even on most Austrian

maps!' (which is true.) I told him, 'That's where my 314th FA Bn. was when WWII ended and my CP was in a little gasthaus there.' He was even more astounded. 'My uncle used to own that gasthaus!,' he gasped. I told him the 314th made a habit of going to places Kilroy never heard of.

At the end of the war in the ETO, Cpl. Francis Moon (Hq Btry) was inspired by the title of a song popular at that time to design this V-Mail letter.





Path of the 314th FA Bn
May 21 - May 31, 1945

Not to Scale
Locations Relative Only

• MAUTERNDORF

• MURAU

• TAMSWEG

• PREDITZ