

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND MATERIAL 144th FIELD ARTILLERY GROUP

The 144th Field Artillery Group, commanded by Colonel Clifford B. Cole of Pacific Grove, California, has its origin in the 144th Field Artillery Regiment, known as the California Grizzlies in World War I. The last fully volunteer regiment in the United States Army the Grizzlies were mustered in at the old Tanforan race track and began their training at Camp Kearny. After service on the Mexican border the regiment moved to France where they went into action near Metz and moved on to the Rhine with the Army of Occupation. Over 1,000 officers were graduated out of the regiment and when it was mustered out of service at the Presidio of San Francisco former members organized the 144th Field Artillery Association. The latter organization is still active and numbers among its members Frank Jordan, Secretary of State of California; Fletcher Bowron, Mayor of Los Angeles, and many other notables.

When the War Department accorded to the 144th Field Artillery Regiment* (155mm Gun) of the California National Guard the colors and honors of the War I organization the Grizzlies were again a part of the Army of the United States. An outgrowth of Battery E, 143rd Field Artillery, which was organized about 1932 at Santa Barbara, California, the 144th Regiment was activated in August 1940 with Headquarters at Santa Barbara and subordinate units at Santa Maria, Ventura, Oxnard, Santa Monica, Riverside and Bakersfield. The 144th was inducted into Federal Service on February 3, 1941 and moved to Fort Lewis, Washington for training.

With the outbreak of hostilities on December 7, 1941, the First Battalion of the regiment was placed on coast defense in the Gray's Harbor Sector of Washington, and the Second Battalion was rushed to defend vital points along the coast of Southern California. The regiment remained split in this manner until October of 1942 when the Second Battalion was relieved of coast defense duty in California and joined the regimental headquarters and the First Battalion, also relieved of coast defense duty, at the Field Artillery Firing Center at Yakima, Washington.

On February 17, 1943 the regiment was reorganized as the 144th Field Artillery Group with its two battalions becoming the 980th Field Artillery Battalion and the 981st Field Artillery Battalion attached to the Group. On April 16, 1943 the Group headquarters and its two attached battalions along with other units of the 76th Field Artillery Brigade moved to the California-Arizona maneuver area. After an intensive training period of four months on the desert the group and its battalions moved to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where it was stationed and trained for about three months.

On November 20, 1943 the group moved to a staging area in preparation for overseas movement, and sailed from the Port of Boston for the United Kingdom on December 29, 1943, arriving in Liverpool, England in January. Leaving the 980th and 981st Field Artillery Battalions in England the Group Headquarters moved to North Ireland on January 11, 1944. After four months of training among the peat bogs and at the firing range of the Sperrin Mountains in North Ireland, the 144th moved to Wigpool Common, near Ross-on-Wye, England. Several trips were made to the Sennybridge Firing Range in Wales and on July 16, 1945 the group landed on the coast of Normandy, France.

Upon its arrival in the United Kingdom, the 144th was assigned to XV Corps and because of its long experience with heavy artillery became the long-range group of the XV Corps artillery. It landed in France as part of the XV Corps and the Third Army at Utah Beach on July 16, 1945. The Group with the 208th, 731st, and 989th Field Artillery Battalions, and the 999th Field Artillery Battalion as attached battalions went into a bivouac with other corps artillery units in the vicinity of Sortosville, France.

The Corps became operational on July 29th, and on August 4th, the Group with the 208th, 989th, and 999th Field Artillery Battalions attached moved out the Coutances - Avranches break-through with the XV Corps and the Third Army. The 270th Field Artillery Battalion was attached on August 5, 1944. The corps artillery marched with the 79th Division on the entire "end run" through Fougères, Laval, Le Mans, and thence north to close the so-called "Falaise Gap." The 999th Field Artillery Battalion was detached from the group on August 9, 1944.

The first fires against the enemy were placed in the Forêt de Perseigne on August 12, 1944. Up until this time the fires of the heavy artillery had not been needed. The 989th Field Artillery Battalion was detached on August 13, 1944 and the 208th Field Artillery Battalion on August 17, 1944.

On August 15, 1944 the group with the 270th Field Artillery Battalion attached, again following the 79th Division, pulled out of the "Falaise Gap Sector" and on August 19, 1944 reached the area in the vicinity of Mantos-Gassicourt and positions were occupied to harass the enemy crossings of the Seine, and interrupt traffic on the other side. The 208th Field Artillery Battalion was again attached on August 24, 1944.

Commencing August 27, 1944 the XV Corps was relieved by XIX Corps, and corps troops moved to a bivouac area to the south. On September 1 the 270th Field Artillery was detached from the group and on September 8th, the group headquarters and the 208th Field Artillery Battalion moved south and east of Paris to Brienne le Chateau and thence to Feys, where the 267th Field Artillery Battalion was attached to group. From there the group and its battalions moved to positions near Diarville to support the Moselle River bridgehead at Charmes.

On September 19 the group moved to positions to support the attack of Luneville and later the Forêt de Parroy.

The group has had under its control a total of over twenty battalions and has operated under assignment to the First, Third and Seventh Armies. It has been attached to the XV Corps Artillery most of the time since arriving in the European Theater, except for a short period of assignment to XXI Corps Artillery in January, 1945.

The Group participated in the XV Corps drive which liberated Strasbourg in November 1944. Following that drive it took up positions near Enchenberg where its battalions played a prominent part in the reduction of the forts surrounding Bitch. When the XV Corps was moved westerly following the German counter-attack of December the 144th Group moved to Puttlinge. In March 1945 the group left Leywiller and shortly thereafter was marching with the rest of the XV Corps Artillery in the drive through Saarbrücken to the Rhine.

(PASSED FOR PUBLICATION BY THE FIELD PRESS CENSOR R.O. 285 4/25/45)

Harvey J. Richards ### 6773

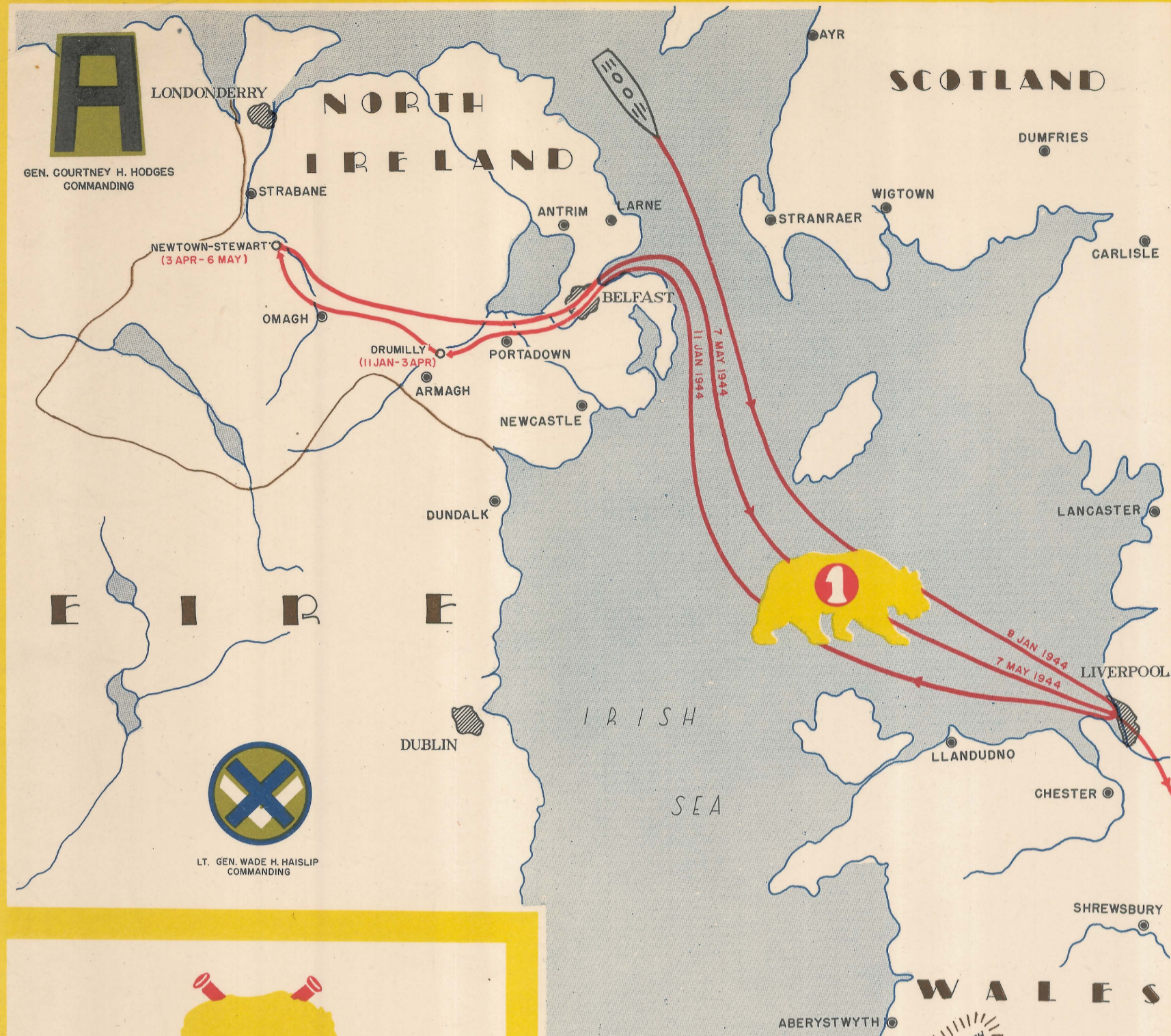
WITH THE 144th FIELD ARTILLERY GROUP OF THE SEVENTH ARMY, GERMANY: "We do not know when this meeting will take place but we feel confident that the California Grizzly and the Russian Bear will meet soon somewhere in Germany." This was the sentiment expressed by more than one member of Headquarters Battery, 144th Field Artillery Group, a former California National Guard organization, as they crossed the Rhine recently.


A reconnaissance party led by the Group Commander Colonel Clifford B. Cole, 53, of Pacific Grove, California, and including the Commanding Officer of Headquarters Battery, Captain Merlin M. Anderson, 28, of Midland, Michigan, had received a little "88" fire and some airplane strafing while waiting to cross about an hour earlier but the main convoy made the crossing without enemy interference. The heavy pontoon bridge and probably half a mile or so of the river was well screened by artificial fog from smoke generators on the near shore so that the Grizzlies could see very little of the river. They didn't need to see much, however, to feel that this was a momentous occasion for each one of them and one vehicle displayed, fluttering from its radio antenna, the flag of the California Republic, the so-called "Bear Flag."

Twenty-seven years ago the Bear Flag was carried to the Rhine by the California Grizzlies of World War I but this time it is going farther, much farther. As they push into the heart of Germany the vehicles of Headquarters Battery bear the insignia of the organization, a golden bear on a background of artillery red, while the flag which was flown during the Rhine crossing is held "in reserve" to be flown again in Berlin.

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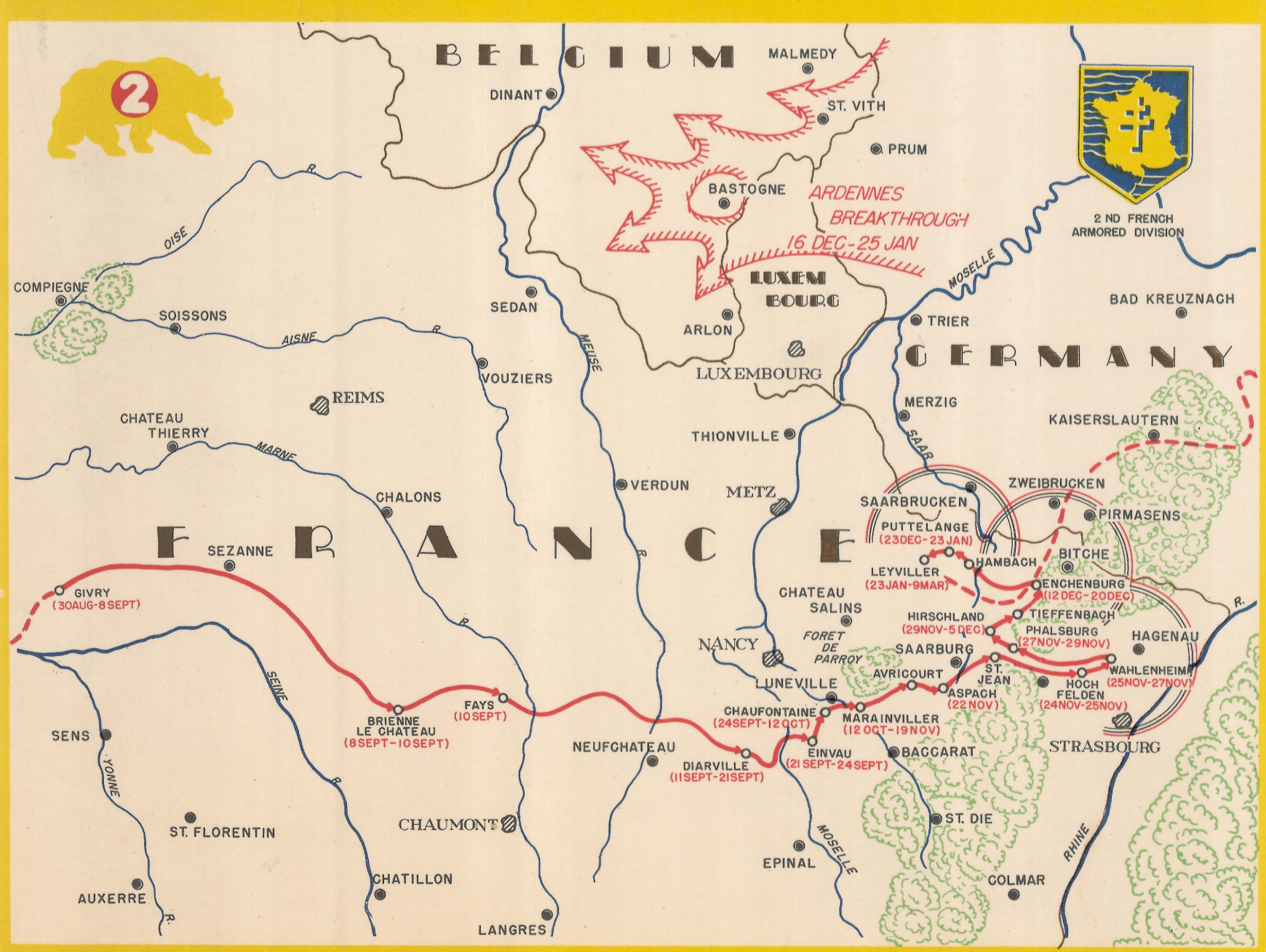



OPERATIONS OF THE
144TH FIELD ARTILLERY GROUP
XV CORPS ARTILLERY
 9 JANUARY 1944 TO 9 MAY 1945

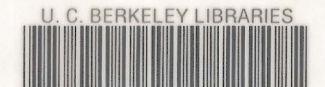
 COLONEL CLIFFORD B COLE, COMMANDING

 LT COLONEL JOHN M COFFIN, EXECUTIVE
 LIEUTENANT MARVIN O SANDERS, S-1 MAJOR HENRY P WIST, S-2
 MAJOR VANCE C MAPE, S-3 MAJOR JAMES J SHAU, S-4
 CAPTAIN MERLIN M ANDERSON, COM OFFICER
 CAPTAIN JOHN D McGOY, AIR OFFICER

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