

The California National Guard and the Korean War: 981st Field Artillery Battalion, 1950-1954

Extracted from, *The Guns of Korea: The US Army Field Artillery Battalions in the Korean War*
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981st FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

(155mm How, TracDr, 40th Inf Div, CA NG)



Motto: Contendimus (We strive)

3 August 1917: Constituted at Santa Barbara, California as Battery C, 2d Field Artillery, California National Guard.

5 August 1917: Drafted into federal service at Santa Barbara, California.

24 September 1917: Redesignated as Battery C, 144th Field Artillery and assigned to the 40th Division.

29 January 1919: Demobilized at San Francisco, California.

14 April 1930: Reconstituted in the California National Guard as Battery E, 143d Field Artillery; reorganized and Federally recognized at Santa Barbara, California.

14 April 1936: Redesignated as Battery C, 196th Field Artillery,

1 July 1936: Expanded, reorganized and redesignated as the 2d Battalion, 144th Field Artillery with Headquarters at Santa Barbara, California.

3 February 1941: Inducted into federal service at Santa Barbara, California.

8 February 1943: Reorganized and redesignated as the 981st Field Artillery Battalion

28 November 1945: Inactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

25 June 1946: Hqs & Hqs Battery, 144th Field Artillery Group consolidated with the 981st Field Artillery Battalion.

17 December 1946: Reorganized and federally recognized with Headquarters at Santa Barbara.

1 September 1950: Ordered into active federal service at Santa Barbara, California.

2 September 1952: The 981st Field Artillery Battalion (NGUS) organized and Federally recognized with Headquarters at Santa Barbara, California.

30 June 1954: Released from active federal service, reverting to California State control; concurrently, federal recognition withdrawn from the 981st Field Artillery Battalion (NGUS).

1 July 1954: Reorganized and redesignated as the 225th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.



Tractor-drawn, 155mm howitzers of the type used by the 981st Field Artillery Battalion in Korea.

981st FA Korean War Timeline

25 June 1950: Southern California; 981st Field Artillery Battalion (155mm howitzer, tractor drawn), 40th Infantry Division, organic medium field artillery element, California National Guard. Peace-time weekly drills and summer field training. Headquarters at Santa Barbara, California.

10 August 1950: All units, 40th Division alerted for induction into federal Service. The 981st FA enlisted toward TO&E¹ strength and prepared for overland move to Camp Cooke, California.

1 September 1950: Camp Cooke, California; 981st FA ordered into active federal service and assigned to Sixth Army.

October-November 1950: Camp Cooke, California; 981st FA receives fillers and begins intensive individual and unit training cycles.

24 February 1951: All units, 40th Division alerted for overseas shipment to Japan.

29-31 March 1951: San Francisco Port of Embarkation, California; 40th Division sails for Japan.

11 April 1951: Port of Yokohama, Japan; 40th Division arrives and is assigned to the XVI Corps, to bolster the defense of the Japanese islands and complete unit training cycles. The 981st FA moves to Camp Younghans, northern Honshu, Japan.

22 December 1951: Camp Younghans, northern Honshu, Japan; 40th Division alerted for movement to Korea to relieve the 24th Division by an exchange of equipment in place.² The 981st FA leaves howitzers and organizational equipment in Japan, except for five mess trucks and trailers, and moves with only individual weapons and equipment.

Second Korean winter 1951-1952

22 January 1952: Inchon, Korea, I Corps; 981st FA arrives from Japan to relieve the 11th FA (155mm how), 24th Division. The 11th FA is ordered to Tent City (24th Division rear) in preparation for shipment to Japan. Those 11th FA redlegs with not enough points to leave Korea are transferred to 40th Division artillery units. The 40th Division attached to IX Corps.

28 January 1952: Line Missouri ³(Kumwha-Chwapr-ri area), North Korea; 981st general support 40th Division.

10-15 February 1952: Operation Clam-up; Eighth Army curtails daylight movement and artillery firing in an attempt to lure enemy troops forward. Forward Observers keep close watch on enemy construction and movement. All suspected targets taken under fire on 16 February with Time-on-Target fires. (Author's Note: From my position on the MLR, all I saw was CCF troops come out in the open and have six days of unhindered new construction and rebuilding of their defensive fortifications.)

30 March 1952: Line Missouri (Kumwha-Chwapr-ri area), North Korea; 40th Division relieved by elements of both the Capital and 6th ROK divisions. The 981st FA remains on-line, general support for both divisions.⁴

1 April 1952: Line Missouri (Kumwha-Chwapr-ri area), North Korea; 40th Division relieves the 2d ROK Division 981st FA general support 40th Division

Korea summer fall 1952

May-June 1952: Line Missouri (Kumwha-Chwapr-ri area)), North Korea; 981st FA continues general support 40th Division

28 June 1952: Line Missouri (Kumwha-Chwapr-ri area), North Korea; 40th Division relieved by the 2d and 24th ROK divisions. The 981st FA remains on-line, general support for the 2d ROK Division.

17 October 1952: Line Missouri (Kumwha-Chwapr-ri area), North Korea; 40th Division released from attachment to IX Corps and attached to the X Corps the next day.

¹Table of Organization and Equipment

²The units involved took only individual weapons and equipment, leaving organizational equipment in place. The 11th FA returned to Japan to acquire relatively new howitzers, well-maintained vehicles and organizational equipment generally at TO&E levels while the 981st FA was left with war-weary howitzers, worn-out vehicles and missing organizational equipment.

³Line Missouri (central front): IX Corps MLR for the rest of the Korean War.

⁴Divisional artillery battalions were to remain on-line when their parent units were relieved, in accordance with General James A. Van Fleets desire to always have his "firepower advantage" in action.

22 October 1952: Line Minnesota⁵ (Heartbreak Ridge area), North Korea; 40th Division relieves the 25th Division and moves to the Heartbreak Ridge area, 981st FA general support 40th Division.

November 1952: Line Minnesota (Heartbreak Ridge area), North Korea; 981st FA continues general support 40th Division.

Third Korean winter 1952-1953

December 1952: Line Minnesota (Heartbreak Ridge area), North Korea; 981st FA continues general support 40th Division.

28 January 1953: Line Minnesota (Heartbreak Ridge area), North Korea; 40th Division relieved by the 45th Division. The 40th Division artillery assigned general support 45th Division while 45th Division artillery supports the 12th ROK Division.

3 February 1953: Line Minnesota (Punchbowl area), North Korea; 40th Division artillery relieves the 45th Division artillery for general support of the 12th ROK Division.

27 April 1953: Line Minnesota (Punchbowl area), North Korea; 40th Division relieves the 20th ROK Division. The 981st FA continues general support 12th ROK Division.

Korea summer 1953

7 May 1953: Line Minnesota (Punchbowl area), North Korea; 981st FA returns to 40th Division control, 981st FA general support 40th Div

10 July 1953: Line Minnesota (Punchbowl area), North Korea; 40th Division relieved by the 20th ROK Division

11 July 1953: Line Minnesota (Heartbreak Ridge area), North Korea; 40th Division relieves the 45th Division 981st FA general support 40th Division.

Cease fire 1953

27 July 1953: Line Minnesota (Heartbreak Ridge area), North Korea; 981st FA stands down and prepares to move to post-armistice defense positions.

8 May 1954: The 981st FA returns with the 40th Division to the United States.

30 June 1954: The 981st FA released from active federal service, reverting to California state control.

⁵Line Minnesota (eastern front): X Corps MLR for the rest of the Korean War.

981st FA Campaign Participation and Unit Citations

SECOND KOREAN WINTER 1951-1952

22 Jan - 30 Apr 52

KOREA SUMMER-FALL 1952

1 May - 30 Nov 52

THIRD KOREAN WINTER 1952-1953

1 Dec 52 - 30 Apr 53

KOREA SUMMER 1953

1 May - 27 Jul 53



Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation: KOREA
22 January 1952-15 January 1954, DA GO 50-54

For All Gave Some... Some Gave All

FENWICK, Nelson Edgar: 1st Lt, Hqs Btry
DOC,⁶ 8/28/1952; Simpsonville, MD

HALM, Herbert J: Pvt
KIA, 10/17/1952; Brooklyn, NY

LEAR, Max L: Sfc
KIA, 6/5/1953; Cabarrus County, NC

McCOY, Grady L: Pfc
KIA, 6/5/1953; Glenwood, GA

SPINGARN, Richard: Pvt
DOC, 2/4/1953; New York, NY

⁶Died of other causes.

981st FA Bibliography

Park, Robert. "Memoirs" 981st Field Artillery Battalion, 40th Division."
<http://koreanwar-educator.org/memoirs/park>