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INCOMING

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE 3D BATTALION
15TH FIELD ARTILLERY REGIMENT TOWED
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Commander's Corner

Spring has sprung and Summer is not to far off. The Battalion Reunion Invitations are being updated and will be mailed so that you receive the Invitation by the first week of September. The RSVP's are due back NLT 31 October. As I write this we are 7.5 months from our 5th Reunion, which is not that far off.

We sent an all red wreath and condolence card from the Battalion to the Family of SFC JC McGatha Jr Charlie Battery who passed away in April offering our sincerest condolences.

I attended the Capitol Cannoneers St Barbara Reception on April 18th at the Mount Vernon Inn and I used it as a chance to network trying to secure assistance with funding and getting our name known.

SSG Jerry Green Alpha Battery is hard at work on a project backed by the Board and we are aiming for the August Incoming to be able to show you everything.

This edition of the Incoming features another article by SFC Wendell Gibson, COL Mike Ashley and yours truly along with some other really interesting articles. The only way to keep our history alive is for you to share your stories so we can publish them in your newsletter. Also of note, the Battalion did not publish a newsletter for the 2nd Quarter of 1979.

So keep your powder dry and onward through the fog.

John Hoehne Sr
LTC (R) FA
Last BC

The INCOMING is an unofficial publication authorized under the provisions of AR 360-91, 3d Bn 15th FAR USAR (Inactivated) FT McClellan/Anniston, AL 36205. Published at least quarterly, the views and opinions expressed are exclusively those of the members of this organization as edited by the Last Commander and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Department of the Army. Provided via post and digital to every 3rd Battalion Red Leg……ALLONS

The CSM's Corner

Greetings to all 3/15th Battalion members and to your families.

As Spring is quickly approaching, not only do the flowers begin to bloom, but the snakes, and other creatures come to life, so be ever aware of where you put your feet, and hands.

Remembering back many, many, many years ago, to my first trip to Stewart, Top chose the first site we occupied and located the Company at the edge of the swamp. Come nightfall we thought a group of B-52s were warming up for takeoff although we knew there was no airfield behind us. Thus comes forth a million mosquitoes. These things were huge; you could almost hear them, say, "Do we eat them here or take them with us?"

The next night myself and three other NCOs were tasked to ambush the Company while on a night move, so off we go, just before sundown, with two M-60s, four cans of blank ammo. We located a great spot for the ambush, set up the M60's and set in waiting for the Company to show up. While waiting, we stood in the middle of the tank trail smoking and joking. While we smoked and joked, a huge alligator had moved into within 15-20 feet from the machine gun position across from my gun position, and let out one blood curdling growl. We gave that Gator that gun and position until daylight the next morning! When a huge gator growls that big and loud you get light-footed very quickly and we most defiantly got light-footed that night.

Hope you enjoy a look back in time, as that is a true story.

Donald Peak
CSM (Ret)
3/15th FAR

"Artillery conquers and infantry occupies."

Fuller
Army Ordnance
January - February 1931

Who Had the Best Artillery in Europe — American Gunners Outshot Them in the First Year

Publication Unknown
Author Unknown

On the morning of December 16, 1944, a twenty-year-old 1st Lieutenant named Lyle Bouck laid in a foxhole on a ridge outside the Belgian village of Lanzerath and watched five hundred German paratroopers form up in the valley below. He had eighteen men with him, a reconnaissance platoon from the 394th Infantry Regiment, and four forward artillery observers who had attached themselves to his position the night before. Twenty-two Americans in all, dug into the high ground that the German Sixth Panzer Army needed to take if it wanted the roads to the Meuse River and, beyond that, Antwerp. Five hundred against eighteen was not a fight by any military definition. It was an execution with a delay built into it. Standard infantry doctrine said the correct response was to fall back to the main line before the blow landed. 1LT Bouck did not fall back. What he had that the five hundred Germans did not was a radio, and that radio connected him to something the German military had never built an equivalent of in four years of war. It connected him to the American Artillery Fire Direction Center, developed in the 1930s at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, by officers who had reviewed the failures of the First World War and realized the problem had not been the guns, the problem had been organization.

In the First World War, an observer was connected to a specific battery, usually four to six guns. If more firepower was needed, it had to be requested up a chain of command and then back down again, and by the time the request was approved and translated into fire, the target had often moved, vanished, or ceased to matter. The Fort Sill solution was not a new gun and not a new shell. It was the Fire Direction Center, the FDC, a communications and calculation hub staffed by officers and enlisted specialists with radios, maps, firing tables, plotting boards, slide rules, and mechanical calculators. The observer did not need to know where the guns were. He did not need

to know which batteries were free, what their angles were, or how long a round from one position would take to travel to another. He needed only to know where the target was and say so over the radio. The FDC did the rest. One man with a radio could direct the fire of an entire battalion, twelve guns, or a regiment, thirty-six, and in the specific conditions the Ardennes would create, he could call down the fire of multiple regiments at once, each battery firing on its own set of calculations so that all the shells arrived at the same moment Time on Target. The Germans found that experience so disturbing in their after action reports that they described it less as bombardment than as a tactical shock. There was one moment of quiet, and then, within seconds, saturation by simultaneous impacts from guns positioned miles apart in different directions. The Americans called it Time on Target. To understand what 1LT Bouck's radio meant on that ridge outside the village of Lanzerath, you had to understand what artillery had looked like before Fort Sill changed the doctrine. Before the FDC existed, artillery had been a direct service weapon. A battery commander positioned his guns, registered likely targets, and when an observer called for fire, that battery engaged what the observer could see. If the observer moved, he lost his registered targets. If the battery moved, he lost his connection. It was a system that could be very precise in its individual parts and very rigid in its overall structure. German artillery in 1944 was an excellent version of that older system. The Wehrmacht's 105mm leFH 18, the 150mm sFH 18, and the feared 88mm, which had begun life as an anti-aircraft weapon and ended the war as one of the most feared pieces on the battlefield, were technically sophisticated, well maintained, and operated by highly trained crews. German gunners were skilled and German guns were accurate. But what German artillery could not easily do was what 1LT Bouck was about to ask American Artillery to do: put the fire of twelve batteries on one target at the same moment. Not because the guns were incapable, but because the system was not built for it. The German observer was tied to his battalion. The American observer was tied to the network. On December 16, 1944, in a foxhole outside Lanzerath, that difference was about to matter more than any technical specification of any gun on either side of the war.

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The Battle for Lanzerath Ridge began at approximately 0500 that morning, when the German 3rd Fallschirmjäger Division came down the road out of the forest. These were not second-rate troops. The Fallschirmjäger were among the best light infantry in the German military, veterans of the Eastern Front, trained for aggressive offensive action. Their task was simple in concept. Clear the high ground at Lanzerath, open the road for the 1st SS Panzer Division coming behind them, and keep the offensive moving west toward the Meuse. The American position on the ridge should have taken thirty minutes to overrun. It took twenty hours. 1LT Bouck's eighteen men were dug into foxholes along the tree line, and yes, the terrain favored the defense. The Germans had to move uphill across open ground. But terrain alone does not stop five hundred soldiers for twenty hours but Artillery does. The four artillery observers on the ridge had already registered the likely avenues of approach. They knew where the road was. They knew the open ground the Germans would have to cross. When the attack began, the observer transmitted the call. The FDC received it. The calculations took seconds. The guns that answered were not one battery and not one battalion, but whatever batteries were available and in range, all coordinated through the FDC network. The German columns moved, slowed, stopped, and then tried to flank. The observers shifted fire. German infantry doctrine knew how to deal with a fixed defensive position supported by a limited number of artillery pieces: identify, suppress, flank, bypass. A trained German infantry unit could work around a position, identify where the artillery support was coming from, and try to break communication between the observer and the battery. What they could not do was break a network. Suppress one observer's radio, and three others were still in play. Identify one battery, and that told you nothing about the other twelve firing on the same grid. Shift to a flank, and you were moving into ground a different observer could put under fire in seconds, using the same FDC and the same radio net. German after action reports would later record all of this in the language of professionals who knew they were encountering something they had not fully understood ahead of time. American Artillery responded faster than expected. The volume of

fire was disproportionate to the number of guns identified. Flanking movements that should have produced dead ground were engaged almost immediately. What those reports could not quite capture was the reason. The Germans at Lanzerath were not fighting a battery. They were fighting a system. A German Artillery Battalion, at its best, was a precise instrument. It worked well when the links held and the target was where the plan expected it to be. But when the battle went off plan, when the target was unexpected, when the observer was in a different place, when there was no time for deliberate preparation, German precision became a kind of liability because the process of recalculating and redistributing fire took time. Infantry battles do not give you that time. The American system had been built for exactly this sort of chaos. One observer, any position, any target: call it in, and the FDC solved the geometry for every battery at once. Fire came from wherever it was available, not merely from where it had been prepositioned. 1LT Bouck held the ridge for twenty hours. The spearhead of the Ardennes Offensive, Kampfgruppe Peiper, lost twenty hours because twenty-two Americans with four radios had access to a fire direction system the German military had no equivalent for it. By the time 1LT Bouck's platoon was captured at dusk, the German timetable was already broken. The artillery had done that not the guns by themselves but the network.

Lanzerath was not the only place in the Ardennes where the network decided events. Just over 12 kilometers north of Lanzerath on a stretch of high ground called Elsenborn Ridge, the American Artillery system was about to prove what it could do when it had space to prepare, room to position, and a target that was not going to stop coming. Elsenborn Ridge was where the German offensive died in the north. It died there because of a system Fort Sill had developed in the 1930s and because the Germans had never built its equivalent: a system in which one observer could kill an entire division, provided the radio worked, the FDC answered, and the network held. Elsenborn Ridge, in another year, would have been unremarkable Belgian countryside. In December 1944 it marked the boundary between the American V Corps and the planned axis of advance for the German Sixth Panzer Army. If the Germans held it, they controlled two of the four roads their

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offensive needed. If the Americans held it, those roads were denied. The Germans needed those roads badly. The U.S. 2nd Infantry Division was ordered to hold the ridge at all cost. By December 18, the situation had clarified into something German doctrine believed it knew how to solve: a prepared American defensive position, undermanned, under-supplied, and under pressure from multiple elite divisions, including the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend, among the most fanatical and effective formations in the German order of battle. What German doctrine had not fully accounted for was the artillery behind the ridge. By December 20, roughly three hundred and fifty guns of all calibers were concentrated behind and around Elsenborn Ridge. That was an extraordinary concentration, more guns than many corps-level operations had assembled, and every one of them was connected through the FDC network, available to any forward observer who could see a target.

The crucial advantage was not just the number of guns. It was the system that made those guns act like one weapon. A German observer trying to mass fire from multiple batteries had to move through a sequence: identify the target, estimate its coordinates, communicate to his battery or battalion fire direction element, have the firing data calculated for his specific guns, request additional batteries through higher headquarters if he wanted more mass, wait for additional calculations, wait for additional orders. In the Ardennes that sequential process broke down constantly. Weather was poor, communications were disrupted, roads were clogged, units were already behind schedule. German Artillery in the Ardennes was not ineffective in the abstract. It was frequently late, and late is a specific kind of ineffective. The American system eliminated most of those steps. An observer identified a target, sent its grid coordinates to the FDC, and the FDC simultaneously calculated firing data for every battery in range. Orders went out over the radio net. Each battery received its own elevation and direction. All were given a time to fire. At the appointed moment, all guns fired. The German armor moving on the roads below Elsenborn Ridge did not hear ranging shots, followed by adjustments, followed by eventual fire for effect. It heard nothing and then it was under full

bombardment. This is where Time on Target ceased to be a technical phrase and became a psychological weapon. German accounts describe the shock with remarkable consistency, because all of their assumptions about how artillery behaved had been built around a sequence. There was supposed to be a warning. There was supposed to be a first shell, an adjustment, a delay, a pattern. That sequence gave men time to dive for cover, identify direction, and think. Time on Target removed the sequence. There was no warning and no adjustment. There was only the moment before the fire and the moment of impact. Colonel Oscar Axelson Commander 405th Artillery Group made the effect worse by releasing the proximity fuse, a classified technology that detonated artillery shells at a precise height above the ground instead of on impact. For four years of war on two fronts, the reflex drilled into the German soldier had been sound: go to ground, get in a foxhole, survive the burst. A shell that exploded on impact could often be survived by a man in deep enough cover. A shell that burst several feet above the ground sprayed fragments downward into foxholes and slit trenches. At Elsenborn Ridge, the Hitlerjugend launched multiple attacks. Each one was met with artillery that arrived without warning, detonated above the earth, and came from directions German counter-battery teams had not identified. The 12th SS Panzer Division did not cease to exist because every tank was destroyed or every soldier was killed. It ceased to exist as a fighting unit because the network broke its offensive power.

Bastogne would live in the history books but Elsenborn Ridge would live mostly in the footnotes. Bastogne had drama and a line fit for legend: BG Anthony McAuliffe's "Nuts." Elsenborn Ridge was recorded in firing data, FDC logs, and German after-action reports written in the flat, exact language of professional soldiers who concluded that American Artillery in that sector had made offensive operations well beyond impossible. German artillery doctrine was rooted in destruction through precise fire against specific targets. It demanded careful survey, registration, meteorological corrections, deliberate preparation. German artillerymen were among the best in the world at placing rounds on a chosen point. But against area targets supported by a flexible network that could engage any point within seconds, the German approach was badly mismatched. The German

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battery commander was not incompetent, he was doing exactly what doctrine required. The problem was that while he was still doing it, the American FDC was already processing a fire mission against him. American observers at Elsenborn Ridge could see muzzle flashes, put a position on the radio in thirty seconds, and have shells in the air within two minutes, often before the German gun crews had time to complete a second fire mission of their own. German reports repeated the same pattern: preparations disrupted before completion, guns engaged before registration was finished, columns caught on roads while trying to move into position. None of it was accidental, it was systemic. One German artillery officer later described fighting American artillery as fighting an enemy who could move faster than you could think. By the time your decision had been executed, the conditions had changed and the response was already on the way. That was the defining advantage of the network. Information in the American system moved simultaneously; in the German system it moved sequentially. The German system was not stupid and not primitive. It was simply a sequence operating against a network, and a sequence at that tempo was always going to lose. German officers knew by the end of the battle that they had not been trained to counter what they were facing. They had been trained to fight individual batteries. At Elsenborn Ridge they were fighting an artillery web stretched across the entire front. Germany had not built such a web because the war it had expected to fight had been short, mobile, and decisive. By the time the Bulge proved beyond question that a centralized fire direction network mattered, it was December 1944 and Germany had four months of war left.

To see just how large the gap had become, you had to ask a deceptively simple question: how does a gun hit a target it cannot see? An artillery piece usually cannot see what it is meant to destroy. The target lies over the horizon, behind a hill, down a road in a village the crew has never entered. The gun crew knows only a few numbers: the direction to lay the barrel, the elevation, the propellant charge. Those numbers come from the FDC. The FDC takes an observer's description and turns it into mathematics. Where is the gun? Where is the target?

What shell is being fired? How will wind, air density, and temperature affect the trajectory? In 1944 this was all done by hand, by trained men working fast with printed firing tables, plotting boards, slide rules, and mechanical calculators. A well-run FDC could produce firing data for a battery within minutes. A well-run American FDC could do the same for multiple batteries at once, each one at a different location, each one needing a different set of numbers to hit the same point on the map. That was what the Germans could not easily replicate. It was not beyond their mathematical ability. German artillerymen were more than capable of the calculations. What they lacked was the organizational infrastructure that let those calculations be done quickly, simultaneously, and distributed across a radio network to all the guns that mattered. The prerequisite for the American system was a common survey. Every gun had to know its precise location in the same shared grid. Every observer had to work in that same coordinate language. Every battery had to be calibrated to it. Once that existed, any observer could talk to any FDC, and any FDC could assign fire from any battery in range. In practice, a corps commander could direct every artillery piece available onto one target in minutes. During the fighting at Elsenborn Ridge, American observers were calling fire from as many as twelve battalions at the same time: one hundred and forty-four guns. A man in a foxhole on the ridge could see a target, call it in, and have the first shells from one hundred and forty-four guns landing within minutes. A German observer in the same position could call twelve guns from his battalion. To get more, he had to ask through channels. That was the real ratio: not gun to gun, but system to system, one hundred and forty-four to twelve. The postwar German judgment was blunt. American artillery was the best they had faced. Not because American guns were technically superior to German ones, but because the system made the guns better than they were by themselves. German soldiers had been trained to survive artillery by reading its sequence. Go to ground. Wait for the shift. Move when the fire lifted. That training had been correct for the artillery they had known. At Elsenborn Ridge, it failed because the premises had changed. The fire came from several directions at once. There was no predictable ranging. No safe interval. No reliable lift. One American observer with a radio

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could summon one hundred and forty-four guns. No warning.

On December 17, the second day of the German offensive, Schutzstaffel Joachim Peiper finally got his armored column moving. The delay at Lanzeroth had already cost him the better part of a day, and the entire offensive had been planned around speed. He drove west toward the Meuse, trying to recover lost time against a schedule the operation could not survive without. Along the way, at Malmedy, his route crossed a column of American prisoners. What followed became one of the most infamous crimes of the western war: the murder of eighty-four American prisoners of war by Waffen-SS troops. News of the massacre ran quickly through American military radio nets, and those nets were the same communications web that linked forward observers to FDCs throughout the V Corps area. Orders followed. No German armored column was to be allowed free movement on Belgian roads within artillery range. Any column identified was to be engaged immediately and continuously until it either stopped moving or retreated. Schutzstaffel Peiper's column was seen by observers. The observers called it in. The FDC distributed the target data to multiple batteries and the batteries fired. Schutzstaffel Peiper moved at night and dispersed by day, a sensible doctrine when the primary danger was aircraft. It worked less well when the threat was artillery directed by ground observers. The weather in the Ardennes had grounded Allied aircraft, and German planning had counted on that. What German planning had not fully accounted for was that American Artillery did not require clear skies. It required observers, radios, and the network, and all three were there. From high ground north of Peiper's route, American forward observers could watch the Amblève Valley. That was enough. Peiper's 1st SS Panzer Division came under repeated artillery attack. These attacks were not individually decisive in the sense of instantly wiping out heavy tanks; Tigers and Panthers were armored against 105mm shells in many circumstances. But artillery did not have to destroy every tank to wreck the offensive. It had to disrupt movement, break timing, destroy fuel trucks and supply vehicles, force dispersal, consume daylight, and drain momentum. The German offensive had been designed on the assumption that armor would reach

the Meuse in seven days. That assumption depended on American forces needing time to reorganize under shock. The artillery did not need to reorganize. It was already organized, already networked, already able to answer any target a forward observer could identify in minutes. Peiper reached Stoumont Belgium on December 19, short of fuel, his supply line under constant artillery pressure, three days behind schedule and still forty-five miles from the Meuse. On December 24 he ordered his force to abandon its vehicles and withdraw on foot. The greatest armored spearhead Germany had thrown into the west in the last year of the war was stopped not by American tanks, which Peiper's Tigers could often defeat in a direct fight, but by American Artillery. Forward observers on the heights, radio traffic moving across the net, FDCs putting shells from a dozen batteries onto roads in the Amblève Valley within minutes. 1LT Bouck's eighteen men had held for twenty hours. The artillery had held for the rest of the offensive. Somewhere in the Belgian winter, Joachim Peiper was walking back towards Germany on foot. The difference was not in gun quality and not in gunner skill. It was in the speed with which fire could be called, calculated, and delivered. German doctrine said: identify the target, calculate the data, fire when ready. American doctrine said: identify the target, call it in, and let the network do the rest. In the overcast December weather that grounded the aircraft of both sides, that was the difference that mattered.

By early 1945, German officers had begun writing exactly that in their own professional reports. A specific analysis of American artillery, circulated to senior Wehrmacht commanders by officers who had fought V Corps at Elsenborn and First Army units farther north, identified three things. First, American artillery responded faster than German countermeasures could adapt. The elapsed time between target identification and shells arriving was shorter than the time needed to suppress the observer or move the target. By the time a German position identified the American observer and began reacting, the fire mission was already inbound. Second, American fire came from unexpected directions. German units that suppressed the battery they believed they had located were then engaged from the flank by batteries miles away, firing on data from observers they had never

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seen. Suppressing the identified threat did not suppress the total threat. Third, the volume of fire was wildly disproportionate to the number of guns German teams had identified, because those teams were trying to counter visible pieces while invisible batteries throughout the network were also firing. The report recommended that Germany develop a centralized fire direction system similar to the American one. Nothing came of it. By then Germany lacked the time, the infrastructure, the fuel, the training capacity, and the institutional freedom to build what Fort Sill had spent more than a decade refining. The war had four months left. And that was the direct cost in the Ardennes. Hitler's last strategic offensive had aimed to split the Allied armies, capture Antwerp, and force a negotiated peace. The plan depended on speed, specifically on armored columns reaching the Meuse before the Allies could absorb the shock and respond. The plan failed because it did not move fast enough. It did not move fast enough because 1LT Bouck's eighteen men held Lanzeroth for twenty hours, because the artillery network at Elsenborn Ridge denied the northern roads the offensive needed, and because Peiper's supply line was repeatedly disrupted by artillery arriving from multiple directions without warning. None of that reflected a lack of German courage. The Fallschirmjäger were elite troops. The 12th SS Panzer was one of the most dangerous armored formations in the German military. Peiper's column made deep penetrations that American forces could not always stop directly. The failure was systemic. The American artillery network created a tactical environment in which German speed advantages were blunted and German precision advantages were made largely irrelevant. German after-action language was restrained, but the facts underneath it were stark: American artillery made mobile operations more costly than anticipated, reacted faster than commanders expected, and massed fire from multiple directions in ways existing German counter-battery methods could not solve. That network, functioning from the opening hours of the offensive, before the weather cleared, before Allied air power reasserted itself on December 23, before Patton arrived at Bastogne, was one of the principal reasons the Bulge became Germany's last offensive in the west.

But the system that fought in the Ardennes had not appeared there by accident and had not sprung fully formed out of theory. It had been built over years: at Fort Sill, in training cycles, in staff work, in field exercises, and then in combat from North Africa to Sicily to Italy. The American military had built into itself a habit of after-action review. Each engagement produced reports. Those reports produced changes to doctrine, to training methods, to the exact procedures FDC operators used in processing fire missions, massing batteries, calculating time on target, and conducting counter-battery work. The artillery system that landed in North Africa in November 1942 was not the same system that held Lanzeroth Ridge and broke the 12th SS Panzer at Elsenborn Ridge in December 1944. It was better, faster and more flexible. More capable of solving the problem of connecting the man who could see the target to the guns that could destroy it. It was better because the American military had not merely built a system for fighting; it had built a system for improving the system. The German military also learned, and German after-action reports were serious, intelligent, and often brutally honest. German commanders identified tactical problems and did adapt throughout the war. But the German method of learning was in many ways like German artillery coordination itself: sequential. Lessons from one front moved slowly to another. Doctrinal change requiring new organization, new training, and new communications architecture had to pass through an army under collapsing pressure on multiple fronts with shrinking resources and little time to retrain units. The American process was faster, not because American officers were inherently smarter, but because the institution had created a mechanism that turned battlefield experience into doctrine faster than the German army could. The FDC itself was the result of that same insight. It had not been invented in a single flash. It grew out of a series of questions. Why does artillery miss? Why does it take so long? Why can't one observer call fire from many batteries? Each answer produced a technical and organizational adjustment; each adjustment revealed a new problem; each new problem led to another solution. The final system was not the product of one brilliant officer's vision so much as the product of a process that kept revising itself. What Germany lacked, in the end, was not the ability to imagine

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centralized fire control. Germany had excellent engineers, first-rate artillery officers, and men who could grasp the theoretical value of such a system instantly. What it lacked was the institutional infrastructure to convert that understanding into doctrine, spread it through the army, train units to use it, and then improve it through repeated iteration. Fort Sill had been doing exactly that since the 1920s. By December 1944, that long institutional labor had produced what was, by most objective measures, the most effective artillery system in the world. Not the best individual gun—the 88 still had that kind of technical prestige. Not the largest artillery arm—the Soviets outnumbered everyone. Not the most battle-worn crews—German gun teams had been in the field since 1939. But the most effective system, because artillery effectiveness is measured not by isolated excellence but by how well the parts work together. No other army had built a better way of making its observers, guns, radios, maps, surveys, and calculations function as one organism. The German military had long trusted individual excellence: the skilled gunner, the seasoned commander, the brilliant officer. The American military, in this instance, trusted the system: the process, the network, the institutional machine that produced reliable performance even when individuals were ordinary men under extraordinary pressure. In the Battle of the Bulge, the system won. 1LT Lyle Bouck was not a legendary battlefield genius in the old heroic sense. He was a twenty-year-old lieutenant with eighteen men and a radio. The radio connected him to the system and the system did the rest.

And that is where the story returns, inevitably, to the ridge on the morning of December 16. Twenty years old. Eighteen men. Four radios. Five hundred Germans in the valley below. He stayed because he knew that the radio in his foxhole was not just a piece of equipment. It was a link to guns miles away, in positions the Germans had not identified, firing on grid coordinates the Germans could not see, directed by a network they had never built and could no longer build in time. He held for twenty hours. The entire 1st SS Panzer Division, one of the most formidable armored formations Germany still possessed, was delayed twenty hours by eighteen men and four radios. Every hour 1LT Bouck held was another hour for American formations at Elsenborn

Ridge, Bastogne, and St. Vith to organize, dig, shift, prepare, and call in the artillery that would eventually stop the offensive outright. 1LT Bouck was captured at dusk on December 16. Every member of his platoon received a decoration. The Presidential Unit Citation came thirty years later. They had held the northern shoulder of the Ardennes offensive with a radio and a connection to the American artillery network. And opposite them, somewhere months later in a prisoner-of-war camp in the spring of 1945, sat German officers trying to explain what had surprised them in the Ardennes. Their answer was always some version of the same thing. The artillery was different not the guns. The guns were not individually better than German guns. The system was the difference. Artillery, as they had known it all their professional lives, was supposed to behave sequentially. First the ranging shot, then the correction, then the fire for effect. That sequence gave you time. It let you think. It let you move. It let you survive. The American system had removed the sequence. Time on target was not merely a clever tactic; it was the destruction of a deeply held tactical assumption. The first round was already the full weight of the mission. Take cover on the first shell? There was no first shell in the old sense. Wait for the pattern? The pattern had already arrived. Move before the volume peaked? The volume was on you at the moment of impact. In an artillery war, wrong assumptions are fatal. Fort Sill had not invented time on target to counter some specific German field expedient. It had developed it because simultaneous arrival of shells from multiple batteries was the logical expression of a system built to connect one observer to every gun in range. The tactical implication was devastating. Any German position an American observer could see was vulnerable to more firepower than it could suppress, arriving faster than counterbattery could answer, from more directions than any defensive layout could fully cover. Not because the 105mm howitzer was a magical weapon, but because every 105mm in the network multiplied the power of every other one. The German 88, for all its technical brilliance, remained tethered to pre-registered fire and anticipated targets unless time and structure existed to do more. One observer. Many guns. Any target. No warning. That was the Fort Sill solution. That was what 1LT Lyle Bouck had in his foxhole, and what the German military did not.

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The Battle of the Bulge is remembered as the last great German gamble, the offensive that almost worked, the desperate winter throw of the dice. Popular histories remember Bastogne, Patton's relief column, McAuliffe's one-word defiance, stubborn infantry in the snow, men freezing in foxholes against impossible odds. All of that deserves to be remembered. But artillery lives in the footnotes, indispensable and largely unglamorous, measured in tables, logs, coordinates, and minutes. Yet if there is an argument hidden beneath the snow and drama of the Ardennes, it is this: the American fire direction system—the FDC network, the common survey, the radio infrastructure, the time-on-target method—was the single most important tactical innovation the United States Army produced in the Second World War. Not the Sherman tank, not the M1 Garand, not strategic bombing, not even the logistics system that kept armies moving across Europe it was The FDC. The American willingness to accept tactical disadvantages in tanks, in infantry weapons, even at moments in aircraft, rested in part on the belief that American Artillery could neutralize the sharp edge of German tactical excellence in those very areas. Take away the FDC, take away the network, take away time on target, and the entire calculus of the American war in Europe changes. The 88 could destroy a Sherman, but it could not destroy the FDC that was calling the fire of twelve batteries down on its own position. Fallschirmjäger could overrun a platoon, but not the radio net behind that platoon. A Panzer division might break through a local line, but not the artillery that followed the breakthrough, engaging every road, every column, every movement from positions it could not identify and with a volume of fire it could not suppress. That was the Fort Sill answer to the central problem of modern combined-arms war: how do you give the man on the ground the firepower he needs, in the place he needs it, in the time he has? The answer was radio, network, FDC, common survey. One observer, any target, all the guns in range, no warning. Germany had built some of the best guns in the world. America had built the better network. At Lanzerath Ridge, on December 16, 1944, 1LT Lyle Bouck had eighteen men and a radio. The radio connected him to the network. The network connected him to the guns. The guns held

the ridge. The offensive failed. Not because the German soldier was not good enough. He was very good. Not because the German tank was not technically superior. Often it was. But because the American system was better, because Fort Sill had spent a decade building what Germany never found the time to build, because the radio in Bu's foxhole connected him to twelve battalions of artillery, and because the German army had no equivalent for the network that connection implied. The gap was not in intelligence. The Germans understood the problem by the end. The gap was in time. And time was exactly what 1LT Lyle Bouck and eighteen men with four radios bought on December 16, 1944, on a ridge outside Lanzerath. They bought it at the price of their freedom. The platoon was captured at dusk. The German offensive paid for those same hours with its last real chance. The system held the ridge. The ridge held the line. And in the end, the war in that corner of Belgium turned not on the best gun, but on the better network. ★

Reunion News and Updates

• This years Reunion is scheduled for 12 December from 1100-1600 hrs at the Venue @ Coosa Landing in Gadsden AL.

• The Downtown Chief will cater the meal again and the menu will be posted once we have it finalized.

• There will be two cakes again to celebrate our 5th Reunion.

• Reunion Invitations will be mailed NLT 1 September to everyone on the BN Mailing List……RSVP's are due back NLT 1 November with payment either Check, Money Order or by Zelle to 210-249-1818.

• Rickey Moore Photography will be there taking all the Reunion photos.

• This date does not conflict with the Auburn - Alabama game but it does conflict with the Army - Navy Game.

• Reunion Cost per person will remain the same $30.

• Dress Code is Business Casual.

• St Barbara and King of Battle are authorized .

Chaplain's Corner with Chaplain Wes Hodgins

Spring 2026

Spring is the time of year to plant a garden. The weather has warmed to germinate the seed and the '*April-showers*' bring the moisture for young plants to thrive.

I love sweet potatoes, so I have planted 30 '*slips*' in my three patches. Last year I wanted to keep those '*pesky-runners*' out of my lawn; so I built a Trellas to lift them '*up*' and stay off the grass. BIG MISTAKE! (The kind only a 'dis-placed Yankee' would make!) Well, a few of the runners went on the ground beside the Trellas. Last year, I got a '*few*' sweet potatoes and a lot of pretty purple flowers! I had no idea that it was the 'runners' which put down roots and produced the potatoes! This year, I have planted '*according to the fruit*'; trying to follow '*God's-plan*' for the harvest. Jesus pointed out to His disciples that the "***Harvest was 'white unto-harvest***". May we today catch that '*vision*' and order our lives '*according to the fruit*'! That '*fruit*' is the restoration of the hearts of men to a '*right-relationship*' with their creator! And Jesus is the '*only-way*' for them to get back to God! This '*planting-season*', let us also work in the '*harvest of God*' for His glory. "***let your light so shine before men, that they might see your 'good-works' and glorify your Father who is in heaven***." (Matt. 5:16) Doing things '*God's-way*' is always the '*best-way*' in any endeavor we may put our hand to.

-- Chaplain Hodgins

Right Destiny Different Path

As I look back over my time, I realize my association with 3d Battalion 15th Field Artillery Regiment has been one magnificent journey which has taken me to where we are at today. It is a journey that I'm glad I was able to take.

To begin at the beginning: I came off active duty, August 1980 via an "European Out" as life threw my family a major curveball - a Blue Bark Reassignment. Stephanie received orders for the MP Advanced Course at Ft. McClellan, Alabama. I didn't know where our adventure would take us but I knew we were going to do it together.

She began the course pregnant with our daughter and while at the MP School we met a civilian named Tommy Woods who was a 1LT in the 3rd Trans on Fort McClellan. Tommy would constantly needle me every time he saw me about joining the Reserves. My attitude at that time was, "It was not happening." I was done and wanted no part of it. Tommy was persistent and kept after me for over a year. One day I finally said, "Tommy, give me the number and I'll call and set up an appointment."

Little did I realize then that I was about to embark on an adventure that would become what I now consider the greatest time of my life in the Field Artillery and the USAR.

I called the Battalion and spoke with Oliver Denson which would lead to a friendship that would last until he passed away in October 2023. We set the interview for 1600 Friday September 18, 1981. "Bring your paperwork and we'll discuss options."

I showed up and Mr. Denson took my file reviewed it and asked, "What are you looking to do?"

"I want a Command." I was a senior First Lieutenant and I knew what I wanted which was to command.

"You're not FA qualified for a Firing Battery."

"I know but I have what it takes to be a commander."

He said "Well, we don't have any command slots but I do have Battalion

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Ammo Officer for Service Battery." Without even batting and eyelash I said "I'll take it."

I'm not sure to this day why I even said yes but I do know if I hadn't said yes it would've been the biggest mistake of my career. I reported to the October 1981 drill in my BDU's ready for wherever this adventure would take me as the BN Ammo Officer. I met Captain Danny Harvey, 1SG Hubert Wright, SFC Wendell Gibson Battalion Ammo NCOIC, SFC Ken Badgett BN S-4/Battery AST, SFC Larry Smith Full Time Battery Supply Sergeant, CW2 Billy Harp BN Maintenance Technician and SFC Bill McCain BN Maintenance NCOIC.

I got through that drill weekend as the BN Ammo Officer and thought, "I can do this." Then came November Drill 1981, when everything went up in smoke and my career was about to change. That Saturday morning Captain Harvey came in the Orderly Room and announced that he would be taking a job elsewhere in Mississippi and that they were looking at 1LT Tommy Woods, the guy who kept pestering me to join the Reserves, as his replacement. I already knew Tommy was junior to me and my attitude was move me or discharge me as I would not serve under or be rated by an officer junior to me. Captain Harvey went back over to Battalion, had some discussion with Major Don Johnson and the next thing I know I'm summoned to Battalion Headquarters to see Major Johnson. We discussed options: reassign me in the Battalion or release me from the Reserves with the final decision still pending. Saturday comes and goes with no news. Sunday, I happen to be sitting in the orderly room when Captain Harvey comes in from a meeting at Battalion and said to me "They're going to make you the commander as it's the most logical choice. You're already here and you're Combat Arms." Internally I'm "Wow! I'm gonna get my chance!"

I saw Major Johnson the Battalion XO who officially told me that I would be the Commander of Service Battery as "it makes the most sense." I thanked Major Johnson for this opportunity and assured him that they made the right decision.

At the December drill, I assumed command of Service Battery along with the additional duty of Battalion S4. From that point on I never

looked back to wonder if my decision was right or wrong. I knew I had made the right decision with only an inkling of the doors it would open for me later on.

So the Battalion had to get ready for AT-82 and I had to be ready to support three firing batteries plus Headquarters Battery along with ensuring that Service Battery had enough manpower and equipment to be able to do their job to keep the battalion in beans, bullets and fuel.

To be continued
LTC (R) John A Hoehne Sr

M101 Howitzer

Public Sourced/Author Unknown

The M101A1 (previously designated Howitzer M2A2 on Carriage M2A2) howitzer is an artillery piece developed and used by the United States. It was the standard U.S. light field howitzer in World War II and saw action in both the European and Pacific Theaters and during the Korean War. Entering production in 1941, it quickly gained a reputation for accuracy and a powerful punch. The M101A1 fires 105 mm High Explosive (HE) semi-fixed ammunition and has a range of 12,330 yards (11,270 m) or 7 miles, making it suitable for supporting infantry.

Development —
After World War I, the U.S. Army Ordnance Department studied various captured German 105 mm-caliber howitzers and developed the 105 mm Howitzer M1920 by using the Carriage M1920. A box trail carriage design (the M1925E carriage) and two other split trail designs (the T1 and T2) were also developed, but the original split trail design was found superior after testing. After being selected, the piece was standardized in December 1927 as the 105 mm howitzer M1 on carriage M1. The Army intended to replace all 75 mm guns in its divisional and non-divisional field artillery regiments with 105 mm pieces, but a lack of appropriations stalled the idea and eventually forced it to be completely abandoned by 1929; a limited plan developed in 1925 envisioned re-equipping three regiments, but by 1933, only 14 M1 howitzers had been manufactured.

A modified version of the M1, which was trialed in 1932, used semi-fixed ammunition instead of separate-loading ammunition. Since this development required a different breech block, the new piece was designated the 105 mm howitzer M2 on carriage M1. 48 pieces were manufactured in 1939. The original M1 carriage had been designed for towing using horses rather than trucks, and a new carriage, the T5 (M2), was developed in 1939 and standardized in February 1940. The breech ring of the howitzer M2 was modified in March 1940 before large-scale production began, creating the 105 mm howitzer M2A1 on carriage M2.

In 1939, the new howitzer cost $25,000, which was three times as much as

the modernization cost of a 75 mm field gun M1897 on a M2 carriage, and its adoption required procurement of a colossal amount of new ammunition (War Department estimate of $26 million).

Small-scale production of the M2A1 began in April 1941, with 25 pieces, followed by 18 each in May and June. Production began to ramp up in August, and production for the year totaled 604 pieces.

World War II —
3,325 pieces were built in 1942, 2,684 in 1943, 1,200 in 1944, and 730 up to and including August 1945. The gun was designed to be very durable and was therefore heavy for its caliber, but studies after 1943 found that, after prolonged firing, the muzzle end of the barrel was prone to cracking. To relieve stress in the barrel, new production M2A1 tubes were counterbored two inches from the muzzle starting in the late 1940s. By the end of World War II, 8,543 105 mm towed howitzers had been built.

Cold War —
Post-war production continued at Rock Island Arsenal until 1953, by which time 10,202 had been built. In 1953, the new howitzer M2A2 was standardized to further increase the life of the howitzer at the cost of some muzzle velocity. The M2A2's barrel had a higher strength breech ring, deeper rifling grooves, and shallower rifling taper than the M2A1's barrel, resulting in a 50 percent more effective full charge barrel life than the M2A1.

A further development, the M2A2E2, featuring a muzzle brake and with its maximal range increased along with the propelling charge, on carriage M2A2E2, featuring an increased maximal angle of fire, was designed and tested in 1958, but with the coming XM 102 Howitzer both were canceled in 1961.

In November 1960, the U.S. military artillery designation system began to change; howitzers M2A1 or M2A2 on carriage M2A1 were renamed M101s, while howitzers M2A1 or M2A2 on carriage M2A2 were renamed M101A1s. These models continued to see service through the Vietnam War. Though the successor M102 howitzer was adopted in 1964, both the M101 and M102 shared similar roles in battle and the M101A1 was never fully replaced in front-line service until the adoption of the M119 Howitzer. Today, the

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M101A1 has been retired by the U.S. military, although it is still retained for ceremonial purposes. Abroad, it continues to see service with many other countries.

Gun Variants:

- M1920 – prototype.
- M1925E – prototype.
- T2 – prototype, standardized as M1.
- M2 (1934) – minor changes to the chamber to allow the use of fixed ammunition.
- M2A1 (1940) – modified breech ring.
- M2A2 (1953) – deeper rifling and shorter rifling taper.
- M2A2E2 (1958) – prototype with muzzle brake.
- M3 – lightweight howitzer, with barrel shortened by 27 inches (69 cm) with carriage of the M1 Pack Howitzer.
- T8 – prototype vehicle-mounted variant with modified breech and with cylindrical recoil surface, standardized as 105 mm M4 howitzer in September, 1943.
- FH M1A2 – Rheinmetall-modified M101 in German service.
- M101 – post-1961 designation of M2A1 or M2A2 on carriage M2A1.
- M101A1 – post-1961 designation of M2A1 or M2A2 on carriage M2A2.
- M2A1 – modernized L33 variant by Yugoimport SDPR with max range of 15 km (9.3 mi)/18.1 km (11.2 mi) (boat tail shell base bleed shell)
- C3 – Canadian C1 (M2A1) with lengthened, 33-caliber barrel
- KM101A1 – South Korean license of M101A1, 1977
- KH178 – South Korean 38 calibers variant, 1983

Carriage Variants:

- M1920E – prototype, split trail.
- M1921E – prototype, box trail.
- M1925E – prototype, box trail.
- T2, standardized as M1 – split trail, wooden wheels.
- M1A1 – M1 carriages rebuilt with new wheels, brakes and other parts.
- T3 – prototype.
- T4 – prototype.
- T5, standardized as M2 (1940) – split trail, steel wheels with pneumatic tires.
- M2A1 – electric brakes removed.
- M2A2 – modified shield.
- M2A2E2 – prototype with increased elevation to 70 degrees.
- XM124 & XM124E1 light auxiliary propelled howitzer – prototype (1962–1965) – produced by Sundstrand Aviation Corporation, who added an auxiliary drive system for local maneuverability (See also similar XM 123 Medium Auxiliary Propelled 155 mm Howitzer with similar configuration). The base XM124 provided two 20 horsepower (15 kW), air-cooled engines, while the XM124E1 provided a single 20 horsepower (15 kW) engine and electric steering.
- M2A2 Terra Star auxiliary propelled howitzer – prototype (1969–1977) – Lockheed Aircraft Service Company added an auxiliary drive system and a tri-star wheel system to the carriage of an M2A2 105 mm light howitzer to provide local maneuverability. The last surviving example is at the Rock Island Arsenal Museum.

Ammunition —

The gun fired semi-fixed ammunition, with 105 mm Cartridge Case M14. The propelling charge consisted of a base charge and six incremental charges, forming seven charges from 1 (the smallest) to 7 (the largest). Use of M1 HE rounds prepared for the 105 mm howitzer M3 (same projectile and cartridge, but different propelling charge) was

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authorized.

HEAT M67 Shell was originally designed as fixed round, with Cartridge Case M14 type II. It was later changed to semi-fixed type with the standard cartridge, but with non-adjustable propelling charge. For blank ammunition, a shorter Cartridge Case M15 with black powder charge was used.

Available Ammunition

Type	Model	Weight Complete / Projectile		Filler	Muzzle velocity	Range
Available Ammunition						
HE	HE M1 Shell	19.08 kg (42 lb)	14.97 kg (33 lb)	TNT or 50/50 amatol, 2.18 kg (5 lb)	472 m/s (1,550 ft/s)	11,160 m (36,610 ft)
HE-AT	HE-AT M67 Shell	16.71 kg (37 lb)	13.25 kg (29 lb)	Pentolite, 1.33 kg (3 lb)	381 m/s (1,250 ft/s)	7,854 m (25,768 ft)
Smoke	HC BE M84 Shell	19.02 kg (42 lb)	14.91 kg (33 lb)	Zinc chloride (HC)	472 m/s (1,550 ft/s)	11,160 m (36,610 ft)
Smoke, colored	BE M84 Shell	17.86–18.04 kg (39–40 lb)		Smoke mixture		
Smoke	WP M60 Shell	19.85 kg (44 lb)	15.56 kg (34 lb)	White phosphorus, 1.84 kg (4 lb)	472 m/s (1,550 ft/s)	11,110 m (36,450 ft)
Smoke	FS M60 Shell	20.09 kg (44 lb)		Sulfur trioxide in chlorosulfonic acid, 2.09 kg (5 lb)		
Chemical	H M60 Shell	19.43 kg (43 lb)		Mustard gas, 1.44 kg (3 lb)		
Practice	Empty M1 Shell				472 m/s (1,550 ft/s)	11,160 m (36,610 ft)
Drill	Drill Cartridge				-	-
	M14					
Blank						

Armor penetration

Ammunition \ Distance	0	457 m (500 yd)	914 m (1,000 yd)	1,828 m (1,999 yd)
HEAT M67 Shell (meet angle 0°)	102–183 mm (4–7 in)			
Concrete penetration				
HE M1 Shell (meet angle 0°)	457 mm (1 ft 6 in)	427 mm (1 ft 5 in)	396 mm (1 ft 4 in)	335 mm (1 ft 1 in)
Different methods of measurement were used in different countries / periods. Therefore, direct comparison is often impossible.				

The M198

A Soldier's Journey

This background of how I became a member of the 3/15 FA post Vietnam highlights my personal appreciation of being a member, and is a small part of illustrating the variety of military and personal experiences that led to the creation of our unified organization which excelled in supporting ground force operations. Consider this an endorsement of my appreciation for being a part of the 3/15 "Family" of artillery men and not a claim of personal accomplishments.

I come from a family with a military heritage. Thus, even with the outcries against the Vietnam conflict (War), I felt an obligation to meet the call of our country. Despite that, after high school, I worked a year with the Federal Forestry Service to earn money for college. I attended an all-male college (coeducational now) with an ROTC program. I was so focused on my studies and working that I felt that ROTC would be too much of a distraction. Graduated in 1968, with teacher qualification and accepted an offer to teach at a Junior High on James Island, South Carolina. During that whole year I felt that I was guilty of not serving my country. So I left.

I joined the Army with a "contract" to attend Artillery OCS at Ft. Sill. After basic at Ft Leonard Wood, I had my MOS training with an OCS Prep "Battery" which focused on gunnery - the subject that washed out most artillery officer candidates. Our Prep class graduated in November of 1969. That year the presidential election was on and a major platform was to get our country's armed forces out of Vietnam. After completing the first phase and starting the second of three in the OCS program, all were feeling that the worst was over and now the real artillery begins. A few weeks into that phase, the entire group of the OCS program were told that the project was ending as of that day. We essentially had two options: 1. Take the MOS assignment as qualified with one year guaranteed assignment CONUS and the following subject to the Army's needs. 2. Be sent to the Infantry OCS program at FT. Benning, starting back at day one. All but one took the one year CONUS assignment in hopes the additional year and the promised reduction of troops in Vietnam would be in their favor. My dreams of doing my part in the time my country needed me as a leader were

dashed. Being qualified in gunnery I volunteered for Vietnam. And there I went serving with Delta Battery of the 1/82 FA. We fired two 175 SP Howitzers and two 8" SP Howitzers. Started out on Fire Base Dottie south of Chu Lai. Lt. Calley's company was still there and I am sure you know that story of My Lai. That experience is a whole other story and I have bored you enough already.

The previous is my attempt to understand why being accepted into the 3/15 FA had such an impact on my life as a soldier. Returning from Vietnam, I was assigned to the Intel school at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona where I capitalized on my map reading, communication, and artillery experience. I was not bothered by my experiences in Vietnam, but haunted by not being able to complete the OCS program.

After discharge I worked as an engineer with a large textile company. After three years of disappointment with not having the chance to complete the Field Artillery OCS, I started calling local National Guard and Army Reserves units to see if I could attend an OCS program that might be offered or even if one existed. I even contacted an Army recruiter. I eventually learned that an Artillery Battalion was being moved from New Jersey to Ft McClellan, Alabama and I should try them. May I say at this point, thank the good Lord for Mr. Denson. He was discouraging, but in an afterthought said he would pass my request on to the Commander, LTC. Holiday. I am not sure how many of you had the privilege of knowing LTC. Holiday, but to me he was one of the most concerning and personable commanders I had met. We talked on the phone on several occasions with him explaining why it was going to be difficult to find a solution. One of the main factors was my age of 32. LTC Holiday met with me on two occasions in Anderson to have a face to face disappointment for not being able to provide the opportunity I wanted. A dedication I will never forget. On our last informal meeting he felt that Mr. Denson had a possible solution, but I would have to be an active member of the unit. At that time the reserves offered a one year enlistment for prior service MOS qualified soldiers. With that Mr. Denson requested an age waiver based on active duty service. A gratifying moment for LTC. Holiday and Mr. Denson. Both could now look forward to fewer phone calls. I completed the National Guard OCS program and the Field Artillery program determined to honor

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those two men who helped me redirect my disappointment in the Army and reestablish my love for artillery and the uniform. As an after note, after reporting to the commander as an official Field Artillery Officer, I wanted to express my overwhelming gratitude for his patience with me. I will never forget the surprising reply he gave. "Thanks to your persistence in what was almost an unachievable goal, I have used the example in motivational speeches."

If you have continued to this point, I ask your forgiveness for what may have been too lengthy or boring. I just wanted to reflect on the impact these two men of the 3/15th FA had on me as a person and of course a soldier. In all that I tried to accomplish while serving I always tried to encompass their efforts through me to others. I have no doubt that both of these men would be overwhelmed with pride for what is being carried on and not lost with time. Great men who provided a great foundation for all who came after them. We share "greatness" in what we have ascribed. Men in support of our military heritage. May God bless all before and after.

LTC Mike Ashley
FA Retired

SFC Wendell Gibson, Platoon Sargent, (The Battalion Ammo Section Battery) Fort McClellan, AL Training Period 1976 thru 1984.

Thanks to LTC Hoehne and CMS Peak and all of my Comrades for giving me the opportunity and support that I have received while writing and participating for the Incoming Newsletter again" Thank You for Your Service."

I am still reminiscing after the Reunion 2025, I hope many of my Comrades are too, just standing there with them was very grateful and humbling, for me not knowing then what we had accomplished/ achieved.

Please forgive me while writing this article which was NOT done in proper order. I read my material for facts/information and I failed to mention my ("GO TO" Connection) CSM Freddie Martin, HHB, MSG Danny Warwick B-Battery, 1SG Chevy Glenn and Jerry Montgomery B-Battery. They always took the time to train and communicate with everyone, anywhere, and anytime. I really believe that they established the culture within the Battalion during this timeframe. They all served with HEART, thanks Red Leg's for taking time with me HOORAH!!!

During 1978 thru 1981 at Fort Stewart, GA the Ammo Section has trained two Ammo Officers (OIC) 2LT Roy Hall and 2LT Orlando Lemons. They both showed a lot of Leadership Skills and really supported the Ammo Section very glad to have served with my Comrades.

The Ammo Section at this time is about 100% recruited (approximately 15 soldiers) we are now tasked with delivering both in accordance with the ARTEP (Army Training and Evaluation Program) both Conventional and Nuclear Ammunition. Also, around 1986 the Battalion changed from the M114A1 towed weapon system to the M198 towed weapon system. We are now training to deliver both the Conventional and Nuclear Ammunition by air and land with an aggressive force included. The Ammo Section has a very good morale during this time period, because we are now receiving TWO drill checks per month this gave us more time to train and socialize together " March Orders" Thanks Again …. to be continued. ★

Ghosts of the Battlefield:War Machine

Author Unknown

The M109A6 and M109A7 versus the 2S19 Msta-S is not simply a comparison of self-propelled artillery. It is a comparison between two different ideas about how artillery should survive, move, and deliver fire in a modern land war.

The M109A6 Paladin was the U.S. Army's major Cold War-era modernization of the long-serving M109 family. It retained the 155 mm gun but added onboard navigation, improved fire control, and much faster emplacement and displacement than older variants, allowing the gun to stop, fire, and move with less external setup. The M109A7 took that concept further by rebuilding the platform around a new chassis and power architecture derived from Bradley-family components, while retaining the same basic 39-caliber 155 mm cannon. The U.S. Army and industry sources describe the A7 as a modernization built to keep pace with armored brigade combat teams while improving survivability, electrical power generation, and digital integration.

The 2S19 Msta-S was developed in the Soviet Union and entered service at the end of the Cold War as a 152 mm tracked self-propelled howitzer intended to support armored and mechanized formations. Open technical references describe it as a roughly 42-ton system with a five-man crew, a 152 mm 2A64 gun, full 360-degree traverse, and a rate of fire generally listed at about 6 to 8 rounds per minute, with later modernized variants improving that figure further.

What most people do not realize is that the American and Russian systems solve the same problem in slightly different ways.

The M109A6/A7 places heavy emphasis on responsiveness, network integration, and precision-enabled fires. The M109A7 can fire precision munitions such as Excalibur, and its modernized electronics and power system were built specifically to support a more digital battlefield. The U.S. Army's own language around the A7 stresses that it is meant to remain relevant for decades as part of a larger armored force, not simply as a gun on tracks.

The 2S19 emphasizes protected mobility and sustained firepower within a self-contained tracked platform. Rather than relying on low weight or expeditionary lift, it was built to move with mechanized forces and remain near the main fight. Its larger onboard ammunition capacity and armored chassis reflect a doctrine in which self-propelled artillery remains closely tied to battlefield maneuver and high-volume fire support.

There is also a major difference in logistics and mobility. The M109A7 is still a heavy tracked vehicle, but the U.S. modernization effort focused on commonality with Bradley components to simplify sustainment inside armored brigade combat teams. The A7 also replaced older hydraulic turret functions with electric gun drives, which reduced maintenance burden and increased onboard power availability. The 2S19, by contrast, remains a more traditional tracked self-propelled howitzer in concept, built first and foremost as a protected firing platform rather than a digitally modernized growth path inside a broader U.S.-style vehicle ecosystem.

Another point people often miss is that this is not just 155 mm versus 152 mm. The more important distinction is how each side intends to use the gun. The M109A7 is increasingly valuable because of what it can do with modern targeting and guided munitions. The 2S19 remains valuable because of what it can do as a durable, armored, high-volume artillery asset operating with maneuver formations. Both remain relevant, but for slightly different reasons.

There is a human side to this comparison as well. An M109 crew operates inside a system that increasingly depends on digital targeting, precision engagement, and rapid displacement. A 2S19 crew operates inside a system that still puts enormous value on sustained artillery weight delivered from a protected vehicle near the front. Both crews fight inside armored steel, but the battlefield logic around them is not exactly the same.

The strength of the M109A6/A7 lies in digital integration, precision-fire compatibility, and modernization within a networked force. The strength of the 2S19 Msta-S lies in protected mobility, sustained firepower, and its role as a heavily armed artillery platform built to

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accompany armored maneuver. The limitation of the M109A7 is that, despite its modernization, it still retains a 39-caliber cannon rather than the longer guns now seen on some newer artillery systems. The limitation of the 2S19 is that its battlefield value remains more tied to traditional artillery mass than to the kind of precision-networked strike architecture the U.S. has increasingly emphasized.

In the end, this is not just Paladin versus Msta-S.

It is a comparison between two artillery traditions.

One leans toward precision, digital integration, and sustained modernization.

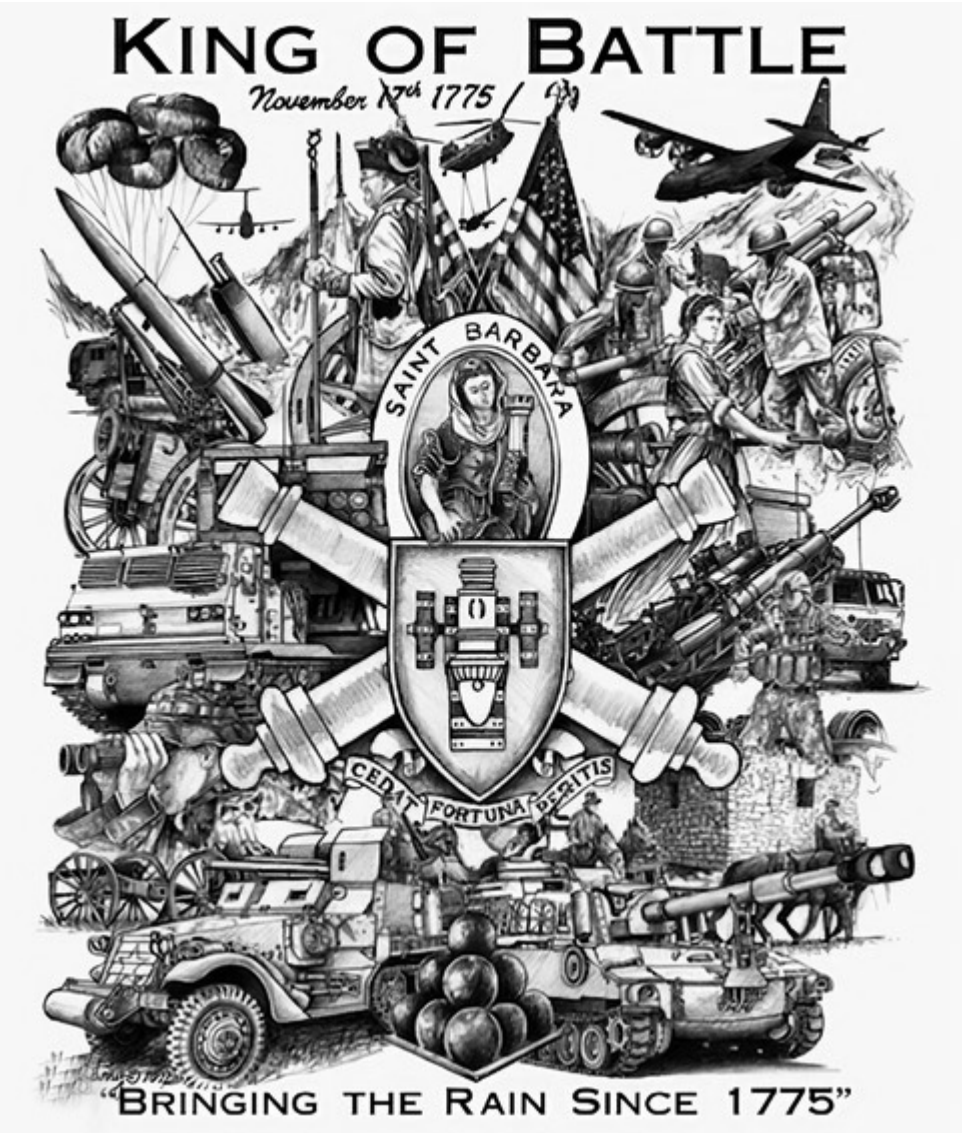
The other leans toward armored endurance, fire volume, and direct support to mechanized war. ★

M109A6/A7 Paladin

2S19 Msta

"No army is efficient unless its field artillery is efficient."

Major General William J Snow
letter in "The Shrapnel - 1924"
The Field Artillery School
1 March 1924



The German Seventh Army singled out for special mention the power of U.S. artillery support…."

"St Lo"
Historical Division, War Department
21 August 1946

Helpful Phone Numbers

Veterans Administration

Appointment line	800-872-0328
Audiology	877-894-2600 ext 4704
Birmingham VA Medical Center	205-933-8101
Community Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC) Huntsville	256 -533-8477
Emergency Room Birmingham	844-724-7842
Employment Specialist	256-3100 x 7441
Madison County Veterans Service Office	256-532-1662
Mental Health	256-533-8477 option 3
Optometry	866-487-4243
Pharmacy refills	888-250-3510
Suicide Hot Line	800-273-8255 option 1
The Vet Center	256-539-5775
Triage Nurse Line	866-487-4243
Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist Rachel Parker, LICSW, PIP	205-440-7930 (cell) 205-933-3797 (fax)
Veteran Experience Manager	205-933-8101 x 7909

Other resources

Still Serving Veterans	256-883-7035, 866-778-4645

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