

A HISTORY OF THE 4TH MISSILE
BATTALION (HERC) 43D ARTILLERY

FORWARD

A list of facts taken from the 4th Missile Battalion files, no matter how cleverly arranged, can never be a complete history of the unit, for only with a knowledge of significant world developments accompanying it can the progress of the Battalion be understood. The following history, therefore, attempts to explain situations and to place against a proper background the events in the growth of the battalion.

Two separate units have been involved in the development of an air defense for the Anchorage-Elmendorf Air Force Base area: the 96th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion was responsible for defending against air attack until the 4th Missile Battalion arrived with its NIKE-HERCULES missiles in 1959. For the history to be complete the courses of both must be understood. In this account we shall discuss their separate histories from their organization to 1959. After 1959, we shall be concerned only with the 4th Missile Battalion.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE BEGINNING

The American public was not prepared for the news of the outbreak of general war in Europe in 1914.¹ Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia 28 July 1914 for protecting the terrorists who had assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Germany backed Austria, and when Russia mobilized to protect Serbia, the Germans declared war on both Russia and France. On the way to France the Germans crashed through neutral Belgium; and Britain, pledged to defend the Belgian neutrality, declared war on Germany.

The Americans, still isolationists who wanted no part of the war in Europe, supported President Wilson's proclamation of American neutrality on 4 August 1914. They were depressed in May 1915 when, after the sinking of the Lusitania and loss of 1100 lives--128 of them American--the president again announced that the United States would not fight. The majority of the American public wanted to see Germany defeated. They wished to accomplish this by providing material goods and money loans to the Allies rather than taking an active part in the European fighting.²

Our Army was not immediately prepared for war. Fortunately, we had learned something in the border war with Mexico, and legislation affecting the national defense was passed. The National Defense Act of 1916 provided, among other things, for the buildup over a five year period to a maximum Regular Army strength of 288,000 men, organized into 65 infantry, 25 cavalry, and 21 artillery regiments, 91 coast artillery companies, and the necessary service units to support them.

This was the authorization for organizing Battery C, 57th Artillery (Coast Artillery Corps) in the Regular Army at Fort Hancock, New Jersey, 1 January 1918, nine months after Congress declared war on Germany. On 7 August 1918, the unit was redesignated as Battery A, 43d Artillery (CAC), the forerunner of the 4th Missile Battalion, when the 43d Artillery was organized at Hassimont, France.

WORLD WAR I

The artillery was divided in 1907 into the Field Artillery and the Coast Artillery Corps, with the CAC assigned the mission to plot and prepare underwater mine fields and to man heavy guns in the new harbor defenses. Still, before the formation of Battery A, 43d Artillery (CAC), the War Department in 1917 gave the coast artillery the anti-aircraft mission which derived from the use of the airplane in war. It was assigned to them rather than to the

1,2 - The American Nation, Hicks, Mowry, Burke, 4th Edition, Chapter 15,
Subj: The Defense of Neutrality.

field artillery largely because the coast artillery had training in firing on moving objects and because the field artillery was expected to need all its resources in fulfilling its traditional mission.

The 43d Artillery was organized at Hassimont, France in 1918 and soon found itself in the middle of heavy fighting. It fought in two offensives, one at St. Mihiel in September 1918, and the other at Meuse-Argonne beginning later in the same month.

The reduction of the St. Mihiel salient, the only major one still in the hands of the enemy, was assigned to the American Army. General Pershing had a shortage of artillery, aircraft, and tanks because priority had been given to overseas shipments of American infantry and machine-gun units at the request of the Allies. He borrowed 3,000 French guns, 900 British and French planes, and 267 French light tanks. With this support he opened the American attack.³ The Germans were prepared to evacuate and gave way before the attacking forces and the Americans reached their objectives by the end of the first day. They might have pushed farther, but the next major offensive, between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest, was to begin about ten days later. It had still been a very successful day; it was the first major World War I victory won by the American Army under its own command.

For the next few weeks the U.S. Army was busy planning operations and moving troops in and out of the concentration area between Verdun and the Argonne Forest. About 600,000 Americans moved in, making all movements at night to avoid observation by the enemy. Pershing decided to mass three corps on line, each to attack with two divisions in the assault and one in reserve. Three other divisions were held as an Army reserve. The battle, known as the Meuse-Argonne, began on the morning of 26 September 1918 and continued until the armistice on 11 November. The Meuse-Argonne battle was an important World War I victory for the Allies because it was the beginning of an American advance that caused the German Army to send 27 reserve divisions to the American front, thereby facilitating the progress of the other Allied offensives.⁴ A million and a quarter Americans were engaged in the fighting that seized the strategic lines of communications in the Sedan-Mezieres area. This action led to the collapse of the entire German front.

Demobilization began less than a month after the armistice. Almost all of the officers and men in the Army became eligible for discharge when the fighting ended. The Army of the United States, which totaled 3,710,563 on 11 November 1918, was reduced to about 265,000 a little more than a year later. Battery A, 43d Artillery, fell victim to the vast cutback on 17 August 1921, when it was inactivated at Camp Eustis, Virginia.

Three years later, 1 July 1924, the unit was redesignated as Battery A, 43d Coast Artillery, but it remained inactive and was finally disbanded 14 June 1944 after twenty years of inactive status.

3. - Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 29, Subj: World War I:7.

4. - Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 29, Subj: World War I:7.

THE MILITARY IN ALASKA

Military strength and interest in defense declined in Alaska as they did in the rest of the country in the 1920's. While in 1915 there had been 1900 officers and men in the Territory, the number dwindled to 255 by 1927, and all of the military establishments in Alaska except Chilkoot Barracks, near Haines, were abandoned. When Congress appropriated \$82,235 on 4 March 1929 for the removal of the remains of soldiers from cemeteries on abandoned military reservations, the Army appeared to be moving out for good.

Men farsighted enough to recognize the value of Alaska's geographical position argued and pleaded for a stronger defense but their arguments were not accepted and Alaska was forgotten, in a military sense, until World War II began.

WORLD WAR II

The world situation darkened in the 1930's when Japan seized Manchuria and then defied the efforts of the League of Nations and the United States to pry them loose, finally quitting the League a year later and announcing that it would no longer be bound by the usual limitation treaties. Hitler had come into power in 1933, and in 1936, after renouncing the Treaty of Versailles, Germany began rearming and occupying the Rhineland. Italy's Mussolini attacked Ethiopia in 1934; the Germans annexed Austria in March 1938; the Munich crisis occurred in September 1938. World conflict was inevitable.

When World War II broke out in 1939 President Roosevelt and his official family wanted to stay out of it. The primary emphasis during the limited preparedness campaign that followed was on increasing the striking power of the Army Air Corps and on developing an adequate hemispherical defense. The emphasis had to be changed when Denmark, Norway, and France fell, and England was in grave danger. It appeared that the United States alone would remain to face the aggressors. By early 1941 it was an accepted fact that we would be drawn into the war. Preparations increased.

The 96th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA) (Semi-Mobile) was activated 15 April 1941 at Camp Davis, North Carolina, and trained there until 27 December. Twenty days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the unit was ordered to proceed to the San Francisco port of embarkation. During those twenty days the Japanese had raided the Philippines, invaded Thailand and Malaya, seized Shanghai, attacked Hong Kong, Wake, and Guam, invaded the Gilbert Islands, Luzon, Burma, and British Borneo. The regiment reached the port 27 February 1942 and loaded immediately for the trip to the Territory of Hawaii, arriving at Oahu 10 March 1942, when the Allies were at their lowest point.

MacArthur had just left Bataan and LTC James Doolittle's morale boosting air raid on Tokyo was still a month in the future. The 96th was emplaced on the Island of Oahu and remained there to help protect Hawaii until December 1943. At that time, the 1st Battalion, less Battery A, formed a new unit, the 96th AA Gun Battalion, and made ready to sail for the Marshall Islands where

it participated in the landing on Enubuj. The Battalion stayed on to defend the island for the next five months.

Relief came with reassignment to Kaneohe Naval Air Station at Camp Mahale back in Hawaii. The relief was short-lived. The battalion received orders to ship out for Okinawa to secure the island after the U.S. Tenth Army had landed on 1 April 1945. On 6 May their orders were changed and the unit remained at Schofield Barracks, Oahu. On 11 May 1945, the day that the Chinese forces halted the 13 month long Japanese drive on Chihkiang, the 96th went back to Kaneohe Naval Air Station. The development of the overpowering and devastating atomic bomb and the subsequent destruction of two Japanese cities showed the Japanese that they were defeated. On 14 August 1945, the Japanese surrendered, and the battalion was inactivated at Fort Hase, Oahu, 7 November 1945. The 96th received battle participation credit for the Eastern Mandates Campaign.

THE 43D ARTILLERY IN WORLD WAR II

The battles of the First World War that Battery A, 43d Artillery had been involved in were summarized on a prior page. This unit saw no action in WWII because it had been inactivated in 1921 and was not reactivated until 17 August 1950. The Battalion colors, however, include eleven campaign streamers and a distinguished unit citation, all awarded for World War II actions, logically raising the question of how the unit happens to fly streamers for campaigns fought while it was inactive.

It happened this way. In 1950 the 43d Coast Artillery split up. Its 1st Battalion became a part of the 43d Field Artillery Battalion (assigned to the 8th Infantry Division), its 2d Battalion became a unit of the 61st Field Artillery Battalion (assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division), and its 3d Battalion went to the 64th Field Artillery Battalion (assigned to the 25th Infantry Division). Each of these three units had been active in World War II and had fought to earn the streamers. When, in 1959, the three battalions--the 43d, 61st, and 64th--were consolidated, reorganized, and designated the 43d Artillery Regiment, they brought their old campaign ribbons with them. Even though no unit of the old 43d had joined them until five years after the end of the war the new 43d became the owner of all the campaign streamers.

Since the three battalions above are the antecedents of the 4th Missile Battalion, we should take a quick look at the campaigns in which their awards were earned. Two of the divisions; that many years later were assigned units of the 43d, the 25th Infantry Division, and the 1st Cavalry Division; fought in the Pacific and were given campaign streamers for the Central Pacific campaign and for campaigns in the Northern Solomons, New Guinea, and the Bismarck Archipelago. The 25th Infantry, one of three divisions in the XIV Corps, was involved in the unopposed landing and subsequent six-month defense of Guadalcanal. The 1st Cavalry was part of the 6th Army, fighting in the Philippines on both Leyte and Luzon. In all of these actions, Japanese losses were termed "staggering".⁵

5. Encyclopedia Americana, Vol 29, World War II: 9.

Meanwhile, the 8th Infantry Division had gone to Europe where it added four streamers to the flag; earning them in the invasion of Normandy in June 1944, in Northern France, Rhineland, and Central Europe.

THE KOREAN CONFLICT

If our awards for World War II were not legitimately earned by elements of the 43d, the ten streamers added during the Korean Conflict were. In 1950 the 43d split up and its battalions were consolidated into field artillery units and assigned to infantry divisions. As a part of the United Nations Forces these divisions were in Korea for the duration of the conflict, being awarded streamers for campaigns from the UN Defensive and the UN Offensive at the beginning of the war, to the Third Korean Winter and finally the Korean Summer-Fall 1953 when the war ended. Artillery units, we should note, are credited with having been the greatest enemy killer, primarily because of the mountainous terrain that made normal armor tactics difficult and relegated tanks, in many cases, to a fire support role.

96TH AAA GUN BATTALION (120mm)

The 96th, having reactivated on 8 June 1949 and renamed the 96th AAA Gun Battalion (120mm), had no part in the Korean Conflict. In December 1949 it began a 16 week training cycle which was only half finished when the 120mm guns were exchanged for 90mm. At the end of the following eight weeks all equipment was turned in or packed for overseas shipment. After 30 day POR leaves, the battalion departed Fort Bliss, Texas in two sections. Batteries A and B and half of Headquarters went on one train and Batteries C and D plus the other half of Headquarters went on another. Everyone knew that the final destination was Alaska, and some men had even shipped their automobiles. No family quarters were available.

One section left El Paso and traveled the southern route on the Southern Pacific Railroad into Southern California and then north to San Francisco (Camp Stoneman), the point of debarkation, while the other section traveled through Colorado and arrived at Camp Stoneman only six hours after the first group. After three days at Camp Stoneman the battalion boarded the USS Jefferson and sailed to Alaska on 10 July 1950. On 12 July the ship pulled into Seattle to pick up a small group of Air Force men heading for Alaska, but returned to the open sea the same day. A message was received that ordered the ship to return to Seattle and unload all personnel and equipment because the ship was to be used for a Korean run. Two weeks passed before another ship was available.

Finally the battalion was able to sail on the SS O'Hara, arriving at the Port of Whittier on 31 July 1950, and debarking to the music of an Air Force band. The troops were loaded from the ship to a train and departed for Anchorage, arriving there after dark and in a downpour. They loaded into trucks and were transported through wilderness to the dispersal area.

The twelve 90mm guns that had been shipped were assembled on the athletic field, but the fire control equipment and prime movers had not arrived. It was estimated that the batteries could have all of their equipment and be fully operational by 15 September 1950. However, the plans were changed and the batteries moved to their positions on 12 August, even though they still did not have any fire control equipment or generators.

During this period living quarters were Jamesways and pyramidal tents. The construction of pit latrines, field kitchens, mess tents, and gun positions filled all sixteen to eighteen hours of daylight, allowing the men time out for meals and Sunday church services only.

When the batteries moved to their positions, D Battery drew the only improved area, getting a kitchen, latrine, hot water plant, and several quonsets. The area had previously been a training site and was at one time a NCO recreation area. Even electricity and a telephone were available, making this a really improved area compared with what the other units had to begin with. Battery C was to emplace on what appeared to be a high, dry position; but it turned out to be almost as swampy as the low area surrounding it. Battery B, after an early reconnaissance, claimed that their area contained nothing but swamp, knee deep muskeg, and a small creek. One of their commanders pointed out a low dirt pile at the head of the stream and there they crowded the guns together, planning to build a fill for the rest of the battery. Battery A was to establish a position high on the hill and the site progressed rapidly until they were told to move to another position a hundred yards across ski bowl road. The headquarters was set up in some rusting, unpainted quonset huts of various sizes, a weathered, prefabricated mess hall, and a latrine in the same condition. When it rained the whole area was especially dismal and mud was ankle deep.

Once the batteries were fully operational, there was still little time for formal training or recreation. Frequent alerts, a full scale exercise, and two weeks fighting forest fires punctuated the tedious hours of construction and housekeeping.

The most aggravating problems were water and sanitation. All line batteries hauled water in trailers, which proved to be more and more difficult as freezing weather set in. The kitchens and mess tents of Batteries A, B, and C had floors of salvage lumber that were impossible to clean, and attempts to scrub them resulted in a glaze of ice. Space heaters were not adequate for Alaska and were unable to keep the tents comfortably warm. To add to the general discomfort, winds on Thanksgiving day blew down the mess tents.

In November 1950, contractors finally appeared to build maintenance shops, mess halls, and latrines. Quonset huts, unassembled, were delivered to the batteries to replace the Jamesways, and though the season was not the best for pouring foundations, the need was urgent. Under the supervision of engineers the troops erected the quonsets, being delayed by operational requirements, material shortages, and temperatures as low as -30°, but finishing the job in February 1951.

The mission of the 96th was primarily the same as ours is now: to provide AAA fire against medium and high flying hostile aircraft in direct support of the 10th Air Division (Def) for the air defense of the Elmendorf Air Force Base-Fort Richardson complex. A minimum of two guns per battery was kept on a 20 minute alert status.

Newer, faster aircraft were being built and to keep pace with them, the NIKE missiles were developed. As early as 1957 members of the 96th AAA Battalion knew that they were soon to be replaced by NIKE.

MISSILES GO TO ALASKA

In 1957 the battalions of the 43d Field Artillery Regiment that had been separated seven years before were brought together to form the 43d Artillery, a parent regiment under the Combat Arms Regimental System. One of the units, Battery A, had been assigned to the 8th Infantry Division and was inactivated when it was relieved 1 August 1951 in Germany. A year later it was designated Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 4th Gun Battalion, 43d Artillery, just six weeks before its activation of 15 September 1958 at Fort Richardson, Alaska.

In October 1958, Overseas Package 7 was formed at Fort Bliss, Texas, and began training with four NIKE systems (1137, 1138, 1139, and 1140). They fired two Ajax and one Hercules missiles per system by the end of the year and soon were in Alaska, arriving on a bitter, cold day, 23 January 1959. By the time of the arrival of the NIKE missiles the 96th had solved many of the problems of cold weather operations, and the missilemen were happy to be able to absorb a great many sourdoughs into the missile battalion. The old gun men were converted to missilemen by classroom work and on-the-job training. The Overseas Package arrived in Alaska with 3 officers, 2 warrant officers, and 25 men per firing battery and 3 officers and 2 warrant officers in the battalion headquarters.

The battalion was redesignated 4th Missile Battalion, 43d Artillery on 1 March 1959, and assumed defense of the Anchorage Complex although three of the gun batteries were still employed as prime units. When system 1140, installed at Battery A(W), became operational on 7 March 1959, the 96th AAA Battalion relinquished all operational responsibilities. It immediately began deactivation and equipment turn-in. The other three systems were soon in working order, A(S) becoming operational on 25 March 1959. Battery C (1138) followed on 15 April and the four battery defense was complete when Battery B began operations 5 May 1959.

ALASKA'S PROGRESS TO 1959

The day Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939, there was one active military establishment in Alaska, located at Haines, manned by eleven officers and 286 enlisted men, armed with .45 caliber pistols and 1903 Springfield rifles. The normal means of travel was a small and very slow tug boat. Nearly a year passed before the first troops, members of the 4th Infantry Regiment, arrived in Anchorage, setting up tents until a permanent post could be built. There was still little interest in a strong defense for Alaska. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, however, the situation changed and construction of bases began in summer of 1942. The expected Japanese attack came with the early dawn of 3 June 1942, when carrier based planes attacked Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians. A severe attack followed on the next day, but the American planes were able to drive off the Japanese, who then proceeded to overrun the islands of Attu and Kiska, establishing a permanent base on Kiska. Through-

out the winter of 1942-43, the United States continued flying raids and destroyer attacks on Attu. On 11 May 1943 the 7th Infantry Division advanced on the island. Nineteen days of bitter fighting followed, leaving 1791 Japanese killed and 11 captured.

Immediately after the capture of Attu, Japanese activity on Kiska ceased and the Americans feared a trap. Therefore, they pounded Kiska by sea and air for six weeks before landing. When they went ashore, not a single Japanese could be found; they had evacuated in the fog weeks earlier.

The Territory of Alaska was not forgotten after World War II as it had been at the end of the First World War. It retained its importance as a defensive position and the military establishment, as well as the civilian community, grew. By 1954 Fort Richardson comprised 67,296 acres and the permanent troop barracks, several hundred family quarters, and a power plant had been completed. The new commissary and post exchange were finished in 1958, along with many more family units, and when the 4th Missile Battalion took up residence in 1959, it did so at a modern, well-equipped post. The rigors that the men of the 96th faced were things of the past. Two historic events, not related, occurred in December 1959; Alaska was made a state and for the first time a NIKE-HERCULES missile was fired from an actual operational site, Battery B, 2d Missile Battalion, Fairbanks, Alaska.

4TH MISSILE BATTALION

The 4th Missile Battalion fired at Fairbanks in 1959, but in 1960 it made history again by being the first to fire a NIKE-HERCULES from an operational site near a heavily populated metropolitan area. All of the homesteaders from the South Fork of the Eagle River and from the upper part of the Eagle River were housed, fed, and entertained at Army expense while the battalion used their homesteads as part of the missile range. At the firing they were honored guests at Battery B, visiting with generals and local dignitaries, an experience as exciting to them as the actual shoot.⁶ All Anchorage was excited, too, watching the missile blast off on 21 November 1960, and reading about the 73-mile "kill" in the Anchorage Daily Times, which ran a long article on page one and a full page of photos on the fifth page.

The second missile of the series, fired shortly before noon on 22 November fail-safed after leaving the launcher, apparently because of a booster break-up before separation, and destroyed itself in a startling display for the thousands of flatlanders who were watching. The newspapers quoted an Army spokesman who stated there were no personnel injuries.

Within the week history was made again when the first night and bad weather firing took place at 5:08 p.m. on an overcast evening after a day of steady snowfall.

Battery B was used as a firing site for several Annual Service Practices, until it became impractical to move the homesteaders. Beginning in 1965, ASP was held in Fairbanks, and Alaskans became somewhat oblivious to what had once been a great news event.

At 5:26 p.m. 27 March 1964, the largest earthquake in the history of North America struck southcentral Alaska. The earthquake and tidal waves started fires, tore buildings apart, ripped open streets, and demolished waterfront areas throughout 70,000 square miles. Twenty-three thousand square miles of land uplifted in the largest earth movement ever recorded.

⁶ THE PIONEER, Anchorage, Alaska, 24 November 1960.

The most severe damage to a USARAL unit was to Battery A on Campbell Point. Both the fire control and launcher areas suffered extensive damage and were non-operational for several weeks. Walls and floors cracked, section buildings split, radars vibrated on their towers and slipped from their pedestals, and missiles moved around on the storage racks. The most serious damage was to the launcher area and it was long after the ground stopped moving that men could again breathe normally. The cool heads of the old and experienced men on site stabilized the round-the-clock recovery operation. For meritorious conduct in the performance of the extremely difficult and hazardous operation, the battery was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation on 10 August 1964.⁷

Also in 1964 the USARAL Air Defense Artillery Group, composed of two NIKE-HERCULES missile battalions, was activated and moved its offices from Building 1 to the upstairs half of our present headquarters, located in building 656, Fort Richardson.

1965 AND AFTER

The events of 1965 and 1966, still fresh in our minds and seeming now to be historically unimportant, consisting of service practices, normal inspections, and routine activities, will perhaps in time become interesting and worthy to be included in the unit history rather than being stored in our data files. Certainly before the sites are deactivated, if they are, we must fully describe our operations and our structure in this history. Only time will tell which should be recorded, however, and I leave that task to a later historian.

⁷ GO 27, Hq, DA dtd 10 Aug 64.