

936TH FA. BN. USUALLY RUNS AHEAD
OF ALL INFANTRY GROUPS IT "SUPPORTS"

WITH THE 5TH ARMY, Feb. 28--When the 5th Army's 936th Field Artillery Battalion--a 155 mm. howitzer outfit--first went into action near Miganao 15 months ago, it collected its field manuals and put them on a shelf.

The manuals said a 155-howitzer unit would "support" front-line troops, but the 936th found that, instead of "supporting" front-line soldiers, it was in the front lines itself. And it has remained there almost continually, as the 5th Army moved up the Italian boot.

Since it went into action on the Italian front, the 936th has established a record few combat units can boast. Out of 450 days in Italy, the unit has been in action 420 days, its big guns firing an average of 300 rounds a day, a total of more than 125,000 shells.

Its big guns can lob a 100-pound projectile nearly ten miles over the highest mountain in the Apennines.

Although its men--about a fourth of them have become casualties--have seen action in dozens of battles and counter-attacks, the men still remember vividly the units's first

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six-week stand near Mignano, where the 936th found itself in the front line, protected only by one company of 36th Division Infantry.

ENEMY RETURNS FIRE:

Its gun sections then received enemy small arms fire; and the men, armed with carbines and machine guns, dug in along a railroad track like infantrymen. Once an infantry attack moved out through its gun sections and during the engagement, the unit's aid station handled 60 infantry casualties.

During one month of the Mignano battle, the 936th howitzer fired a total of 18,500 rounds. Not infrequently, nine-man crews worked day and night. Once they fired 2,500 shells in 24 hours, and in reply, enemy counter batteries sent an average of 150 shells a day into the battalion area for six weeks, causing nearly 50 casualties.

Since Mignano, many heroic acts have been written into the 936th Mt. Maggiore, Capt. Merlin E. Faulkner of Goldthwaite, Tex., crawled 500 yards across open terrain to an observation post just in time to spot German infantry moving out toward the battalion's sector. Immediately he directed a barrage which killed over 100 Germans and completely broke up the attack.

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Since that period, the 936th has served three 5th Army corps, supporting French, British and New Zealand troops and nearly every American infantry and armored unit in the 5th Army. During the spring offensive on Rome in 1944 the battalion moved almost every day to keep on the heels of the 88th and 85th Divisions. Often gun sections rolled into new areas and began firing before advance surveying parties could plot and stake out gun positions. Following the liberation of Rome in June, 1944, the 936th fired over 15,000 rounds in one month on the retreating columns of German transport and troops that jammed highways north of the capital.

In the weeks after the Roman liberation, the battalion worked with the 1st Armored Division as part of an armored task force that moved swiftly up the west Italian coast. Again the big guns were set up as often as three times a day. Once they were strung out along a battalion front of 15 miles, creating some of the toughest communications problems of the Italian campaign.

Since returning to combat last August, the 936th has been in continuous action, supporting infantry units as they push up through the fall rains and mud and now into the snows

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of northern Italy.

KEY MEN "UPSTAIRS"

Key men in the unit's operation throughout the Italian campaign, have been its pilots and aerial observers--the "eyes" of the battalion. When the 936th worked with the 1st Armored Division last summer, pilots and observers often flew 16 hours a day. This winter they are circling snow-capped Apennine peaks in temperatures as low as 20 degrees below zero. One of the first battalions in the theater to use aerial observation in night firing, 936th gunners have been able to lay concentrations on as many as five different night targets in 15 minutes under the direction of one observer. Men in the unit's air section have been awarded six Air Medals and eight Oak Leaf Clusters, each in recognition of 35 missions over enemy territory.

The 936th Artillery Battalion was activated as a separate unit in February, 1943, at Camp Bowie, Tex., after training for two years in Louisiana and Texas as part of a former Arkansas National Guard regiment. Approximately a fifth of the men in the unit now are from Arkansas. The battalion arrived at Oran in early September, 1943.

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The unit is commanded by Lt. Col. David B. Kennedy of Cleveland, Ohio, who has led the battalion for over three and a half years.

THE STARS AND STRIPES

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