

# THE SCREAMING EAGLE

## *Dover's Adopted Battalion*

4th August to 17th September 1944

By Charles W. Vulyak, Jr

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Dover, England

On 1st July 1944, the HMT Scythia set sail for England from a New York harbour. Below her decks were about 700 men of the US 127th AAA Gun Battalion and other military personnel. Her destination was Liverpool, England. During her 14 day voyage, she was accompanied by Naval War ships and other troop transports. As the days went by, many of the soldiers aboard became seasick as the convoy zigzagged across the northern Atlantic to out manoeuvre possible enemy U-boats. On 15th July, the HMT Scythia dropped her anchor safely in Liverpool harbour. The soldiers with their personal gear disembarked for about a mile march to waiting troop trains that would take them to their first encampment. Destination: Anzio Camp at Blackshaw Moor, Staffordshire. A day later the Battalion received their new equipment: 90mm guns, ammunition, radar and communication equipment, trucks and tractors.

From 15th to 29th July they degreased, cleaned, checked and prepared all of their equipment for the future fire missions to come. Many briefings were held to instruct the soldiers on their next assignments. On the night of 29th July, the battalion began



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their movement from their camp to the White Cliffs of Dover. Within three to four days, the battalion was in position at Camp Swingate to start their task of defending southeast England and London. During their month and a half assignment at Dover they shared slit trenches, foxholes, anti-aircraft defence tactics, firing missions and numerous

enemy shelling events with the British anti-aircraft soldiers positioned alongside their batteries. The Screaming Eagle Battalion engaged 188 V-1 bombs and fired 6,105 rounds of 90mm shells. They claimed 89 V-1 bombs and were allowed 56 kills. During their time on the cliffs four members of the battalion were killed, seven were wounded from enemy shelling and one wounded from friendly fire. The battalion had more casualties while defending the southeast of England and London than during any battle campaign on the continent of Europe. On 27th September, the battalion crossed the Channel from Southampton to Omaha Beach to begin their next big assignment of helping to free continental Europe of tyranny.

My father was a member of the 127th AAA Gun Battalion, Battery "B" as the gunner.



*The gun crew*

Many times when I was a boy, I would ask him about his experiences in Dover and on the European continent. Many times he would not want to talk about it. When I was older, he would mention how terrible the shelling was on the Cliffs. While he was on guard duty on the Cliffs, he would use the high-powered military binoculars to scan the Channel and the air for enemy movement and watch for flashes of fire coming from the enemy's 16-inch guns 20 miles across the Channel near Calais, France. Once he spotted the flashes, he would then alert the battalion about incoming shells. It took the projectiles approximately 60 seconds before impacting on the White Cliffs. On a very clear and quiet night, he said he could see the clock tower in Calais, France. Considering all of the ugly faces of war around him, he told me that the White Cliffs of Dover was the most beautiful area he had ever seen in his young life. It was a very different vista compared to the sights of his small steel mill town in Ohio. When off duty, he would go into Dover and get something to eat and drink at the Red Lion pub on St. James Street. He mentioned that the residents were very kind and friendly to him and the rest of the G.I.s that were stationed in the Dover area, but it was a completely different picture as the battalion moved

across Europe. When they crossed the western border of the enemy's country, he said as their convoy would roll through small towns, the residents, from their second floor windows, would throw garbage and waste on them. Somewhere in this area, he was injured by a large enemy shell that landed and exploded near him rupturing one eardrum and damaging the other. His war had come to an end. For about the next five months, he was treated at a hospital in England. After his recuperation, he was shipped back to the States for further treatments.

My interest in my father's war history is very important to me because of the great courage and sacrifice shown by the battalion during dangerous and difficult times during WW II. I am happy to see people in the Dover area keeping up the spirit, sacrifice and proud tradition it has shown the world so many times in the past. It is important that our future generations always be aware of the sacrifices experienced by their loved ones of the past. On behalf of my late father and his battalion, thank you Dover for your kindness, friendship and understanding shown towards the Screaming Eagle Battalion so long ago.



*The Screaming Eagle*