

Uncle Luke & Battery B, 747th Field Artillery Battalion

His OVERSEAS / GARRISON CAP



My uncle, **Corporal Luther Warren Rice**, was a veteran of Battery B and is recorded as having served with that 203mm artillery battalion during World War II. The unit served in the European Theater of Operations, where it provided heavy artillery support during the Allied advance across Western Europe.

Following the Normandy invasion, the battalion participated in the campaigns that drove German forces back across the continent and into the heart of Germany. Historical records show the unit took part in both the Rhineland and Central Europe campaigns. During this period, my uncle served in Operation Grenade, the Allied crossing of the Roer River into Germany, which was conducted in conjunction with Operation Veritable, the major offensive launched through the Reichswald Forest by British

and Canadian forces. Together, these operations helped clear the west bank of the Rhine and opened the way for the final Allied advance into Germany.

Operation Grenade

- The U.S. Ninth Army under Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson.
- Objective: Cross the Roer River and drive eastward to link up with the Allied forces advancing from the north in Operation Veritable.

Operation Veritable

The northern part of an Allied pincer movement that took place between 8 February and 11 March 1945 during the final stages of the Second World War. The operation was conducted by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's Anglo-Canadian 21st Army Group, primarily consisting of the First Canadian Army under Lieutenant-General Harry Crerar and the British XXX Corps under Lieutenant-general Brian Horrocks.

- Originally scheduled for 9 February, but German forces opened the Roer dams, flooding the river and postponing the crossing for about two weeks

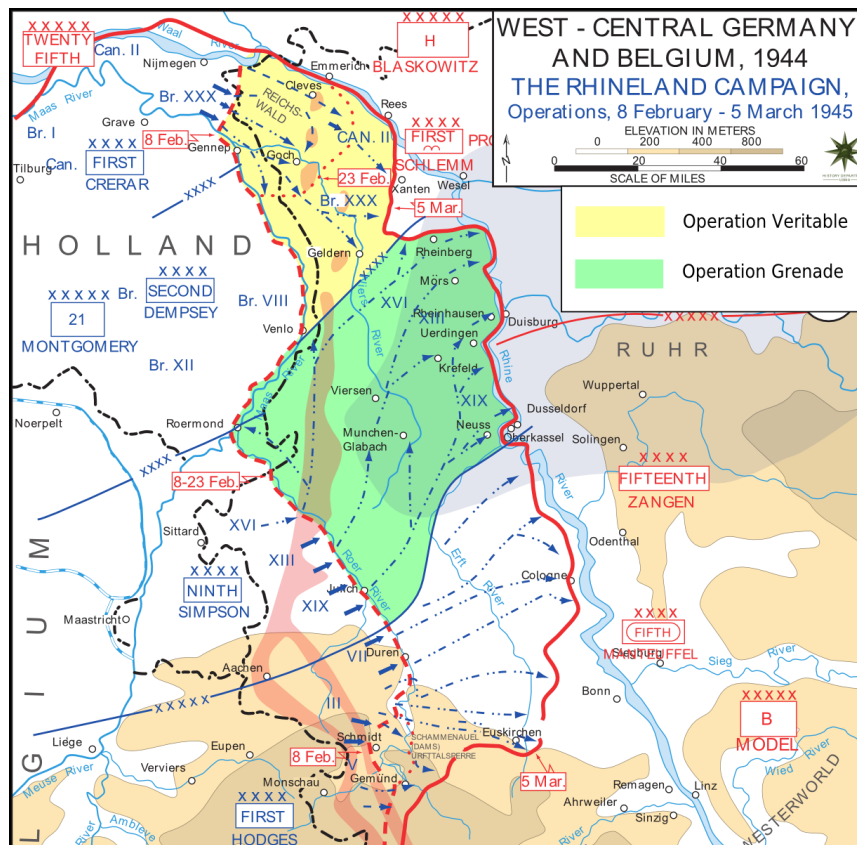
In practical terms, those campaign credits place the battalion in the fighting:

- **Veritable** attacked from the north through the Reichswald.
- **Grenade** attacked from the west after crossing the Roer.
- The two forces linked up near Geldern in early March 1945, trapping and destroying large numbers of German troops west of the Rhine

- **Rhineland Campaign** (September 1944 to March 1945), which included operations along Germany's western frontier and the advance toward and across the Rhine River.
- **Central Europe Campaign** (March to May 1945), covering the final Allied advance through central Germany and the collapse of Nazi Germany.

Cpl. Luther Rice is seated right





The 747th was a non-divisional heavy artillery battalion equipped with 203 MM (8-inch Howitzers) meaning it was assigned as needed to corps level or army level commands rather than permanently attached to an infantry division, its batteries were typically attached where corps or army level commanders needed long-range heavy fire support rather than serving permanently with a single infantry division. Records identify it specifically as an 8-inch gun battalion. A category of long-range, high-power artillery used for counterbattery fire, destroying fortifications, and deep support missions. Which places its combat activity in the

final phase of the war as U.S. forces crossed the Rhine and advanced into Germany.

Because it was a heavy, non-divisional battalion, the 747th would have been attached to corps artillery headquarters, shifting between supported divisions as operations required. Therefore, matching the general pattern described for U.S. field artillery units in Europe whose histories were preserved through was diaries, after action reports, and unit journals.



According to the family researcher who identified him as "Uncle Luke," Luther Warren Rice was a Corporal in Battery B, 747th Field Artillery Battalion, enlisted in February 1943, and went ashore in Normandy with the 203 MM (8-inch Howitzers), heavy artillery. and served until the summer of 1945."

Luther Warren Rice Jr. grave memorial also identifies him as:

"N.C. CPL BTRY B 747th FLD ARTY BN WWII" [findagrave.com]



The next step would be locating the 747th FA Battalion's wartime operational reports at the National Archives. Those records can place Battery B almost day-by-day after landing in Normandy. The National Archives has confirmed WWII operational records for the **747th Field Artillery.**

About the guns

The 8-inch/203-mm projectile Howitzer M1, was a towed howitzer used by the United States Army. The 203-mm howitzer addressed the requirement for heavy field artillery capable of attacking heavily reinforced targets like those likely to be found along the Siegfried Line.

Because of the desire for mobility and maneuverability and because of the belief that the newly developing Army Air Corps would provide much of the support formerly furnished by the

field artillery, the War Department did not place a very high priority on heavy artillery. In September 1942, the AGF (Army Ground Forces) recommended one hundred one battalions of heavy artillery (203mm (8-inch guns) and 240-mm. Howitzers, and one hundred forty battalions of medium artillery (155-mm./ 4.5-inch howitzers) to be organized in addition to the division artillery units, but the following year, the War Department drastically reduced this number to fifty-four heavy and eighty-one medium battalions. The low number of authorized battalions made it impossible for the planning figure of 3 non-divisional field artillery battalions for each division as devised by the AGF. At no time during the war did the non-divisional field artillery battalions ever exceed the ratio of 2 battalions per division. From one hundred forty-two non- divisional field artillery battalions (thirty-two heavy, fifty-three medium, and fifty-seven light) active on 31 December 1942, the number expanded to three hundred twenty-six by 31 March 1945, of which one hundred thirty-seven were heavy, one hundred thirteen medium, and seventy-six light. The Army Ground Forces had proposed considerable increases in heavy and medium artillery that the War Department did not accept in 1942. After combat experiences in Italy (especially Cassino in early 1944) proved that air support could not altogether replace heavy artillery, the department authorized more heavy and medium artillery than the AGF had originally requested.

The medium and heavy battalions were organized along lines similar to the divisional artillery battalions. Each had a headquarters and headquarters battery, a service battery, and three firing batteries. Each battalion was authorized two liaison airplanes for observation.

Caterpillar tractors eventually replaced trucks as prime movers of all heavy artillery weapons. The 203-mm (8-inch howitzer) was slightly heavier than the 155-mm. gun, fired a heavier projectile at a shorter range. Considered by some to be one of the most accurate field artillery weapons in the inventory, its destructive and concussive effect was significant. The weapon was used effectively in operations against cities, heavy fortifications, communications lines, gun emplacements, and bridges behind enemy lines. The 8-inch gun was primarily used for long-range destruction of enemy communications lines and fortifications,

The non-divisional artillery battalions were organized under the same tables as their counterparts in the divisional artillery with minor differences. For example, non-divisional units were not authorized forward observer sections, which had been added to the divisional units in 1944 in response to numerous requests from field commanders for increased liaison and coordination between the divisional field artillery units and their supported infantry.

