

# VC Battery D Goes to War



American World War II  
Heritage City

Valley City  
North Dakota

# VC has 1st State Homeguard

## The 188th/957th Field Artillery Battalions and Battery 'D' of Valley City take on Germany

The 188th Field Artillery Battalion was headquartered in Bismarck, ND, with its "D" Battery stationed in Valley City. Activated in April 1941 for a year of duty, the unit reported to basic training in Fort Warren, WY. But following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, the battalion was sent to Fort Lewis in Washington state where winter training on Yakima Ridge would prove to be invaluable preparation for the brutal conditions they would face at the Battle of Ardennes between Belgium and Luxembourg – the Battle of the Bulge – years later. In Washington, the battalion was divided into the 188th and its 'sister' battalion, the 957th, with many Valley Citians assigned to the latter.

*The Fargo Forum, Aug. 15, 1945:* "The former National Guard unit landed in France only a few days after D-Day, and within a few hours had its big guns blazing at the Nazis. Attached at first to airborne outfits, the group went through several battles. Much of the time, the artillery unit found itself on the front lines (and) had



to adopt infantry methods of fighting along with its big guns. As it swung into the battle of Belgium, it had the unusual opportunity of capturing 258 of the enemy at Mons. They continued across Belgium, went on to breach the Siegfried line and participated in the siege of Aachen."

The 957th continued into Germany, and were received by an all-out German counteroffensive in the Belgian Ardennes and the Battle of the Bulge. It was the last major German offensive campaign on the Western Front. The 957th would come upon the Nordhausen Concentration Camp where thousands of slave laborers had starved to death while grinding out war materials for Hitler; those horrors steeled the troop's resolve for their final battles.

The battalion fired its last rounds April 23, 1945. In the end, the unit earned five campaign stars on its ETO ribbon (Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, the Ardennes, and Central Europe), had occupied 104 combat positions and took 501 prisoners of war with 24 of its soldiers killed in action and 61 wounded in action (two of them twice).

(Left) A collection of photographs donated to the Barnes County Museum show the camaraderie of the Battery D Motor Section of the 188th/957th Battalions - "A bunch of real buddies."



### Want more information?

Visit the Barnes County Museum at 315 Central Ave North in Historic Downtown Valley City or scan the QR Code to connect to the Barnes County Historical Society website.



Battery D of Valley City pose at the Armory on April 1941



(Above) The Home Guard marches through the streets of Valley City.

(Left) Valley City's All-Volunteer 'Company F' Home Guard reports for a photo on the steps of the VC Armory.

## Valley City Volunteer Home Guard is First Unit Formed in the State of North Dakota

One day after war was declared against Japan, North Dakota state officials started organizing a state guard for protection of critical infrastructure. More than 3,000 North Dakota guardsmen had left for service elsewhere leaving the state vulnerable. Forty local men volunteered to guard the Hi-Line bridge - a major railroad spanning the Sheyenne River in Valley City. It is the longest such bridge in North Dakota and was of vital importance in moving supplies and men, so was closely guarded during both World Wars to prevent sabotage.

Local volunteers from the American Legion, VFW, city, and railroad personnel along with veterans guarded the bridge. Volunteers brought their own shotguns for guard duty and warm winter clothes. The important contributions made by these volunteers were not lost on



the Northern Pacific Railroad Company which praised them for their efficiency and thoroughness: "Valley City had the finest volunteer defense guard for a strategic point of any city in the state."

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, Governor John Moses announced "Home Guards" be organized across the state. Within 12 hours, 74 men from the Valley City area signed for Company F with the ND Home Guard. Although the War Department supplied old surplus uniforms, all else had to be funded locally. In April '42, the community organized a benefit dance for Company F. The local commander pointed out "many and sundry needs will arise for materials and equipment, and the benefit dance is designed to provide this." Thus, this community enthusiastically volunteered for duty locally once the US joined the war effort.