

June 25, 1979

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Enclosed are notes based on the format you sent to me, plus some clips which might be of assistance. Please return the clips when you have finished with them. I trust that this will aid in your research, and I will continue my search for additional data that might help. As you can see, I must resort to this means of communication, and I hope that the machine will not make too many errors in spelling and printing.

Having been somewhat of a military history buff, I have acquired a modest library of WW II, and later books that I will check through for any pertinent references and cite the reference for you. Also, if it would be of assistance, I can supply the names and current addresses of many former members of the 803d TD Bn (the results of an unsuccessful try to stage a reunion in 1978). No doubt they could add to your collection of factual data. Let me know if you are interested.

I wish you the best of luck in the reconstruction of the interesting story of the Tank Destroyer Force whose motto was "Seek, Strike and Destroy", but which was - I hope - jokingly referred to as "Sneak, Peek and Retreat". Also the patch depicting the Black Panther cruising the tank was referred to as "The Snapping Pussay".

Sincerely,

Bob

ROBERT P. BAJON

1. Rank: First Lieutenant, Tank Destroyer (Infantry).
2. Jobs: Communications Officer, TD Platoon Leader, Company Commander, Battalion Liaison Officer.
3. Code Name: Victim (Assigned to 803d TD Bn while a part of V Corps during year in England, 1943-44).
4. Battalion was equipped with M-10's until January 1945, then M-36's.
5. Good Features of our TDs: Maneuverability, dependable engines (diesel on M10, Gas on M36), suspension system, gun OK against PZKW III and PZKW IV German Tanks, able to furnish direct support to Infantry, wider tracks on M36 greatly improved cross country mobility, and mobility in mud and snow because of much better flotation (fewer pounds of ground pressure per square inch), and speed.
6. Bad Features: Lacked coaxial and bow machine guns for protection against enemy infantry, only cal.50 MG in its installed mount required gunner to stand exposed on rear deck to fire - we changed the mounts to the leading edge of the turret to give armored protection to the gunner except for his head and hands, frontal armor would not stop high velocity 76mm or 88mm, lack of night firing devices, lack of capability to deliver accurate fire while moving.
7. Experiences with enemy armor: at various times we met up with 1st SS (Das Reich), 2nd SS (Adolph Hitler), 6th SS, 130th Panzer Lehr, and others. Early in the campaigns on the continent they were well led, well crewed with good gunners and tough to beat. Later, we found the leadership poorer, crews slower and less adept and their gunnery was not the best. We found tanks abandoned that had not been hit but left because of maintenance knowhow or lack of available parts. During the Bulge while proceeding north along Skyline Drive in Luxembourg, S/Sgt Bud Harmier, Company C, 3d Platoon Sergeant sighted a PZKW V (Mark V) tank and stopped his brand new M36, fired one round of APC - the first he had ever fired with the 90mm gun - and knocked out the enemy tank. The measured distance was 2200 yards.
8. Combat experiences: When we went ashore in Normandy we were attached to the 29th Infantry Division as we had been for the preceding 10 months, but that status did not last long. We began to jump back and forth across the front attached to many divisions their first days in combat, and until their attached TD Battalions got ashore and caught up with them. Of course this meant constant changes in liaison, radio frequencies and Signal Operating Instructions, and ever changing infantry Commanders to adjust to.

8. (Continued).

The assignment time table read something like this:

June 7 - 9, 1944	29th Infantry Division
10-12	2d Infantry Division
13-14	29th Infantry Division
14-15	30th Infantry Division
16-18	3d Armored Division
19- July 3	82d Air Borne Division
July 4 -14	8th Infantry Division
15-16	90th Infantry Division
17-24	29th Infantry Division
25-31	28th Infantry Division
Aug 1 - 6	79th Infantry Division
7 -14	9th Infantry Division
15-31	30th Infantry Division
Sep 1 -10	113th Cavalry Group
11- 2 Oct	30th Infantry Division
3 -22 Dec	4th Infantry Division
Dec 23-15 Jun, 1945	5th Infantry Division

The above attachments placed us at one time or another in III, V, VII, VIII, XII, XIX, XX and XXIV US Army Corps and required liaison from the battalion to the Corps Armor Section and its TD Group Headquarters. The varied assignments also made us a part of First, Third and Ninth US Armies, and 2d British Army, but did not require any direct contact with the Army Headquarters.

➤ We were a part of the 29th Infantry Division Task Force that took SE. Lo, with the 79th, 9th, and 30th Infantry Divisions during the dash across France, with the 113th Cavalry Group that led the way across Belgium capturing Fort Eben Emael, Belgium and Maas-trich, Holland, made the first breakthrough of the Siegfried Line just north of Aachen, Germany, broke through a second time in Huertzen Forest with the 4th Infantry Division, and still a third time out of Ecternach, Luxembourg with the 5th Infantry Division. We crossed the Rhine at Openheim and were the first TDs on the east bank of the Rhine, then it was the Mainz River and took Frankfort, moved north and helped eliminate the ruhr pocket, followed by a 500 mile move in three days from Iserlohn to the Czech border north of Passau on the Danube. Then it was NE toward Prague - all with the 5th Infantry Division.- and did the last fighting by US Forces in Europe on the 7-8 May, 1945 when we had a German Army sandwiched between the 5th Infantry Division and Russian forces driving SW from Prague.

The 803d TD Bn was credited with approximately 330 days of combat, entitled to 5 campaign stars, awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, French and Belgian Fourre a Guerre's.

9. Funny Experiences.

At the end of the Argentan-Falais Gap battle we made a blackout move during the night of about 50-60 miles through what had been German lines all day. We took uppositions to block a road network that it was thought the Germans would use in their withdrawal. Just before daybreak we heard an American 2½ ton truck moving fast but at considerable distance, then we saw the headlights-on bright- and moving toward us. We had dropped a couple of trees across the road, and laid 2 Daisy Chains of Anti Tank mines between, and covered the road block with both TDs and dug-in cal.50 MGs. The truck upon spotting the felled trees skidded to a stop, and the driver dismounted and moved into the headlight beams with his hands high. About that time one of the cal.50 gunners pulled back the operating handle of his gun and let it fly forward with the usual emphatic clunk. The man in front of his truck then quickly shouted, "Don't shoot! I ain't no combat soldier! I'm just a Quartermaster truckin' boy!"

The Bn Command Post was located just on the edge of Simpleveld, Holland - about 4 miles from Aachen, Germany. We had been at that location for about 3 days as the 30th Infantry Division punched through the Seigfreid Line and the 1st Infantry Division was assaulting Aachen. The word was passed that noon Chow was to be a hot meal and soon there were 20-25 officers and EM lined up in the vicinity of the mess truck. Suddenly a German artillery piece from the vicinity of Aachen started throwing some harrassing fire into our area which caused everyone to head for his slit trench. Everyone except one lieutenant that missed and dove into the garbage pit! No one noticed this discrepancy, and in a few minutes when the firing was shifted to another sector everyone emerged and we were about to ascertain if anyone had been hurt when we heard a cry - "Somebody help me get out of this #%*"♣&() hole!" After he was assisted out of the hole and went thru the ribbing you could be sure that in the future he would be sure before he leaped.

10. Unusual Experiences.

During the period July 17 - 24, 1944 we discovered many concrete slabs in the area south of St. Claire and Northeast of St. Lo. Investigation of them by 29th Infantry Division and V Corps Engineer units determined that they did not cover any mass graves, or other obvious misdeeds by the Germans. We did find through interrogation of local French that all residents had been forced to leave the area for a six weeks period in April-May. Eventually, it was determined that these were launching ramps for V-1 and V-2 weapons that the Germans had planned to unleash at the invasion ports in England. Apparently the weapons were not ready in time, and it was in August before the V-1 was first fired and in September before the V-2 was operational.

Our three sojourns through the Siegfried Line with 3 different divisions, and in 3 widely separated points in September, November and January.

Our formal acceptance of the surrender of the Hungarian Navy on the Danube River just east of Passau, Germany. 36 M36s lined up on the river bank to receive the Hungarian Admiral that was the Commander, his officers, other ranks, and many families and "friends".

11. TD Training.

The Bn was activated in February, 1941 as the 103d Anti-tank Bn, and stationed at Camp Murray and Fort Lewis, Washington. In 1942 it was moved to Camp Hood, Texas - site of the TD Center - and received rigorous field tactical training as a unit. Incidentally, the 803d was redesignated in the original War Department General Orders issued December 11, 1941 which established the 8 original TD Bns. In December 1942 the Bn was moved to Ft. Dix, N.J. from which they shipped their equipment and six officers to Casablanca. In a not too unusual Army foul-up, the Bn was ordered to move to Pine Camp, N.Y. about March 30, 1942 and directed to draw all new equipment, inspect it, repack for overseas shipment and receive replacements for the 6 officers sent to North Africa. The replacement officers arrived from Camp Hood, were assigned to jobs and work proceeded. About late April the 6 officers returned from Casablanca sans Bn equipment. Finally in early June the Bn moved to Camp Kilmer, N.J. processed vehicles and heavy equipment and other impedimenta through Bayonne, N.J. and on June 20, 1943 boarded the Queen Mary, sailed on June 22, and ~~arrived~~ after sailing alone as far south as Bermuda and as far north as Iceland rounded the northern coast of Ireland and anchored in the Clyde

11. (Continued).

across from Grenoch, Scotland on June 29, 1943. We were debarked and moved by train to Camp Chiseldon, in the British Midlands just outside of Swindon. We found that the camp was the home of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps of the British Army. After unpacking and getting the camp organized, we made a long road move to the vicinity of ~~Exmoor~~ Bournemouth and spent a couple of weeks firing at Kimmeridge Range - out into the English Channel. Upon return to Cp. Chiseldon we trained both there and on Exmoor. In September we were moved to the town of Barnstaple, Devon and quartered in the town - population about 12,000. We continued our training with a trip to the British anti-aircraft range near St. Agnes, Landsend, Cornwall. Tactical training and more firing exercises were conducted on Exmoor, Dartmoor, and at Minehead. Also we were assigned as part of the training cadre at the assault training center on the Atlantic just outside Woolacombe where we helped put the 29th, 1st, 4th, and other divisions through amphibious assault training. When not at the Assault Tng Center we were participating in amphibious landing training with the 29th Infantry Division out of Portsmouth, Falmouth and Dartmouth on the English Channel. Our training days were expanded from 12 hours daily to sixteen hours about February 1, 1944. All of our personnel were given 3 day passes during the first 2 weeks of May. During the last 2 or 3 weeks we loaded and waterproofed all of our equipment except the vehicles, and departed for Weymouth staging area early on June 5. We heard the invasion announcement while we were loading on to the quay at Weymouth and awaiting the return of the LCT's from Normandy. We loaded and sailed on the evening of the 7th, and arrived off Omaha Beach on the 8th, landed on the same day and joined the 29th Division elements already ashore. Naturally, that ended our training, and from then on it was for real.

12. Value of Training.



Unfortunately, our training had followed the TD Center guidelines which envisioned the Bn operating under Bn command and control with TDs mutually supporting each other utilizing rapid and extensive fire and movement, massed fire at targets, only insignificant resupply problems, and other incidentals. These premises for the most part were entirely invalid. Not even the company commander controlled and commanded his TDs. The Platoon Leader suddenly became the one to deploy and command, resupply and fight the battle of how to best employ his TDs as opposed to the infantry battalion commanders ideas that were spur of the moment decisions made without

12. (Continued).

benefit of either schooling or tactical training. No doubt this oversight reduced the effectiveness of the TDs, caused the loss of men and equipment that should not have happened, and undoubtedly was detrimental to the morale of the TD personnel.

13. Relationship with Organizations to which attached.

Excellent

Our relations with divisions and regiments and battalions to which we were attached ran the full gamut of trials, tribulations and fine rapport. For five months we were by Army orders "Attached" to divisions, by Division orders "Attached" to regiments, and by Regimental order "Attached" to battalions, and in the early days even had a TD "Attached" to a specific infantry company. This placed the infantry battalion or company commander in command of the TDs or TD thus completely ignoring the experience and training of TD officers. Occasionally, an infantry commander would acknowledge that he didn't have the faintest idea how to employ the TDs to best advantage and would ask the TD officer to act as a command liaison and allow him to tactically employ the TDs to best support his proposed operational plan. Too, many of the infantry commanders thought of a TD as being a gun with a mobile foxhole, and gave no consideration to the fact that for us to provide good close support we had to have his infantrymen provide us with defense against German infantry. Finally, after 5 months or writing recommendations, buttonholing senior officers from TD Groups and Army Headquarters it finally was announced that henceforth TD Battalions would be placed "In Support" not "Attached". This succeeded in returning tactical control to the Platoon Leaders and in some instances even to TD company commanders. However, we were never to fight a single day as a bn. and the bn CO and staff became advisers and supporters of the company and platoon commanders. Another early problem was that at dusk the division artillery would assign us harrasing and interdiction missions to be fired during the night at long range targets. Usually this amounted to 1500-2500 rounds of unobserved indirect fire. This of course increased the problem of getting some sleep as this course of events usually took place about 3 nights a week. It went on until we got our M36s and fortunately for us 90mm ammo was not plentiful, and the practice faded.

14. A Typical Day. (TD Platoon).

A typical day started before daybreak with movement into position to take off in the attack in support of an infantry bn at first light. By use of overhead ~~ii~~ fire we could knock out MG positions and light mortar positions, breakup counter attacks, fire at snipers and forward observers when they could be pinpointed. Above all, we were constantly prepared to take under fire any enemy armor or self propelled guns, and alert by radio all other TD companies and platoons that there was enemy armor in the area. Such battlefield was passed to battalion who in turned passed it to division and division artillery. In this respect the TD companies became additional Reconnaissance Companies. Before dark, liaison with the infantry Bn CO and S3 to pick out the likely avenues of German approach during the night, and get the TDs in position for the night, get each gun laid to provide overhead fire at a single point - this was necessary because of the total lack of night firing devices on the TD. Then, when so directed we would have to pull into positions selected by division artillery, register before dark, make out a time firing schedule for each TD, and await the announced time to commence firing per the schedule. Somehow during the day we were supposed to eat, take care of bodily functions and get some sleep. Believe me when I say, "It wasn't easy!".

Tank Destroyer Table of Organization & Equipment (Major Items)

36 Officers 1 Warrant Officer 660 Enlisted Personnel

Bn Hq

Hq Co. A Co. B Co. C Co. Recon Co.

Bn Hq - 1 LTC, 2 Maj, 5 Capt, 3 Lt, 1 WO

Hq Co.- 1 Capt, 4 Lt.

TD Co.- 1 Capt, 4 Lt.

Recon Co.- 1 Capt, 5 Lt.

36 Gun, Motor Carriage, M10 (or other)

3 TD Recovery Vehicle, T2

35 Car, Armored, M20

8 Car, Armored, M8

40 Jeep, $\frac{1}{4}$ ton

15 Truck, $\frac{3}{4}$ ton

25 Truck, $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton

1 Truck, $\frac{3}{4}$ ton, Ambulance

28 Motorcycles

140 cal.50 MG

65 cal.30 MG

630 cal.30 Rifle & Carbine

75 cal.45 Pistols

75 cal.45 Sub MG

6 81mm Mortars

1 LeRoi Compressor

40 Trailers $\frac{1}{4}$ ton

15 Trailers $\frac{3}{4}$ ton

25 trailers, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ton