

HISTORY
630th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
WORLD WAR II

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HISTORY

of

630th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

The 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated on 15 December 1941 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Prior to this time, the nucleus of the organization had functioned as the 30th Infantry Division Anti-Tank Battalion (Provisional). Personnel for the new organization were drawn from the various units of the 30th (Old Hickory) Division, a National Guard Division called into active service on 16 September 1940. Lt. Colonel Samuel T. Wallace, Memphis, Tennessee, was named to command the battalion.

During its training period the battalion was stationed at Fort Jackson; Camp Hood, Texas (the Tank Destroyer Center); Camp Bowie, Texas; Camp Blanding, Florida; and Camp Rucker, Alabama. It participated in the Tennessee maneuvers of the Second Army from 14 March 1943 to 26 June 1943. A self-propelled battalion; it began maneuvers with the M3 tank destroyers (75mm gun mounted on a half-track), but during maneuvers it was issued the M-10 Tank Destroyer, mounting the 3-inch gun.

On the 20th of October, 1943, at Camp Rucker, Alabama, the battalion standard was presented by Colonel Harry C. Larter, Jr., commanding the Eighth Tank Destroyer Group, to Lt. Colonel Wallace. The battalion had already received its battalion insignia - a standing dinosaur, symbolic of heavy armor and great destructive ability, and the motto, "Progredior," (I go forward).

On 15 December 1943, the 630th was reorganized as a towed tank destroyer battalion, with the M-5, 3-inch towed gun. On the same day Lt. Colonel Wallace was transferred to the 2nd Tank Destroyer Brigade, and Lt. Colonel Clyde A. Burcham was assigned to command the battalion.

On 3 June 1944 the battalion started on the liner, "New Amsterdam," from New York on its way to England. "D" Day, 6 June, found the battalion in mid-ocean.

The battalion spent approximately 5 weeks in England. The major part of the time was spent at Packington Park, near Birmingham, although the gun companies fired at Harlick Range, and the battalion spent a few days at Towbridge Barracks.

The battalion spent approximately 5 weeks in England. It was then loaded on LST's and on 24 July 1944 it landed on Omaha Beach, Normandy, France.

On arrival in assembly area near Colombeires, France, the battalion was attached to the 28th Infantry Division XIX Corps, First United States Army. At this time things were at a standstill, but not for long. On July 25, VII Corps started its spearhead attack after an intense aerial plastering of an area near the PERIERS - ST LO Road. Thus began the breakthrough across France.

The 28th Infantry Division and the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion were committed to action on 28 July, with the objective PERCY. On the 30th the battalion received its first enemy air raid.

During the 52 days military contacts and personal friendships were made which were to exist a long time, as the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion spent the major portion of its time in combat with the 28th Infantry Division. An SOP was formulated whereby Company "A" would support the 109th Infantry Regiment, Company "B" support the 110th Infantry Regiment and Company "C" support the 112th Infantry Regiment.

The initial days of combat found the 28th Division and the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion encountering heavy resistance. While the Third Army moved South in a fast move to capture the Brittany Peninsula, the 28th moved through GATHEMO to ST SEVER CALVADOS and on to TESSY. From 12 to 17 August resistance was very limited. On 17 August the battalion bivouaced with the Division in the vicinity of GER, remaining there until the twentieth when it moved to a new sector near VERNEUIL.

The enemy fought delaying action with small groups North to le NEUBOURG, and toward the SEINE RIVER. At this time the Germans were trying to shove across their remnants at a narrow shoulder of the lower SEINE, from ELBEUF to GUILLEBEUF, and First Army's XIX Corps had the job of stopping them. The 28th and the 630th moved beyond CONCHES up to ELBEUF, closing in rapidly to place themselves between the SEINE and the approaching Germans. On August 25th, ELBEUF was reached, with heavy resistance encountered. The British, to the North, were contacted and on 26 August they relieved the division.

On 28 August the division moved to VERSAILLES and then to assembly areas in BOIS DE BOULOGNE (PARIS). On the 29th the battalion participated with the division in a triumphal march down the CHAMPS ELYSEES, past the ARC D'TRIUMPH and on to retake front line positions near ST DENIS. Both organizations, while at PARIS, had been transferred from the XIX to the V Corps.

An advance toward COMPIEGNIE was ordered, and the division moved quickly. Units were held up slightly at the OISE and AISNE Rivers, but then the division motorized elements which were to make a fast move to the final objective, ATH, BELGIUM. The route was through COMPIEGNIE, NOYON, HAM, and ST QUENTIN.

On the fourth of September the battalion, still with its "Keystone" companion, halted its Northward movement and moved South, then East, to assembly area vicinity LAON and RETHEL. On the fifth and sixth the fast movement to the East continued with little opposition from the enemy. The night of the sixth was spent near MEZIERES and BOULZICOURT.

On the 7th movement East continued, with units moving into BELGIUM, where a joyous celebration by the Belgians generally greeted our troops. Company "A" moved with Task Force "S," commanded by Lt. Colonel STRICKLER, over route FLIZE, DONCHERY, West SEDAN, FLORENVILLE, toward objective TINTIGNY.

Company "B" moved over route NOUVION, LUMES, ST MENGES, GIVONNE, LACHAPPELE, toward FONTENOILLE. Company "C" and battalion CP followed over route of Task Force "S." Resistance was slight and movement continued on the eighth and ninth.

On the tenth, Company "A" moved with Task Force "S" over route TINTIGNY, ETALLE, and VANCE to take the Belgium town of ARLON. (The Luxembourg border was crossed by most of the battalion on this date). The First Reconnaissance platoon, attached to Company "A," entered ARLON at 101316. Company "B," minus its second platoon was moving Northeast with the 109th Regimental Combat Team over route MARTELANGE, WARNACH, BAVIGNE, NCTHUM, WILTZ, closing on WEICHERDANGE. The Second Reconnaissance Platoon served as point for the regiment during most of these fast moving days. The Second Platoon of Company "B" moved with 110th Infantry Regiment through BASTOGNE to Northeast. Company "C" moved through CHATILLON and MEIX-le-TIGE toward MESSANCY. On the eleventh further progress was made in Luxembourg, with Company "A" returning to the 109th Infantry Regiment, relieving Company "B," which returned to the 110th Infantry Regiment and moved through CLERVAUX to the North. During the afternoon the 112th RCT, with Co. "C," were attached to the Fifth Armored Division, operating on the right (South) flank of the 28th Infantry Division.

During the afternoon of the 12th guns were being moved across the OUR RIVER into GERMANY, directly facing the vaunted SIEGFRIED LINE. Platoons of Company "B" were in position by 2230. Two platoons of Company "A" were moved into position during the night. These, in company with the division's infantry, were the first troops to enter Germany. One platoon of Company "A" and First Reconnaissance Platoon, commanded by 1st Lt. LAWRENCE MILLER, were moved to vicinity HEINERSCHIED to give protection to the open flank to the South.

Although the SIEGFRIED LINE had been only slightly held when first encountered, during the days to follow its forces were greatly augmented and our troops faced continuing resistance. On the sixth the Second Platoon of Company "A," commanded by 1st Lt. FRED MUHLEMAN, knocked out five enemy Mark V tanks with their towed three-inch guns. During the same day, Company "A" also destroyed one fortified house, 1 anti-tank (88-mm) gun, 1 observation post, and three machine gun emplacements. All were by direct fire. *

From this time until the end of the month the division continued to hold a niche into the SIEGFRIED LINE, but outside of one successful attack made by Major Harry Yeager's Second Battalion of the 110th Infantry Regiment, no large attacks were made. Company "A"'s second platoon occupied positions at HARSPELT with the third platoon at SEVENIG. Company "B" continued in position near BERG and HECHUSHEID. On the 24th the first platoon of Company "A," commanded by Lt. STEVEN ROLLINS, and the two Reconnaissance Platoons were placed under Task Force "X." The Task Force was commanded by Major JOHN W. COOPER, San Antonio, Texas, battalion executive officer, and had the mission of protecting the Division's South flank. Also included in this group were the 28th Reconnaissance Troop and Company "B," 741st Tank Battalion. On the 26th Company "C" returned with the 112th RCT from the Fifth Armored Division area to the 28th Division area.

During the period 17-30 September platoons were at intervals placed in indirect fire positions and fire brought to bear on DASBURG, DALEIDEN, PREISCHEID, and areas across the German border.

During the period 2-4 October 1944, the 28th Division was relieved by elements of the Second and Eighth Infantry Divisions, and the wearers of the Keystone moved North to assembly area vicinity CAMP ELSENBORN, BELGIUM, over route OUDLER, ST VITH, AMHLEVE, BUTGENBACH, ELSENBORN. On the ninth the battalion was ordered to reinforce the 110th Infantry in defending the Division left (North) flank, and guns were employed in that area.

On the 26th of October the battalion moved North to new division area vicinity ROTT, GERMANY, with platoons occupying direct and indirect fire positions. The division was committed on a North-South line running from just South of HURTGEN to just North of LAMMERSDORF. This was the home of the HURTGEN FOREST, scene of some of the most intense warfare known to man. On the second, the division began an attack to the East and Northeast (toward HURTGEN and VOSSENACK), and then attacked South toward KOMMERSCHIEDT and SCHMIDT. Though the attack progressed well at first, and KOMMERSCHIEDT and SCHMIDT were taken without too much opposition, this, in the old saying, "was only the beginning." For, with the loss of SCHMIDT, whole sections of the lower SIEGFRIED LINE were isolated. The "HUN" could not allow this, and soon the 28th was encountering some of Germany's finest troops, given the task of retaking SCHMIDT. The Keystone men, backed also by the 707th Tank Battalion and 893rd TD Battalion, fought hard, but soon four divisions were against them. There was nothing to do but give up SCHMIDT and KOMMERSCHIEDT and hold VOSSENACK RIDGE. That was the order of the day. It was during this fierce struggle that the Germans began calling the Keystones the "Bloody Bucket," and from that time on the 28th was nicknamed the "Bloody Bucket" Division.

VOSSENACK was a small German village, but it will live in military history. It was so situated that three hills looked down on it, like a football stadium, and those hills were held by Germans. Movement was impossible in daytime and the village, with its snow, bodies of dead men and animals, and skeletons of houses, was like a specter of the grave. Eighteen guns of the battalion were in VOSSENACK at one time and those gun crews can testify to the worth of German artillery.

On the nineteenth the division and the battalion were relieved and on the twentieth they moved to take over a quiet sector of the VIII Corps' front in LUXEMBURG. The route was ROTGEN, GERMANY; EUPEN, MALMEDY and ST VITH, BELGIUM; OUDLER and MALSCHEID, LUXEMBOURG.

The history of Luxembourg and the 28th Infantry Division and the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion were again merging. These two units had played an important role in liberating the Grand Duchy - soon they would be fighting a more historic and relentless battle over the quiet countryside.

Company "A" and the first Reconnaissance Platoon supported the 109th Infantry Regiment in the area ERMSDORF, GILSDORF, BETTENDORF, REISDORF, BEAUFORT, AND SAUELBCRN.

Company "B" and the Second Reconnaissance Platoon supported the 110th Infantry Regiment along line HEINERSCHIED-MARNACH-HOSINGEN.

Company "C" had guns on both sides of the OUR RIVER, supporting the 112th Infantry Regiment, its positions extending from WEISWAMPACH to vicinity LUTZKAMPEN.

On the fourth and fifth of December companies were assembled in company assembly areas and an intensive training program was begun. On the sixth Lt. Col. (then Major) Albert W. Jones, Morgantown, West Virginia, assumed command of the battalion.

On the morning of the sixteenth all hell broke loose as Field Marshal GERD VON RUNDSTEDT began his great winter offensive, a bold gamble to capture needed supplies from the Allies and effect a deep salient into the Allied lines. NAMUR, BELGIUM, was one of his objectives, and the men of the 630th contributed greatly in delaying the Jerries long enough for reinforcements to be brought up on the shoulders of the "BULGE."

There was heavy German artillery coming in on the morning of the 16th, and, as the day wore on, reports were received of enemy infantry infiltration around some of the division's infantry companies. On the 17th it became apparent the enemy was attempting something big although no one yet believed he was effecting his greatest push into the wooded and mountainous ARDENNES.

Company "A," commanded by CAPT JOHN F. GRANEY, supporting the 109th Infantry Regiment, was on the South Flank around DIEKIRK and ECTERNACH. The force of the enemy blow compelled the regiment to drop and pivot and after one of those exchanges the men of the 109th had stopped a German Division and the intended thrust toward LUXEMBOURG City and ARLON was over.

Company "B," commanded by CAPT ROBERT C. HUTCHINSON, Florida, was supporting the 110th Infantry in the center, holding a twelve mile front. The company fought well and long but in less than 72 hours its twelve towed guns were "kaput." One platoon was unaccounted for.

Company "C," commanded by 1st Lt. CLARENCE M. BRYANT, Atlanta, Georgia, supported the 112th Infantry and with it fought successful delaying actions to the North and Northwest, being attached to the 106th Infantry Division and XVIII Airborne Corps. Nearly a month was to pass before "Fighting Charlie" would re-join the battalion. Company "C" was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for action during the period 16-24 December 1944.

The First Reconnaissance Platoon, stationed in MARNACH, was encircled by the enemy but continued to hold the vital roadnet until the enemy employed tanks and infantry on the night of 18 December. Later check-up showed four men from the platoon had gotten out of MARNACH with the remainder being carried as MIA (Missing in Action).

The Second Reconnaissance Platoon performed contact missions, acted as protective escort for guns or personnel and worked with no rest for days on end.

The Germans intended to make this gamble good and the 28th and the 630th stood in the center of the weak, drawnout line that opposed them. The Germans pushed them back, but it took time and cost men and equipment. The battalion headquarters and headquarters company held the little hilltop village of KNAPOSCHIED for a while but had to withdraw, and then to find German armored vehicles blocking the road. The personnel later got out on foot. The battalion commander, who had been with the organization less than two weeks, participated in the defense of WILTZ with gun sections of Company "A" and Company "B" until orders were given to evacuate the town,

These were days that tried men's endurance and unit's fighting stamina. The 630th never faltered in either respect. Clerks, cooks, rear echelon personnel - all were given new jobs calling for guts and ability.

On 19 December elements of the battalion joined elements of the 28th Infantry Division West of BASTOGNE, with the mission of holding the road junction near MORHET, BELGIUM. At 210400 the enemy attacked the position and the group was forced to withdraw to LIBRAMONT, where, with the 7th T.D. Group they defended the LIBRAMONT-RECOGNE roadnet. These remnants had no T. D. guns, but they set up a defense with a willing determination. A light assault tank and an infantry howitzer were commandeered for use.

Pages would be required to tell the story of the "Break-through" - the cold, the rain, not knowing whether the Germans or the unit would eat turkey prepared for Christmas. Tasks of valor and heroism could be written, and not just a few - the story of Corporal HOWE, hitch-hiking a three-inch towed gun; or the epic of the First Reconnaissance Platoon, which stayed in MARNACH, surrendered by the enemy, and from which only four survivors returned to the organization (others, prisoners of war, were released by the Allies in their sweep across Germany). There's the much repeated story of personnel walking many days and nights behind enemy lines before they reached American troops; and of men being evacuated to hospitals because of frostbite and damaged feet due to continued exposure to the cold and snow. There are some statistics - not a true picture, but an aid to realizing the scope of the fight. The battalion lost 24 out of 36 towed guns, but destroyed 28 enemy tanks, 2 88mm SP guns, 13 other vehicles and numerous other equipment, as well as several hundred enemy killed.

As the old year turned into the new, the fight was turning again in our favor. The First Army was putting pressure on the North shoulder of the Bulge; the Third Army was kitting hard on the South Shoulder; and the courageous 101st Airborne Division was still holding BASTOGNE.

The battalion was receiving its three-inch guns, and though short of personnel (nearly one-third) on New Year's Day the battalion (minus Company "C" with the 112th Infantry Regiment) was attached to the fresh 17th Airborne Division and again entered the drive just West of BASTOGNE with the 101st Airborne on the right flank and the 87th Infantry Division on the left flank. The Battalion remained with the Division until the eleventh when it was at last pulled out of line and moved to PETITVOIR, BELGIUM, to reorganize. On the 15th Company "C" rejoined the battalion after an absence of nearly a month.

On the eighteenth the battalion moved South to ST DIE, FRANCE, to rejoin the 28th Infantry Division, following the route NEUFCHATEAU, ARLON, LONGWY, METZ, LUNEVILLE, ST DIE.

On the 19th and 20th the battalion took up positions in the snow-covered VOSGES MOUNTAINS, with the battalion CP in ST. MARIE - AUX - MINES and companies in general area LA BONHOMME - LA POUTROIE. The division and the battalion operated under control of the First French Army.

The situation was relatively quiet, although not too pleasant, due to the cold weather and snow, until the second of February when the 109th Infantry and platoons of Companies "B" and "A" entered COLMAR. Soon the COLMAR POCKET was but a memory and the Jerries were on the East bank of the RHINE. For its work in this operation the Mayor of COLMAR gave the battalion authority to wear the Arms of the City of COLMAR.

In commending the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion for its work at COLMAR, Major General F. W. MILBURN, commanding the XXI U. S. Corps, wrote "The 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion was particularly outstanding in these operations. It performed its assigned missions with great enthusiasm. It completed these missions successfully, contributing materially thereby to the great victory achieved by our units. I wish to commend you, the officers and the enlisted men of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion for the superior manner in which they performed during these operations. Their actions were superb, and they reflect the finest traditions of the Armies of the United States."

General Tassigny, commanding the First French Army, under the 28th and the 630th fought at COLMAR, spoke, in an Order of the Day, of "The chivalrous spirit of the 28th US Infantry Division, which, after long hard days of combat, reached the outskirts of COLMAR, and left the honor of entering the city first to the French tanks."

On the 14th of February the battalion moved with the Division over route COLMAR-INGERSHEIM-KAYSERBURG-FRAIZE-ST DIE-LUNEVILLE to assembly area in EUVILLE-VIGNOT, FRANCE, sector. Battalion prepared for future operations and on the twentieth began move to Division Assembly Area vicinity MONTFORT, BELGIUM, following route COMMERCEY, VERDUN, STENAY, BOUILLON, ROCHEFORT, LIEGE.

The "Bloody Bucket" men and the 630th moved into the line on the West bank of the RUHR RIVER, relieving the Second Division in the area just west of SCHLEIDEN, GERMANY. On the seventh of March an attack was made across the river to the East, then South and Southwest. Little resistance was encountered, and movement continued until the Division was ordered to halt near the RHINE.

On the thirteenth the battalion left the First Army and the wearers of the Keystone and again began the trek to Seventh Army.

In a letter of commendation, written to the battalion commander by Major General Norman D. Cota, commanding the 28th, he stated in part "During the period your unit functioned as a part of the 28th Infantry Division the spirit of cooperation has been highly appreciated. It is my desire to commend you on the excellent discipline, training and morale of your unit and also for the courageous attitude displayed by all members of the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion under the many trying circumstances which this division and its attached units have undergone. It is my wish and hope that the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion will continue to 'ROLL ON' as it has in the past."

The battalion traveled through SCHLEIDEN, MONSCHAU, AACHEN, LIEGE, MARCHE, BOUILLON, SEDAN, STENAY, VERDUN, PONT-A-MOUSSOW, CHATEAU-SALINS, SAARBURG, SAVERNE, to assembly area vicinity MOMMENHEIM, FRANCE. All companies placed in indirect fire supporting VI Corps Artillery. The battalion supported the attack as the Seventh Army moved North and the Third Army quickly advanced South to close the SAARLAND-PFALZ - PALITINATE area. On the twenty-first Company "A" established a record by firing 2830 rounds of high explosive shells at the bridge over the RHINE RIVER (knocking it out) and other missions for a grand total of 4180 rounds during the night. This was approximately 350 rounds per gun. For this outstanding work they were commended by the Artillery Commander, Zeme Corps d' ARMEE, (French).

march
The morning of the 23rd again found the battalion on the road as it moved to area vicinity TROIS-FONTAINES, FRANCE, where it was converted to a self-propelled battalion, being given the new tank destroyer, the M-36 with the powerful 90MM gun. Here the Reconnaissance Company again came into being with Captain LEO E. OSBOURNE, ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS, as Commanding Officer.

On the second and third of April the battalion (minus M-36 destroyers) moved North by motors to rejoin the 28th Division and the First Army. Route was VARREBOURG, METZ, THICNVILLE, TRIER, KOBLENZ, ST GOAR crossing the RHINE, and to destination vicinity WESTERBURG, GERMANY. The destroyers were shipped on two trains, but, through error, were sent to BORDEAU on the West Coast of FRANCE. The destroyers rejoined the battalion on the tenth, to find the battalion attached to the recently committed 13th Armored Division, XVIII Airborne Corps.

The big picture was fluid now. The RUHR POCKET was cut off from aid. Elements of all U. S. Armies were rapidly pushing farther into the heart of the Fatherland. The 13th Armored Division was given the task of advancing North on

on the East side of the RUHR POCKET, with its left flank along the RHINE RIVER. The advance was rapid and what had been estimated as 100,000 enemy troops in the pocket turned out to be nearly 375,000. During the few days left higher before the resistance crumbled entirely, the battalion destroyed 6 enemy tanks, two 88mm SP guns, various other vehicles and equipment and captured approximately 1674 prisoners. *

On the eighteenth the battalion was attached to the 97th Infantry Division and from there moved to METTMAN to KUPPERDREN, GERMANY, in the heart of the industrial RUHR, performing temporary occupational duties.

The 22nd found the 630th again on the road as it moved South to WOLFSTEIN to rejoin its old "Bloody Bucket" companions. The days of combat in Europe were over for these veterans of five campaigns.

The battalion occupied the WORMS area for three days and on the 28th relieved the 447th AAA Battalion of control of the ZWEIBRUCKEN (PFALZ), Landkreis (county), situated on the French-German border. The role of the 630th was now that of occupation of conquered Germany. On V-E Day, 8 May 1945, the only battalion Order of the Day was published.

The battalion continued occupation of the border area until the fourth of July when it, supported by the 654 TD Bn, relieved the 110th Infantry Regiment of control of the much sought after SAARLAND. This was a period of leave taking as the 28th Division moved to assembly areas at RHEIMS for redeployment to the United States.

The tenth of July was a memorable date, when the battalion, operating under the XXIII Corps, turned over control of the SAARLAND to the French First Division (Motorized) at high noon.

As his division departed for the redeployment to the United States, and the long association of the 28th and the 630th came to a close, General Cota again commended the battalion for its "superior teamwork, gallantry, resourcefulness and cooperation." In closing he wrote, "I wish to commend the superior leadership, initiative, and gallantry displayed by the officers and men of your battalion. It is, in my opinion, a 'crack' outfit and it is hoped we will again 'ROLL ON' together in the very near future."

End