

HEADQUARTERS
645TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

APO 45, c/o Postmaster,
New York, New York,
31 October 1943.

Subject: Battle Report, 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion
From: 9 September 1943, To: 30 September 1943,
Map Reference: Italy, 1/100,000, Sheets 186 and 198

To : Commanding General, Fifth Army, APO 464, U. S. Army (Thru channels)

1. 09091900 - 09100600

All elements of this battalion disembarked on Red Beach 32 in the vicinity of PAESTUM, ITALY by 1900 and moved into de-waterproofing area to the northeast in the vicinity of the beach. The strength of the battalion had been reduced to 493 enlisted men and 32 officers, prior to embarkation from Bizerte, Tunisia. Vehicle strength had been reduced to 93 vehicles. Battalion was immediately attached to 36th Infantry Division. Given first mission of protecting Division left flank. Battalion went into position astride Highway #18 (Vic. 8609) at 0200.

2. 09100600 - 09110600

Battalion attached to 45th Infantry Division and in turn attached to 179th Infantry at 1200, and given mission of AT defense during the Regiment's advance through PERSANO: Company C in support of 1st and 3rd Battalion, Company A in support of 2nd Battalion, and Company B in regimental reserve.

179th Infantry began move toward PERSANO at 1900. This Battalion was held up in its advance at river ford (880126) until after daylight the next day because of the ford's impassability for M-10's.

3. 09110600 - 09120600

Reconnaissance Company and the Battalion CP moved across ford at 0730 and moved toward PERSANO until stopped in the vicinity of 877134 by enemy fire. Reconnaissance Company was able to get through and around PERSANO to the 179th Infantry sector (1st and 3rd Battalions) while Battalion C.P. was forced to withdraw to vicinity of 875127 on north bank of SELE RIVER. Company B moved into a reserve position in the vicinity of 880142. Company A in firing positions 940143 at 0700.

Enemy artillery and machine gun fire fell on all companies throughout this period. With the battaion being at reduced strength, there were no security or reconnaissance elements with the companies at this time. Battalion C.P. withdrew to vicinity of one mile south of SELE RIVER ford at 1530 hours because of heavy enemy artillery fire falling nearby. After move, C.P. continued to receive intermittent artillery fire.

At 1400, Company C, together with a platoon of medium tanks(753rd Tank Bn) attempted to force way into PERSANO but failed due to 88mm fire, road blocks, blown bridges, machine gun fire, and swampy ground. Losses in this action were seven (7) M-10's (2 destroyed, 5 later recovered) one M2 half track destroyed. Company A moved up to cover enemy tank threat in the vicinity of 962173 at 0900, without being given time for reconnaissance.

PARAGRAPH 3 (CONT'D)

Due to heavy enemy artillery fire at 1200 hours, Company A withdrew to bridge crossing the vicinity of 894153. One platoon moved to cross river at this point, supported by a platoon of medium tanks.

Because of enemy shelling and small arms fire, friendly infantry and attached platoon of medium tanks withdrew to south bank of river. Company A then withdrew losing three M-10's, one by shell fire, two by going into ditches. (One later recovered), two half tracks destroyed, and one motorcycle destroyed. Before Company A withdrew, they destroyed two Mark IV tanks, one Mark VI tank, and one 88mm gun. Entire company withdrew to vicinity 932146, reorganized and took up AT defense positions at 1400 hours. Entire area was shelled from dusk to dawn. No material losses. Two men killed, five men wounded during days actions.

4. 09120600 - 09130600

At 09120600, Commanding General, 45th Infantry Division Artillery ordered an attack on PERSANO be made at 09120700A. A medium tank company of the 753rd Tank Bn., made the attack along the east bank of the CALORE RIVER and was successful in getting through to the 179th Infantry area west of PERSANO. They were followed by two platoons of Company B of this battalion to vicinity of 924194. Third platoon proceeded along edge of tree line west of SELE RIVER as ordered and met strong resistance losing one M-10 before withdrawing to original position.

Company C attached to 157th Infantry at 09121200. Company C moved to vicinity 850140. At 1700, the 179th Infantry then withdrew to fork of CALORE and SELE RIVERS. The Battalion C.P. moved to vicinity 857116. Company A and Company B took up firing positions in the vicinity of CR's 838168 and 840152 respectively, and fired direct fire on enemy OP's.

At 1500, the Commanding General, 45th Infantry Division sent S-1 to mine ford in vicinity of 880126 with some C.P. personnel. Remainder of C.P. group under S-2 prepared to support an infantry company, using light machine guns, along Highway #18, north of the SELE RIVER against expected enemy attack. Infantry Company never materialized and later mission cancelled at 2400.

At 2400, Lt. Col. JOHN W. CASEY, Fifth Army Anti-Tank Officer, assumed command of this battalion.

At 1500A, Reconnaissance Company moved into position to cover above mentioned ford. (S-1 and crew relieved from covering mine field at ford) One man killed during day's action.

5. 09140600 - 09150600

At 0800 hours, Reconnaissance Company encountered enemy tanks at mined ford 880-126. One half track was destroyed. They held ford with help of artillery. A platoon of Company C was ordered to move to support Reconnaissance Company, but was stopped by Commanding General, 45th Infantry Division, before reaching destination and placed in position, north of SELE RIVER., vicinity 857117; another platoon of Company C was ordered to support of Reconnaissance Company and was stopped before reaching destination by Commanding Officer, 157th Infantry Regiment. A 3rd platoon finally reached Reconnaissance Company after need was over. (Reconnaissance Company, while at this position, was under intermittent fire)

At 1430, Company B repulsed a tank attack near stream crossing at 837176 and railroad crossing at 848870, destroyed eight enemy tanks (confirmed) one M-10 was hit, repaired and returned to action in two days.

PARAGRAPH 5 (CONT'D)

Command Post was under shell fire (Target was hit, battery to rear) for two hours in afternoon.

Enemy at this time were elements of 1st PGR, 15th PGR, 79th PGR and 2nd Pz Regiment. Two men were killed and two men wounded during the day's action.

6. 09150600 - 09202030

No tank destroyer action. Tanks reported by artillery and taken under fire by them. Enemy mortar and artillery fire continued to fall on battalion areas. No material losses. Personnel losses to date: DEAD 5 WOUNDED 7. Enemy believed digging in. Liaison established with Division Artillery, 45th Infantry Division as of 09140900A.

Infantry ordered to attack enemy evening of 15th by infiltration (157th Infantry) into PERSANO area.

Situation vague on 17th. Mines and demolitions encountered. Command Post moved to vicinity 833145.

Major EDWARD L. AUSTIN, assumed command of Battalion at 09181400.

Company C moved in position vicinity 898209 at 09191305. Reconnaissance Company reconnoitered roads for passability and mines in division area east of Highway #18, and north of SELB RIVER. One man wounded during this action.

7. 09201030 - 09221030

At 09202210, Battalion C.O. ordered Company B, this unit, to move to vicinity 979280 before daylight of 21st. Company C in position vicinity 965265 at 09202300. Company A in position vicinity 943242 at 09211010; Company B in position vicinity 987282 at 09210855. Battalion forward C.P., with Company C at 965265 at 09211144. Reconnaissance Company reported enemy infantry contacted vicinity 005300 at 09211430. All through this period, Reconnaissance Company worked ahead and to right flank of division reporting road conditions, enemy mines and demolitions. One man wounded during day's action.

8. Battalion Command Post, this unit, moved to vicinity 971264 at 09221305. Company B moved into position vicinity 010310 at 09221700. Company C, 3rd platoon vicinity 025271 at 09221610; Company A in position vicinity 040285 at 09231145 was strafed and bombed at 09231400. 3rd platoon, Company B, expended fifty rounds HE September 23rd as follows: 1st mission, four enemy tanks; 2nd mission, supply route behind tanks, results of both undetermined. Company C captured PW's from 15th Pz Division. Company C moved Company C.P. and 1st platoon to vicinity 055325 at 09231910. Company B, 1st platoon in position at 038327, 2nd platoon at 001316 at 09231740.

9. 09241030 - 09271030

3rd platoon of Company B, this unit, in position vicinity 023375; Reconnaissance Company C.P. at 075426; Company in position vicinity 040420 at 09252010. Company B OP at 000476. Company C in vicinity 07435 at 09252000. Reconnaissance Company lost one half track by mine in the vicinity of 098492 at 09261200.

10. 09271030 - 10011030

Reconnaissance Company working north to ANDRETTA to establish OP to observe Highway 91. Company A in position vicinity 07550 at 09280245. Battalion C.P. located vicinity of 065508; Company B in position vicinity of south of TORRELLA at 09300856. Company C in position vicinity of 008623. Battalion Command Post moved to vicinity 972667 on 09302300.

11. After the PERSANO area was taken, the Battalion continued it's mission of Division AT defense and while the 45th Division moved through EBOLI, OLIVETO, QUADRIETTA, CALABRITTO, TEORA, LEONI, S.ANGELO de LOMBARDI, and GUARDIA LOMBARDI, executed it's mission by following the infantry closely through the OLIVETO, CALABRITTO, TEORA pass and at the same time covering the Division right flank in vicinity of CONTURSIO. When the Division emerged from the pass and started NW through LEONI, S.ANGELO de LOMBARDI, GUARDIA LOMBARDI, this battalion displaced it's units in order to closely support the infantry and also protect the Division right flank to the northeast. Reconnaissance Company continually reconnoitered to the north and northeast to maintain contact with the British on the Division right flank. They also swept roads for mines and sent in reports of passability of roads, blown bridges, bypasses, etc. Four personnel replacements received 27 September 1943.

EDWARD L. AUSTIN
Major, F. A.,
Commanding