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1-31 May-44

HEADQUARTERS  
701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION  
APO 464, c/o Postmaster, New York, N.Y.

1 June 1944

SUBJECT: Operations Report

TO : Adjutant General, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C. (thru channels)

1. In compliance with the requirements of paragraph 10, AR 345-105, dated March 10, 1943, the following operations report of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion covering the period, 1 May 1944 to 31 May 1944, is herewith submitted.

2. The operations covered in this report are statements from the Unit Journal and the Battalion Dairy, and supporting evidence for said statements is attached.

3. Previous operations report submitted and including 30 April 1944.

For the Commanding Officer:

JESSE B. WRAY  
Capt., 701st T.D. Bn.  
Adjutant.

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OPERATIONS OF THE 701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

Period - 1 May - 31 May 1944

Locations of 701st T.D. Bn. beginning of period:

Map - Italy, 1/50,000  
Sheets 158 I, II, III, IV  
GSGS 4229

Bn CP - 867227

Recn Co - 867224

"A" Co - 991247 (atcd to 691 TD in support of 133 RCT) - guns in posn as follows:

A-1 - 008288; 011281; 006281; 001281

A-2 - 005293; 005293; 004285; 004282

A-3 - 032273; 031272; 024282; 022277

"B" Co - 869252; B-1 861249 (6 guns); B-2 862253 (6 guns)

"C" Co - 860247; C-1 864247 (6 guns); C-2 862245 (6 guns)

Bn Trains - 875218. Bn Medical Detachment - 875218

Recn CP's - 851290; 876267 and 918295

The period from May 1 to May 3rd was generally without incident.

"C" companies continued in the role of supporting artillery with Recon.

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Reconnaissance company manning its three OP's. "A" company remained in static anti-tank positions in the 34th Div. sector. They received the usual amount of shelling but no casualties.

Our tubes were changed by Ordnance. "B" company received first priority. Guns were sent a few at a time so that there is always a six gun battery in firing position.

Reconnaissance company continued school on radio maintenance.

Plans for relief of "A" company by "B" company in the 34th Inf. Div. sector were put into effect May 4th. "B" company officers established liaison with "A" company to facilitate relief and conducted reconnaissance in the area, without incident. "B" companies' guns have all been retubed. "C" company to get their guns retubed next.

"A" company returned to artillery positions night of 5-6 May, movement began at 2145 hrs. Relief was by platoon. Upon completion "A" company returned to Battalion control and occupied artillery positions vacated by "B" company. "B" company attached to 601 TD Bn. upon closing in anti-tank positions. Relief was completed with incident. None.

On May 5th Major Doran started a school for platoon commanders in forward observation. Everyone took great interest because, while learning the finer points of Forward Observation, they were also shooting Krauts.

From May 7th to May 12th the gun companies worked with the First Armored Division on Tank-Infantry-Tank Destroyer problems in preparation for future operations. Recon Co. reconnoitered routes to assembly areas in the La Ferrier area for future operations. Pioneer Platoon also worked

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with 1st AD sweeping areas for mines. During this time FO school, 100 hrs. checks on MLO's and maintenance of vehicles continued. The usual number of TOT's were fired. Generally, everyone was devoting all available time for the future operation. "B" company was relieved from anti-tank role in the 34th Inf. Div. sector the night of 11-12 May without incident. It was returned to Battalion control at 0315 hrs. in the Padiglione Sector.

May 12th "A" company fired on the anti-tank West Coast Range. "B" company occupied artillery positions vacated by "C" company which moved to assembly area vicinity 977195 in preparation for the drive out of the beachhead.

May 13th - Reconnaissance by "B" company for indirect fire positions and also by transportation section for routes of supply for coming operations. "C" company used terrain plot at 1st AD headquarters to study terrain to be fought over.

May 14th - "C" company prepared forward positions in conjunction with coming operations. Transportation platoon began laying down ammo in "B" company's reconnoitered positions in vicinity of Le Ferrier.

May 15 - Work continued on forward positions by "C" company. "A" company fired on the West Coast Anti-Tank Range. Two new MLO's drawn to be used as command vehicles in coming operation. Usual TOT's and maintenance continued.

May 16 - Work on forward positions. Continued maintenance check of all vehicles. All MLO's to duty and in excellent shape. Wire laid to units from proposed Bn. CP for coming operation. Usual TOT's fired.

May 17 - Plans "Buffalo" and "Grasshopper" were studied by the

the Battalion and preparations made to carry out either one as the case might be. Maintenance check continued on vehicles.

May 18 - Road reconnaissance from Bn assembly area at Le Ferrier made. Preparations made for plan "Buffalo".

May 19 - Lt. Edson, in conjunction with 10th Engrs. made bridge ren. Tank-Inf.-TD exercise with one platoon of "B" company held in 1st AD training area. Maintenance of all vehicles continued.

May 20 - "B" company alerted for movement on order of 1st AD. Preparation for plan "Buffalo" continued.

During the night of May 21-22, "B" company moved to indirect fire positions in vicinity 942294 without incident. Bn. Hq., stripped down, moved to new CP located at 971271. Ren. made morning of May 23 to area in vicinity of Bn. CP, also "B" Co., 636th which was attached for the operation "Buffalo".

During the hours of darkness "A" and "C" companies moved to prepared positions. "C" company in vicinity 909303 with CC "B", 1st AD, and "A" company to vicinity 9031 with CC "A", 1st AD. May 23 the attack jumped off. During the attack the first day "C" company had eight TD's knocked out by mines but even with that KO'd 2 enemy tanks. "A" company had a field day by knocking out 11 tanks and one 88. The platoon of "B" Company that was attached to "C" company accounted for a "flamer". "B" company fired artillery preparation and supporting fires with excellent results.

Crews of knocked out TD's reported back to trains to pick up their new M10's and went straight back to the fight. So ended the first day of our all out attack with Rome and beyond as the objective. The Comps took all their objectives the first day; everything went according to plan although

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resistance was plenty stiff.

The attack continued at dawn May 24th; all gun companies detached. Rcn. Co. manned OP at 936294 covering flank of the attack. Reported enemy counter-attack in 45th Div. sector at 2140. SP's, MG's, and Inf. was used.

"C" company's disabled M10's were almost all replaced by morning of 24th May. The spares of TD's in Corps are exhausted. Attack progressed with resistance slackening. "C" company took a few prisoners also fired a round into a dugout erasing 10 Germans. No tanks reported knocked out today. So far the companies have claimed 12 tanks, one "88" towed, 2 SP's, 2 47's, and 1 Ferdinand damaged. Morale was never higher. Recovery of M10's continued.

During the night of 24-25 May a counterattack on the 130th Inf. (our left flank) was repulsed with no penetrations.

On May 25th the Beachhead is no longer. The 91st Rcn. Squadron and the 30th Engrs. met along coast west of Littoria. Lt. Loveless of "A" company wounded today - seriously; second time on the beachhead for him. The CP is moved forward as the attack progresses beyond the railroad to the left of Cisternia. "C" company reports getting a "probable" Lk. VI. Nothing else reported. Our forward elements were at 902302; 903303; 907307; 973356; 980308 in the 45th Div. sector. In the 1st AD sector the 6th Infantry secured Red Line (See Overlay inclosed). Retrieving of M10's continues. Maintenance is having a tough job on this operation.

May 26 - The companies have the following TD's for duty - "A" Co. - 12; "B" Co. - 12; "C" Co. - 13. 4 TD's in maintenance repairable; 3 salvaged.

The attack continued toward Velettri with resistance light. Col. Howse with his task force reported in Artena.

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"C" company knocked out battery of dual purpose 88's. Caught them while the men were working on their guns; also got 2 tanks and 2 vehicles.

Battalion alerted to move to assembly area in vicinity 970275. Back to our old CP. Battalion will perform maintenance for at least 24 hours.

May 27 - Orders are received that companies are still attached to same Combat Commands. Maintenance of all vehicles and radios. Shower trucks and general clean up.

List of equipment knocked out by companies from 22 to 26 May inclusive. Some of it hadn't been reported before - everyone too busy working over the enemy to worry about how much damage we had done:

"B" Co. - 2 Mk. VI's, 1 tank towing a gun, 1 AT gun & 4 Mk. IV's.

"C" Co. - 1 Mk. IV; 1 Mk. VI, 1 MG; 2 vehs., 8 A/T guns; 5 arty. pieces (220 Hows.)

"A" Co. - 12 Tanks; 3 SP's; 3 A/T guns.

Received information that there would be no move tonight except in emergency.

May 28 - Maintenance continues today. Bn. CO reported to General Harmon to discuss reconnaissance made during morning. Attack planned for morning 29 May. Routes of approach and Field Order to be out as soon after 1800 hrs. as possible. It is understood that the 45th Division is to follow the 1st AD in trucks.

39 M10's for duty. Bn. maintenance has done a fine job.

"A" company in assembly area in vicinity 935300.

May 29 - The Bn., less "A" and "C" companies, detached from Division Reserve and attached to CC "A" with mission of maintaining contact with the 34th and 45th Division and furnishing A/T protection for the right flank of

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CC "A".

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"C" company reports armor has crossed line Wolf and is meeting little resistance.

The Bn. CP moved to 913375 without incident.

1 MIO hit by enemy shellfire - 5 enlisted men wounded.

May 30 - Attack progressing satisfactorily. "C" company reports that they are 300 yards past phase line Oscar. "B" company reports that they are with the right people and that everything is going OK.

Major Redding, Battalion Cmdr., was injured in an automobile accident and evacuated. Major Doran assumed command.

May 31 - The attack continued. Resistance was pretty stiff. Jerry was using more artillery and anti-tank fire than usual. The companies said it looked like our stuff coming in instead of German.

1st AD is going to reshuffle troops tonight - some that should be in CC "A" sector are in CC "B" and vice versa. Tanks will initially be out in front of infantry but will pull back after infantry has dug in, altho some will be left well forward in direct support of the Infantry. CC of CC "A" asked if we would be able to stay where we were without extra help; also to submit request for defensive fires and give accurate location of our elements. All this was done. There was no counterattack during the night.

The period ended with companies detached and in position:

(Bn - "A" & "C" Co's.) reinf. by Rcn Co. 1st AR - Attached to CC "A"

Bn. CP - 880379

"B" Co. - 873386. B1 - 866404; B2 - 873392; B3 - 872403

Rcn Co. - 872383. Fwd elements - 861389.

OP - 868389. Rcn 1st AR - 872383. Fwd elements - 868403 and 861403.

"C" company attached to CC "B"

"C" Co. - 859401. C1 - 857402; C2 - 854403; C3 - 857402

"A" company attached to CC "A"

"A" Co. - 913373; A1 - 873403; A2 - 913373; A3 - 913373

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**ANNEX:**

**Ammunition expended during period:**

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| HE - - -    | 11187      |
| Time - - -  | 143        |
| Smoke - - - | 411        |
| APC - - -   | <u>857</u> |
| Total       | 12598      |

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1 June 1944

## LESSONS LEARNED IN COMBAT

### Gun Companies:

1. In the recent operations it was quickly learned that a 13th LHO proved of great value to the company commander for the close command of his platoons which would have been impossible without the use of a command vehicle containing the same degree of mobility and fire power.
2. There were conflicting views as to whether the liaison officer should be sent to Combat Command or the Battalion with which the company is working when a TD company is attached to other units. However, it has generally proved to be more effective when the company liaison officer was placed with the Combat Command.
3. High ranking officers of supported units have often tried to use TD's as tanks. However, a destroyer cannot be used as a tank; we cannot fire while moving, and we do not have the machine guns and maneuverability of tanks. The TD's should employ their own methods of destroying targets even when located by some tank officer. One excellent opportunity was lost because a company commander of a tank unit told one section when to fire and when not to fire. The TD's, themselves, should know better just when and at what to fire than other units.
4. The platoon should always be employed as a unit. One gun, by itself, is not effective protection for tanks. Always use two guns or more together so that they have mutual support.
5. TD's can support M-4 and M-5 tanks at supporting distance usually between assault and reserve companies. You cannot support anyone from 400 or more yards back in the usual terrain encountered in Italy. Neither can it be done right in among the supported units, for then you are neutralized by the same fire. A supporting unit should never allow itself to be brought under the same fire as the unit supported. Enough room must be kept for sufficient maneuvering and still offer efficient support.
6. Tanks will sometimes storm ahead and seemingly forget about their supporting TD's. However, this need not occasion any worry among the TD's; the tanks will always be glad to send back a guide as soon as the TD's are needed.
7. Supported units often do not disseminate sufficient information of friendly troops and locations. On more than one occasion our TD's drew friendly artillery fire. One conclusion drawn was that the headquarters of the supported unit must advise the artillery of our locations, as they had the responsibility of placing the TD's in that location.
8. The TD 3" gun is fine and drew many commendations from infantry, tanks, and other supported units for its power and speed, but, with a TD more lightly armored than a tank, it is highly vulnerable to anti-tank fire. When moving against anti-tank guns across an open field, enough infantry

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should be provided to move ahead and overcome such obstacles upon call. The point cannot be overemphasized that a Tank Destroyer gun is even more vulnerable than a tank itself when encountering enemy anti-tank guns.

9. The 3" gun, while lacking the velocity of one or two German weapons, is very capable in dealing with these so-called "superior" weapons of the Germans. This is due to a large part to good construction of the vehicle, fast operation of the gun, aggressive crews, and excellent ammunition. Past experience has taught us not to rely on the fire of one gun when the massed fire of many guns can be concentrated on targets such as heavy armor and SP guns. Since the principle of massed fire was adopted in the battalion, results have shown a marked improvement.

10. While the M10's were not quite fast enough to keep up with the light tanks, they gave a surprisingly good performance in operating, cross-country and in difficult terrain. An expert driver is of prime importance in getting where you want to go. In proper condition, an M10 could go anywhere a light tank could except in extremely narrow defiles. TD's should attempt to outmaneuver enemy heavy armor, to try for side shots or where armor is thinner whenever possible. Teamwork by a gun section or larger units is necessary to derive the maximum benefits from the employment of TD's against enemy heavy armor. A single TD is almost helpless when sent alone against German heavy armor such as the "Ferdinand."

11. Either infantry security should be provided or the TD's should pull back and consolidate with the tanks at night for protection against enemy infantry.

12. A power traverse would be a great asset for the M10. In a fast moving situation, it is of utmost importance to get on a target to the flank, and even rear, rapidly and accurately. Driver's hatch should be hinged so turret may rotate with the hatch open.

13. Vision slits are needed in the M10 turrets. The battalion lost a number of men during the past operations because of snipers. When operating with tanks, enemy infantry is often by-passed, yet the only way the platoon or section leader can observe is by raising his head out of the turret.

14. A Sponson machine gun is badly needed in the M10 to emphasize a repeat in "Lessons Learned". When operating with tanks where the M10's are well out in front of our own infantry, a Sponson or Lap gun is an absolute necessity.

15. Home light sets are one of the biggest fuel savers the army has, but M10's are not equipped with them. Instead we must run two engines about 35% of the time just to keep the batteries charged so that the radios might be operated. In a static defensive position, the waste of fuel is practically 100% for the sole purpose of keeping the batteries charged.

16. Gunners should be instructed not to shoot at the middle of the target but always at the base. When shooting down hill, shoot less than the judged distance if you are quite some distance above the target.

17. Disabled destroyers should not be towed over great distances by T-2's to Battalion Maintenance; rather, they should be placed on retrievers and transported back. Too much time was lost by T-2 towing disabled vehicles back.

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18. The firing celenoid circuit box should be placed in a well in the interior of the fighting compartment. It seems to always be in the way. Also, it is much safer for the crews to sleep in their destroyers when the m10's are in a "hot" position. If the firing celenoid were in the compartment, four men could sleep across the floor of the vehicle quite comfortably.

19. Three trucks attached to each company should improve the supply system. Supplies should go along with company headquarters and should include sufficient fuel for 200 miles of operation. However, this would depend more or less on the situation.

20. It is an old maxim of war that in any case where a unit is attached to a larger unit, the latter supplies all common items. In such tactical situations as those just concluded, it is imperative that this principle be mandatory for all units so attached. This has been found the most pragmatic means of supply, and only one unit to which we were attached even suggested such a plan. The larger units should furnish guides for such articles as fuel and ammunition when the company is broken down to platoons or less. A still better plan is to carry a limited bulk supply in the train of the supported unit.

21. Communications sergeants should have a blacked out vehicle, preferably an L-20 or an M-3 H/T to carry out radio maintenance at night in forward positions. If possible, our c10 radios should all have the tankers' crystal. Communication to the platoon leader only is not of sufficient benefit as such. Since the battalion crystal isn't used, why not take it out and substitute the tankers' (if available). A L-20 radio is the standard for all platoon leaders' M10's. If a 13th M10 is adopted as a command destroyer, it should have one 608 radio, one 610, and one 510 radio.

Reconnaissance Company:

1. The Battalion Commander of a Tank Destroyer battalion does not have sufficient use for a Recon. company in an armored attack to justify its use only for that battalion. In fluid warfare, some six officers and 120 enlisted men are often wasted because of lack of a suitable mission.

2. The present organizational setup of the Recon. Co. does not provide for its effective use in forward Recon. This applies especially to Tank Destroyer battalions assigned to Armored Divisions. In this past operation, the Recon. company of this Battalion was assigned the mission of forward and flank reconnaissance for a tank-infantry combat command in the attack. The predominance of vehicles in the company are 1/4 ton trucks and these 1/4 ton vehicles preceded the actual tank attack by some 1000 to 1500 yards. Due to the knowledge by the reconnaissance personnel of their extreme vulnerability, it was impossible for them to assume the aggressive spirit so necessary in successful reconnaissance work.

3. Unlike Africa where the 1/4 ton truck provided the best Recon. vehicle, the same vehicle is no longer so valuable in Italy. This is due both to the nature of the terrain and to the nature of the combat involved. The M8 armored car is a satisfactory vehicle for Recon.

4. If the Recon. Company is to be detached from the Battalion for reconnaissance missions for the Division or combat commands, the organization of the Recon. platoon must be so changed as to provide a sufficient weapon in that platoon to accomplish the mission. A platoon of 5 M8 armored cars or 3 M8's and 2 M20's would be a satisfactory organization.

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5. An assault gun from the combat command or Division should be attached to the Rcn. company if it is to precede tanks in the attack.

Headquarters:

It is recommended that Battalion Headquarters be authorized two MLO's to relay more and better information to higher headquarters and to provide excellent control over the guns of all companies.

Trains:

1. During the last operation it was found to be very difficult if not impossible to supply all the line companies every day while the companies were detached from the battalion and operating on different axes of supply and advance.

2. Companies must cooperate with Trains to the fullest extent in furnishing guides and advising their locations.

3. Selection of Trains location should be flexible and far enough forward to maintain good communications with Battalion Headquarters.

Battalion Maintenance:

1. It is important that maintenance knows the exact location of the companies and that the companies are aware of the precise location of maintenance. Maps should be distributed to the Maintenance crews for the location of road nets and the men should be constantly briefed on the enemy situation.

2. When a TD is disabled, its exact location must be reported. Maintenance can then quickly find it and either repair or retrieve.

3. During a fast moving operation such as the last action, the Division should have a Maintenance Radio Net, and this applies particularly to an Armored Division. It would facilitate our locating units of the Maintenance Battalion and helps them to locate supporting units. When emergency parts are needed, they can be secured more rapidly. Locations of abandoned or destroyed equipment can also be given quickly.

4. The equipment supplied by the Army for the handling and towing of tanks and TD's are not heavy enough. Tow clevis, pistles, rings, and chains are, in general, too light. Tow bars are not strong enough to tow TD's over rough country without failing. The Germans have a very good heavy constructed tow bar which is made of solid steel. Every effort should be made to improve our equipment. Correct information as to company needs would speed up all maintenance and recovery.

Communications Officer:

1. The present method of changing crystals in the 510 radios of the platoon leaders' MLO's as they change assignment from tank company to tank company is too slow. Radio maintenance is unable to change the crystals rapidly enough to keep the platoon leader in radio contact with the tank company. The only remedy for this is to assign two TD cooperative channels for the tanks to have in all their 508's. The TD's could then operate on one or the other of their 510's. To install 508's in the destroyers would take up too much room in the present MLO. If the future tank destroyer has a place for a 608 or 508 in the turret, the problem could be solved much more satisfactorily.

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