

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 702ND TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

The 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated on 15 December 1941 at Fort Benning, Georgia, seven days after the entry of the United States into World War II. The nucleus, or cadre, for the Battalion was furnished by the various component units of the famous Second Armored Division. The Battalion actually sprang to life when LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROBERT O. WRIGHT read the rosters of the companies on a bleak day, 5 January 1942 and the men were marched to the tent area that was to first house this lusty progeny of the "Hell on Wheels" Division.

Early in its career the "Seven O Deuce" gained a widespread reputation for many things, and managed to remain abreast of the Division in both "Spit and Polish" and fisticuff hardihood. A four day maneuver with the Second Armored Division in April in which the Battalion and a mythical division thoroughly contained and confused the "enemy" convinced the personnel that they were worthy of much notice. It was here that GENERAL CRITTENBERGER, then commanding the Second Armored Division, wrathfully asked CAPTAIN NAWROCKY of Company "A" "Just how many guns have you got in this Battalion?" GENERAL CRITTENBERGER had been "killed" three times that day.

In August 1942 the Battalion operated with the Second Armored Division in the North Carolina maneuvers under VI Corps. Following these dusty ramblings the unit remained at Mott Lake, Fort Bragg, Reservation, preparing for overseas service. Bidding the Division farewell the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, attached to the Second Army, on 8 November 1942 moved into Fort Bragg where this training was continued. Several alerts for overseas movement during this period caused consternation among many of the junior officers whom cupid had tapped, but the alerts were cancelled.

On the 11 January 1943 the unit moved to Camp Hood, Texas and was assigned to the Tank Destroyer Center for advanced training. Extensive firing exercises assisted in producing the superior gunnery that later distinguished the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion in battle. On 15 April 1943, LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROBERT O. WRIGHT was transferred to command the 20th Tank Destroyer Group and LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN A. BEALL took command of the battalion.

Camp Gruber, Oklahoma became the next station for the 702nd on 2 May 1943 where they operated with the 88th Infantry Division and later the 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division. In July and August the Battalion participated in the Third Army Maneuvers in Louisiana. Shortly after return to Camp Gruber the Battalion was alerted for overseas movement and issued the new T-70 Tank Destroyer with the 76MM gun, in exchange for the M-3, 75MM gun. This necessitated a short stay at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas from 3 December to 18 December 1943 for firing where personnel were convinced the unit was preparing for arctic service.

The Battalion arrived at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts on 6 January 1944 and patiently waited for orders. On 16 January 1944 the unit was sent to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, where the unit impatiently waited for orders.

The Battalion boarded the ship Ille de France at Halifax, Nova Scotia on 15 February 1944, and departed for England. Heavy weather caused many a swaggering Tank Destroyer man, proud displayer of the new trench knife, to give all for his country, and some even declared they'd never return until the Atlantic was bridged.

(Brief History of 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Cont'd)

Landing in Garock, Scotland on 25 February 1944 the officers and "other Ranks" (The Ille de France was operated by British personnel) whistled at the bonny Scotch lasses and received doughnuts from New York raised Red Cross Girls. Amazed at the speed and power of the tiny English trains and happily eating their first K rations, the Battalion moved into Pockington Park, England for training with the M-10 Destroyer. Coventry and Birmingham were "off duty" necessities during this period.

Firing on Kimmeridge Range in April afforded the Battalion their first opportunity to fire the 3" gun. Imber Range in the same month completed the training in gunnery, indirect fire. The Battalion then rejoined its parent unit, the second Armored Division, at Tidworth Barracks, England.

On 10 June 1944 the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion left the Old Docks at South Hampton, England in three LST's and landed on Omaha Beach on the 11 June. All personnel alert to surge ashore in six feet of water and with guns blazing were agreeably suprised to roll onto the beach almost dry and to find MP's directing traffic in comparative quiet.

Greeted with rumors of women snipers and mined fields, personnel moved gingerly and with ready weapons through the transit area. A blackout march to the vicinity of La Mine, France for bivouac seemed interminable and all were convinced that this was "IT". Penetrating Odors aroused the suspicions that dead krauts abounded in the area. Daylight revealed an ancient bull in the center of the Battalion CP as the offender.

The Battalion formed an anti-tank screen south of Balleroy, France on the 17 June 1944 as a reserve line in event of strong attack on the American beachhead. It was here the unit received its first baptism of fire. A robot bomb and an occasional shelling proved great stimulators in fox hole digging.

On 2 July 1944 the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion relieved British units at Caumont and went into the line in the vicinity of Livry, France, assisted by the 41st Armored Infantry. Shortly after occupancy the Battalion discovered why the British called the "Bloody Bois" bloody. It was here also that the unit made the acquaintance of the "Screaming Meemies". On 17 July the Battalion was relieved on the line by British troops and moved to the vicinity of La Mine, France to prepare for the coming breakthrough.

After the tremendous bombing on the German lines the Battalion moved with the Division through the gap, assisting the tanks and Infantryman in completing the breakthrough. Companies "A" and "B" under Combat Command "A" engaged in heavy fighting in the vicinity of St. Gilles, Canisy and Le Mesnil-Herman. Company "C" under Combat Command "B", followed through the gap and at Canisy turned west with the tanks to push across the Cherbourg Peninsula. MAJOR HARRY H. HART served as staff command for Company "C". CAPTAIN ROBERT B. LYONS was Company Commander. It was here that Sergeant Oxenrider and his Tank Destroyer crew won Silver Stars for assisting in the total destruction of a large German column which had unknowingly moved into our lines. Company "C" under control of CC"B" participated in the heavy fighting in the vicinity of Notre Dame de Genilly. The subsequent attacks effectively cut off the balance of German forces from withdrawal from the North.

Companies "A" and "B", under CC"A" control took part in the attack on Moyon where LIEUTENANT HERBERT K. STEVENS platoon from Company "B" distinguished itself by action on the crossroads above Villenboudon and also at Moyon.

(Brief History of 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Cont'd)

On 1 August 1944 the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion less Company "C" took part in the attack on Tessy Sur Vire, in which the Battalion did some of the hardest fighting in their career. In the short day and a half fight the two gun companies destroyed seven Mark V's, Nine Mark VI's, and captured sixty four prisoners.

The Battalion under the Combat Commands was then committed to the East pushing South to secure Vire and St. Sever Calvados and then to march to the vicinity of Barenton, France. Companies "A" and "C" assisted in the smashing of the heavy counter-attacks in the Mortain-Barenton area.

The Battalion with the Combat Commands of the Division was then moved South and East to assist in the encirclement of German troops in the Falaise pocket and eventually to cut off German withdrawal across the Seine River. In this push the Battalion assisted in the taking Domfront, La Verneuil, Bereuil, Le Neubourg, and Elbeuf. Company "A" under command of CAPTAIN GABRIEL J. MAURO, was the Tank Destroyer Company to enter Elbeuf and received written verification of contact with the first Canadian troops from the North.

The Battalion crossed the Seine River near Mantes Cassicourt with the Division and raced for the Somme River which they crossed 2 September 1944. "One More River To Cross", became the popular song throughout the unit; for personnel not able to visualize the days to come between the insignificant Wurm and Roer streams.

On 5 September 1944 the Battalion, assisting the Division, crossed the frontier into Belgium. After regrouping in the vicinity of La Glanerie, Belgium, the battalion crossed the Albert Canal and through the bridgehead established by the 30th Infantry Division. Company "A" with CC"A", received the dubious honor of capturing some sixty German soldiers from a dumb battalion.

Immediately on crossing the Albert Canal and Mass River at Maastricht the Battalion with the Combat Commands, smashed through to a line just north of Sittard and Gangelst and crossed the German border. The letterhead "Somewhere in Germany" after the 18 September 1944 inspired large quantities of mail to the states. The numerous white flags displayed from German homes made chests swell and led to a fancy that the war was about over.

On 30 September the Battalion was grouped near Versilienbasch, Holland to reorganize and prepare for future fighting. During this period the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the Second Armored Division was placed in the newly constituted Ninth U. S. Army.

On 4 October 1944, Company "B", the first element of the Tank Destroyers to again cross the German border, crossed the Wurm River at Palenberg, to assist elements of Combat Command "B" in the attack on the Siegfried Line. In support of the tanks Company "B", under command of CAPTAIN NAWROCKY, pushed out and assisted in the taking of Ubach, Frelenberg, Waurichen and Beggendorf. Heavy losses in personnel and vehicles were suffered in this engagement.

Company "A", under command of CAPTAIN BERNARD J. MORRIS, with Combat Command "A", pushed through to the South of Combat Command "B" to assist in the securing of Basweiler and Oidtweiler. Company "C" under command of CAPTAIN ROBERT B. LYONS, with the Division Reserve assisted in securing Alsdorf. The heaviest enemy artillery concentration yet encountered was in this area and the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion lost a number of guns in the assault. In the course of this operation the 3" guns of the unit accounted for many of the pillboxes neutralized and destroyed, which composed the Siegfried Line in this area.

(Brief History of 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Cont'd)

The Division, assisted at times by Infantry attachments from new Divisions, held the front line secured, until the offensive was again resumed in late November. Companies "A" and "B" were interspersed along the front with the tanks of the 66th and 67th to serve as anti-tank defense. Frequent artillery concentrations from both forces kept this period enlivened. In the latter part of November the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion began the exchange of the M-10 with the 3" gun for the new M-36, 90MM Tank Destroyer. During this period of transition the three line companies were called upon to support the tank attacks of the two Combat Commands toward the Roer River. Company "B" under Combat Command "B" bore the brunt of the fight in the 702nd, during the stubbornly fought armor fight for Immendorf, Loverich, Floverich, Puffendorf, Apweiler, and Gereonsweiler, armed partially with 90MM guns and partially with the 3". Company "B" was called on to attack the heavily armored and heavily gunned German tanks. Their performance was highly credible and in no small way attributed to the success of the American tanks. Great losses were sustained and many "old timers", both officers and men died on the short but bitterly contested drive toward the Roer River.

Companies "A" and "C" drove East out of Puffendorf with Combat Command "A", overcoming difficult, heavily defended anti-tank ditches and taking the towns of Friealdenhoven, Merzenhausen, Ederen and Barmen to the edge of the Roer River. CAPTAIN ROBERT B. LYONS was wounded at Friealdenhoven and CAPTAIN WOLFGANG LEDERER took command of Company "C" for the final surge to the river on 28 November 1944. In the ten miles from Basweiler to the Roer River the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion suffered the loss of 10 guns, 13 Officers and 105 Enlisted men. Payment was extracted in the destruction of 26 German tanks, including several Royal Mark VI's.

Following this action the Battalion was utilized along the defensive line, being rotated to allow for maintenance and training. The Battalion CP was located in Alsdorf, Germany, with the bulk of the unit in reserve.

On 22 December 1944 the Battalion made the 100 mile march with the Division to the Ardennes to meet the German Counter offensive in that area. Company "A", in support of Combat Command "A", was employed out of Ciney; Company "C" in support of Combat Command "B" out of Celles, stopped the advance of the westernmost prong of the German advance. In this action the 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion with the Second Armored Division, assisted in crushing the 2nd Panzer Division, consisting of hundreds of vehicles and tanks, destroyed as the battalion moving with the tanks pushed the Germans back to Rochefort. Extreme cold caused great personal discomfort and suffering but the unit could be justifiably proud of the staunch fighting ability of the command in spite of the rigorous opposition encountered. The radio message often used by the Division, "Send up the Tare Dogs" held a highly significant meaning to the crews of the Destroyers.

On 2 January 1945 the Battalion, under control of the two Combat Commands, slipped and slid on their steel tracks over the icy roads to the Grandmenil where the Division attacked toward Houffalize. In over two weeks of hard fighting in the snow and cold over difficult, wooded country, after battling at Odeigne, Lamer-menil, Dochamps and Samree, the Tank Destroyers over watched with the tanks the entry of patrols of the Division into Houffalize where contact with the Third Army sealed off the Western half of the bulge.

The Battalion was then assembled in Lince, Belgium where an intensive recreation and rehabilitation program was undertaken. Early in February the Battalion moved with the Division to Epen, Holland in the Gulpen-Aachen area. There extensive maintenance and preparations for the new offensive soon to take place were completed.

(Brief History of 702nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Cont'd)

On 7 February 1945 the Battalion was loaned to the XIX Corps and moved to Aldenhoven, Germany to assist in the artillery preparation for the assault over the Roer River. As the 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions began their assault over the Roer River at Julich, Germany, the Battalion assisted by direct and indirect fire from their 90MM guns, firing a total of 9,000 rounds during the assault.

On 28 February 1945, the Battalion rejoined the Division and crossed the Roer River. Company "A" was placed under Combat Command "A"; Company "B" in Division Reserve, and Company "C" under Combat Command "B". On 1 March 1945 the Second Armored Division attacked out of the bridgehead to the northeast with CC"B" on the right and CC"A" on the left. The Battalion pushed forward vigorously with the tanks assisting in the capture of Vierwinden and Grefrath. Resistance stiffened during the early morning of 1 March and a strong enemy counterattack threatening the Division rear was met by guns of Companies "A" and "B". The attack continued over the Nord Canal with great success. Strong counterattacks against CC"R" at Schiefbahn were met by Company "B", who in support of the tanks soon destroyed or drove off the attacking forces. On 3 March 1945 patrols from CC"B" had reached the Rhine at one point and the Combat Command was ordered to attack and secure the Adolph Hitler Bridge at Verdingen. Company "C" under command of CAPTAIN FITZPATRICK assisted in this drive, while Companies "A" and "B" with CC"G" and CC"R" drove North through Krefeld. Enemy Infantry armed with bazookas, panzerfausts and supported by heavy artillery and AF fire resisted this advance stubbornly. Krefeld and Verdingen were taken but the bridge was blown. Company "B" took up positions along the river in the vicinity of the blown bridge with orders to fire on any movement observed on the East Bank.

By the middle of March the entire Battalion had been assembled at Horset-Schelsen in the Division assembly area for a period of recreation, rehabilitation and continued training. There it remained until 25 March when again under control of the Combat Commands the Battalion began movement to assembly areas just West of the Rhine River opposite the Ninth Army bridgehead.

Companies "A" and "C" with the two combat Commands crossed the Rhine River on the 28 March 1945 and moved to assembly areas East of the River. On the 29 March 1945 the Battalion with the Division passed through the XVIII Corps lines near Haltern and launched an attack to the East. A bridgehead was established over the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Ludinghausen by the afternoon of 30 March 1945, and the attack continued to the East cutting the vital Autobahn Highway Southwest of Beckum on 31 March.

The attacks continued to the utter confusion of the enemy and the Battalion with the tanks assisted in the closing of the trap at Lippstadt where contact was made with the 3rd Armored Division. Company "A" with Combat Command "A" assisted in the batterng through of the defenses of the Teutoburger Wald. Company "C" with CC"B" moved abreast of CC"A" and the two commands pushed forward to the West Bank of the Weser River, reaching it by the 4 April 1945. The Division had achieved a thirty mile advance in twenty four hours.

Company "A", in support of CC"A" assisted in the establishment of a bridgehead against considerable enemy opposition and in the taking of Hameln. Company "C" with CC"B" moved forward assisting in the capture of Bad-Pyrmont, a famous German resort town of more than 50,000 population. The Weser River was crossed by all the combat elements on the 6 April and the attack renewed. Company "B" under Battalion control moved in Division reserve throughout operations protecting the South flank and extended supply lines.