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# Employment of Four Tank Destroyer Battalions in the ETO



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A RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared at  
THE ARMORED SCHOOL  
Fort Knox Kentucky  
1949 - 1950

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# U. S. Army Military History Institute

## THE EMPLOYMENT OF FOUR TANK DESTROYER BATTALIONS IN THE ETO

A RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED

BY

COMMITTEE 24, OFFICERS ADVANCED COURSE

THE ARMORED SCHOOL

1949-1950

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## PREFACE

Preparing a research report on tank destroyers proved to be a more interesting task than most members of the Committee anticipated. The announcement of the subject cast some doubt upon the worth of a report on a now obsolete weapon of war, but not for long. The splendid achievements of tank destroyer units in action, the outstanding esprit of officers and men in these units under all conditions of combat, and the ingenuity and bravery they combined to stop the most feared menace of the battlefield in World War II created admiration for them and professional interest in their methods. It is hoped that this report adequately describes the courage and tenacity with which they fought and the skilful techniques they employed in outmaneuvering and outfighting their armored foe.

Because tank destroyer units were employed as small elements attached to major combat organizations, reports of their activities have been found difficult to trace. Organizations to which they were attached sometimes failed to mention these subordinate attached units in after action reports, and parent tank destroyer battalions were unaware, at times, of the scope of combat activities in which their companies and platoons took part. Considering this, and the fact that tank destroyer organizations provided only a comparatively small group of combat units, it is not surprising that after action reports on their activities are few in number and are not prepared with as much attention to detail as those of, for example, an Infantry Division or a Corps Headquarters.

There is additional reason for the shortage of reports from tank destroyer companies and platoons. They were often separated from parent organizations for days and weeks at a time. Individuals interviewed in connection with this study agree this was a deterrent to preparing more than casual records.

With no complaint intended, it is an observation of the Committee that combat records of battalion-size units are few in number and sketchily prepared. This is apparently a result of the disinclination, on the part of line officers, to spend time preparing reports, and a lack of appreciation, in terms of improved combat efficiency, of the various purposes for which after action reports are used. In the direction of correcting this situation and assisting battalion staffs in simplifying their work of recording, the standard form of report used by lower echelons of the British Army could be examined as a method of preparing paperwork with no more than reasonable pangs of authorship.

After some time was spent on research and interview, seeming conflicts of fact made it desirable to analyze the slim stock of available documents pertaining to tank destroyers and to determine their validity. It was decided that all could be more closely scrutinized. For instance, more than one after action report listed, with understandable pride, the elimination of three or more German "Tiger" tanks in a day's operation. However, Division and Corps staff officers who were at the scene of action declare no enemy tanks of this type were near the areas described in post-combat



records. One ironically suggested "Tiger" tanks must have been the most prolific item of German war production, considering the vast numbers knocked out in after-action reports.

Committee members have noted that well planned offensive operations were invariably recorded with greater preciseness than defensive actions. German accounts, particularly in the ARDENNES Offensive, gave a more accurate picture, a check of eyewitnesses reveals, than reports from United States units on the defensive.

The Committee received invaluable assistance in the preparation of the report from former members of the four tank destroyer battalions. Without their aid it would not have been possible to approach any semblance of accuracy in presenting the details of combat which are condensed in an after-action report and, of necessity, lost in the condensation. For their kindness and cooperation, the Committee expresses its appreciation and thanks to Lieutenant Colonel James W. Bidwell, former commanding officer of the 704th TD Battalion, now stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky; Lieutenant Colonel Stanley Dettmer, former commander of the 823d TD Battalion, now residing at San Anselmo, California; Lieutenant Colonel William A. Hamberg, commanding officer of the 10th Tank Battalion, 5th Armored Division, now stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky; Lieutenant Colonel Ashby I. Lohse, former operations officer of the 823d TD Battalion, now living in Tucson, Arizona; Major Edward R. Garton, executive officer of the 644th TD Battalion, now at The Armored School, Fort Knox, Kentucky; Major Crosby P.

Miller, S-3 of the 704th TD Battalion, now at The Armored School, Fort Knox, Kentucky; Captain Bruce A. Crissinger, a former commanding officer of the 823d TD Battalion, now living in Massillon, Ohio; Captain Thomas Evans, commander of "G" Company, 704th TD Battalion, now a resident of Greensburg, Pennsylvania; Captain James Leach, commanding "E" Company, 37th Tank Battalion, now on duty at Fort Knox, Kentucky; Captain Edwin Leiper, commander of the 3d Platoon, Company "C", 704th TD Battalion, now a resident of Indianapolis, Indiana; Captain T. L. Raney, commander of the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon, 823d TD Battalion, now stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland; Lieutenant John E. Barron, commander of the 1st Platoon, Company "C", 823d TD Battalion, now residing in El Paso, Texas; Lieutenant Ellis McInnis, commanding officer of a platoon of Company "C", 823d TD Battalion, now living in Odessa, Texas; Lieutenant Leon L. Neel, commander of the 1st Platoon, Company "B", 823d TD Battalion, now residing in Thomasville, Georgia; and Lieutenant Thomas Springfield, commander of the 1st Platoon, Company "A", 823d TD Battalion, now living in Dodge City, Kansas.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The motivating impulse for this report dates back to the European Campaigns of 1940, when the French Army surrendered to swift-moving German divisions whose success rested primarily on the speed, firepower and shock action of tanks supported by planes, when remnants of the British Expeditionary Force prepared airplane and tank obstacles throughout the British Isles and regrouped for the last-ditch battle of England, and when, in the United States, the majority of military thought was centered on a method by which the terrifyingly successful tank-air combination could be stopped.

One of the outcomes of those urgent times was the formation of tank destroyer units as a part of the United States Army and their use, particularly during the later European Campaigns of 1944-1945, in the greatest combined-arms offensive in history.

That tank destroyer units never fulfilled the master role for which they were intended is a quirk of circumstance plus the introduction of other ingenious devices contrived to combat tanks.

The original subject assigned this committee for research and report was "The Operation of the Tank Destroyer Battalion." The topic covers a wide field, which fortunately was narrowed with the announcement of the scope as "A study of the employment of the tank destroyer battalion in the European Theater, with conclusions and recommendations," with limiting dates extending from June of 1944, to May of 1945.

Confined within reasonable bounds, the title assumed more

workable proportions, though it was still considered too general when committee members initiated individual research. After a more thorough look at source material it was determined the best output of the committee's efforts would be achieved if the subject was restricted to operations of four outstanding tank destroyer battalions. Thus the subject was chosen.

Research concerning tank destroyer operations has revealed an interesting and important field for further investigation. It is suggested that the overall subject, "The Operation of the Tank Destroyer Battalion," could be the basis for a group of studies aimed at a more complete picture of combat operations involving tank destroyers versus tanks. The subject is important because of its possible effect on current antitank doctrine.

Tank Destroyers entered and emerged from World War II as the center of a doctrinal controversy. Conceived in haste, they were designated "Tank Chasers," before birth, by the French; "Antitank Regiments," by the British; "Self-propelled Artillery," by the Russians; and "Tank Destroyers" by our forces. They had common characteristics as well as a common purpose. All were team-operated, super-velocity, low-trajectory weapons, self-propelled or towed, suitable for employment on direct-fire missions against tanks - primarily German tanks.

The argument which centered on tanks replacing tank destroyers in an antitank role entered the theoretical phase in this country as tank armament was improved to exceed that of existing tank destroyer

weapons. Major factors in the difference of opinion were the tank's heavier vehicle, armor and weapons weight, with loss of mobility, as against a lighter, thin-skinned, more agile and heavier-armed anti-tank vehicle.

This controversial side issue is not a part of the report, though it well might be. The facts of combat operations, highlighted during the period June 1944, to May 1945, were an important influence on the decision which eliminated tank destroyers from U. S. Army organization in 1946.

Although some aspects of the study were not immediately obvious to the researcher, one feature of tank destroyer employment was quickly noted. This was the wide variety of combat assignments, outside the scope of antitank combat, in which tank destroyer organizations participated. Many missions were considered, by those in subordinate command of the units, to be beyond the sphere of organizational training or equipment. Surprisingly, the unorthodox missions were quite successful from an overall viewpoint and added to the versatile reputation of the anti-tankers.

This report is not concerned with the application of principles to a combat situation facing a commander, harassed by the problem of taking an objective with the means at hand. However, the statements of tank destroyer unit officers that they were rarely able to utilize the potential of their weapons and personnel because of restrictions imposed by unusual missions and attachments, directed by higher authority, is of interest.

The purpose of this report is to present a series of illustrative general actions hinging on the assignment of tank destroyer units in two well-recognized roles: Supporting a major organization and its subordinate elements on the offensive, and providing the same support when the larger element is in a defensive situation. The combined actions will show the various methods of employment of tank destroyers by major unit commanders; the adherence to or departure from tank destroyer doctrine extant at the time of employment; and a comparison of unit actions with the objective of highlighting successful features of operation.

The four battalions selected for illustration are the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 644th, 704th and 823d. Although they were shifted within Corps, the battalions spent the majority of combat time attached to the following divisions:

628th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 5th Armored Division

644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 2d Infantry Division

704th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 4th Armored Division

823d Tank Destroyer Battalion, 30th Infantry Division

The first part of the report is concerned with background material, the organization of units for combat, types of equipment used during the period of operations and a brief of doctrine governing the training and contemplated employment of tank destroyers in the combined arms fighting team. Following background data, operations of the four tank destroyer battalions are described in separate chapters, with another section devoted to comment by selected tank

destroyer unit commanders and the final chapter devoted to conclusions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER 2

### GENERAL MISSIONS AND ORGANIZATION OF TANK DESTROYER UNITS

This chapter is devoted to a general discussion of technical material on the employment of tank destroyer units. It contains information on the missions for which tank destroyer units were trained, the contemplated principles of employment and methods of employment.

[The chapter also includes organizational charts prepared and later modified during World War II by the Tank Destroyer School at Camp Hood, Texas.]

As with other special organizations of the armed forces, tank destroyers were given a specific goal to achieve. This goal, or primary mission, was the destruction of hostile tanks by direct gunfire. It is of interest to note that even the wording of direct gunfire implies an aggressive as well as an offensive role. When approaching the subject of tank destroyer use, it is of importance to differentiate between antitank and tank destroyer units. Unquestionably the two elements have a great deal in common and are closely related. However, they are also quite different,

Antitank units are set up and equipped to be used in relatively fixed roles. Even when the larger units of which they form a part are on the offensive, their role is primarily defensive. Antitank units function generally by successively setting up defenses of certain critical areas such as avenues of approach of possible armored counterattack. When they do not succeed in stopping an

attack, their purpose is to disrupt, delay, and canalize hostile armored forces, thus creating conditions favorable for counterattack by highly mobile reserves. Here is where tank destroyers enter the picture.

...Tank Destroyers are the highly mobile element in operations against armored forces. In contrast to Antitank units, their role is purely offensive, even when supporting large-scale defensive operations. Because of their characteristics, Tank Destroyers are not bound up with positions and places on the ground. In fact, ...to bind their operations down to places takes much of the power out of their wallop. Tank Destroyers are organized and equipped to strike and strike hard at tanks with great fire power and great maneuverability. Their function is not to deny the use of certain terrain feature to tanks but to seek out and destroy the tanks themselves...<sup>1</sup>

Suitable secondary missions for tank destroyer units are:

1. To reinforce or supplement the fire of artillery units with direct or indirect fire.
2. To destroy pill boxes and permanent defensive works.
3. To support landing operations.
4. To defend beaches against waterborne attack.
5. To be used on roving gun and roving battery missions (more applicable to self-propelled units).

With regard to the use of tank destroyers on secondary missions, the field manual on employment has the following to say:

...Employment of tank destroyers on secondary missions is a command decision. When ammunition requirements for reinforcing artillery missions exceed the supply facilities of the units, higher headquarters assumes the responsibility of supplying the additional ammunition required. Except in an emergency, the organic ammunition loads of tank destroyer units should remain intact for primary missions.

Most secondary missions require the use of high-explosive ammunition. Since the trajectory of anti-tank guns is too flat for the execution of many<sup>2</sup> missions, reduced charges are often preferable.

In order to use tank destroyers to their best advantage, and to gain the maximum possible results from their favorable characteristics, a commander would be governed in tank destroyer action by application of the following principles:

1. The seeking of information of hostile tanks by continuous reconnaissance.

2. The movement to firing positions so as to intercept hostile tanks by arriving sufficiently in advance of the tanks to permit proper emplacement and concealment of tank destroyers. Tank destroyers ambush hostile tanks, but do not charge nor chase them.

3. Holding ground and not firing until tanks get within as close range as possible.

4. Occupying forward positions from which to pursue withdrawing tanks by fire.

5. Using every practicable measure to secure concealment. This is necessary because tank destroyers are vulnerable to hostile tank, antitank and artillery fire.

6. Digging in towed guns whenever time permits.

7. Digging in and camouflaging tank destroyers in featureless terrain.

It is important that tank destroyers be used aggressively. Their mobility permits them to be concentrated rapidly in an

advantageous position. Stealth and deception are predominate factors. Tank destroyers are not capable of independent action; they should be used in close cooperation with other troops.

The organization of tank destroyer units was a subject of much discussion and the usual controversy, but was finally decided and established as brought out in Field Manual 18-5.

...a. Tank destroyer units are organized as battalions, groups, and brigades. The battalion is both a tactical and administrative unit. Groups and brigades are organized only as tactical units. There are two types of battalions, classified according to their equipment as self-propelled and towed.

b. The self-propelled battalion consists of a headquarters and headquarters company, a reconnaissance company, three gun companies, and a medical detachment. Each gun company has three platoons of four self-propelled guns each--a total of 36 guns within the battalion.

c. The towed battalion is similar to the self-propelled battalion except that it is equipped with towed guns and has no reconnaissance company. Two reconnaissance platoons are included in the headquarters company.

d. Group. The group consists of a headquarters and headquarters company and two or more battalions.

e. Brigade. The brigade is composed of a headquarters and headquarters company and two or more groups...<sup>3</sup>

As to methods of employment, tank destroyer units certainly have flexibility and maneuverability beyond the scope of most armored elements. They can be employed to attack the head, flanks, or the rear of a hostile armored formation. These points may be hit simultaneously, or successively, engaging one while maneuvering to hit another. The choice of method is largely influenced by the

relative size of the elements involved. A tank destroyer battalion should be able to attack a hostile tank company at three points simultaneously. If the terrain is favorable it might be possible to attack a hostile tank battalion at three points.

Tank destroyers should be kept in concealed positions well to the rear initially. Their mobility will permit their use in mass in particular areas anywhere over a wide zone.

Tank destroyers use the concept of surprise attack in mass. Therefore, they should hold out small or no reserves, initially employing their maximum fire power and shifting it continuously to gain and maintain the maximum tactical advantage.

An outline distributed by the Tank Destroyer School at Camp Hood, Texas, compared the employment of tank destroyer units to that of the man backing up the line in football. "...he stays well back until he sees where the play is coming and then hits it with everything he has."

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

<sup>1</sup>  
"T-61" (school doctrine), Tank Destroyer School, Department  
of Tactics, Camp Hood, Texas, p 1.

<sup>2</sup>  
Field Manual 18-5, Tactical Employment Tank Destroyer Unit,  
18 July 1944, p 3.

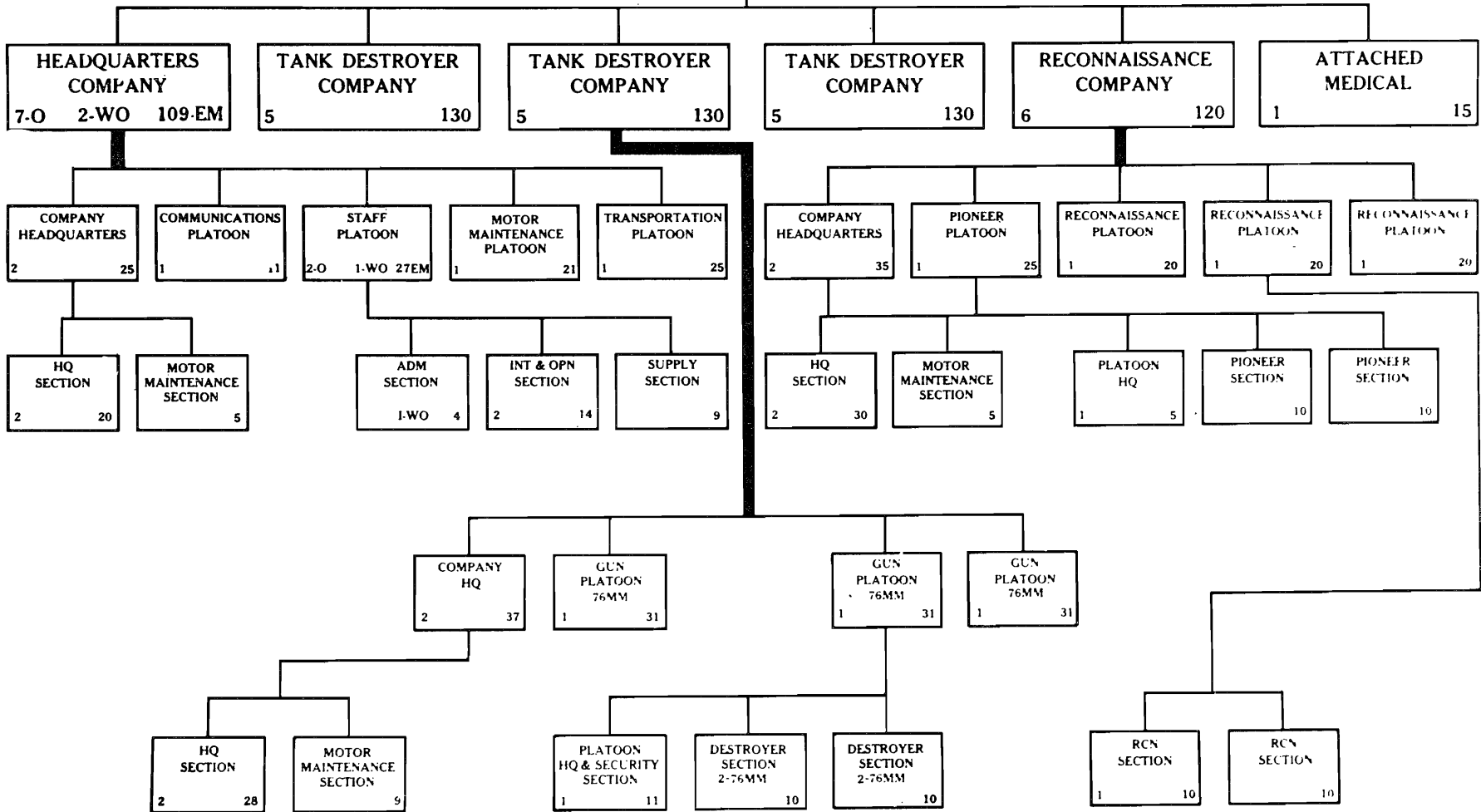
<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid, p 1.

<sup>4</sup>  
Op cit, "T-61" (school doctrine), p 6.

**TANK DESTROYER  
BATTALION**  
(SP)  
35-O 1-WO 634 EM

*Figure 1*

**BATTALION  
HEADQUARTERS**  
6-O

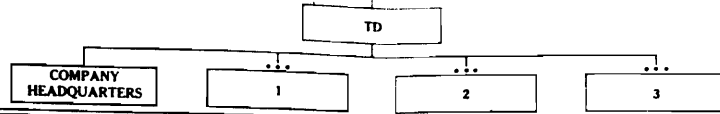


**PERSONNEL**  
OFFICERS  
ENLISTED MEN

**SUMMARY**

WEAPONS		
5	GUN 76 MM SP	12
130	GUN MACHINE CAL 50 HB M2	22
	GUN MACHINE LIGHT CAL 30	5
	PISTOL CAL 45	13
	RIFLE CAL 30 M1	55
	CARBINE CAL 30 M1	67
	LAUNCHER ROCKET AT M9	9
	MORTAR 81 MM M1	1

**GUN COMPANY (SP)**  
**TANK DESTROYER BATTALION (SP)**



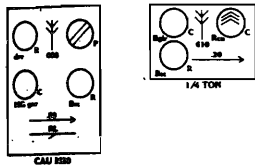
**COMBAT ECHELON**

**SUMMARY**

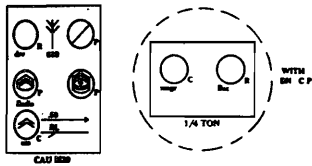
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100 AMPHIBIOUS TRUCK M35	100
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100 AMPHIBIOUS TRUCK M35	100

**REAR ECHELON**

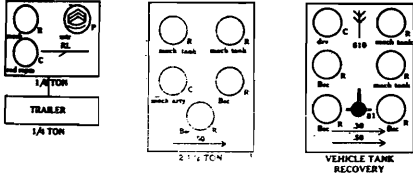
**COMMANDER'S PARTY**



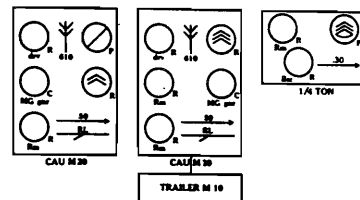
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**MOTOR MAINTENANCE SECTION**



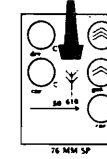
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**PLATOON HEADQUARTERS & SECURITY SECTION**



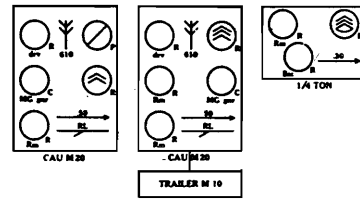
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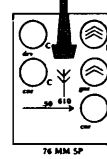
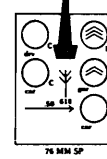
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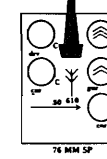
**GUN PLATOON**  
**PLATOON HEADQUARTERS & SECURITY SECTION**



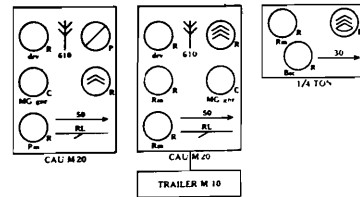
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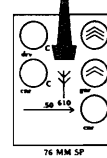
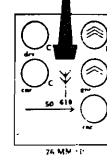
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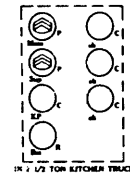
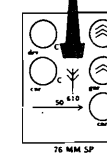
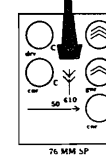
**GUN PLATOON**  
**PLATOON HEADQUARTERS & SECURITY SECTION**



**GUN SECTION**



**GUN SECTION**



**NOTE:**  
SUBSTITUTE CAB HALF TRACK M3A2 WITH M1 ARMAMENT WHEN HALF TRACK M3A2 IS AVAILABLE. SEE FIG CAL M20 AND ONE 3 MACHINE GUN CAL 50 AND ONE MACHINE GUN CAL 30 PER EACH TWO 3 CAB HALFTRACK.

**REMARKS:**  
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2. SYMBOLS 'C', 'P', 'M', 'R', 'S', 'A', 'B', 'D', 'E', 'F', 'G', 'H', 'I', 'J', 'K', 'L', 'M', 'N', 'O', 'P', 'Q', 'R', 'S', 'T', 'U', 'V', 'W', 'X', 'Y', 'Z', 'AA', 'AB', 'AC', 'AD', 'AE', 'AF', 'AG', 'AH', 'AI', 'AJ', 'AK', 'AL', 'AM', 'AN', 'AO', 'AP', 'AQ', 'AR', 'AS', 'AT', 'AU', 'AV', 'AW', 'AX', 'AY', 'AZ', 'BA', 'BB', 'BC', 'BD', 'BE', 'BF', 'BG', 'BH', 'BI', 'BJ', 'BK', 'BL', 'BM', 'BN', 'BO', 'BP', 'BQ', 'BR', 'BS', 'BT', 'BU', 'BV', 'BW', 'BX', 'BY', 'BZ', 'CA', 'CB', 'CC', 'CD', 'CE', 'CF', 'CG', 'CH', 'CI', 'CJ', 'CK', 'CL', 'CM', 'CN', 'CO', 'CP', 'CQ', 'CR', 'CS', 'CT', 'CU', 'CV', 'CW', 'CX', 'CY', 'CZ', 'DA', 'DB', 'DC', 'DD', 'DE', 'DF', 'DG', 'DH', 'DI', 'DJ', 'DK', 'DL', 'DM', 'DN', 'DO', 'DP', 'DQ', 'DR', 'DS', 'DT', 'DU', 'DV', 'DW', 'DX', 'DY', 'DZ', 'EA', 'EB', 'EC', 'ED', 'EE', 'EF', 'EG', 'EH', 'EI', 'EJ', 'EK', 'EL', 'EM', 'EN', 'EO', 'EP', 'EQ', 'ER', 'ES', 'ET', 'EU', 'EV', 'EW', 'EX', 'EY', 'EZ', 'FA', 'FB', 'FC', 'FD', 'FE', 'FF', 'FG', 'FH', 'FI', 'FJ', 'FK', 'FL', 'FM', 'FN', 'FO', 'FP', 'FQ', 'FR', 'FS', 'FT', 'FU', 'FV', 'FW', 'FX', 'FY', 'FZ', 'GA', 'GB', 'GC', 'GD', 'GE', 'GF', 'GG', 'GH', 'GI', 'GJ', 'GK', 'GL', 'GM', 'GN', 'GO', 'GP', 'GQ', 'GR', 'GS', 'GT', 'GU', 'GV', 'GW', 'GX', 'GY', 'GZ', 'HA', 'HB', 'HC', 'HD', 'HE', 'HF', 'HG', 'HH', 'HI', 'HJ', 'HK', 'HL', 'HM', 'HN', 'HO', 'HP', 'HQ', 'HR', 'HS', 'HT', 'HU', 'HV', 'HW', 'HX', 'HY', 'HZ', 'IA', 'IB', 'IC', 'ID', 'IE', 'IF', 'IG', 'IH', 'II', 'IJ', 'IK', 'IL', 'IM', 'IN', 'IO', 'IP', 'IQ', 'IR', 'IS', 'IT', 'IU', 'IV', 'IW', 'IX', 'IY', 'IZ', 'JA', 'JB', 'JC', 'JD', 'JE', 'JF', 'JG', 'JH', 'JI', 'JJ', 'JK', 'JL', 'JM', 'JN', 'JO', 'JP', 'JQ', 'JR', 'JS', 'JT', 'JU', 'JV', 'JW', 'JX', 'JY', 'JZ', 'KA', 'KB', 'KC', 'KD', 'KE', 'KF', 'KG', 'KH', 'KI', 'KJ', 'KK', 'KL', 'KM', 'KN', 'KO', 'KP', 'KQ', 'KR', 'KS', 'KT', 'KU', 'KV', 'KW', 'KX', 'KY', 'KZ', 'LA', 'LB', 'LC', 'LD', 'LE', 'LF', 'LG', 'LH', 'LI', 'LJ', 'LK', 'LL', 'LM', 'LN', 'LO', 'LP', 'LQ', 'LR', 'LS', 'LT', 'LU', 'LV', 'LW', 'LX', 'LY', 'LZ', 'MA', 'MB', 'MC', 'MD', 'ME', 'MF', 'MG', 'MH', 'MI', 'MJ', 'MK', 'ML', 'MM', 'MN', 'MO', 'MP', 'MQ', 'MR', 'MS', 'MT', 'MU', 'MV', 'MW', 'MX', 'MY', 'MZ', 'NA', 'NB', 'NC', 'ND', 'NE', 'NF', 'NG', 'NH', 'NI', 'NJ', 'NK', 'NL', 'NM', 'NN', 'NO', 'NP', 'NQ', 'NR', 'NS', 'NT', 'NU', 'NV', 'NW', 'NX', 'NY', 'NZ', 'OA', 'OB', 'OC', 'OD', 'OE', 'OF', 'OG', 'OH', 'OI', 'OJ', 'OK', 'OL', 'OM', 'ON', 'OO', 'OP', 'OQ', 'OR', 'OS', 'OT', 'OU', 'OV', 'OW', 'OX', 'OY', 'OZ', 'PA', 'PB', 'PC', 'PD', 'PE', 'PF', 'PG', 'PH', 'PI', 'PJ', 'PK', 'PL', 'PM', 'PN', 'PO', 'PP', 'PQ', 'PR', 'PS', 'PT', 'PU', 'PV', 'PW', 'PX', 'PY', 'PZ', 'QA', 'QB', 'QC', 'QD', 'QE', 'QF', 'QG', 'QH', 'QI', 'QJ', 'QK', 'QL', 'QM', 'QN', 'QO', 'QP', 'QQ', 'QR', 'QS', 'QT', 'QU', 'QV', 'QW', 'QX', 'QY', 'QZ', 'RA', 'RB', 'RC', 'RD', 'RE', 'RF', 'RG', 'RH', 'RI', 'RJ', 'RK', 'RL', 'RM', 'RN', 'RO', 'RP', 'RQ', 'RR', 'RS', 'RT', 'RU', 'RV', 'RW', 'RX', 'RY', 'RZ', 'SA', 'SB', 'SC', 'SD', 'SE', 'SF', 'SG', 'SH', 'SI', 'SJ', 'SK', 'SL', 'SM', 'SN', 'SO', 'SP', 'SQ', 'SR', 'SS', 'ST', 'SU', 'SV', 'SW', 'SX', 'SY', 'SZ', 'TA', 'TB', 'TC', 'TD', 'TE', 'TF', 'TG', 'TH', 'TI', 'TJ', 'TK', 'TL', 'TM', 'TN', 'TO', 'TP', 'TQ', 'TR', 'TS', 'TT', 'TU', 'TV', 'TW', 'TX', 'TY', 'TZ', 'UA', 'UB', 'UC', 'UD', 'UE', 'UF', 'UG', 'UH', 'UI', 'UJ', 'UK', 'UL', 'UM', 'UN', 'UO', 'UP', 'UQ', 'UR', 'US', 'UT', 'UU', 'UV', 'UW', 'UX', 'UY', 'UZ', 'VA', 'VB', 'VC', 'VD', 'VE', 'VF', 'VG', 'VH', 'VI', 'VJ', 'VK', 'VL', 'VM', 'VN', 'VO', 'VP', 'VQ', 'VR', 'VS', 'VT', 'VU', 'VV', 'VW', 'VX', 'VY', 'VZ', 'WA', 'WB', 'WC', 'WD', 'WE', 'WF', 'WG', 'WH', 'WI', 'WJ', 'WK', 'WL', 'WM', 'WN', 'WO', 'WP', 'WQ', 'WR', 'WS', 'WT', 'WU', 'WV', 'WW', 'WX', 'WY', 'WZ', 'XA', 'XB', 'XC', 'XD', 'XE', 'XF', 'XG', 'XH', 'XI', 'XJ', 'XK', 'XL', 'XM', 'XN', 'XO', 'XP', 'XQ', 'XR', 'XS', 'XT', 'XU', 'XV', 'XW', 'XX', 'XY', 'XZ', 'YA', 'YB', 'YC', 'YD', 'YE', 'YF', 'YG', 'YH', 'YI', 'YJ', 'YK', 'YL', 'YM', 'YN', 'YO', 'YP', 'YQ', 'YR', 'YS', 'YT', 'YU', 'YV', 'YW', 'YX', 'YZ', 'ZA', 'ZB', 'ZC', 'ZD', 'ZE', 'ZF', 'ZG', 'ZH', 'ZI', 'ZJ', 'ZK', 'ZL', 'ZM', 'ZN', 'ZO', 'ZP', 'ZQ', 'ZR', 'ZS', 'ZT', 'ZU', 'ZV', 'ZW', 'ZX', 'ZY', 'ZZ'.  
PREPARED BY TD SCHOOL AND BASED UPON T-10 1025 AM 1/8 1927  
DATED 15 MARCH 1944

*Figure 2*



## CHAPTER 3

### THE 628th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION (SELF PROPELLED)

#### Introduction and Buildup

General. The 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP) was selected for study in the preparation of this report on tank destroyer operations in the European Theatre of Operations after a careful consideration of factors, situations and missions; the more important of which are as follows:

- (1) This unit was employed extensively in the primary tank destroyer role.
- (2) A self propelled unit, it worked throughout combat on the European Continent, except for one brief period, with an armored unit, the 5th Armored Division.
- (3) In the Battle of WALLENDORF, the battle selected for detailed study, this tank destroyer battalion was employed with an armored division in the penetration of a heavily fortified position; the SIEGFRIED LINE.
- (4) Also in the Battle of WALLENDORF, this battalion was heavily engaged in repelling armored attacks.
- (5) In addition to the above listed roles this battalion was employed in just about every manner to which it could be adapted, for example; reinforcing artillery, as assault guns, against personnel in the open, as road blocks, and to provide flank protection.

On 5 August 1944, only a few days after the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion landed in Europe it was attached to the 5th Armored Division. Neither the Battalion nor the 5th Armored Division had been committed to combat. Thus a team that was to work together through most of the European Campaign was formed. It is of course important that a team remain intact if the ultimate in cooperation and coordination is to be achieved. This permanent attachment was, therefore,

very desirable and led to understandings that could only have been bettered if the units had trained together.

In order to understand the operating procedure of this team, of which the 628th was a member, it is necessary to explain that the 5th Armored Division employed "married companies" to make up tank-infantry teams.

One tank battalion and one infantry battalion were assigned to each combat command, but the cooperation between tanks and infantry was to go further than that. The "A" tank companies and "A" infantry companies were paired off. Likewise paired were the "B" and "C" tank and infantry companies. Within the companies each infantry platoon of five squad half-tracks was paired with a platoon of five medium tanks. Within the platoons each medium tank crew of five men was paired with its own infantry squad of 12 men. The final result of the marriage was a Sherman tank, a half-track and 17 men who were to eat, sleep and fight together.<sup>1</sup>

It was also customary to attach a platoon of tank destroyers to a married company.

CCB's tank-infantry teams were made up from the 81st Tank Battalion and the 15th Armored Infantry Battalion. The B Companies of the medical battalion, engineer battalion, ordnance battalion, and Troop B of the cavalry reconnaissance squadron were the normal supporting troops, and the 71st Armored Field Artillery Battalion was normally in direct support. It normally fought as two task forces; one heavy, containing two "married companies", and one light, containing one "married company".

Each task force bore the name of its commander. During the WALLENDORF operation the commanders were Lt. Col.

Anderson and Lt. Col. Wintermute.

CCR's two units were the 10th Tank Battalion and the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion. Its regularly supporting artillery the 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and its normal supporting companies the "C" companies of the Engineers, ordnance and Medics and "C" Troop of the Cavalry. The heavy task force during this operation was commanded by Lt. Col. Hamburg the CO of the 10th Tank Battalion and contained the married "A" and "C" Cos. Task force Boyer named for Lt. Col. Boyer the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion Commander was the light task force and was made up of the "married 'B' Cos".<sup>2</sup>

Since CCA was occupied in a different sector protecting the City of Luxemburg, during the period while the 5th Armored Division was on German soil, and did not figure in the WALLENDORF operation, its organization is not important and is omitted.

The 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion was committed to combat with the 5th Armored Division 2 August 1944, and with them fought through France into Belgium and liberated Luxemburg. During the advance the major actions participated in were at the FALAISE-ARGENTAN Gap and the SEINE River.

Friendly Situation. By the end of August the Allied force on the Continent included twenty American divisions, twelve British divisions, three Canadian divisions, one French division, and one Polish division, and the necessary supporting troops. Against a defeated and demoralized enemy they were advancing rapidly. Due to limited port facilities and conditions of the railroads in

France it was impossible to support the armies as the supply lines lengthened indefinitely. There was bound to be a time when the rapid advance would of necessity stop, if not due to enemy resistance, then because the supply lines had been stretched to their elastic limits.

All along the front we pressed forward in hot pursuit of the fleeing enemy. In four days the British spearheads, paralleled by equally forceful American advances on the right, covered 195 miles, one of the many fine feats of marching by our formations in the great pursuit across France. By September 5, Patton's Third Army reached Nancy and crossed the MOSELLE River between that city and METZ. Hodge's First Army came up against the Siegfried defenses by the thirteenth of the month and was shortly thereafter to begin the struggle for AACHEN. Pushed back against the borders of the homeland, the German defenses showed definite signs of stiffening. On September 4, Montgomery's armies entered ANTWERP ...MARSEILLE had been captured on August 28 and this great port was being rehabilitated.<sup>3</sup>

Enemy Situation. By September 1st no organized front existed. The remnants of the German formations were fighting unorganized rear guard actions in an attempt to fall back into Germany and gain the protection of the WEST WALL.

In the meantime the Germans were making a desperate belated attempt to prepare the defenses of the SIEGFRIED LINE. Labor battalions and Volksturm (home guard) troops were being employed along with crippled units that had withdrawn from the battle of France.

Early in September 1944, when the German armed Forces in the West during their withdrawal through

France-Belgium approached the German frontier, the bulk of the formations could be designated only as remnants. According to the statistics of the OKW (High Command of the Armed Forces), the Westheer, including the navy and the air forces, but including the fortresses, had suffered a total loss of about 500,000 men since 1 June 1944. Principally as a result of the absolute air supremacy of the Allies, the losses in material were even more conspicuous. As an example, it may be mentioned that the I SS Pz Corps had at its disposal only one tank fit for action and the LXXIV Army Corps possessed only one gun, which was in full fighting order. All formations were heavily intermixed, so that there were divisions consisting of men belonging to a variety of units of every branch of arms.

During the entire withdrawal to the German frontier, the controlling organs, however, had remained intact. The army, corps, divisional, as well as the bulk of the regimental and battalion staffs were in working order and had on hand more or less strong cadres of the troop formations.<sup>4</sup>

The main German forces opposing the 5th Armored

Division on 13 September were the:

256th S Panzer Regiment  
Elements of the 5th Parachute Division  
Elements of the 130th Panzer Lehr Division  
Miscellaneous Volksturm formations<sup>5</sup>

### Operations

Pre battle movement. The U. S. First Army planned to make its entry into Germany with a main thrust in the vicinity of AACHEN. To assist in the execution of this thrust V Corps, to the south, consisting of the 4th Infantry Division, 28th Infantry Division, and 5th Armored Division attacked the much taunted WEST WALL. CCR of the 5th Armored Division was ordered to cross the OUR River and penetrate the SIEGFRIED LINE in the vicinity of WALLENDORF.

The following quotation from the unit history of the 5th Armored Division indicates the Division had already done some reconnaissance of the Line on its own initiative.

At 1815 on September 11, 1944, a strong patrol from B Troop 85th, crossed the Our River into Germany and made history. Word flashed back to division, to army, to the world that the first Americans were fighting on German soil.

For the next three days patrols probed the Siegfried Line and found it manned by small lightly armed forces. The enemy began building up his strength, however, and the steep hills, mud and defiles threatened to make movement difficult for the tanks.<sup>6</sup>

This action proved to be correct for

On the 12th of Sept the 5th Armored Division was directed to conduct reconnaissance to the SIEGFRIED LINE, demonstrate to its front and be prepared to break through the German defenses in the general area WALLENDORF-ECTERNACE to secure objectives in Germany.

By Corps order on 13 September the 5th Armd Div was told to reconnoiter and demonstrate against the Line in its sector. If the Line was not held in force one Combat Command with one Bn 112th Inf Regt was to break through and seize the high ground east of BITBURG.<sup>7</sup>

CCB was to assist and cover the advance of CCR with artillery support. Company A (628th TD Bn) was attached to CCR for this purpose. The rest of the Battalion was attached to CCR.<sup>8</sup>

Operations 13 September. Elements of the 628th TD Bn attached to CCR moved into position to fire into German on 13 Sept 1944. They fired all that afternoon, all the next morning and then about 1300 hours on the 14th crossed into Germany. An interesting observation made by members of the CCR task forces was that in all the time during the two days of firing the enemy did not fire in return.

Dispositions of troops may be noted on map Figure 3.

On the 13th the action, as is shown in the following quotations,







consisted primarily of moving into positions and firing into the enemy pill-boxes.

A demonstration against enemy fortifications of the Siegfried Line with tanks, tank destroyers and artillery fire was ordered by Corps and was carried out beginning at 1500, 13 September.... CCR delivered direct tank and artillery fire on enemy pill boxes between AMMELDINGEN and GETTENGEN. No enemy fire was returned.<sup>9</sup>

On 13 September 1944, 2d Platoon, Company B (628th) in position on hill near RIGELBACH, Luxemburg, used direct fire methods at 2000 yards range on German pill boxes and other enemy targets in the vicinity of WALLENDORF and BIESDORF. On the same day 2d Platoon, Company "C" moved across the MOSELLE River and fired on enemy pill boxes northeast of HOESDORF, Germany. Direct fire methods were used and six pill boxes were knocked out, after which the platoon returned to the bivouac area.

On 13 September 1944 Company "B" with Reconnaissance Platoon attached, moved with the 47th Armored Inf Bn into firing positions on high ground east and northeast of REISDORF, Luxemburg, on direct fire support for 47th Armored Infantry Bn., attacked fortifications of the Siegfried Line northeast of WALLENDORF.

Three inch gun direct fire from massed M-10s was employed against the permanent fortifications of the Siegfried Line. It was observed that normal AP shells had little effect against concrete, especially when covered with earth.<sup>10</sup>

... Company "C" with Reconnaissance Platoon, still attached to the 10th Tank Battalion moved to an assembly area five miles east of GILSDORF at 1315 hours. 1st Platoon, Company 'C' then moved to WALLENDORF, Germany crossing the OUR River, and set up road blocks to protect the main body of CCR. 2d Platoon, Company 'C', assisted 1st Battalion. 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division also attached to CCR in the seizing of REISDORF, Luxembourg, and the establishing of road blocks there. 3d Platoon Company 'C' moved to a position one mile north of WALLENDORF, Germany to guard the right flank of CCR. Pioneer Platoon, Reconnaissance Company, was attached to Company 'C', 22d Armored Engineer Battalion for a bridge building mission. Company 'C' was in Germany and to Major Burgess, then Captain, go

the honors of being the first man in the Battalion to set foot on German soil. The remainder of the Battalion, except Company 'A' working with CCB, crossed into Germany on 15 September 1944 and at 1700 hours the Battalion CP was established on Hill 408 one mile east of FRTLINGEN, approximately six miles into Germany....11

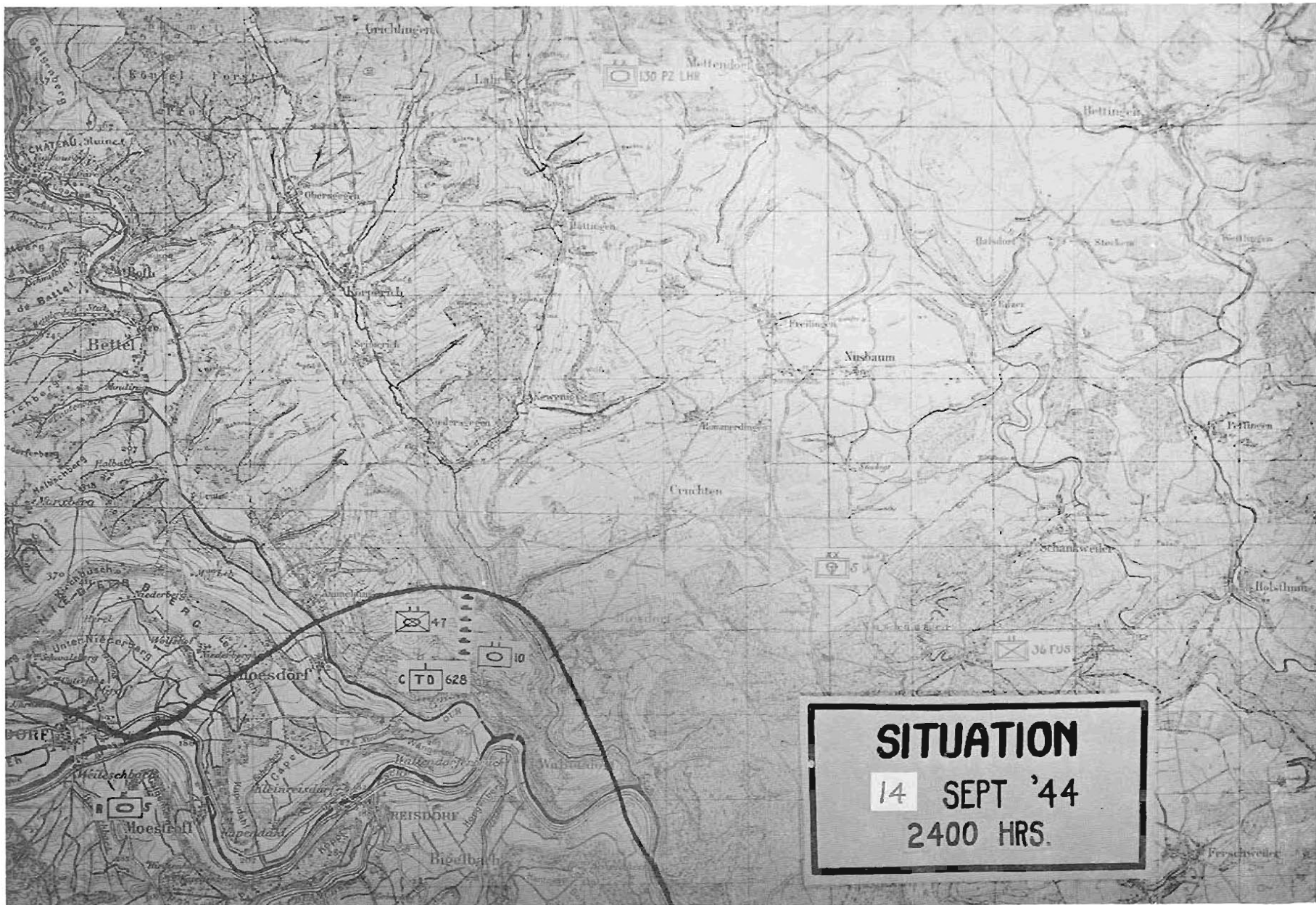
Operations 14 September. See Figure 4 . Since there was no large caliber fire being returned from the enemy positions the task forces decided to cross the OUR River and go into position preparatory to crossing the Gay Bach the next morning.

At 1130 B (14 September 44) Combat Command R with the 1st Battalion 112th Infantry, attacked to break through in the vicinity of WALLENDORF. The infantry, preceded by the armor crossed the OUR River at 1330 B crossing by ford since the bridge had been destroyed by the Germans before our forces reached the river.... Progress was slow due to automatic weapons and small arms fire. A hard rain also slowed the movement.12

The advance continued and at 1825 the bulk of the CCR forces were across the river and on the high ground.13

Company "C" (628th TD Bn) with Reconnaissance Platoon, still attached to the 10th Tank Battalion, moved to an assembly area 5 miles east of GILSDORF at 1315 hours. 1st Platoon Company "C" then moved to WALLENDORF, Germany, crossing the Our River and set up road blocks to protect the main body of CCR. 2d Platoon Company "C", assisted 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division also attached to CCR in the seizing of REISDORF, Luxemburg, and the establishing of road blocks there. 4th Platoon, Company "C" moved to a position one mile north of WALLENDORF, Germany, to guard the right flank of CCR. Pioneer Platoon, Reconnaissance Company, was attached to Company "C" 22d Armored Engineer Battalion for a Bridge Building mission.14

Operations 15 September.





At 0800, 15 September CCR resumed the attack. Fog and low clouds made visibility very poor. Some enemy tanks had moved in front of the combat command during the night. The advance against heavy resistance consisting of the enemy tanks and some 88 mm guns continued and by noon elements had moved into HOMMERDINGEN. Soon thereafter the 1st Bn 112th Inf. was in BIESDORF. The forward momentum continued and by night Task Force Hamburg had advanced through ENZEN and STOCHEN to RETTINGEN, and Task Force Boyer was occupying Hill 408, which was about a thousand yards north of FREILENGEN and commanded the area.15

Company "B" 628 TD Bn occupied positions to command the approaches to Hill 408.16

Company "C" had moved through the fog to attack HOMMERSDINGEN and CRUCHTEN. Part of the company provided flank protection for Task Force Hamburg and the remainder of the company established road blocks to protect CCR Headquarters. 17

On the evening 15 September V Corps ordered CCB released to division control to assist in the continuation of the division attack to seize the objective in the vicinity of Bitburg.18

#### Operations 16 September.

CCB with Co "A" 628th attached crossed the Our into Germany on the 16th, passed through WALLENDORF and stopped for the night at HOMMERSDINGEN, with a force still engaged in cleaning out NIEDERSGEGEN.19

Co A 628th went into direct and indirect artillery positions protecting CCR lines of communication.20

CCR had continued its attack but at 1500 was still up against heavy enemy resistance and had made no advance during the day. At 2145 they reported that the enemy was counter-attacking five hundred yards Southeast of WETTENGEN.21

The 1st Bn 112th Inf, attached to CCR was dug in at WETTENGEN. During the day CCR threw back three strong counterattacks at WETTENGEN, and smashed an armored attack.22

1st and 3d Platoons of Company "B", 628th were in position southeast of Hill 408, and the 2d platoon was on Hill 298 near STOCHEN supporting 1st Bn 112th Inf.

The 1st and 2d Platoons of Co "C" in anti-tank defense of Task Force Hamburg were in positions southeast of STOCKEM and northeast of HALSDORF, respectively, while the 3d Platoon provided anti-tank defense for CCR trains near HOMWERDINGEN.<sup>23</sup>

Operations 17 September. See Figure 5

On 17 Sept enemy small arms, mortar and artillery fire increased in intensity in all areas. At 0745 CCR reported that its artillery was firing on enemy tanks to the northeast, that the 1st Bn 112th Inf Regt was receiving enemy machine gun and artillery fire northeast of WETTENGEN, that the right tank column was fighting in the vicinity of STOCKEM, that artillery fire was coming from the north, northeast and east and enemy tanks were to the northeast and east. At 0830 CCR reported the fifth enemy counter-attack repulsed, that a total of eight enemy tanks were knocked out.... The enemy attacks were supported by at least forty tanks.<sup>24</sup>

The enemy counter-attacks against Task Force Hamburg, the right tank column of CCR, in and around HALSDORF and STOCKEM were launched from the vicinity of BETTINGEN and were made by tanks accompanied by infantry. Artillery fire which was placed on the attacking forces separated the infantry from the tanks. The tank attack was then broken up by tank destroyers of 1st and 3d platoons of Co "C" 628th TD bn from positions in the vicinity of HALSDORF and STOCKEM, and tanks on the high ground northeast of HALSDORF.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile...on the unforgettable Hill 298 the second platoon, (Co "B" 628th) under Lt. Leon Rennebaum, was engaged in desperate fighting. This platoon was supporting the 112th Regt of the 28th Inf Div.... In close support of the foot sloggers, the platoon was successful in repulsing several enemy counter-attacks attempting to dislodge the Tank Destroyers from their excellent firing positions. Sgt Thomas R. Kearney and Sgt. John Kalis had fired all their ammunition and accounted for many enemy dead and wounded....Pvt. Grizzle and Pfc. Masters accounted for a good many casualties among the attacking force. After







three destroyers were hit and damaged by enemy fire and the remaining forces were just about out of ammunition; Lt. Rennebaum gave the order to withdraw.<sup>26</sup>

For this brave show of arms, the second platoon was recommended for the Presidential Unit Citation and Lt Rennebaum subsequently received the Distinguished Service Cross.<sup>27</sup>

1st Bn 112th Inf was withdrawn to the vicinity of STOCKEM. They dug in on the high ground west of town. On the 17th CCB left elements of the married Cos "B" at HOMBERDINGEN to protect CCR's rear and moved to the WALLENDORF, AMWELDINGEN, NIEDERSGEGEN area where they were employed destroying pill-boxes and to protect the left flank of the penetration. Task Force Anderson, less the "B" Cos elements occupied Hill 375, between NIEDERSGEGEN and AMWELDINGEN, which commanded the terrain in that sector. Task Force Wintermute continued to hold NIEDERSGEGEN.<sup>28</sup>

By the night of the 17th Sept the furthest penetration into Germany had been made.

#### Operations 18 September.

No appreciable changes in dispositions or locations took place on 18 Sept. CCR with Task Force Hamburg in the vicinity of HALSDORF AND STOCKEM, and Task Force Boyer on Hill 408 were subjected to artillery fire, but sustained no major attacks. CCB continued to destroy pill-boxes and to drive the enemy from NIEDERSGEGEN, RIESDORF and from around the bridge site at WALLENDORF. The Germans reoccupied these localities nightly by infiltration.<sup>29</sup>

#### Operations 19 September.

Nineteenth of September was the high point in the Battalion's (628th TD Bn) combat history in so far as knocking out enemy tanks during any single twenty-four hour period is concerned. Missions and positions had remained approximately the same as on 17 September.<sup>30</sup>

At 0400, 19 September, CCR reported enemy vehicles moving in its sector and placed artillery concentration on them. Considerable movement of enemy tanks was reported in the vicinity of METTENDORF. At 0740 the

positions of CCR were being heavily shelled by enemy artillery. At 0800 the enemy launched a two-pronged tank and infantry attack on CCR, moving southeast and southwest from METTENDORF. Eighteen enemy Mark IV tanks are known to have been knocked out by CCR in repelling this attack.... At 0910 CCR reported its CP had moved to HOMERDINGEN to avoid enemy artillery fire..... CCR was attacked at 1325 from the northeast.

The attack was repulsed but CCR continued to receive heavy artillery fire.

The 2d Bn, 112th Inf Regt going up to relieve the 1st Bn with CCR had been halted by fire north of EIESDORF. CCB was ordered to send a force to relieve the pressure on them so they could continue. This pressure was neutralized by CCB at 1600.... The 1st Bn, 112th Inf Regt, having been relieved from CCR was given the mission of protecting the bridge at WALLENDOR for the night 19-20 September. At 1800 the Commanding Officer, Division Artillery, was ordered to move all artillery to the west of the German border without delay.

At 1830 CCR was ordered to have 2d Bn, 112th Inf Regt, protect its East flank while the remainder of CCR withdrew west of the frontier to a position south of DIEKIRCH.... At 1845 Commanding Officer, Division Artillery, was given a fire line and ordered to lay heavy fire east of the line to cover the withdrawal of CCR.31

Prior to the CCR withdrawal both Companies B and C of the TDs had an artilleryman's field day. 1st Platoon, Company "B" with Lt. Jones commanding, while in position north of FREILINGEN, Germany, protecting the left flank of CCR knocked out six Mark VI tanks attempting to approach their position from the vicinity of HUTTINGEN, Germany, by direct fire at ranges from 1500 to 3600 yards. Cpl. Rice, Tank Destroyer gunner, knocked out three enemy tanks in quick succession at 1800 yards while Cpl. Tomaszewski and Cpl. Kiwior knocked out tanks at 3600 and 3200 yards respectively. Two unidentified enemy tanks were also knocked out by the 2d Platoon. In addition, this Platoon assisted the tank attached to the 47th Armored Infantry Bn. in knocking out an additional five enemy tanks of undetermined designation, while Cpl. Giacomino knocked out two other enemy tanks but was unable to identify the tanks due to enemy fire. The 3d Platoon, Company "C", with Lt. Feldman commanding, established OP and firing positions on the revers slope of a hill 1500 yards north of HOMERDINGEN, Germany. Considerable enemy movement was observed in the vicinity of HUTTINGEN and brought

under fire at ranges from 1000 to 2000 yards which resulted in one enemy Mark V tank definitely knocked out and observed hits scored on six Mark VI's and one other Mark V, which the enemy either recovered or else completed the destruction. This in one twenty-four hour period. The Battalion received credit for six Mark VI's, one Mark V, and four unidentified tanks destroyed; six Mark VI's and one Mark V probably destroyed and assisted in the destruction of five unidentified tanks.<sup>32</sup>

The sector held by CCB was also heavily attacked on the 19th. At 0800 they reported the enemy working west and northwest from RIESDORF with continuous light and medium enemy artillery fire coming from east and northeast. They had cleared the enemy out of RIESDORF by 1037, but at 1030 enemy infantry attacked and took the bridge at WALLENDORF. It was held for only a short time for by 1250 they had been forced to withdraw to the southeastern edge of WALLENDORF. At 1225 CCB repulsed an attack by enemy tanks from the north.<sup>33</sup>

One platoon of the TD company with CCB was sent back into Luxemburg to face into Germany and cover the approach lane from the north of Hill 375 located between AMTELDINGEN and NEIDERSGEGEN. Another TD was driven up on top of Hill 375 from where it poured direct fire into the town of NEIDERSGEGEN in support of Task Force Wintermute.<sup>34</sup>

Enemy fire continued to increase in intensity forcing movement of the Tank Force Anderson CP to a new saucer-like location on Hill 375, where they organized a tight defense.<sup>35</sup>

Task Force Wintermute and the "married" companies B

were ordered to cover the route of march of CCR in its withdrawal.<sup>36</sup>

Operations 20 September. See Figure 6. CCB was ordered to consolidate its position and prepare to follow CCR on 20 September. Orders were, however, received from Corps at 2005 that CCB would not be withdrawn west of the German border except on Corps order.<sup>37</sup>

CCR successfully completed its withdrawal from Germany and at 0500 20 September was closing in its assembly area south of GILSDON. The 1st and 2d Battalions, 112th Infantry protecting the WALLENDORF Bridge were subjected to heavy artillery and mortar fire and enemy attacks, but retained possession of the bridge throughout the day.<sup>38</sup> CCB continued to be subjected to enemy attack and intensive artillery fire.

A column of eighty Wehrmacht troops, marching along the river road from GENTINGEN south toward ANNELDINGEN was caught in the open by the TD platoon from "B" Company of the 628th. Subjected to a heavy fire from the platoons' 50 cal. machine guns and three inch cannons, only one of the German soldiers managed to crawl away.<sup>39</sup>

NEIDERSGEGEN was lost to the enemy and the attempt to retake it was unsuccessful. During the night the enemy infiltrated through the elements of the 112th Infantry protecting the WALLENDORF Bridge.<sup>40</sup> Both the threadway bridge and timber bridge were demolished.<sup>41</sup>

Operations 21 September. CCB was continuously attacked during the 21st by both infantry and tanks, and was subjected





to hostile artillery fire that grew in intensity as the day grew older. To add to their difficulties heavy fog prevented observation of enemy activities and enabled the Germans to infiltrate into CCB positions before they were detected.<sup>42</sup>

By now the Germans had moved an Air Force infantry division into BIESDORF, along with elements of five other divisions, a regiment of medium field artillery and five battalions of assorted artillery. A tank brigade had been badly beaten by CCR but the remnants were still thrown into the fight to hurl the Americans from German soil.<sup>43</sup>

During the afternoon the fog lifted and permitted the Air Force to fly. This gave CCB temporary relief, but as the afternoon passed and the planes had to return to their bases the German artillery again opened up.<sup>44</sup>

At 1930 CCB was ordered by dropped message to withdraw west of the river beginning at 2130. CCR was ordered to cover the withdrawal and to maintain forces along the river at WALLENDORF. The Division Artillery was to deliver heavy fire to cover the withdrawal. The withdrawal was executed as planned and by 0400 22 September CCB had cleared the ford.<sup>45</sup>

Summary. The Battle of WALLENDORF, one of the first battles of World War II fought on German soil was over. In this engagement the 628th TD Battalion had been put to a severe test, for it had operated in just about every role that could be assigned the TDs. During this assault on the SIEGFRIED LINE the battalion employed its M-10 Tank Destroyers in the following ways;

- (1) Anti-tank defense
- (2) Road blocks
- (3) Flank defense
- (4) Assault of fortified positions and pill-boxes
- (5) Direct fire against ground personnel
- (6) Reinforcing Field Artillery<sup>46</sup>

Several lessons concerning the TD's and their employment were further proven. For example:

(1) The TDs could best be employed by attaching companies to major commands of the supported unit, because the Germans continued to employ their tanks piecemeal in delaying actions as dug-in guns, and in such numbers as not to warrant the use of an entire TD battalion against them.<sup>47</sup>

(2) None of the HE, AP, APC, or APCBDF 3-inch types of ammunition could satisfactorily penetrate the concrete fortifications of the Siegfried Line. However, when used against the steel doors of the fortifications the APCBDF ammunition would make a satisfactory penetration and often blow the door open.<sup>48</sup>

(3) The much vaunted German Tiger Tank (Mark VI) could be knocked out by the 3-inch gun by a direct frontal shot even at ranges up to 1500 yards.<sup>49</sup>

(4) The .50 cal. MG on the mount provided on the M-10 destroyer was inadequate, particularly for firing against ground troops. A ring mount or coaxially mounted .50 cal. MG's would be highly desirable.<sup>50</sup>

(5) Manually operated turrets were not satisfactory in cold weather. Even when the lightest lubricants were used it was almost impossible to turn the turret.<sup>51</sup>

Another deficiency that existed and was costly in this battle but which was borne out more strongly in later operations was that most of the casualties sustained by the TDs resulted from the lack of an armored covering over the turret.<sup>52</sup>



An interesting light is thrown on this battle by the statement of German Major General Frhr Von Gersdorff who was Chief of Staff of the Seventh German Army. When questioned in November 1945 and asked if he recalled any action where the American troops were thought to have blundered badly he replied:

It is my opinion that the thrust the 5th American Armored Div and the 28th Am Inf Div through the West Wall near WALLENDORF mid September 44 was neither planned nor executed skillfully. Admittedly the terrain presented special difficulties in that it restricted tank attacks to certain directions so that it would have been necessary to use strong forces. The objective of the operation is not known to me, but I presume it was an attempt to breach the West Wall in the First attack and to thrust forward up to the Rhine. Strategically this drive represented a grave danger for the German command but its execution was weak and inefficient and therefore we were able to contain and later eliminate by comparatively weak German forces. This enterprise caused the Americans heavy losses and greatly improved the morale of the German troops who had suffered a series of defeats previously. For the first time once again it had been possible to defeat the American troops who were superior in every respect. The steady increasing feeling of inferiority on the German side was reduced substantially by this fighting. Thus the operation was disadvantageous to the American command in every respect, even if it was meant to be only a scouting raid or an attempt. For particulars I refer to the report presented to the Twelfth Army Group by General Bayerlein in April 1945.<sup>53</sup>

This of course need not in any way reflect on TD's or TD operations.

## LOGISTICS AND PERSONNEL

General. The status of logistics and personnel, of course, has a direct bearing on military operations. It is appropriate then that brief comments be made concerning these matters and how they affected the 628th TD Bn.

In the penetration of the SIEGFRIED LINE equipment and material losses were heavier than at any other like period of time in the campaign. Supply and evacuation was difficult due to inability to protect the supply line within German territory. In the previous phases of the campaign it had been necessary for the combat units to keep their combat trains close behind for protection of the trains. This policy resulted in abnormal losses in Germany when the train areas were subject to enemy artillery and mortar fire. The withdrawal from Germany was accomplished with the evacuation of the majority of the damaged vehicles which were repairable.<sup>54</sup>

Class I. The platoons of the 628th were, for the most part, scattered and had no organized serving of hot meals. The men subsisted on emergency type rations.<sup>55</sup>

Class II and IV. During the early part of the month supplies had to be hauled approximately 135 miles. This partially immobilized the service elements of the battalion due to the time on the road to and from the supply point. Later in the month a new T/O and E which would allow additional vehicles was placed in effect lessening to some extent this restriction caused by limited transportation.<sup>56</sup>

Some items of ordnance were hard to replace, i. e., launchers rocket, 2.36 in. Replacements on M-10 and T-2 recovery vehicles were slow.<sup>57</sup>

Class III. Class III supplies became critical during this period. After unit trains had been withdrawn from Germany CCB became out of and ammunition, gasoline and water supplies became nearly exhausted. It became necessary to form armored supply convoys using half-track vehicles and fight in to the troops.<sup>58</sup>

Class V. Procurement of class V supplies presented no problem, however, because of the inability to maintain the supply lines open ammunition became critically short at times. It is noteworthy that one of the heaviest TD engagements during this period, fought by the platoon of Lieutenant Rennebaum on Hill 298, was broken off when the TD's became very short of ammunition.<sup>59</sup>

Maintenance. The performance of maintenance on the vehicles during this period was quite a problem because of enemy action which caused considerable damage to the vehicles and permitted little time for repair. This conditions existed for only a relatively short period of time, and following the withdrawal from Germany the 628th was given time for repair and maintenance.

Evacuation of Casualties.

During the month of September the Company Aid Men evacuated casualties through the 112th Infantry Bn Aid Station and the 75th Medical Collecting Company. During the time that the aid men were evacuating through the 112th Infantry Aid Station, the aid station was located approximately two miles from the front which was found to be the best method of

evacuation.<sup>60</sup>

Communication. With the normal communications available to armored units this phase presented no unusual problems. Because of the excellent communications available it was possible to keep an accurate picture of the situation at all times.

Personnel.

The practice of making almost daily requisitions was found to work well and was continued. The replacement battalion serving the command was moved closer thereby greatly facilitating the receipt of replacements. The quality of replacements, as in the preceding month, ranged from very satisfactory to excellent. Difficulty was still experienced in obtaining certain categories of specialists. Too much time elapsed between requisition and receipt of personnel. This resulted in important positions remaining unfilled over too long a period; and in MOS getting converted to meet the requisitions -- Sometimes without sufficient accuracy. It is appreciated that, this being a question of stockage, it goes back ultimately to training necessary specialists at home in sufficient numbers and of the needed kinds. To the extent that numbers and diversity of specialists available as replacements can be increased, it should be done.

The number of our men returned to duty continued unsatisfactory. The present policy of holding them for 30 days before use as replacements for other units is not enough.<sup>61</sup>

Battle losses for September 62

Friendly		Enemy	
	Killed 11		Killed 527
	Wounded 38		Captured 205

Since most of the action of this unit for the month of September was fought during the battle described

herein the casualties listed above are indicative of the results of that battle.

Morale. Remained excellent throughout this period despite a shortage of supplies indicated above.

Enemy Material Losses<sup>63</sup>

<u>Tanks and SP Guns</u>	<u>Destroyed</u>	<u>Damaged</u>
Pz Kw VI	9	5
Pz Kw V	6	0
Pz Kw IV	5	0
Unidentified	6	0
Armd Car w/20 mm gun	2	0
<u>Transport</u>		
Armd Personnel Carriers	9	0
Command Cars (sedan)	7	0
Gen Purpose (1 to 3 tons)	18	0
Motorcycles	2	0
<u>Towed Guns</u>		
88 mm	7	0
40 mm	0	0
<u>Enemy Installations</u>		
Pill-boxes	0	53
OP's	9	0
<u>Miscellaneous</u>		
MG (emplacements)	16	0
Mortar positions	7	0

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## CHAPTER 4

### 644th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION OPERATIONS IN THE ARDENNES

#### Introduction

General. The 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self Propelled) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ephriam F. Graham, Jr., sailed from United States on 2 January 1944, on board H.M.T. Aquitania. The battalion landed in Northern Ireland on 13 January and there continued its training with emphasis placed on indirect fire.<sup>1</sup>

This unit left the United States equipped with the 3 inch motor gun carriage, M 10, the vehicle it retained throughout its operations in Europe.

On 10 May the Battalion moved to HUNGERFORD, England where along with more training, preparations were made for the move to NORMANDY Peninsula. In order to provide protection for the crews against artillery fragments, a cover for each tank destroyer turret was made. These covers were made of one quarter inch armor plate. They completely covered the overhead openings of the turrets.

The battalion landed in Europe on UTAH Beach on 11 July 1944. The major portion of the battalion moved across the English Channel on 11 July in Landing Ships, Tank. The remainder of the battalion, also in LST's and under the control of its executive officer, Major Edward R. Garton, crossed the following day.<sup>2</sup>

On 15 July the battalion was attached to the US 8th Infantry Division and although elements of the battalion were from time to time attached to other divisions, the battalion itself remained so

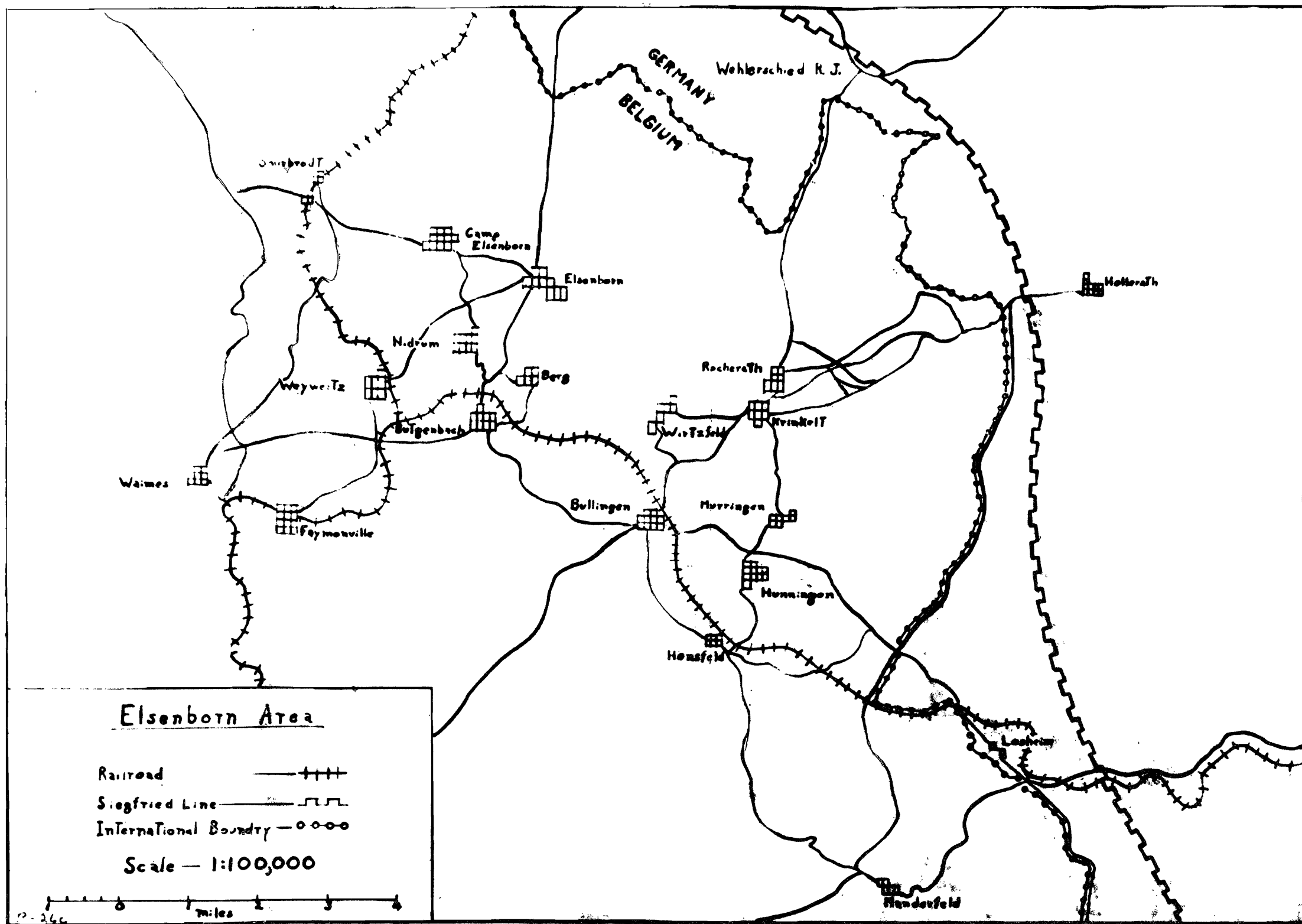


Figure 7.



attached until early December 1944.

Friendly situation. In late autumn 1944, the U. S. forces driving across Europe were confronted with the ROER River in their northern sector. The crossing of the river itself as it flowed at this time presented no great problem. However, located on this German river in the vicinity of URFTTALSPERRE and PAULUSHOFF were two very important and well defended dams. The importance of these dams was fully realized by both the Allies and the Germans. Should these dams be blown, the released water would cause the river below to become so swollen and swift that a relatively small defending force could render a military crossing in this area next to impossible. The US First Army stated, in its report of operations for that period, "Since the middle of September our attention had been directed toward the problem presented by the ROER River dams. It was realized at that time that no large-scale crossing of the ROER River below the dams could be undertaken until they were in friendly hands." <sup>3</sup> The US First Army was commanded at that time by Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges.

V Corps, US First Army, stretched thin its lines in the south so that it might assemble a force in sufficient strength to attack these dams.

...Early in December changes were made in V Corps dispositions in order to attack in the area of the Roer Dams. On 7 December the newly attached 78th Division commenced to arrive and close one of its regiments into assembly areas in the zone of V Corps, its second regiment arriving the following day. On 10 December the 2d Division commenced moving its units from front line positions in the Schnee Eifel area

to the area of V Corps. On 12 December CCB of the 9th Armored Division was attached to V Corps, and the 2d Division was attached at 1030 hours and closed in assembly areas. On 12 December the 78th Division took over the center of the corps front from Lammersdorf to Monschau, relieving the 102d Cavalry Group. To its left the 8th Division continued along the line of the Kall to include the Brandenburg Ridge. To its right the 99th Division still held the front from Monschau to the corps southern boundary in the Buchholz Forest northwest to the Losheim Gap. The 2d Division was now assembled in the Camp Elsenborn region ready to participate in the attack by passing through part of the 99th Division front...<sup>4</sup>

V Corps order of the battle on 13 December 1944 was as follows, front line units being listed in order from north to south:

V Corps

8th Div  
78th Div  
2d Div  
99th Div  
CCB 9th Armd Div (in reserve)  
102d Cav Gp (in reserve)  
CCR 5th Armd Div (in reserve)<sup>5</sup>

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his account of World War II, wrote the following in connection with the situation existing in this area:

...Through late November and early December the badly stretched condition of our troops caused constant concern... In order to maintain the two attacks that we then considered important we had to concentrate forces in the vicinity of the Roer dams on the north and bordering the Saar on the south. This weakened the static, or protective, force in the Ardennes region. For a period we had a total of only three divisions on a front of some seventy-five miles between Trier and Monschau and were never able to place more than four in that region...Our conclusion was that in the Ardennes region we were running a definite risk but we believed it to be a mistaken policy to suspend our attacks all along the front merely to make ourselves safe until all reinforcements arriving from the United States could bring us up to peak

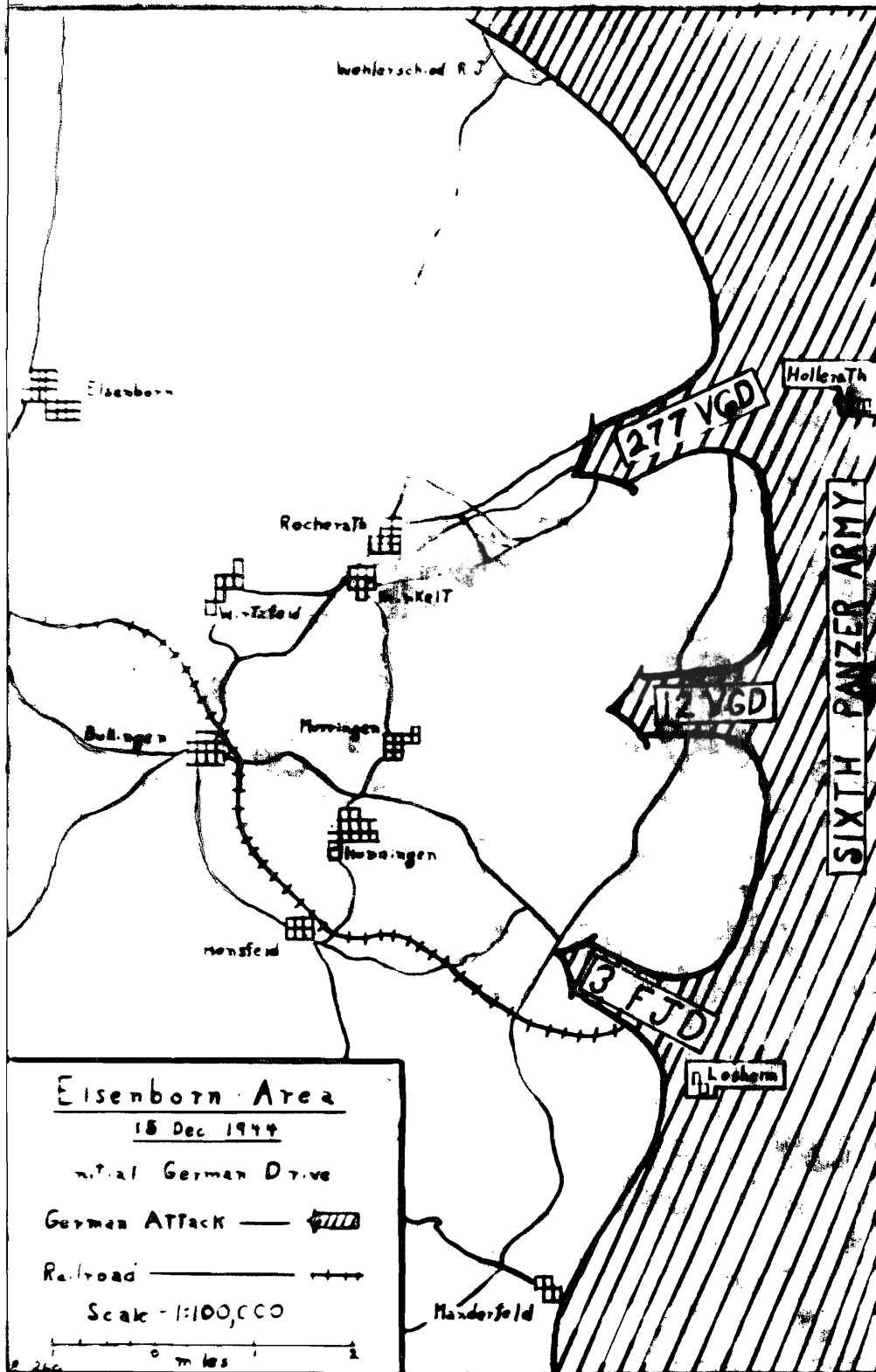


Figure 8.





strength<sup>6</sup>..

Enemy situation. In the fall of 1944 the German troops and equipment at the front were generally in a poor state after ten years of fighting and repeated Allied bombings of industries and transportation.

The Germans were engaged in the east along a wide front against the Russians. On the western front the Allies were attacking the border of the Homeland. The German defenders had been forced back to the SIEGFRIED LINE and in the north to the line of the ROER River.

Hitler, anxious to regain the initiative and bolster home front morale, was extremely desirous of mounting an offensive. He reasoned that no decisive objectives could be gained on the eastern front against the unlimited Russian manpower. In the west prospects looked better to him. An attack through the difficult, but thinly held ARDENNES could with surprise cross the MEUSE River, capture the port of ANTWERP and destroy the northern half of the Allied Forces. The SIEGFRIED positions were to be held with a minimum of troops. The best units were withdrawn, reorganized, and completely reequipped for this grand offensive.

Three armies were to attack. On the north, General Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army; in the center, General Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army; on the south, General Brandenburg's Seventh Panzer Army.

Sixth Panzer Army assigned the major effort was forced, because of the terrain and narrow front, to attack with the I SS

Panzer Corps followed by II SS Panzer Corps.

...The plan was that the Corps was to break through on its own sector of the enemy's main field of combat with the three infantry divisions: the 277 VGD (right) to reach the area of Elsenborn, the 12 VGD (center) to reach the area of Nidrum - Weywertz, and the 3 F J D (left) to reach the area of Schoppen - Elberdingen?..

General Kraemer, chief of staff of the Sixth Panzer Army, in his report of the commitment of that army, wrote the following "The best division was the 12 VGD which had an especially skilled  
8  
Commander and had fought excellently in the Battle of Aachen."

The 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions were not to be used in the initial breakthrough. The strength of these divisions was to  
9  
be conserved for the thrust beyond this.

...On 14 Dec 44 at noon, the Corps took over the command of its attack sector.

Following formations were committed in the sector:

277 VGD, the right wing of which stood at the edge of the wood, about 2 kms southeast of Alzen, and thus, inside the sector of the contiguous corps (LXVII). The left wing was near Losheim.

1 Bn of the neighboring corps on the left (LXVI) was near Krewinkel.

e. Moving into the assembly areas.

In the evening of the 15 Dec 44, the 12 VGD and the 3 Para Div moved into their attack sectors and assembly areas...

g. Situation immediately before the attack....

The reinforced Bn of the 277 VGD, which was in the LXVII Corps sector, had not been relieved, so that it was absent at the beginning of the attack. This weakened the right wing attack group.

The 12 VGD had completed its preparations according to plan, and had undertaken its own security.

The 3 Para Division, which had been put under Corps command on 14 Dec 44 by Army Group (Heeresgruppe), arrived during the early evening of the 15 Dec 44 with only two regiments (the second regiment of which was without heavy weapons in some of the elements.)...

At 0530 hrs, the artillery opened its preparatory fire<sup>10</sup>..

## Operations

Pre-battle movement. In the early days of December, the US 8th Infantry Division of the US First Army was fighting its way through the HURTTGEN Forest in an attempt to capture the ROER River Dams. The resistance displayed by the Germans proved too stubborn for such a head-on attack by this depleted division. First US Army commander, Lieutenant General Hodges, organized a new plan calling for a strong ground thrust from the south, just north of the ARDENNES, aimed at these all-important dams. The attack was to be made by the 2d Infantry Division on 13 December. To add more power to the attack, US V Corps, on 8 December ordered the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion (minus one gun company and one reconnaissance platoon) detached from the 8th Division and attached to the 2d Division, then commanded by Major General Walter M. Robertson.

The order was received on 8 December and the battalion commander accompanied by Captain Harry L. Godshall, Jr., the battalion S-3, proceeded immediately to the headquarters of the 2d Division located at ST. VITH, Belgium, where orders for the battalion to proceed to SOURBRODT, Belgium, on 11 December were received. Graham and Godshall returned to the battalion area, located at HURTTGEN, Germany, on the 9th of December and plans were formulated  
11  
for the move.

On 10 December the 817th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed), a unit believed to be less suited for offensive operations because its weapons were towed, relieved the 644th TD Battalion (minus

Company B and one platoon of Reconnaissance Company). The battalion moved to SOURBRODT the next day. From this point on in this report when the 644th TD Battalion is mentioned, it is to be understood that it is referring to the battalion minus Company B and one platoon of Reconnaissance Company.

On the morning of 11 December at approximately 0930 hours, the battalion set out on its move from HURTGEN to SOURBRODT. The distance was approximately 50 miles. The weather was very cold and all roads were covered with snow. No enemy interference was encountered, however, and the battalion completed the move without incident at 1745 hours the same day. The battalion CP was set up in SOURBRODT and the tank destroyers were serviced and made ready for the operations to come.

On 12 December Company A was attached to the 9th Infantry Regiment, then located at ROCHERATH. Company A moved to the regiment's assembly area located in NONSCHAU Forest north of ROCHERATH, and closed by dark. Company C was attached to the 38th Infantry Regiment which was at that time located at CAMP ELSENBORN. Plans were made to move Company C forward to the regiment's assembly area on order. The 644th TD Battalion was attached to the 2d Infantry Division Artillery.

The plan to capture the ROER River Dams initially called for the 9th Infantry Regiment to pass through the positions held by the 2d Reconnaissance Troop and the 99th Infantry Division north of ROCHERATH, and to attack and seize that portion of the SIEGFRIED

Line located at the WEHLERSCHEID Road Junction. The regiment was then to swing north and seize the town of ROHREN lying to the north beyond the MONSCHAU Forest. When the 9th Infantry had taken WEHLERSCHEID, the 38th Infantry was to pass through the 9th and advance through the MONSCHAU Forest toward DREIBORN, Germany.

Operations, 13 December. At 0830 hours the 9th Infantry began the attack as planned. The regiment advanced through the woods along both sides of the ROCHERATH-WEHLERSCHIED Road. Because the woods on both sides of this road contained many swamps, the tanks and tank destroyers were confined to the road. With the morning had come a sudden thaw. The snow on the road turned to slush. Visibility was very poor. In order to gain surprise, no artillery preparations were fired. By 1330 hours the regiment had advanced to within 600 yards of the WEHLERSCHIED Road Junction. There it met a German strong point impervious to quick attack. The road junction was defended by 24 enemy pillboxes placed 20 or 30 yards apart. In front of these pillboxes was an anti-tank ditch, a wide belt of barbed wire concertinas, and thickly sown anti-personnel mines. The ROCHERATH-WEHLERSCHIED Road was also mined, thereby denying the infantry the direct fire support of the tanks and tank destroyers.

Operations, 14 December. On 14 December the regiment was not successful in its efforts to seize this strong point. This was largely due to the lack of effective supporting artillery and to the weather, which kept our tactical bombers grounded. On this

date the 644th TD Battalion forward CP moved to ROCHERATH. The battalion forward CP, as was normal, consisted of the battalion commander, the S-2 and S-3 sections, and the Reconnaissance Company.

Operations, 15 December. The morning of 15 December found the weather still too hazy for the use of tactical bombing. The 9th Infantry spent the day patrolling and probing the objective.

The 38th Infantry made plans this date to relieve the 9th Infantry on the 16th. The regiment planned to employ the 3d Battalion in a flank attack against the position from the southeast. During the day routes and positions were reconnoitered for the attached tanks and tank destroyers so that their direct fire weapons could be brought to bear on the objective, thereby assisting the 3d Battalion in the main attack. Just after dark on 15 December Lieutenant Colonel Walter M. Higgins, Jr., commanding officer, 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry, sent a patrol to cross the German lines. The patrol reported the Germans off guard and an attack in strength was made by the 2d Battalion. The attack was successful.

Operations, 16 December. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 9th Infantry advanced through the gap in the enemy lines, made by the 2d Battalion, prior to daylight on 16 December. By 1200 hours, what was to be remembered as "Heartbreak Crossroads" was taken, and the 9th Infantry was in the process of consolidating its positions.

Due to the success of the 9th Infantry attack, the 38th Infantry did not carry out the attack planned the previous day, but advanced north to pass through the 9th Infantry as called for in the

original plan. By 1700 hours the 38th Infantry was located in a defensive position for the night along the high ground approximately 1100 yards directly east of the WEHLERSCHIED Road Junction.

Company C, 644th TD Battalion, which had been in support of the 38th Infantry was disposed as follows on 16 December: 2d Platoon located just east of ROCHERATH-WEHLERSCHIED Road approximately 5500 yards north of ROCHERATH; 1st Platoon located approximately 3000 yards north of ROCHERATH and 600 yards east of the ROCHERATH-WEHLERSCHIED Road in the vicinity of 2d Battalion, 395th Infantry Regiment, 99th Infantry Division; the remainder of Company C was located in ROCHERATH where the company CP had been moved this  
18  
date.

Late in the evening of 16 December Companies A and C were ordered released to 644th TD Battalion control as of 17 December.

On 16 December the Germans launched their counteroffensive in the ARDENNES. Their attack extended from KESTERNICH in the north, to include all of the LUXEMBOURG frontier in the south. In the area immediately concerning the 2d Division the Germans had attacked the over-extended 99th Division lines and succeeded in local penetrations. The US lines held, however, and by the end of the day the situation was partially restored. The Germans had, in their attack, succeeded in breaking contact between the 99th Division on the north of MANDERFELD, and the 106th Division on the south of  
19  
MANDERFELD by capturing that town.



On the afternoon of 16 December the 23d Infantry Regiment, 2d Infantry Division, then located at CAMP ELSENBORN, received orders to attach its 1st and 3d Battalions to the 99th Division. The 1st Battalion was attached to the 394th Infantry. This battalion left on trucks at 2330 hours and proceeded to BULLINGEN where the troops were detrucked and marched southeast to HUNNINGEN where the battalion took up a defensive position. The 3d Battalion was attached to the 393d Infantry, and left its area on trucks at 1400 hours. At 1630 hours the battalion arrived at the western edge of KRINKELT Forest and immediately deployed north and south of the road, in the 393d Infantry area.

The 2d Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment, under 23d Infantry control, was moved at 1345 hours a distance of approximately 15 miles by truck to an assembly area 3000 yards north of KRINKELT, arriving at 1430 hours.

Operations, 17 and 18 December. Early on 17 December the German 1st SS Panzer Division committed its armor in the attack. The division smashed to the northwest on the railroad running from LOSHIEM to BUTGENBACH, and overran the town of HONSFELD. By 0830 hours the armored force was in BULLINGEN, and shortly thereafter sent an armored thrust northwest toward the villages of WIRTZFELD and KRINKELT.

The 644th TD Battalion received information of the heavy armor attack advancing toward BULLINGEN. One platoon of the Reconnaissance Company, commanded by First Lieutenant Edward B. Patterson,

was immediately sent to establish and maintain contact with the enemy tanks. The platoon was surrounded in BULLINGEN and the 1st Section was captured. The 2d Section escaped capture by breaking from the encirclement.

To meet the enemy armor thrust driving from the southeast 1st Platoon, Company C, 644th TD Battalion, and one platoon of the 741st Tank Battalion were ordered to pick up infantry of the 23d Infantry and proceed south. At 0845 hours the tank destroyers and tanks contacted Company E, 2d Battalion, 23d Infantry, north of ROCHERATH. With the company of infantry mounted on the tanks and tank destroyers, the small force moved south through ROCHERATH and into KRINKELT. Colonel Stokes, assistant division commander, 2d Infantry Division, met these tanks and tank destroyers at KRINKELT. He ordered the tank destroyers and that part of Company E mounted on them to go to WIRTZFELD. The four tanks and accompanying infantry, he ordered to BULLINGEN under Captain Byrd. The tanks had gone only a short distance out of KRINKELT when they encountered a Mark IV tank, a half track, and an armored car. The infantry dismounted and took cover while the tanks prepared to open fire. Meanwhile the three tank destroyers which had turned right toward WIRTZFELD sighted the enemy vehicles. After the infantry had dismounted, the tank destroyers immediately opened fire and knocked out all three enemy vehicles. The infantry from the tanks and tank destroyers joined forces and captured 12 prisoners who were hiding<sup>22</sup> along the road in the vicinity of the three enemy vehicles.

Company A (minus 2d Platoon), 644th TD Battalion, had been ordered to WIRTZFELD early on the morning of 17 December and arrived just as the 1st Platoon, Company C, had knocked out the three enemy vehicles. The commanding officer, Company A, was wounded by a shell fragment and evacuated. First Lieutenant Clarence Steves assumed command of Company A and was ordered to provide anti-armor defense for WIRTZFELD, relieving Company C without delay. Commanding officer, Company C, was ordered to provide anti-armor defense for ROCHERATH-KRINKELT area. With the bulk of the battalion located in WIRTZFELD and KRINKELT, the forward CP (minus the Reconnaissance Company) was moved to WIRTZFELD. Captain Godshall, the battalion S-3, was ordered to take command of Company A late in the afternoon of this date. The commanding officer 38th Infantry assumed responsibility for the defense of ROCHERATH-KRINKELT area. <sup>23</sup>

The 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry, and the 3d Battalion (minus Company K), 9th Infantry had moved from WEHLERSCHIED down to WIRTZFELD about noon on 17 December. The 2d Battalion was given the mission of protecting the road out of WIRTZFELD to the east. The 3d Battalion (minus Company K) was positioned between WIRTZFELD and BULLINGEN with the mission of protecting WIRTZFELD from the direction of BULLINGEN which was in the hands of the Germans. The commanding officer, 9th Infantry was made responsible for the defense of WIRTZFELD where his CP was now located.

From the time the elements of the tank destroyer battalion moved to WIRTZFELD and KRINKELT, heavy artillery fell throughout

the area.

On 17 December the Germans pushed forward directly from the east in an attempt to take ROCHERATH and KRINKELT, and joined its southern forces attacking toward BULLINGEN and BUTGENBACH. The enemy unit making this attack directly from the east was the German 277 Volksgrenadier Division reinforced with assault guns. The plan for this attack was recorded by General Kraemer as follows:

...The 277 Volks Gren Div was to continue their attack on both sides of Udenbreth past Krinkelt-Wirtzfeld fro a later assault on Sourbrodt, south Elsenborn. The division was reinforced by an assault gun detachment that had not been ready for the commitment on 16 Dec (because the last parts of this detachment could only be extricated during the night 15/15 Dec). It was to be expected that the division with their attack in the direction of Elsenborn would gain terrain and contain the enemy forces that were situated in this area<sup>24</sup>.

The seriousness of the attack was realized by Major General Walter M. Robertson, the 2d Infantry Division commander. One platoon of Company A, 644th TD Battalion was sent to guard the crossroads located about 1400 yards east of ROCHERATH. Also sent to this location were the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon, Company K and 1st Platoon, Company M, all elements of the 3d Battalion, 9th Infantry. Orders to proceed to this location were received while this unit was proceeding south between ROCHERATH and WIRTZFELD. The units bearing the brunt of the German attack aimed east toward ROCHERATH were those of the 23d and 393d Infantry Regiments. It was apparent that this line was about to give way to the German thrust.

The movement of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, to the south was intercepted by General Robertson about 4000 yards north of

ROCHERATH. The battalion was ordered to move to the road junction recently occupied by the platoon of Company A, 644th TD Battalion. General Robertson punctuated the urgency of the situation by personally loading the leading elements of the infantry in commandeered  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ton trucks and leading them to within 1000 yards of the road net. The commanding officer, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry had orders to command all friendly troops in the area. The battalion managed to get Companies A and B astride the road facing southeast just as darkness fell.

The commanding officer, 1st Battalion, having of necessity left all the battalion anti-tank mines in the WEHLERSCHIED area, contacted the tank destroyer platoon leader and arranged for the use of anti-tank mines in the possession of the tank destroyer platoon. The problem of setting up a defense in this area, at this time, was extremely difficult. The elements in contact with the enemy were falling back in a disorganized fashion. The area was subjected to direct enemy machine gun fire. With darkness setting in the units attempted to set up their defenses in an unfamiliar area.

The commanding officer, Company I, 23d Infantry arrived without men from the east. He was shown the area he would occupy and defend when and if he could get control of his company. A hurried defense plan was given the company commanders at the 1st Battalion CP, located 300 yards northwest of the crossroads.

The battalion artillery liaison officer had been out of contact with his artillery battalion for over two hours. He worked

feverishly to restore communications and as darkness set in he succeeded. He immediately planned his defensive fires along the road in front of the position.

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With the darkness came the first enemy attack. The entire situation was confusing. While the enemy was attacking, elements of the withdrawing front line units were entering the battalion's position from the same direction. In attempting to allow friendly elements to pass into this position, enemy vehicles, including tanks, were allowed to pass through. When this was discovered, a "daisy chain", made of the tank destroyer platoon's antitank mines, was dragged across the road. This measure along with artillery fire support and direct fires from the battle position stopped the attack.

By midnight this force had destroyed five enemy tanks and an undetermined number of foot troops. Throughout the night artillery fire was placed continuously in front of the position.

At 0645 hours on 18 December the full force of the German armor fell in this zone. Every means at hand was employed to repel this attack, but the task became impossible. Had it not been for a platoon of Company A, 741st Tank Battalion, which was sent forward to the position about noon, this unit could not have been withdrawn. By employing tremendous amounts of artillery fire and counterattacks by the tank platoon, the defenders were able to withdraw through the 2d Battalion, 38th Infantry, and assemble 2000 yards northwest of ROCHERATH.

For this action at the crossroads near ROCHERATH, known to the

men of the battalion as "Purple Heart Corner", the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, received a Presidential Citation. Throughout this entire defensive action, the 2d Platoon, Company A, 644th TD Battalion, remained in its position at the crossroads, lending its support to the 1st Battalion. The platoon withdrew with the 1st Battalion. This platoon proceeded to KRINKELT on the afternoon of 18 December and was attached to Company C, 644th TD Battalion.

The German's view of the action of 18 December on this front as expressed by General Kraemer, was as follows:

...The attempts, to win the roads from Monschau to Euskirchen to the camp at Elsenborn, and from there the roads from Bullingen to Weismes, were continued in cooperation with 277 V.G.D., that continued the attacks near Udenbreth.

The 277 V.G.D. advanced well forward on 18 Dec, and took the heights north of Wirtzfeld. With this the Division was freed and together with the 12 V.G.D. could attack in the direction of Elsenborn. This was ordered for the 19 Dec. The attacks -- Monschau -- and Elsenborn -- had to be under the direction of LXVII Corps.

The 12 V.G.D. had together with the 12 SS Pz Div taken Buellingen after a hard battle. Both divisions fought for the village Butgenbach against a strongly defended enemy, who for the first time attacked with tanks.<sup>28</sup>

When the 644th TD Battalion CP moved from ROCHERATH to WIRTZFELD on 17 December, the Reconnaissance Company (minus one platoon) remained in its position in ROCHERATH. At about 2030 hours that night the Germans who had passed through, and to the south of the defensive position of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, forced their attack into ROCHERATH. The attack fell in the area of the Reconnaissance Company, The CP group was organized by the commanding officer and the company attempted to repel the enemy attack. The

company managed to hold off the attackers until late in the morning of 18 December, at which time the attack ceased. During this action the company destroyed an enemy tank, damaged another, and accounted for about 20 casualties among the enemy. The company lost all vehicles open to the attacker's view, but suffered only minor personnel casualties.

On 18 December the commanding officer, 644th TD Battalion, was made responsible for the anti-armor defense of the WIRTZFELD area. Company C, 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed), and three guns of the 801st Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed) were attached to the 644th TD Battalion. Throughout the day of 18 December elements of the 394th Infantry and 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry withdrew through the defensive positions of the WIRTZFELD-KRINKELT area.

The 801st TD Battalion had been attached to the 99th Division since 9 November 1944. This battalion had met the brunt of the German attack with the 99th Division. The three guns attached to the 644th TD Battalion on 18 December were of the 1st Platoon, Company A. These were the only guns remaining in Company A. Lieutenant Colonel F. B. Horsfall, commanding officer, 801st TD Battalion wrote of this in the unit's after action report.

...18 Dec - At 0215A the 1st plat of Co A was ordered to proceed to WIRTZFELD thru KRINKELT. Upon reaching WIRTZFELD they met with the 23d Regt, 2d Div. There they set up AT defense on the North and East side of town with their remaining three guns. The rest of the Co which had lost the majority of its equipment were employed with the infantry...

All of the remaining guns of the Bn, less three in WIRTZFELD, were placed East of Elsenborn in AT defense. A provisional



company was organized from these gun crews and placed under the command of the Co C commander...

The concensus of opinions of the plat leaders and the gun crews are that if it had not been for the fact of the non-mobility of the towed gun and the lack of armor protection for the gun crews and in most cases the over-running of the gun positions by the infantry many more tanks and vehicles could have been destroyed...

Enemy action on 18 December in the area consisted of armor and infantry attacks from the south and southeast. None of the attacks were successful, but the pressure being brought to bear by the powerful enemy caused the U. S. forces to plan a withdrawal to the better defensive terrain of ELSENBORN Ridge approximately two miles west of ROCHERATH and WIRTZFELD. The pulling back of the forward units of V Corps resulted in the concentration of force in a tight semicircle to the west of ELSENBORN.

Operations, 19 December. The withdrawal was planned for the night of 19 December. Enemy artillery fire was moderate during the withdrawal. Company C covered the withdrawal from ROCHERATH - FRINKELT as rear guard. Company A covered the withdrawal from WIRTZFELD which was set on fire. The withdrawal was accomplished without undue difficulty.

On ELSENBORN Ridge. Prior to daylight on 20 December, one platoon of Company C moved into position on the high ground east of BERG in support of the 38th Infantry. Company A moved into reserve in ELSENBORN. One platoon of Company A moved to high ground east of ELSENBORN to provide anti-armor protection from the east. The battalion forward CP was established in BERG.

On the morning of 20 December the 2d Division commander, Major General Robertson, called the commanding officer, 644th TD Battalion, to personally commend the battalion.

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General Kraemer recorded the actions of the Germans in this area on the 19th of December as follows:

...19 December:

On that day the enemy countermeasures were quite obvious. The enemy resistance at the LXVII Army Corps was growing. Counterattacks were made in the north. The terrain captured during the preceding days had to be given up. Kalterherberg south of Monschau was taken. The 277 VG Div reached the road Forsterei Wahlerscheid-Rocherath. On the whole, no perceptible progress was made. On 18 Dec, a Volksartillery Corps was attached to the LXVII Army Corps and was moving up to the new positions.

The 12 SS Pz Div and 12 VG Div of the I SS Pz Corps could no more advance against the increasing enemy forces. The terrain being very muddy, the infantry advanced only slowly, and the tanks could not be committed off from the road. Enemy anti-tank guns and tanks were well emplaced. Stronger artillery fire and the difficult terrain would probably prevent our breakthrough past Buettgenbach, because it was no more possible for the attacking forces to move into the assembly positions. Evidently the two divisions did not find the appropriate terrain for the attack, the battalions could not advance on the muddy ground and had to use the roads, where they were exposed to the enemy artillery. That caused temporarily an incoordinated direction of the two divisions. Tanks, that during the morning hours had found by-passing road south of Buettgenbach broke down in the mud at the west end of the village and only at night could be removed from there with great difficulties. A further advance was impossible the weather continued like this. Therefore, the Army gave order in the afternoon that the 12 SS Pz Div cease the attack, be extracted rapidly and assemble in the area Baasen - Losheim - Mandersfeld, and be sent either after the 1 SS Pz or the 9 SS Pz Div<sup>31</sup>.

Summary. During the period covered by this report the 644th TD Battalion's offensive operations were severely limited due to the terrain and weather. The method in which the battalion operated is shown however. As was normal, the battalion itself was

attached to division artillery. The companies were attached to the infantry regiments. The platoons were attached to the infantry battalions. When working with infantry on the offensive, the battalion attempted to operate in units no larger than platoon strength.

On the defensive the battalion operated where possible in company strength. At times however, when it was more suitable, it operated in platoon strength. Also, because of their flexible organization, there were times when platoons were attached to companies of the battalion other than their parent companies.

In regard to destroying enemy armor in this operation, the 38th Infantry recorded the following:

...In the attack, every effort was made to keep tanks and TD's well forward to place direct fire on enemy fortifications and to repel any counterattacks. When the enemy launched his offensive available elements of 741st Tk Bn and 644th TD Bn, SP, were employed to counter enemy armor. Because of the superior firepower and frontal armor of the enemy tanks, our armor was employed in TD fashion, taking up firing positions along the flanks of approaches and placing their fire on the flank and rear of enemy tanks. Normal procedure in countering enemy armored attacks on Roherath and Krinkel were to take enemy armor under fire with medium artillery before it reached our lines; then to hit individual tanks from the flank with our tanks, TD's and 57 mm AT guns, and mop up infiltrations. Destroyed were set afire with gasoline-oil mixes poured on them and with thermite grenades set in gunbarrels which burned through the barrels. The 57mm AT gun proved very unsatisfactory, only one effective hit being scored on the turret of one enemy tank. Medium artillery proved effective in breaking up enemy tank formations. The close teamwork between infantry, artillery, tanks and TD's accounted for 69 known enemy tanks, plus several armored trucks and scout cars<sup>32</sup>.

When the 2d Division had completed its withdrawal to the ELSENBORN Ridge area, General Hodges phoned the following message

to General Robertson: "What the 2d Division has done in these past four days will live forever in the history of the United States Army."<sup>33</sup>

The 644th TD Battalion indeed played an important part in the defense of this area, for during the period starting on the morning of 17 December and ending on the night of 19 December, the battalion destroyed 17 enemy tanks, knocked out two SP guns, and damaged two enemy tanks.

#### Logistics and Personnel

General. The 644th TD Battalion during the period covered by this report was well supplied with materiel and personnel. Moving supplies from the battalion CP located at SOURBRODT to the forward CP in ROCHERATH became a problem when the Germans launched their counteroffensive. The only practical route from SOURBRODT to the forward CP was the ELSENBORN-BUTGENBACH-BULLINGEN-KRINKELT road. On the morning of 17 December a battalion supply convoy moving to the west, met the advancing Germans on the eastern edge of BULLINGEN. The supply vehicles were able to withdraw to ELSENBORN. Only after much difficulty did they succeed in reaching the forward CP by moving over foot trails southeast of ELSENBORN. Many routes appeared on the map in this area but these routes proved to be but trails. An engineer unit made a road from WIRTZFELD to ELSENBORN by enlarging one of these trails and it was used by all units in the area for both supply and withdrawal.



**FIRST ARMOR ACROSS THE ROER**  
Figure 9. An M-10 of the 644th TD Battalion.



Class I. At no time were Class I supplies short in supply. Prior to 17 December the rations were picked up by company vehicles from the battalion CP. These consisted of 5 in 1 rations and when available, fresh meats and vegetables were sent forward. Three days supply of rations were carried with each unit. The company kitchen trucks were kept in the battalion CP area.

Classes II and IV. These classes of supply presented no problem. The only items not readily available were certain ordnance items. Due to the proximity of division and army supporting ordnance units and readily available transportation, these needed items could be obtained with little difficulty.

Class III. Because this unit was equipped with M-10 motor gun carriage, the fuel problem would have been that of diesel fuel. There was at no time however, any shortage in this fuel. There was also no problem in the supply of gasoline.

Class V. Ammunition supply was no problem during this period. There seemed to be always more than enough small arms ammunition available. This unit had opportunity to replace their 3 inch motor gun carriage, M-10 with the M-18 at various times in Europe. However, because the supply of 3 inch ammunition seemed always to be adequate, the commander retained the M-10. Such was the case during this operation, an adequate supply of 3 inch ammunition was at all times available. HVAP (high velocity armor piercing) proved most effective and was in good supply.

Maintenance. This battalion was well trained in vehicular maintenance. Because of this the maintenance problem was kept to a minimum. Also, because of the excellent availability of Class II supplies and the availability of ordnance units, no serious problems were encountered.

Communications. This battalion used much wire. It made a practice of installing wire between its CP and the switchboard of the division to which it was attached. The forward CP also installed wire to the nearest regimental switchboard. Because of this, radio had to be used only between platoons and as a supplementary means of communications for forward and rear CP's and the companies.

Personnel. This battalion was kept to its authorized strength most of the time. The replacements received were seldom tank destroyer personnel. However, because the battalion had lost only between 10 and 15 percent of the personnel it landed with in NORMANDY, the training of these replacements presented no problem.

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#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1

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31

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32

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