

CHAPTER 5

704TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

On 11 July 1944 the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion left the marshalling area in southern England and boarded LCT's at Southampton. On the following day the battalion landed on Utah Beach on the Normandy coast of France. Shortly afterwards the battalion joined the recently arrived 4th Armored Division.

On the morning of 17 July the battalion left the beach area with the 4th Armored Division and went into a defensive position in the vicinity of Raids, France. The battalion was in general support of CCB, 4th Armored Division with the mission of furnishing indirect fire for the front line armored infantry battalions.

The battalion took up firing positions in fields approximately one half mile behind the armored infantry battalions. The battalion remained under control of its own battalion commander and his staff. It was assisted in its fire missions, which consisted of firing at enemy observation posts, snipers in buildings and church steeples, and area targets in the orchards, by the forward observers of the 4th Armored Artillery battalions and by the mortar platoon leaders of the armored infantry battalions. Although much firing was done, the extent of damage was never ascertained.

Through the month of August and early September the 704th moved with the 4th Armored Division in the exploitation phase of the Battle of France. During this exploitation the 704th lost its integrity as a battalion operating under command of its battalion commander. It was decentralized and its units were attached to the

Combat Commands of the 4th Armored Division. One company was attached to Combat Command A; one company to Combat Command B; and the remaining company and the Battalion Headquarters were attached to the Reserve Command.

In this manner of attachment the company commanders remained at the Combat Command command post and received their orders from the Combat Command commander or his representative. In turn the company commanders would transmit their orders to their platoon leaders whose platoons would normally be supporting a reinforced tank battalion.

The battalion commander and his staff kept in close touch with his company commanders by personal visits to the Combat Command command posts. Supply, evacuation, and replacements were executed through the logistical channels of the 4th Armored Division.

Undoubtedly one of the most descriptive and typical examples of the use of tank destroyers with both the infantry and armored units was the action of the 704th during the Battle of Arracourt, France. There the speed, maneuverability and firepower of the tank destroyers were exploited in their fullest; with results that were successful beyond even the highest hopes of the backers of ¹ this type of anti-tank tactics.

The general situation was as follows: During the early part of September the Third Army was making rapid progress against what appeared to be a somewhat confused German Army. The unrelenting pressure exerted against the enemy lines was practically impossible

for the Germans to contain for more than brief periods of time. Without a doubt the Americans were on the move; and they had every intent of keeping the offensive rolling.

On the 16th of September General Patton got his Corps Commanders together and gave them two important objectives as their next missions. The XX Corps was to advance as rapidly as possible and seize FRANKFORT. The XII Corps' mission was the capture of DARMSTADT and the establishing of a bridgehead east of the Rhine. The XV Corps was to follow the XII Corps and be prepared to take MANHEIM on order.

The tentative target date for the XII Corps attack was set for the 18th of September. The maneuver plan was a column of divisions with the 4th Armored Division in the lead. It was decided to strike between SARREGUEMINES and SAARBRUCKEN.²

As was stated, the penetrating force was to be the 4th Armored Division. It was to be followed by General Paul Baade's 35th Infantry Division whose mission was to send one regiment to accompany the armor, and to use the remainder in widening the gap. General Horace McBride's 80th Infantry Division was told to mop up any remaining pockets of enemy resistance, get behind the attacking column, take SAARBRUCKEN, and continue on to the RHINE.

This was the general plan for a rapid advance to the RHINE, but as usual, the Germans had ideas of their own. They were already on the march to launch a counterattack with elements of their Fifth Panzer Army, which most certainly was going to interrupt the

execution of the Third Army's plans.

On the 18th of September General John S. Wood, commander of the 4th Armored Division, issued orders for the resumption of the advance on the following day: CCB to move from DELME ON SAARBRUCKEN, CCA was to move from the ARRACOURT area along the center road in the XII Corps zone (MORHANGE, PUTTELANGE) and by using subsidiary roads on the south flank towards SARREGUIMINES.

But the Germans did a little attacking of their own on the 18th of September at LUNEVILLE, forcing CCA to send a task force to help CCR whose position at LUNEVILLE was being menaced.

And so, on the night of the 18th of September the 4th Armored Division was situated as follows:

CCR had thrown off the German attack with minor losses and was holding its position.

CCB was deployed near FRESNES-EN-SAULNOIS, ready for its attack on SAARBRUCKEN on the following day.

CCA, minus the task force it had sent to CCR, was assembled about 12 miles southeast of ARRACOURT.

Since our first account of tank destroyer action concerns itself with the tank destroyers attached to CCA, the details as to the position of units of that command are of importance.

The sector assigned to CCA was an extended one, reaching from CHAMBREY south nearly to the MARNE-RHINE CANAL. The protection of the north flank between CHAMBREY and ARRACOURT was the responsibility of an armored infantry battalion reinforced with a company of

medium tanks.

Another medium tank company, Company C of the 37th Tank Battalion, was the combat outpost at the crossroads at LEZEY, about 4 or 5 miles northeast of ARRACOURT.

CCA Headquarters, the attached field artillery, and a platoon of tank destroyers were grouped in and around ARRACOURT. The attached engineers held the south flank.

It seems that at this time, the night of the 18th of September, CCA was additionally told to protect the city of NANCY. Reports from air observers and ground reconnaissance patrols had stated that elements of a German Panzer Division, the 11th Panzer Brigade, and units of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division were concentrating to the southeast of ARRACOURT. It was thought that the Germans were preparing an attack against the bridgehead at NANCY; hence, the mission of the protection of NANCY for CCA.⁴

What was actually occurring was that the German 113th Panzer Brigade, with 42 Panther tanks of the Mark V Battalion, and the 2113th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, had moved from BOURDONNAY in a successful night march, reorganized its advance guard near LEY, and was pushing its way toward BEZANGE.

At this point it is of extreme importance to talk about the weather, for it actually played a major role throughout the fighting. There was a seemingly permanent heavy fog coupled with mist and rain at intervals. Actually, the fog was so dense at times that visibility was to all practical purposes non-existent. This fog

played a dual role in that it protected the German armor from air attack, but at the same time permitted American armor to fight at close quarters where the larger range of the German Panther tank gun was of no advantage.

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The stage was now set for action. It was early in the foggy morning of the 19th of September. German armored units were generally known to be in the area. CCA was deployed as described previously, and was preparing for its own advance while awaiting the return of the task force it had sent to the aid of CCR at LUNEVILLE.

Captain Evans, the commander of Company C, 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion, (the company attached to CCA) stated that at this time his mission was that of supporting the anti-tank mission of the tanks, and when necessary, to furnish protection for the combat trains going to and from the Division Supply Point.

The first reported contact with the German armor occurred near LESEY where Company C of the 37th Tank Battalion was outposted. A section of M-4 tanks were in position just south of LESEY when suddenly out of the dense fog which permeated the area appeared a Panther tank, hardly 75 yards from the two American tanks. The Panther, and two additional German tanks were destroyed almost within a matter of seconds; the remaining German tanks turned away in a southerly direction.

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Now Lt. Leiper and the 3d Platoon of Capt. Evans' company of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion enter the picture with their brilliant action against the German armored thrust. As told by

Lt. Leiper, this is what happened:

For some time prior to the 19th of September, Company C of the 704th was assisting in manning the combat outpost on the high ground north of ARRACOURT. Its Command Post was located at XANREY and the company had two platoons placed on the line on the ground east of MOYENVIC and its 3d Platoon in reserve with CCA Headquarters in ARRACOURT. Their system was alternating the platoons every three days to give each one some rest from the guard detail. The 51st Armored Infantry was deployed along the MOYENVIC line and the tank destroyers were being used as an infantry support team. Along the same line, but just west of LESEY was Capt. Tanner with tanks of the 35th Tank Battalion.

On the night of the 18th of September the 3d Platoon of Company C, with Lt. Leiper in command, was brought back to ARRACOURT after being relieved from its tour on the line. It had spent an extra day on the front and was tired and ready for a little rest. There had been no anti-tank action on the line, but the machine guns of the tank destroyers had been used effectively against enemy night patrols attempting to pierce the area. And so the platoon bedded down, with no forethought of any action in the immediate future.

About 0730 of the 19th of September Lt. Webb, the Communication Officer of CCA, rushed in to Lt. Leiper and told him to alert his platoon immediately but could offer no explanation as to the reason for the emergency. A short time later, Capt. Dwight, a liaison officer from the 37th Tank Battalion hurried in and asked if

the platoon was ready. By this time Lt. Leiper was sure something big was up, and his thoughts were confirmed with the arrival of Colonel Clark, CCA commander, who ordered the platoon to follow Capt. Dwight to a certain HILL 279 and take up positions there as an outpost.

But further than that, Lt. Leiper had no idea as to the enemy situation or as to what was occurring in the immediate area. Probably no one knew exactly what was happening, except that there were a lot of German tanks rumbling around the zone.

Lt. Leiper and his platoon followed Capt. Dwight on the road to RECHICOURT. It is interesting to note that Lt. Leiper, as platoon leader, did not ride in a tank destroyer, but rode at the head of his platoon in a jeep. This type of guidance had been decided upon by the tank destroyer Battalion Commander in England who had reasoned that it gave the platoon leader a better chance to direct the actions of his 5 tank destroyers; whereas, if he were squeezed in one of the tank destroyers he would be more apt to fight the one tank destroyer rather than the five.

As they reached RECHICOURT, enemy fire started coming in from the east, and Capt. Dwight jumped from his jeep to ask Lt. Leiper if he thought it was direct fire; and it certainly was. Again, the rain and fog made it impossible to determine exactly where the shooting was coming from.

The platoon continued through RECHICOURT and was relieved to recognize an American jeep barreling down the road from BESSINGEN.

Lt. Leiper turned his platoon off the main road in RECHICOURT and started north on a narrow lane for about one thousand yards to the vicinity of HILL 246. They then started cross country up toward HILL 279 which had woods to the front and the right.

As the hill was approached, Lt. Leiper, who was still in front with his jeep, was startled to see the muzzle of a German tank gun sticking out through the trees at what seemed to be less than 30 feet away! He immediately gave the dispersal signal and the many months of continuous practice proved its worthiness as the platoon promptly deployed with perfect accord.

The lead tank destroyer, commanded by Sgt. Stacey, had evidently seen the German tank at the same time as Lt. Leiper, and opened fire immediately. Its first round scored a direct hit, exploding the German tank. The flames of the burning tank revealed others behind it in a V-formation, and Sgt. Stacey's next round hit a second German tank, but immediately afterwards he had his own tank destroyer knocked out by fire from a third German tank. This enemy Mark IV was taken under fire by the No. 2 tank destroyer, and was destroyed. The maneuver and fire of the 3d tank destroyer got another German tank as it tried to back out of the unhealthy situation, and a fifth enemy tank was destroyed almost immediately thereafter.

The entire affair was over in a matter of minutes, and as soon as the shooting had stopped, Lt. Leiper ordered the platoon to the area to make sure the enemy tanks were all out of action and to

be certain that there were no more there.

The box score for that short action stood at 5 German tanks destroyed, and one tank destroyer knocked out of action. The tank destroyer had been hit on an angle along the base of its gun barrel and through the gun shield. The ricocheting round had bounced around the interior of the tank.

The platoon withdrew about five hundred yards to a defiladed position behind a small rise. Security sections were posted around the perimeter and the damaged tank was sent back under its own power so that the injured could get medical care immediately. The assistant driver had been killed at once, and all the others except the gun sergeant had been wounded by the ricocheting shell. After this engagement Lt. Leiper stated that he no longer permitted the assistant driver to stay in the tank destroyer when action was imminent. He served no practical purpose then as assistant driver but just sat around and waited; and Lt. Leiper decided that to place a man in such a position uselessly was not good thinking; and therefore he put the assistant drivers at other tasks when fighting was close.

The tank destroyers were placed in position as near as possible in the direction that the enemy was thought to be. The fog stayed in all the low areas continuously--and it was still raining. Lt. Leiper and his sergeant made a reconnaissance of the area for the next hour trying to find the enemy locations. They succeeded only in receiving small-arms fire from the left and in hearing tanks

moving about on the right of their positions.

Shortly after returning to the platoon defense area, Lt. Leiper and some of his men saw a number of tanks moving on the crest of a hill some twenty five hundred yards away in the area between BESSINGEN and RECHICOURT. They were able to see them because the fog was confined to the valleys and low spots. Because it was known that the 1st Tank Destroyer Platoon of Company C was in the area fire was withheld initially. However, when the sixth tank was counted it was obvious that they must be German, and the platoon opened fire. Either four or five of the tanks (they were Mark IVs) were knocked out. At this time the attached field artillery battalion under Lt Col Parker opened fire on the tanks who were accompanied by infantry, and the enemy was dispersed.

More time of tense waiting went by. A liaison plane was seen overhead dodgin in and out of the clouds. The plane was that of Major Carpenter, who had figured out a method of attaching bazookas to the wings. They saw him dive behind them into the fog and fire his bazookas.

The flash from the exploding bazooka shells revealed three German tanks that had obviously circled around the 3d Platoon and were making their way up the back of the hill to their positions.

Lt. Leiper pulled a tank destroyer around and brought its fire on the tanks destroying two of them before the 3d one's fire hit the right sprocket of the tank destroyer knocking it out of action. Lt. Leiper signalled for another tank destroyer to come up

with a tow to pull the damaged tank destroyer back, but before the plan could be put into action the second tank destroyer was also hit--this one through the gun shield. It was reported that most of the tank destroyers that were destroyed were knocked out by hits on the gun shield, and it was thought that this was probably due to the fact that the gun blast made it a good target point.

Lt. Leiper pulled back his one remaining tank destroyer to defilade, dismounted his other men and set up a perimeter defense using the machine guns from the damaged tank destroyers.

There the platoon stayed until about 1500 when far to the right near RECHICOURT the 1st Platoon of Company C 704th made its appearance.

For some unknown reason several German tanks came out of a wooded area and attempted to cross the cemetery near MONOCOURT making perfect targets of themselves. Before they could get back to cover two of them were stopped by hits in the rear of their tanks by the 3d Platoon's last tank destroyer.

Then the enemy infantry tried an attack but the emplaced machine guns changed their minds immediately.

Finally, Major Hunter, with a platoon of tanks from the 35th Tank Battalion arrived and relieved the dead-tired but still determined members of the 3d Platoon who went back to ARRACOURT for their well-earned rest. ⁷ Capt. Leach, Company Commander of Company B of the 37th Tank Battalion stated that the entire Combat Command was amazed at the terrific fight put up by the tank destroyer platoon

and confirmed the fact that fifteen German tanks had been destroyed
by the platoon's fire during that day.⁸

On the 20th of September CCA was ordered to continue toward SARREGUMINES. However, after several hours of road marching, CCA received word that German tanks had returned to ARRACOURT which CCA had just left (actually, only eight German tanks had returned). CCA dispatched a company of tanks and one platoon of tank destroyers to take care of the Germans. This was done as ordered, with the entire force of German tanks destroyed.⁹

On the 21st of September CCA received orders to utilize the remainder of the day and the next day for a rest period. This was needed as a result of the tank battles around ARRACOURT, and for preparation for an attack against CHATEAU-SALINS.

However, on the morning of the 22d of September the Germans attacked CCA on its left flank which was being protected by the 25th Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized. Company C 704 was dispatched to drive the Germans off.

Company C took the situation in hand, and again against numerically superior Germans destroyed seven tanks, and then caused the remainder of the force to go into a disorganized retreat.

While Company C 704th had been with CCA, Company A 704 was attached to CCB, 4th Armored Division, and Headquarters 704th was attached to Reserve Command, 4th Armored Division.

Company A worked with CCB in the area from DROUVILLE-SALLONES on the 16th of September and remained there until the

21st of September when it moved near FRESNES-EN-SAULNOIS.

On the 24th of September the enemy was encountered near DROUVILLE-SALLONES and four tanks were destroyed. No tank destroyers were lost. Capt. Ryan was wounded in this action and evacuated and on the 25th, Lt. Preneta from Company B was assigned to command Company A. On the 27th of September Company A rejoined the battalion in the vicinity of ARRACOURT.

Headquarters 704th and Company B 704th were in bivouac on the 16th of September $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles southeast of LUNEVILLE. Its mission was the protection of the left flank of CCR which had been scheduled to attack and take LUNEVILLE. However, it was discovered that LUNEVILLE was already occupied by friendly troops; and so the 704th went into bivouac on the high ground northwest of the city on the 17th of September and stayed there until the 20th of September.

During this period the 3d Platoon of Company B, 704th moved to LUNEVILLE, which was under heavy artillery fire, in order to outpost the city against German armored columns which were approaching from the east. The 1st Platoon of Company B, 704th was given the mission of supporting the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion which was located on the high ground north of the city..

In the area east of LUNEVILLE the 3d Platoon of Company B fought throughout the night and destroyed 3 MK V tanks. On the 19th the platoon destroyed one MK V tank, one heavy SP gun, one heavy machine gun and crew, and took five prisoners.

In the afternoon of the 19th of September both the Battalion

Headquarters bivouac area and the position of the 1st Platoon Company B, 704th were shelled. Lt Col Bailey, the battalion commander was killed by enemy mortar fire in LUNEVILLE.

Headquarters 704th and Company B, 704th were relieved on the afternoon of the 19th and moved twelve miles north to the vicinity of SERRES. On the 20th of September these units moved again--this time to the vicinity of ARRACOURT where Lt Col H. P. Heid Jr. assumed command. Company B, 704th took positions guarding the right flank of CCA. On the 20th the company destroyed 5 MK V German tanks and on the 22d of September the 2d Platoon of Company B, 704th destroyed 3 more enemy tanks near RECHICOURT."

As a discussion and condensation of the activities of tank destroyers in general there are several points which can be brought out:

(a) From the employment of Capt. Evans' company at ARRACOURT (page) it is noted that tank destroyers were used in platoons under company control, supporting an outpost line, and moving from place to place looking for enemy tanks or other suitable targets of opportunity. Company B had a similar mission (page) when it was told to support the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion north of LUNEVILLE.

(b) Tank destroyers fought in tank destroyer versus tank actions as shown by the fighting of Lt. Leiper's platoon near RECHICOURT (Page), Company A's action near DROUVILLE-SALLONES, Company B's fight with German tanks when guarding the right flank

of CCA (page).

(c) Missions of flank and outpost security were prevalent for tank destroyers as described throughout the battles.

(d) During the battles at ARRACOURT the Battalion Commander of the 704th lost complete control of his battalion. The control of his detached companies was established at Combat Command Headquarters. However, the tank destroyer Company Commanders did conduct close liaison with the tank destroyer platoons when they supported other units. Both Major Miller, executive officer of the 704th and Lt Col Bidwell, a later battalion commander of the 704th, confirmed the above use of tank destroyer units. Additionally, they both thought that throughout the battles near ARRACOURT the tank destroyers were well employed under combat command control since the higher headquarters had a better picture of the overall situation and could dispatch tank destroyers to the right place at the appropriate time.

(e) It was also generally agreed that the tank destroyer missions at ARRACOURT could not have been as well performed by heavy tanks, such as M-26's, inasmuch as the tank destroyers were able to utilize speed and maneuverability over rough and muddy terrain over which M-26 tanks would have been unable to move. It was also stated that the open turrets of the tank destroyers were both a psychological and an actual discouraging feature to the crews inasmuch as they were always exposed to artillery airbursts and infantry grenades.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1

History of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion, p 3-6.

2

Dr. Hugh M. Cole, The Tank Battles in Lorraine (Military Review, Volume XXIX Nov 1949 No 8).

3

Ibid.

4

Interview with Lt Col Robert M. Parker, The Armored School, Fort Knox, Ky.

5

Cole, Op Cit.

6

Ibid.

7

Interview with Captain Edwin Leiper, Indianapolis, Indiana.

8

Interview with Captain James Leach, The Armored Center, Fort Knox, Kentucky.

9

Cole, Op Cit.

10

Afteraction Report, 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

11

Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

THE 823D TANK DESTROYER BATTALION (TOWED) AT MORTAIN

Introduction and Buildup

General. Much thought and study has gone into the selection of a "typical action" involving the 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed). The MORTAIN operation was selected for four paramount reasons. They are as follows:

- (1) Heavy enemy armor was encountered.
- (2) This unit remained attached to one infantry division throughout the European campaign except for short periods.
- (3) *The great significance, tactically, of the German counter-stroke at MORTAIN.
- (4) Last but not least, a general consensus of opinion from members of the 823d that this action typifies tank destroyer vs tank warfare.

A great opportunity in infantry-tank destroyer cooperation existed early in the history of this unit but whether this cooperation existed in its full potential still remains questionable. It goes back as early as the staging at HERTEFORD, England, where it was attached to the 30th Infantry Division in April, 1944. At this town some 20 miles north of LONDON, began the relationship which brought mutual understanding and respect lasting throughout the European war. During May and June the battalion drew vehicles, weapons and other equipment and found time to spend two weeks on indirect firing training on the SALISBURY PLAIN. After completion of this firing, it moved on to BASINGSTOKE, England, where all vehicles were waterproofed and last minute preparations were made for

the invasion of the European continent. The 823d was an extremely well-trained unit, with high morale and plenty of esprit-de-corps; this was proved correct in its later operations on the mainland of Europe. It had an added advantage, too, in that it had made the acquaintance of and enjoyed mutual respect with the 30th Infantry Division.

Liaison officers of the 823d TD Battalion landed 13 June 1944 in France but it was not until 24 June that the battalion proper disembarked on OMAHA Beach. The 823d participated in the action of the beachhead breakout in and around ST. LO. This was an indoctrination and shakedown period which placed the battalion in a high state of combat efficiency, much to be desired for its latter test at MORTAIN. This action was truly to be a test of tank destroyer capabilities in their primary role against enemy armor where many interesting aspects were brought forth regarding mobility, armament, and lack of armor protection.

Friendly situation. For the proper buildup and importance of the MORTAIN operation, as studied in the light of tank destroyer action of the 823d, it is necessary to pause a moment for the setting of the stage by the Allied Forces, 15 July to 5 August 1944. The Allied Forces in France were gaining a foothold against stubborn German resistance. By the middle of July, the Allied Front stretched from CAEN through CAUMONT to ST. LO and on west to LESSAY on the western coast of the COTENTIN Peninsula. On 25 July General Omar N. Bradley and his United States First Army broke out of ST. LO,

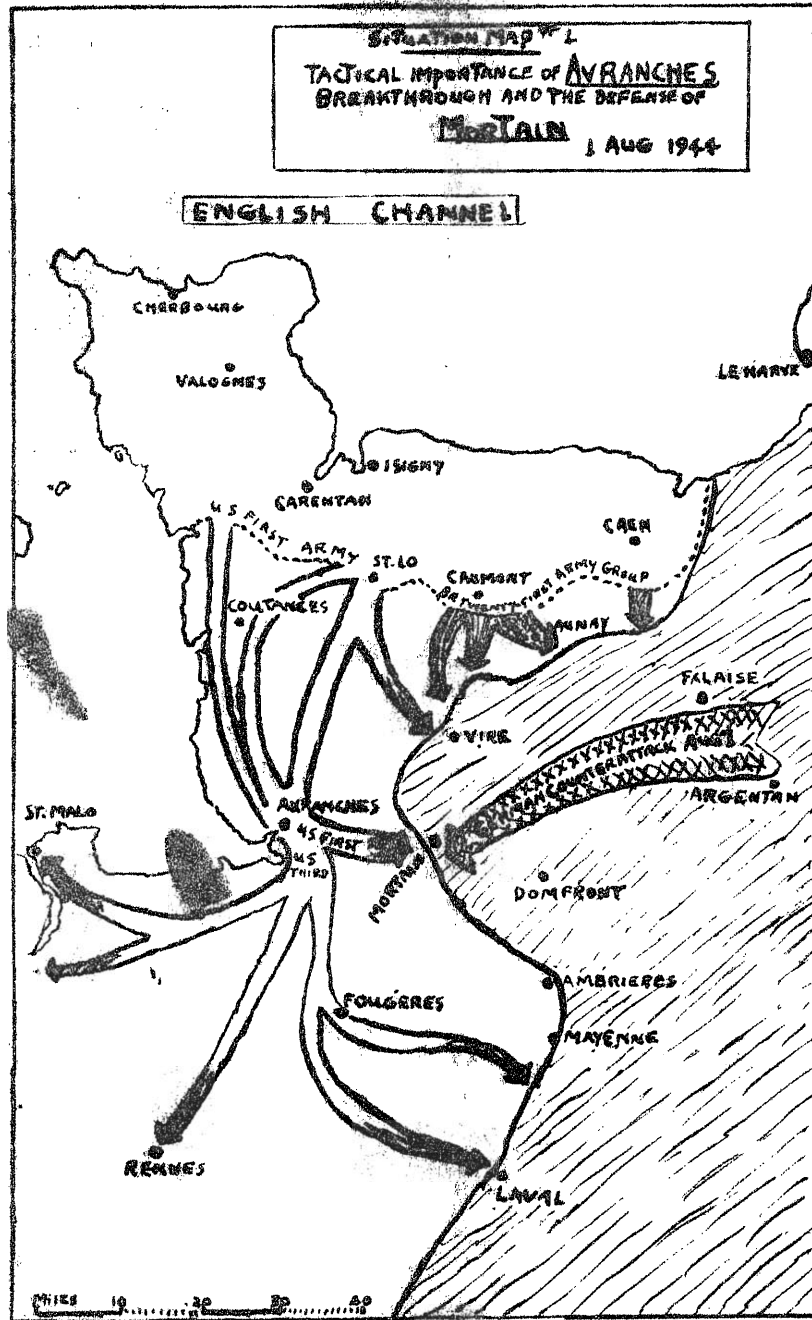


FIGURE 10

slashed downward to the base of the COTENTIN Peninsula, passing through the bottleneck at AVRANCHES and bursting out in full force upon the rear of the German Armies. (figure 10) On 1 August, General George Patton (United States Third Army Headquarters) was brought up to take over operations on the First Army's right flank and to continue the exploitation deeper into France.

Enemy situation. The German High Command wasted little time in realizing the seriousness of the situation now confronting them. Field Marshal von Kluge, in command of the Germans in France and the Low Countries, reported to General Warlimontz, Hitler's personal representative, on 31 July that AVRANCHES must be recaptured and held at all costs. From Field Marshal von Kluge's diary of 4 August:

Estimate of situation . . . the American is trying to exploit his penetration at Avranches by pushing southwardly the first mission is to cut off the enemy units which penetrated to the south from their rear communications and to reestablish communications with the Coast . . .¹

On 4 August, Hitler issued direct orders to Field Marshal von Kluge to stage a large scale counterattack with the objective of smashing through to the sea at AVRANCHES. Von Kluge had foreseen the necessity of such an operation and had commenced the assembly of forces as early as 31 July. This counterattack plan, code named "Luttich", contemplated an attack along the axis of the SEE River, using two good secondary roads, one on each side of the river, for the advance into AVRANCHES to the west. The main objective was the capture of the high ridge paralleling the SEE River and gaining the commanding observation for the entire area. A secondary objective was the

capture of the tactically important HILL 314 at the eastern edge of MORTAIN, a few miles south of the intended breakthrough corridor. In German hands, HILL 314 would not only provide excellent observation of American dispositions south of the SEE River, but would serve to deny the Americans almost equally good observation eastward. The First Army history gives this German operation the code name "Liege", apparently the operation was the same as to mission, troops used and commanders assigned.

Prior to this time, the German High Command had committed its armor by division or even an element thereof at a time. However, with the very survival of the German Army itself at stake, the High Command decided to employ no less than five Panzer divisions, plus attachments, for the counterattack. These were the:

XLVII CORPS

1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler.

2d SS Panzer Division Das Reich filled up with what was left of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division Goetz von Berlichenger.

116th Panzer Division, plus miscellaneous troops.

LXXXI CORPS

9th Panzer Division.

460th Artillery Battalion (motorized).

One AA Regiment, 13th AA Division.

394th Assault Gun Brigade, plus miscellaneous troops.

All of the above units were under the command of the German Seventh Army.
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Operations

Pre-battle movement. August 2d found the 823d TD Battalion and the 30th Infantry Division in XIX Corps reserve south of ST. LO engaged in maintenance activities. The 823d after its landing in Europe had fought with the 30th Infantry Division, crossing the VIRE River and participating in the ST. LO breakout. Personnel and equipment replacements had been coming through in good order and the battalion was nearly at 100% operational strength. On 5 August, the battalion and the 30th Infantry Division were attached to VII Corps and ordered to move into the vicinity of MORTAIN. These units were to relieve the US 1st Infantry Division, which was in turn ordered to extend the Allied line southward and farther into the German rear.

Little if any information was passed down to the battalion units in their relief of the 1st Infantry Division and none was forthcoming. Indeed a vague situation existed and along with this went the usual relaxation that is prevalent in a quiet sector. This statement is substantiated as follows: company commanders report the relief of position took place without incident, that no enemy information was turned over during the relief, and that the units to which they were attached gave them none. One reconnaissance platoon leader reports that information he received was "not much out there." From these observations it is clearly apparent that a true and determined defense of the sector was never considered, thus a great initial advantage was given to the enemy. According to reports

a warning of imminent attack reached the 30th Infantry Division from VII Corps approximately 20 minutes before the first signs of trouble appeared: "Enemy counterattack expected vicinity MORTAIN from east or north within 12 hours."⁴

Initial dispositions. On 6 August the 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion was disposed on the ground as follows:

Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company, located in le CLOS MARION, about 3 miles west of JUVIGNY leTERTRE.

Company A

1st Platoon initially south of MORTAIN guarding roads from Barenton.

2d Platoon on HILL 285 west of MORTAIN.

3d Platoon near the 1st Platoon, protecting approaches from east and south of MORTAIN.

The 1st Platoon, Company A, commanded by Lt. Thomas Springfield, moved the same day, 6 August, to ABBAYE BLANCHE which is located north of MORTAIN. This platoon gained the distinction of halting the enemy's efforts to clean out the MORTAIN area. This freedom of maneuver for a thrust west was badly needed. Company A was attached to 120th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division.

Company B

1st Platoon on the road west of ST. BARTHELMY.

2d Platoon on the same road, echeloned slightly farther west toward JUVIGNY.

3d Platoon (reinforced) located in ST. BARTHELMY.

Actually Company B was disposed in depth from ST. BARTHELMY west along an important road net that the Germans proposed using as one

of their supply routes in the attack to the sea to AVRANCHES. It is not believed this disposition was foreseen to the extent of the purpose served, but it had much to do with the defeat of the enemy in its attempted advance along that route. Company B was attached to the 117th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division.

Company C

1st Platoon near REFFUVIEILLE, in firing positions along main highway running west from JUVIGNY le TERTRE.

2d Platoon near la DAVIAIS protecting Battalion CP.

3d Platoon, in vicinity of 1st Platoon.

Company C, although not receiving the heavy fighting of Companies A and B, made many moves and their presence alone could have done much to thwart off the enemy movements in those areas. Company C was attached to the 119th Regiment, 30th Infantry Division. A reconnaissance platoon was attached to each company and accompanied their respective companies to their new positions. For a further description of the disposition of the 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion on 6 August, see figure 11.

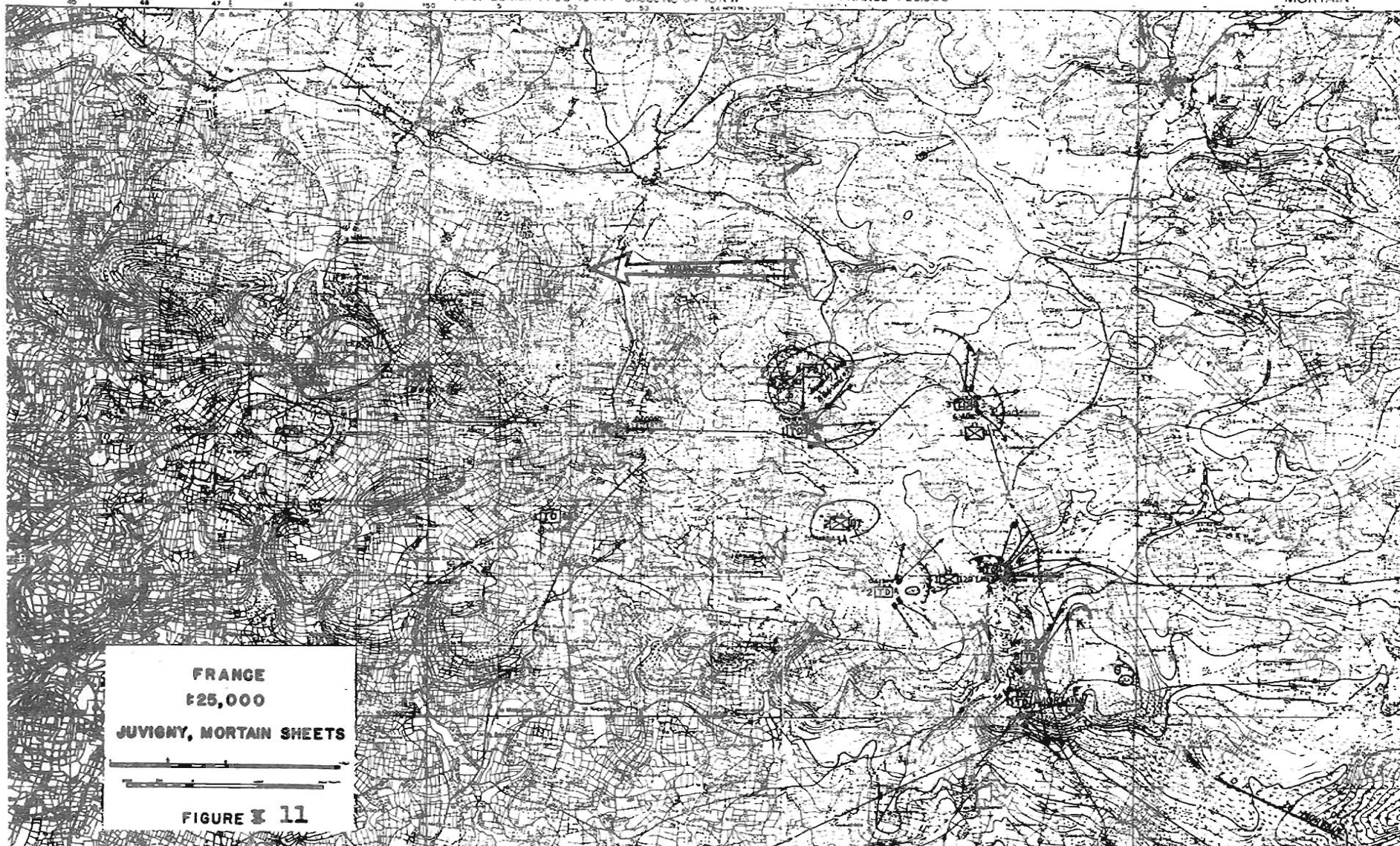
In general, most of the positions were taken over lock, stock and barrel from the preceding tank destroyer unit and remained in the same location throughout the operation. The time factor must be considered here, because as indicated, time was not available to do much moving and it is doubtful whether a full study of the platoon positions was ever made. The fact that the company commanders and platoon leaders did not actually choose their own positions probably had much to do with the later loss of the 3d Platoons of Company A

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FIGURE 3 11

and B. They were without infantry protection and the guns were not mutually supporting. However, Springfield, commanding the 1st Platoon, Company A, did make a study of the terrain after relief at his particular position. He was not satisfied with the location of the guns, so he moved them 200 yards north, just across the bridge spanning the railroad leading into ABBAYE BLANCHE. From this position seven roads and trails could be brought under fire. All of these led into ABBAYE BLANCHE and MORTAIN from the east and north. In addition, southern approaches out of MORTAIN could be covered. Any two guns could take under fire the same road.

Infantry units were disposed as follows:

120th Regiment in vicinity of MORTAIN, particularly the important terrain feature east of MORTAIN (HILL 314) and west and north (HILL 285).

119th Regiment in an assembly area, vicinity le MESNIL ADELEE

117th Regiment situated in the ST. BARTHELMY area, north of MORTAIN.

For a further description of infantry locations, see figure 11.

Tank destroyer gun positions as located on figures 11-14 are substantiated by tank destroyer commanders and after-action reports. Directions of fire of the main guns were variable, of course, and daily changes were made without appreciable difference in their primary mission assignments. It is interesting to note here that all weapons were located generally to deny the use of roads to the enemy. Roads are always the principal avenues of approach and it is a known fact that although weather permitted cross-country operations, all

defenses including infantry were generally set up to block roads. The 823d paid particular attention to roads and road blocks for two reasons; their importance to the movement of enemy armor, and secondly, the ease of movement and change of position for their own weapons. This point is brought out as doctrines teach cross-country operation but very limited use was ever made of same by towed tank destroyer guns. One cannot pass from these remarks without mentioning the restrictions of movement due to hedgerows, most of which could not be traversed by halftracks without the use of demolitions or bulldozers which were not used in this operation. It can be stated that generally the enemy was limited to the road nets, and that they made no serious penetration without that factor being present. Short penetrations were made by roving enemy armored units at positions such as HILL 285 and along the deep valley on the 30th Division's left flank, but neither penetrations were extremely effective. Weather was a great benefit to the enemy at the start of the battle, as they attacked at night or in the early morning hours under cover of fog. It is not to be construed that the terrain was a total obstacle but it did constrict, at least initially, all movement to the roads. This is borne out by members of the infantry as well as the commanders of the tank destroyer units.

Operations, 7 August. A dark cloud sprang out of the east on the night of 6-7 August, the German counterattack for AVRANCHES. The actual time of attack was set for 2400 hours on 6 August but due to last minute difficulties encountered by the enemy in assembling

troops, it was delayed somewhat.⁷ Artillery observers in the north of the 30th Division zone reported tanks moving along the northern road paralleling the SEE River, where it bends south toward ST. BARTHELMY and MORTAIN. This enemy attack was directed along the SEE River towards le MESNIL ADELEE. At 0130 tanks and infantry advanced out of the FORET de MORTAIN and swept around and engulfed the road block manned by the 3d Platoon, Company A, guarding MORTAIN from the south, and penetrated the town itself. Actually the full force of the enemy attack came just before daylight. The Germans had weather conditions in their favor; "darkness gave way to fog-laden daylight."⁸ The first enemy action encountered at ABBAYE BLANCHE was at 0500 hours. A German armored halftrack mounting a 75mm assault gun was knocked out by an anti-tank gun. This vehicle was closely followed by another halftrack, loaded with ammunition, which was also taken under fire and destroyed. "It was a foggy morning and we waited until the cars were only 30 yards from the number three gun before we opened fire."⁹ The anti-tank gun referred to was undoubtedly a tank destroyer 3-inch gun as only two anti-tank guns were in position and one was south of the overpass and could not have taken the enemy under fire.

Much controversy arose later as to the composition and command of the roadblock at ABBAYE BLANCHE. It was this roadblock that stood so determinately in the way of the enemy advance throughout the entire action. Most of the evidence points toward command by Springfield, and as to composition it varied daily, even hourly. As

the fighting continued and pressure increased many individual soldiers drifted into the area, some with crew-served weapons and others with just individual arms. Eventually the defense of this roadblock consisted of some 75 men including tank destroyer and machine gun crews. Best accounts put composition of the road block as follows:

1st Platoon, Company F, 120th Regiment.

1st Platoon, Company A, 823d TD Battalion.

1st Platoon, Anti-tank Company (minus 2 guns), 120th Regiment

1st Mortar section and 1 machine gun section, Company F,
120th Regiment.10

Lt. Colonel J. W. Lockett, commanding 2d Battalion, 117th Regiment, had this to say:

. . . it was learned that Company A of the 823d Battalion (towed) had established a roadblock at the intersection at ABBAYE BLANCHE, and that this roadblock, although supported by Company F of the 120th Infantry, stuck out rather precariously, and was weakly protected. I realized the importance of this position as an avenue of approach for enemy tanks and vehicles and agreed that Company E should move up and tie in with this tank destroyer unit and that the 2d Platoon of Company F, 120th Infantry should cover the guns while they organized and made further plans. This was done - placing machine guns and bazooka teams in support of the tank destroyer position. The wisdom of this decision was borne out throughout the period of the counterattack. The area in front of the position became a graveyard for about 35 to 40 German tanks and vehicles.

Lockett had nothing but praise for Springfield and his unit of tank
11
destroyers.

An after-action interview with Colonel Hammond D. Birks, commanding the 120th Regiment and Lt. Thomas Andrew, of Company F, 120th Regiment, substantiates the tactical importance of the ABBAYE

BLANCHE roadblock to the effect that it was one of the most important factors in the 120th Infantry's successful repulse of the major enemy counterattack of 6-12 August. If this roadblock had not held, the whole position of the 120th Infantry would have been nullified and the resulting gap would have permitted the enemy to smash through the MORTAIN area.¹²

The enemy had once occupied this very ground around the railroad bridge and had set up defensive positions there. Springfield used these as there were no alternate positions in the area. They were adequate and time was short. A 3-inch gun was placed on either side of the main road, with two 30-caliber machine guns nearby for support. A bazooka and BAR team, plus half a squad of riflemen, were placed in former enemy dug-in positions along a small hedgerow at the sharp left turn north of the railroad bridge. A 57mm anti-tank gun was placed at the end of the road paralleling the main north-south road, covering not only penetrations down this road, but from an additional road to the left that curved into it. Two other 3-inch guns were placed north of the railroad bridge, one to cover the main road, the other facing southwest across the railroad to cover any enemy penetration along a straight stretch of the road coming in from the northeast. A 57mm anti-tank gun also covered this road from a position at the road junction near the river in ABBAYE BLANCHE itself.

Immediately south of the railroad bridge, riflemen and bazooka teams were placed in dug-in positions on either side of the road.

The right flank was protected by 8 men and a 30-caliber machine gun at a big rock just off the road from the northeast and facing towards the river. A line running through a cleft in the rock furnished the communications with the mortar squad to the rear of this position. Along the important left flank, a squad of riflemen and two 30-caliber machine guns were placed in an orchard that covered two road junctions, in addition to a short stretch of the north-south road. Six riflemen and a 50-caliber machine gun, manned by tank destroyer men, were placed in and among the houses between this orchard and the railroad bridge. Two belts of mines were laid near the bend of the road from the southeast, at the south end of the roadblock, and these were covered by a bazooka and BAR team.

To sum up the defensive dispositions of the roadblock force, four 3-inch tank destroyer guns and two 57mm anti-tank guns were posted to cover all important roads, with the main emphasis on the north-south road to MORTAIN, and these guns were protected and supported by riflemen and bazooka and machine gun crews.

On 7 August, Lieutenant Stewart with two squads of the 2d Platoon of Company F, 120th Infantry, joined the ABBAYE BLANCHE roadblock. He had established a roadblock to the south, but had been forced to withdraw from his position. Upon joining the ABBAYE BLANCHE roadblock, he organized and defended the rear (south) end. From time to time during the next few days other men from different companies straggled into the roadblock, so that eventually Springfield had men from Companies D, E, H, K and G, 120th Infantry, totalling some 150

men. However, the greater number of these men were battle fatigued cases and had little part in the actual defense. The previous figure of 75 effectives still stands. Some of these extras were concentrated to the south of the roadblock with Stewart.

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During 7 August, the roadblock was not only shelled repeatedly, but was also attacked by the Luftwaffe twice, which strafed the little force with rocket guns. They were even hit by British planes with rocket guns, two tank destroyer men being wounded in this unfortunate and erroneous attack. However, as far as the roadblock force was concerned, the British were soon forgiven as they were quick to testify that the British did a wonderful job against the Germans on the front of the ABBAYE BLANCHE positions.

The 3d Platoon of Company A had a less important existence particularly as to defensive contributions. Its activities can be summed up quickly. Shortly after daylight on 7 August, enemy tanks and infantry came out of the FORET de MORTAIN to the east and slightly south of MORTAIN and swept into that town from the south. The 3d Platoon was quickly surrounded and overrun along with some units of the 120th Infantry. Much happened here to cause bitterness and scepticism among the tank destroyer units-their guns were not protected by infantry. This one factor had a great deal to do with their capture and destruction, they could not protect themselves against an infantry attack. This story is best told by Robert L. Hewitt, author of the 30th Infantry Division History. The tank destroyer platoon south of MORTAIN fended off the first German attack

14

with 50-caliber machine guns mounted on halftracks but was subsequently split asunder when the Germans swept around its positions, making the platoon's 3-inch guns untenable. The close-in fire of the enemy was devastating to say the least. Sixteen men reached the 1st Platoon's positions north of MORTAIN after 5 days of fighting. Nine others joined nearby infantry and fought their way into friendly lines on HILL 314. One man remained hidden in a ditch for five days. Thirteen men were still missing when the battle ended.

The 2d Platoon of Company A held an important position along with doughboys of the 120th Infantry, that of HILL 285, northwest of MORTAIN. Action on the slopes of HILL 285 began in the "mist" about 0500 hours on 7 August. A bazooka team led by an officer of the 1st Battalion, name unknown, went forward about 500 yards stalking a German MK IV tank. The tank was finally stalked down and knocked out by Sergeant Ames Broussard of the tank destroyer platoon. Broussard was unable to get back to his own lines for 14 hours. At 0900 two more German tanks approached, and were knocked out at 150 yards by one of the tank destroyer guns. Another tank moved up, firing at the American position, and it also suffered the fate of his team mates. This last tank was set afire by a shot from only 50 yards by a well concealed tank destroyer gun. Two enemy self-propelled guns and an armored car also fell victim to the tank destroyers on HILL 285.

The 3d Platoon of Company B met with a fate similar to that of the 3d Platoon of Company A. This unit was located in ST. BARTHELMY and had one 3-inch gun from the 2d Platoon of Company B and a platoon

of 57mm anti-tank guns with it. These towed tank destroyer guns of Company B played an important part in halting the Germans, although particularly vulnerable to the well coordinated panzer grenadier-tank attack. Weather enters the picture again: "handicapped by the fog" is used in the same breath as a "well coordinated enemy attack" regarding the loss of positions at ST BARTHELMY. At the start the gunners were firing at nothing more tangible than flashes of enemy tank guns. The 3d Platoon destroyers knocked out two German tanks early in the fight, but three of the four guns of the 3d Platoon were soon casualties. The heavy towed tank destroyer guns were sitting ducks when they revealed their locations by firing. Lt. Leon L. Neel, commanding the 1st Platoon, Company B, brought forward a replacement gun from his platoon under heavy fire in an attempt to reach the besieged weapons of the 3d Platoon at ST. BARTHELMY. His platoon was 1000 yards in rear of the town-to the west. This gun never reached ST. BARTHELMY due to enemy action. It was forced to take a position just west of the town and while there, knocked out a MK V, killed another tank commander and "mowed down" supporting infantry with small arms fire. A German 88 soon found the range on this gun and promptly eliminated it, wounding most of the crew. Another gun from the same platoon was brought forward and had an equally short but useful career. One enemy tank approached and was knocked out. Two more enemy tanks appeared, but halted out of gun range. Then, one of these advanced, covered by the second, and the tank destroyer gun knocked this tank out. About this time, however,

the second tank opened fire and destroyed the tank destroyer gun. Company B lost seven of its twelve guns and their respective half-track prime movers during the action of 7 August. One intrepid crew, however, ventured out forward of the friendly lines and extricated one of the abandoned guns. Other members of Company B fought alongside the infantry with their carbines or joined bazooka teams stalking enemy tanks. Company B accounted for eight MK V tanks during that first day of operations with a probable additional two. The 2d Platoon added depth to the position and never actually engaged the enemy on the first day of operations.

Company B fared little better on enemy information and friendly infantry support than did Company A. According to Neel:

Lack of information probably destroyed the 3d Platoon before it made any defensive contribution whatever . . . we were requested at 0800 to reinforce troops within ST. BARTHELMY without being informed that our 3d Platoon was wiped out.

Contact was inadequate with the infantry as it was not believed they ever realized their obligations to protect tank destroyer units from enemy foot troops. A change of support mission had much to do with this inadequate cooperation. Neel's platoon was changed from support of the 2d Battalion to support of the 3d Battalion, 117th Infantry, but was never able to contact that headquarters, thereby leaving the guns to operate alone. Nothing could be gained in information other than that which came from personal observation.

Company C was quite removed from the heavy action that confronted Companies A and B. They were in position initially with the

823d Battalion Headquarters and during the early morning of 7 August, they took up direct fire positions in vicinity of LA ROCHE and REFFUVIEILLE along the highway running from ST BARTHELMY west to JUVIGNY and on to AVRANCHES.

As the German counterattack became more definite in strength and direction, many hurried calls arrived for additional tank destroyer support in the threatened sectors. Orders were received by 0630 to send guns some 8000 yards to the south along the highway running northeast to southwest from MORTAIN to ST. HILAIRE du HARCQUET. This order could not be carried out at the time but by 1200 hours, the 3d Platoon of Company C was released from control by the 119th Infantry and proceeded to this point to meet this threat of approximately 35 enemy vehicles, including armor, to the south.

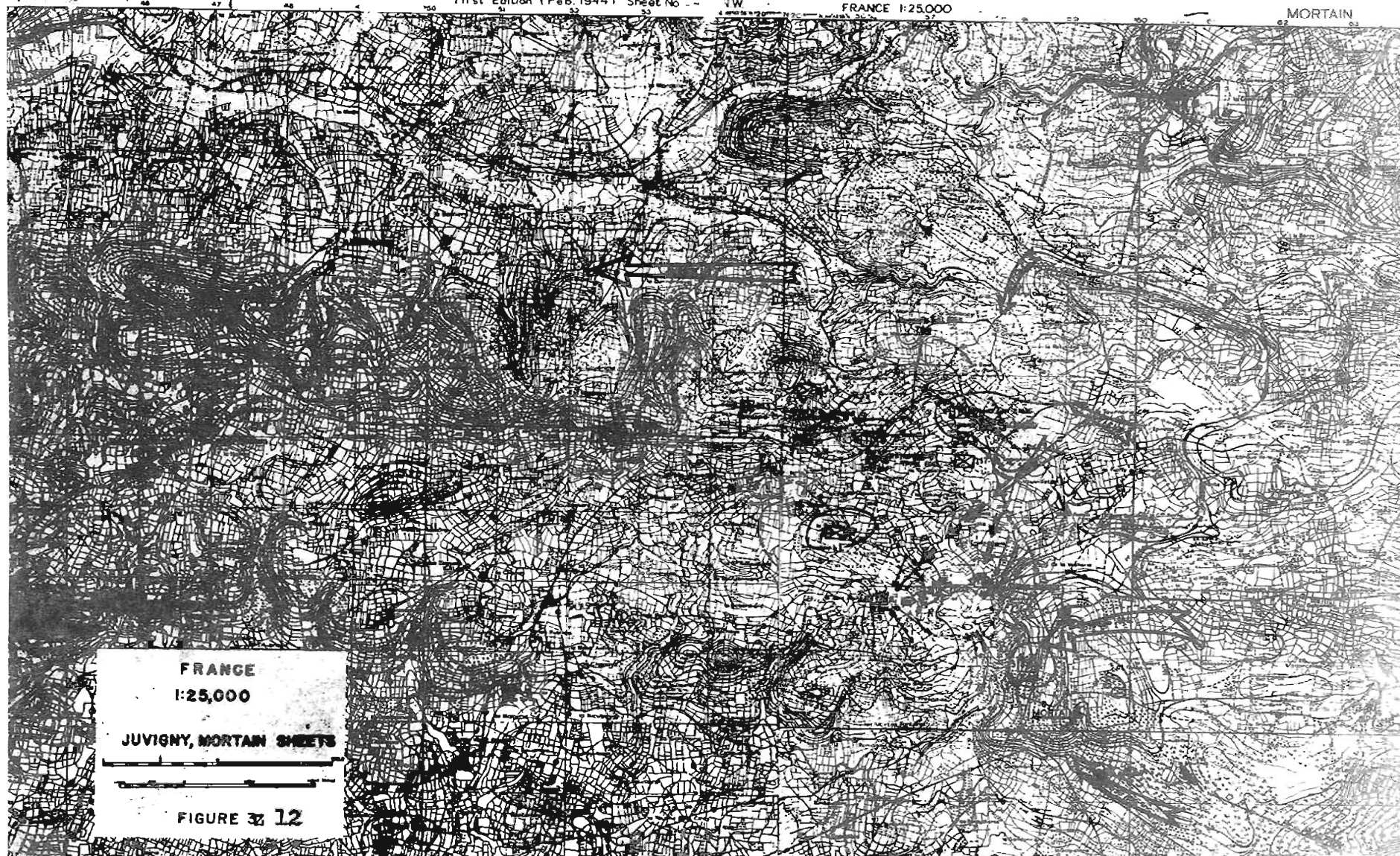
The other two platoons moved north toward leBLAIRIE near the AMBROIS woods and took up direct fire positions, see figure 12. The mission of these two platoons was to prevent the withdrawal of a large number of enemy soft-skinned vehicles which were reported in the AMBROIS woods. Actually these two platoons were to go as far north as le MESNIL ADELEE. Contact was made with a rifle company from the 119th Regiment and they proceeded to a point just south of the town. They were informed (by whom it is unknown but it is unimportant as it was rather obvious in a few minutes) that the enemy was just ahead. A 57mm anti-tank gun nearby knocked out a MK V tank with two flanking shots. Other German tanks were heard moving around in the woods to the north. By 0800 heavy enemy mortar fire began to fall on the tank

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FIGURE 32 12

destroyer positions. "This action convinced us that le MESNIL ADELEE was no place for us to take our armored cars and halftracks, towing 3-inch guns, so we set up a roadblock in place," writes Captain T. L. Roney (then 1st Lieutenant) commanding the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon.¹⁶ The American 3d Armored Division took over the mission of taking le MESNIL ADELEE, somewhat relieving this situation.

The 3d Platoon on the right flank down south was reinforced by a reconnaissance platoon, which moved by a circuitous route from the northern position. Many French families were moving to the west on foot and in wagons, and managed to constrict movements on the roads. This type of movement by civilians usually points toward an attack or expected attack by the enemy. It was about 1700 when the reconnaissance platoon reached the 3d Platoon at their position. It was said to have been a strong defensive position with an equally strong alternate position. Generally speaking this flank of the 30th Division was open, making any defense by this platoon almost unfeasible. Fortunately, no enemy was encountered.

Here ends the first day of action at MORTAIN, the situation very obscure and the final outcome yet to be determined. It was a touch and go proposition with a slight advantage to the defender. An appropriate remark at this time comes from the 30th Infantry Division History: "with a heavy onion breath that day the Germans could have achieved their objectives."

Operations, 8 August. Throughout the night 7-8 August, the fog of battle cleared a little, probably for both sides. Stock was taken

of destruction to personnel and positions, resupply was effected where possible and a vigilant watch was established. The Germans put out heavy patrols, either in an attempt to gain information or to gain positions to continue its attack or withdrawal. It is a fact that much field recovery of personnel and vehicles was attempted and in some cases was carried out effectively. It was the German army policy to pick up their dead close into the battle position even at a great risk. This was psychological in two respects; that of building the morale of the German soldier because he wouldn't have to face these sights in his advance as well as that of knowing he was cared for, and from the American side, the possibility of assessing accurate enemy losses was eliminated. This was particularly bad for the American soldier, when after a heavy fire fight and he was sure the German had many casualties, he pushed forward to find little evidence, if any, of same.

In telephone conversations during the night of 7-8 August by the German commanders, the Leibstandarte was spoken of as having been stopped and in remnants. In instructions to the 1st SS Division for the following day we have this remark: "Each man must give his best. . . if we have not advanced considerably by this evening or tomorrow morning, the operation will have been a failure....." The enemy had gained ground on the 7th but certainly not of any significance and the key terrain was still in the hands of the Americans. ST. BARTHELMY, MORTAIN and the area south of MORTAIN were in the hands of the enemy but HILL 314 and HILL 285 were in the hands of the 30th

Division, who also held control of the road nets leading west.

The principal German attack of 8 August came from the ST. BARTHELMY area to the southwest against HILL 285 where the 2d Platoon of Company A was located. The attack commenced at 0130 and consisted of infantry supported by at least 8 tanks. By 0430 this attack had pressed close to positions on HILL 285 and Company A, 120th Infantry, was forced back to a road traversing the hill. Two flame throwers prevented tank destroyer crews from manning their guns and again tank destroyer men fought as infantry. Artillery fire soon broke up this attack but it was resumed again farther to the south. From all accounts the German attack on the 8th was more intense and better supported than it had been on the 7th. On the other hand, the Americans had an additional regiment, from the 4th Infantry Division, attached and an attack was launched at the Germans at 0800. This attack was in the direction of ST. BARTHELMY and was supported by the 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion. It relieved the immediate pressure on HILL 285, but made little progress. Apparently the tank destroyer unit on HILL 285 spent the day licking their wounds and reorganizing as this attacking force had now presented them with that opportunity. All along the line the American forces attacked with negligible success, but nevertheless it stopped the German assault.

The 1st Platoon of Company A was attacked at 1530 hours on 8 August by an enemy unit of patrol size, which was completely annihilated. Four anti-tank men at the roadblock were wounded. The Germans had managed to mine a road to the south which was being used as

a supply and evacuation route. A half-track being used to evacuate casualties was knocked out by this minefield. This evened the score as a German half-track stopped to investigate the same minefield and was promptly destroyed by our forces. Throughout the day, the 2d Platoon is credited with 2 tanks, 4 half-tracks, 1 wheeled vehicle and 15 prisoners of war.

Company B had been receiving artillery fire all morning and at 1000 moved to a spot not so well "zeroed" in. Two ammunition trailers had been lost. Company B positions were held during the day with little chance to fire. This situation occurred as a result of the American attacks to regain MORTAIN and towed tank destroyers served little purpose, if any, in the attack.

Company C remained substantially in the same localities with exception of the 3d Platoon which moved to the vicinity of JUVIGNY.

Operations, 9 August. Fighting was almost continuous night and day in the MORTAIN - ST. BARTHELMY area. Hours and days meant little - survival was all important. The enemy launched another attack to the southeast on 9 August at 0430 toward the 2d Platoon, Company A on HILL 285. Less strength and aggressiveness was apparent but to the soldier on the ground and at the point of contact, one attack is as strong as another. The 3d Reconnaissance Platoon assisted materially against this thrust by giving close-in protection. No material gains were made by the enemy and by 1600 hours, the 117th and 12th Infantry Regiments launched a counterattack against the enemy attack. This left the 2d Platoon in an exposed position due to

a pocket created by earlier German gains. In order to cope with the situation this platoon pulled back to a better position and the 2d and 3d Reconnaissance Platoons rendered the close protection that was needed. (see figure 13) Artillery fire destroyed one 3-inch gun of the platoon and Lieutenant Cunningham, commanding the 3d Reconnaissance Platoon was wounded by mortar fire. Springfield's 1st Platoon was having a field day against local attacks and against movements across their front directed against HILL 285. The 1st Platoon had two 3-inch gun sights destroyed by artillery fire. Even so he mentions destroying an enemy vehicle by sighting down the tube.

Company B remained in position with little or no activity occurring in their area. Artillery fire continued, causing little damage but placing heavy strain and tension on all members of the company. They received one replacement, Lieutenant Rady, who must have been counting his hours - entering combat at this particular time and place.

Company C made only one change of any consequence during the period. The 1st Platoon was moved near the 3d Platoon in vicinity of JUVIGNY. This completed a build-up to add the necessary strength to hold the important road west out of BARTHELMY.

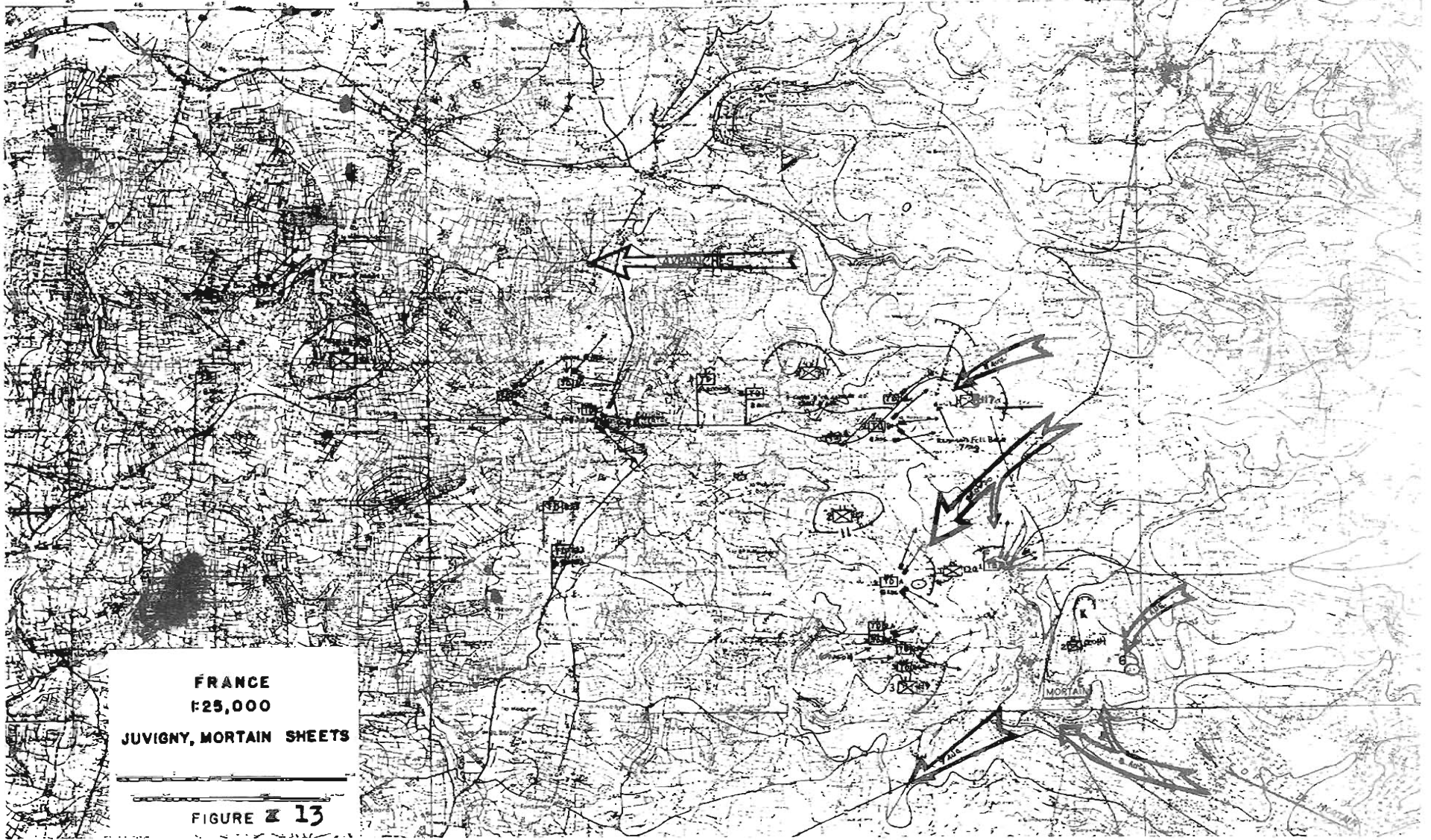
Operations, 10 August. The German commander had reported his heavy losses and inability to make any substantial gains in the MORTAIN area, but he did not receive that much desired order

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FIGURE 13

to withdraw. Although he had taken MORTAIN and ST. BARTHELMY, he
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remarked that the enemy was not entirely cleared from this area.
References were undoubtedly made to the infantry on HILL 314 and
the ABBAYE BLANCHE roadblock. "Springfield's shooting gallery", the
1st Platoon, Company A, defense at ABBAYE BLANCHE, was creating
quite a disturbance to the German program of operations.

Hitler ordered the attack resumed and again on the early
morning of 10 August, the push continued. A vast difference was
noted as it lacked the intensity and coordination of previous days.
A local attack was made against the 2d Platoon of Company A former
position, but to the surprise of the Germans no one was present.
Contact with the 1st Platoon had been lost during the night due to
a roadblock emplaced by the Germans. It was quickly removed and
contact was reestablished. The 1st Platoon was having its usual
field day by destroying several halftracks and nine other assorted
vehicles.

Company B suffered two casualties from intense artillery
fire which they had been subjected to for the past three days.
No other action was reported outside of an integration of re-
placements into that depleted unit.

Company C remained in its former positions without incident.
The platoon on the Division south flank made contact with the 35th
Division now moving up on the right flank. You will recall that
this platoon had reported being in an exposed position earlier.

Final operations, 11-14 August. On 11 August the 2d Platoon

of Company A was ordered back to its original position on HILL 285 along with the 2d and 3d Reconnaissance Platoons. This was accomplished by infiltration in an effort to attract as little attention as possible. No interference by the Germans was encountered. This period was reported as quiet other than local artillery fire. The 1st Platoon, Company A lost one 3-inch gun by such fire. Company B reports no contact for this period, only artillery and mortar fire in the area. Company C completed movement of its 2d Platoon to area of the other two platoons, closing at 2030 (figure 14).

This period of inactivity by the enemy meant two things; another attack was in the making or a general withdrawal was about to commence. The latter was more probable, as friendly infantry successes had been greater during 11 August and on the 12th contact was made with the besieged and isolated battalion on HILL 314. This contact also relieved pressure on the 1st Platoon, Company A. The high light of the day was the return of 11 men who for the past 5 days had been fighting with the infantry on HILL 314. They were men from the 3d Platoon which had been destroyed when their guns were overrun south of MORTAIN on 7 August. The 1st Platoon of Company C relieved the 2d Platoon of Company A on HILL 285 at 2200 with the 2d Platoon going into assembly position near their company command post (see figure 14). Company B spent the day in reorganizing the 1st and 2d Platoons. On the 13th, they moved into an assembly position shown on figure 14).

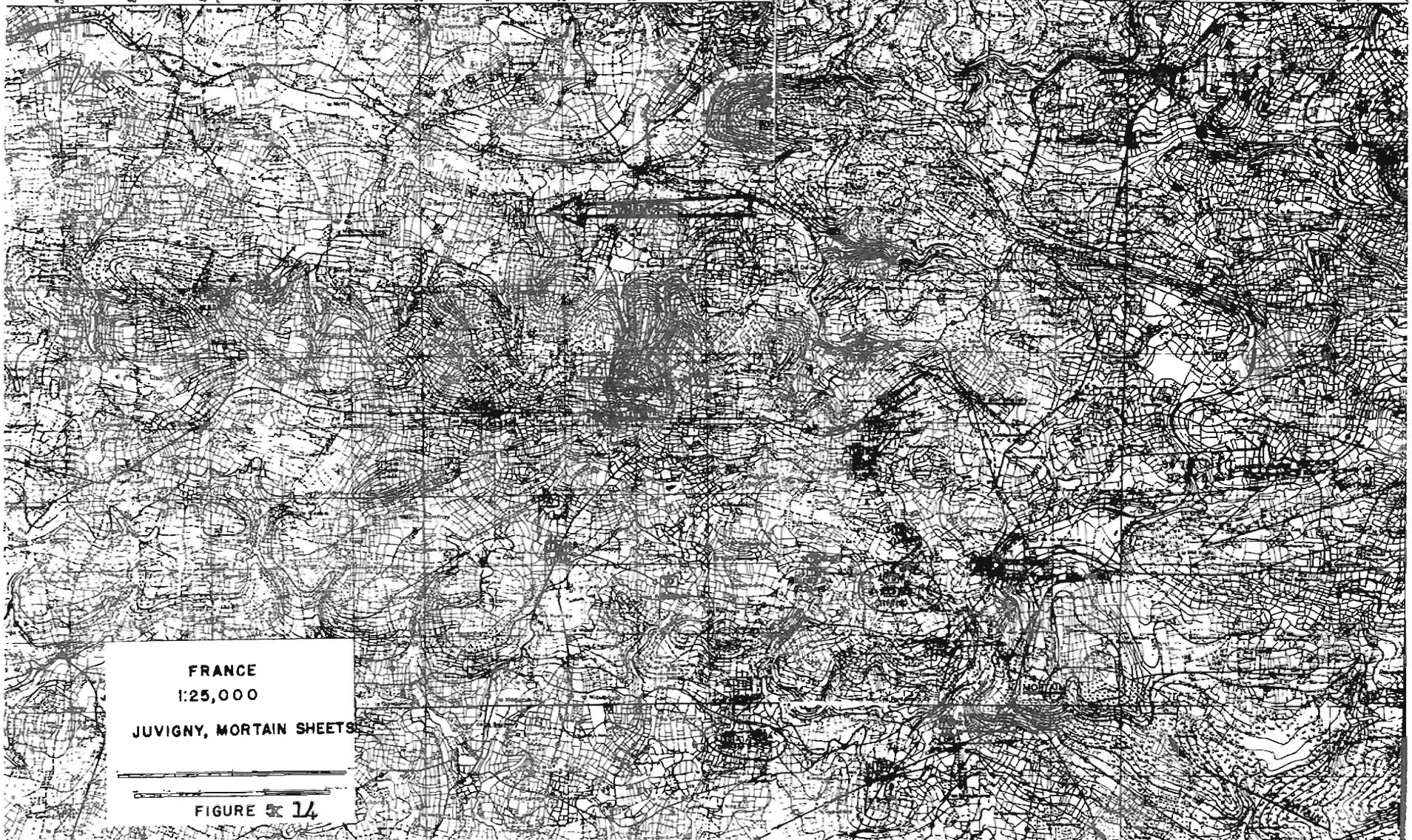
The German withdrawal had commenced and the much needed rest

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FIGURE 5 14

and reorganization period had come. Company C completed the relief of the 1st Platoon of Company A, allowing them to assemble near their company command post. The rest was less than 24 hours in duration. In the late afternoon the 1st and 2d Platoons of Company A moved to an area southwest of MORTAIN to give close support to the 119th Infantry. The 3d Reconnaissance Platoon was attached to the 2d Platoon.

On 14 August the MORTAIN battle ground ceased to be a scene of bitter struggle. The 30th Infantry Division published a field order attaching A, B and C Companies to the 117th, 119th and 120th Regiments respectively. In turn the 823d Headquarters attached the 1st, 2d and 3d Reconnaissance Platoons to Companies C, B and A respectively. The infantry and tank destroyers moved some 14,000 yards east of MORTAIN in a quick follow-up of the withdrawing enemy. This move on 14 August completed the MORTAIN action, where defensive contributions by the tank destroyers had been great. The 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion had proven it was here to stay, its losses had been many but even so they were only proportionate to the intensity of combat.

Logistics and Personnel

General. It is appropriate at this time to summarize the logistical and personnel problems that confronted the 823d TD Battalion. An account of enemy losses is also appropriate as at no other time in the European war did this battalion contribute so highly to the destruction of the enemy. Generally supplies were

adequate during the MORTAIN operation.

Class I. Rations were short on occasions but never to a degree where unit efficiency was affected. 10 in 1 rations with some K rations were used exclusively during the operation. Hot food was impossible during the battle as transportation was unable to move effectively and the situation was too tense for that type of feeding. No units complained, in fact they were well satisfied. Meals, using 10 in 1 rations could be served hot to small units at any time desired.

Class II and IV. Class IV supplies presented no immediate problem and in most cases was adequate. Class II presented a problem with the loss of two platoons and their equipment was irreplaceable at the time. Personnel would not have been available to man the replaced items even so. The 1st Platoon of Company A desired additional barrels for 30- and 50-caliber machine guns. Company B had a replacement of one 3-inch gun and halftrack on 11 August and Company A had a like replacement on 10 August.²¹

Class III. Class III supplies presented no problem. With few exceptions no moves were made. Company C shuffled around some on the 8th and 9th and again on the 11th and 12th of August, but all these moves were short.

Class V. Class V presented a problem to those units heavily engaged, however, it was replenished with some difficulty. No unit was defeated or forced to withdraw for lack of ammunition. Each platoon carried a basic load of ammunition into this engagement.

For each 3-inch gun, 90 rounds were carried, 65% armor piercing and 35% high explosive, with an additional 50 rounds (mixed) carried on a three-quarter ton truck for each four guns. Small arms ammunition was always adequate.

Maintenance. Maintenance was not a major problem in this operation and was performed by each driver locally. Maintenance of destroyed or disabled vehicles was not accomplished during the operation due to the intensity of fire which restricted evacuation procedures. After the enemy commenced his withdrawal on the 12th some battlefield recovery took place and maintenance was performed to the limit of time available. Vehicular replacements were available and could be had easily as the supply lines were short.

Evacuation of casualties. Evacuation of wounded personnel from the front lines was performed in the usual manner with few exceptions. The 1st Platoon, Company A, evacuated a few casualties by use of their halftracks. One of these struck a mine as it was on its way to the rear.

Communication. In some cases communication was adequate, in other cases it did not exist. Actually the only communications needed were those with the infantry units supported, as operational control was usually taken away from the company commanders. Three means of communication were used; wire, radio and messenger with wire and radio carrying the brunt of the load. Lt. Colonel Ashby I. Lehse, Battalion S-3, says "We were in communication with higher headquarters at all time."²² It was not quite the same story at

platoon level, where after all, the battle is being fought and information must be forthcoming to properly understand the situation and control the units. As brought out previously, Companies A and B had poor communications; Company A commander places the blame on himself for not moving his command post closer to his platoons.

Personnel. The personnel situation is hard to summarize exactly, as strength reports are not available for an accurate accounting of losses. From after-action reports and letter interviews with former unit personnel, the total losses add up as follows: 6 KIA, 47 WIA and 91 MIA with enemy losses at 130 KIA and 25 prisoners of war taken. ²³ No accounting of the enemy wounded is available, but members of the 823d believe the number runs as high as 100. Losses for the 823d were nearly 20% of their authorized strength. Somewhere in the vicinity of 40 replacements were received to help fill these losses. Replacements were adequate for those units still intact. Gunners and radio operators were the most difficult replacement problems; however, gunners were trained from old men on hand. Replacements were initially placed in less important positions until they had their feet on the ground.

Companies A and B received the Presidential Citation for their efforts at MORTAIN. Many individual acts of heroism brought individual awards. Lt. Springfield was decorated with the Silver Star and according to Captain Crissinger, his company Commander: "He deserved more. I just wasn't smart enough to realize it at the time. He was a wonderful platoon leader and a great soldier."²⁴



FIGURE 15 Tank knocked out by 823rd TD Battalion (equipped with 3-inch towed guns) shows ineffectiveness of hits on front glacis plate of Tiger II. At a range of 500 yards, frontal hits merely gouged out armor and ricocheted off. A track hit only partially severed the track, which did break completely as the tank attempted to back up.

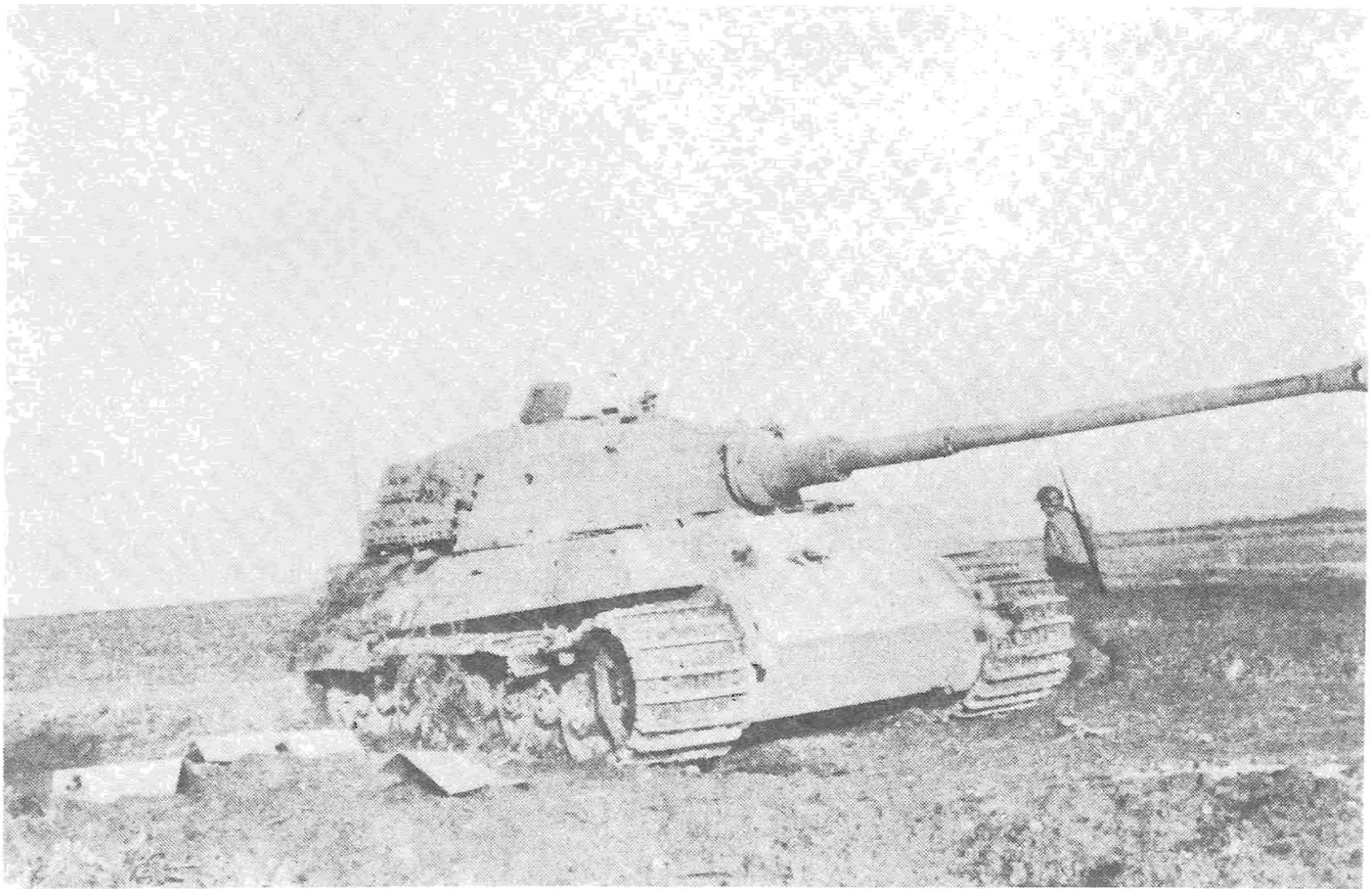


FIGURE 16. Two rounds in same hole on side of tank knocked out by 1st Platoon, Company A, 823rd TD Battalion.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

- 1
Report of Operations, First United States Army, 1 August 1944 to 22 February 1945, p 5.
- 2
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Lt Col Dettmer, letter interview, 29 March 1950.

Personal interview, General Fröherr von Gersdorff, November 1945.
- 3
Dettmer, op cit.

Captain T. L. Raney, letter interview, 30 December 1949.

Lt Col Ashby I. Lohse, letter interview, 16 December 1949.
- 4
Robert L. Hewitt, Workhorse of the Western Front - The Story of the 30th Infantry Division, p 54.
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Raney, op cit.

Lt. Thomas Springfield, letter interview, 10 January 1950.

Lt. Ellis McInnie, letter interview, 27 March 1950.

After-Action Report, 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion, August 1944.
- 6
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Lohse, op cit.
- 7
Gersdorff, op cit.
- 8
Hewitt, op cit, p 58.
- 9
Springfield, op cit.
- 10
Colonel A. H. Payton and Colonel H. A. Tribolte, Combat Observations, 18 August 1944, Documents Section File No. 851.41, The Armored School, Fort Knox, Kentucky.

- 11
Ibid, passim.
- 12
Ibid, passim.
- 13
Ibid, passim.
- 14
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- Lt. Leon L. Neel, letter interview, 21 December 1949.
- 15
Dettmer, op cit.
- Neel, op cit.
- 16
Raney, op cit.
- 17
Report of Operations, op cit.
- 18
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- After-action Report, op cit.
- Payton and Tribolte, op cit.
- 19
After-action Report, op cit.
- Springfield, op cit.
- 20
Gersdorff, op cit.
- 21
After-action Report, op cit.
- Springfield, op cit.
- 22
Lohse, op cit.
- 23
After-action Report, op cit.
- Neel, op cit.
- Springfield, op cit.
- 24
Captain Bruce A. Grissinger, letter interview, 4 February 1950.

CHAPTER 7

CONTEMPORARY COMMENT

The preceding chapters of this report have been concerned with the organization and tactics of TD units and an analysis of combat actions in which four TD battalions participated. During the period from June of 1944 to May of 1945, members of antitank units, observers from rearward headquarters, and foreign military authors with the same vital interest in the subject, prepared a number of articles and reports on the new team weapon designed to stop armor. It is the writings of this group of officers that are of major consequence here. Author members of TD units are considered of primary importance, foreign authors are touched upon lightly, and observers passed over almost entirely because of the still confidential nature of their reports. Three military writers of the 1940 era are presented because of the impact of their studies on the subject.

Publications from which articles were considered for comment are the Field Artillery Journal, the Infantry Journal, and Observer Reports. There remains to the future researcher in TDs a vast field of similar untouched source material of at least equal, if not greater value. Particularly with reference to secret War Department Observer Reports, which may be downgraded at a later date.

Authors writing for military journals and official observers have approached the subject of TDs from varying points of view.

Officer-observers with instructions to obtain specific information on various items of equipment, problems of personnel, tactical employment, the application and correctness of doctrines and technique, and numerous other details of interest to those engaged in long-range support of the battle forces, had the detached and impersonal viewpoint of a reporter-commentator.

Allied officers and enemy writers discussed the subject as it affected their battlefield successes or failures, and wrote from a position tempered by their experiences and differences in equipment and techniques.

The TD officer on the job was generally too busy with more pressing problems to prepare choice items for analysis, but when he write, his material was directly influenced by the immediacy of combat requirements. His were the most personal and detailed of all the sources of authorship.

Early Comment, 1940-1941

In the Field Artillery Journal of March, 1941, are ten articles of major interest. Four are on topics directly related to the gun-armor problem, and are titled, "Field Artillery Organization, Armored Force," "The Artillery in Large Armored Units," "Can Grandma, 75-mm. 1879, Stop 'Em?" and "Some Thoughts on Emplacement of Anti-tank Guns." Two reviews are on activities of German field artillery units, one is on Japanese field artillery, two are on the procurement of artillery materiel and the establishment of an Artillery Replacement Center, and the tenth is a seven-page article, "Suggestions for

Equitation Instructors." Even at that date, it can be seen that a large share of spontaneous writing on military subjects probed methods of aiding or abetting the armored attack, and this issue of the Journal is typical of its time.

An erudite foreign writer of the period was an Italian infantryman, Colonel Oete Blatto, author of "The Artillery in Large Armored Units," translated in the March, 1941 issue previously mentioned. The article is outstanding for its foresight. Colonel Blatto presented a number of principles in the use of armor which were borne out in later combat, and of which some have since been adopted as part of the current U. S. Armored Force doctrine.

Of these, four are considered for purposes of this report. They are: 1. German tank success in Poland and France does not indicate the invincibility of the tank-air team; 2. The most important task of an armored division is the exploitation, the next most important the breakthrough; 3. Armored divisions should be organized for counter-armored actions as well as the exploitation; and 4. The armored division

...must have two types of weapons. The first should have the same mobility as the tank, to perform the functions of antitank or accompanying artillery. The other should be more powerful and possess long range, so that tactical mobility is less essential; this should assume any other function which the tactical situation may demand. It would seem that in the armies of the important powers the tendency is toward a caliber between 75 and 90 mm, on a tank or self-propelled mount, for the first type; and between 105 and 120 mm, motorized, for the second type.

While the infantry and cavalry writers of the time were contriving new and ingenious methods of tracking tanks with the primary

antitank weapon of the U. S. Army, the 37-mm gun, a scholarly summary, "Antitank Defense," appeared in the May, 1941 issue of the Field Artillery Journal. The author was Major A. C. Wedemeyer, now Lieutenant General Wedemeyer, an infantryman who, according to the Journal of 1941, "has spent the last four years in close study of the whole aspect of antitank defense."

As part of a "Proposed Antitank Defense," Major Wedemeyer wrote:

...The 37-mm. antitank gun is sufficiently powerful to stop tanks protected by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches of armor. If the constantly reported trend to thicker armor on tanks (over 3 inches) becomes an established fact, the present 37-mm. gun may be modified to increase its penetration, or a 47-mm., a 57-mm., or even a 75-mm. antitank gun may be necessary. . .It is further suggested that the 8 75-mm. antitank guns now assigned to the medium artillery battalions be removed entirely from the division and that 12 more 37-mm. antitank guns be added to the recommended division antitank unit. This would result in a battalion of 36 37-mm. antitank guns. The commander of the unit would act as antitank advisor on the division staff.

...The medium tank is considered one of the most effective antitank weapons. It should mount at least a 3-inch gun and stress should be laid on its mobility and speed, rather than its armor. This tank is visualized primarily as a "tank chaser" - a positive means to seek, overtake and destroy enemy tanks. . .It is not believed desirable to employ the armored division or its tank elements in the antitank role. Armored divisions and corps are decisive means in the hands of the commander, to be employed primarily in large-scale offensive and defensive operations.

Major Wedemeyer's article mentions the tremendous assault aimed at the French Army by a German armored force of 45,000 motor vehicles striking through the ARDENNES FOREST in 1940. He writes,

...The French General Staff couldn't conceive of an armored thrust of any magnitude driving successfully through the rugged terrain of the Belgian Ardennes. Yet five armored divisions and three motorized divisions successfully penetrated

this deep forest and crossed the Mouse River in an unprecedented employment of armored forces..

An antitank doctrine suggested by Major Wedemeyer was similar to that adopted for the employment of TD units when they became a part of the U. S. Armed Forces. His suggested doctrine was: "Vigorous searching for the armored foe, tenaciously holding on to his flanks, pursuing and destroying him at every turn."

The article ends with several pertinent conclusions, among them the following:

...Tanks and airplanes have not deprived the infantry and artillery of their former supremacy, but have greatly accelerated the methods, changed techniques, and provided supplementary means for maneuver or denial of maneuver. . .The tank itself (or tank chaser) is the primary defensive weapon against tanks. Other antitank means, active and passive, create conditions, such as disruption, delay, casualties and canalization, which favor the employment of tank units.

Shortly after this article appeared, the concept of tank chasers was given additional support in a contribution to the Field Artillery Journal by Major W. B. Palmer, which came out in September of 1941. Writing on the subject "Field Artillery - 1941," Major (now Major General) Palmer included a section on "The Antitank Artillery." In it he asserted,

...It is probably true that the ideal antitank gun is the antiaircraft gun, with its expensive laying devices and terrific muzzle velocity. It can blow the tank apart. It is true, also, that an antitank gun should have a high muzzle velocity, an armor-piercing shell, great mobility, and great maneuverability. It should have an armored tow vehicle or a self-propelled mount; rather definitely the latter, if it is to chase tanks around the battlefield.

The observations of these officers are of interest as examples of informed military thought which, in 1940 and 1941, was the basis

for the conception and formation of tank destroyer units.

Excerpts from Comment in 1944-1945

The concentrated emphasis on counter armor operations between 1940 and 1944 gave our ground forces a number of methods of dealing with the tank threat, particularly by the time U. S. forces faced major German strength on the European Continent after the invasions of 1944. TDs came into their own when a large-caliber, high-velocity gun was placed on the mobile mount foreseen by earlier writers. Armed with this weapon, they enlarged on their primary role. On antitank missions they worked in close support of, or attached to, infantry and armored organizations. As supporting units for artillery they served to reinforce fires and added greater range to the artillery capability.

With these changes came alterations in basic missions. The Tank Destroyer Field Manual of 16 June 1942 gave the units primary antitank missions, and secondary missions as "beach defense, action against parachute and airborne troops, and the reduction of bunkers, pillboxes, and other weapon emplacements."¹

The same manual, revised and dated 18 July 1944, lists suitable secondary missions as:

- a. Direct or indirect fire to reinforce or supplement that of artillery units.
- b. Destruction of pillboxes and permanent defensive works.
- c. Support of landing operations.
- d. Defense of beaches against waterborne attack.
- e. Roving gun and roving battery mission.²

Fursuing this secondary employment with reference to reinforcing or supplementing artillery fires, several combat authors

found time in 1944 to forward articles to the Field Artillery and Infantry Journals describing successful methods of using TDs as artillery. Others mention the practice in articles on associated subjects.

Among interesting comments on this debated method of employment was one by a German officer, a Colonel Seither, written in November 1942 for a German service paper and translated in the March 1944 FA Journal.³ Colonel Seither considered

...The modern antitank gun is taking on the characteristics of a field gun, which may determine its future appearance. In view of these facts it can readily be imagined that the field gun, which has, at all events, disappeared from the German Army, is experiencing a rebirth but is being provided with the special technical improvements characteristic of an antitank gun and is to be used primarily against tanks and secondarily for other artillery purposes.

On the other hand the necessity of at least using the divisional artillery for antitank defense has compelled us to provide these guns also with the technical improvements that ensure that they will have the necessary flexibility and rate of fire.

His conclusion is given as another approach to the evolution of heavy weapons.

Returning to the employment of TDs in a role supplementing field artillery, five combat officers, a cavalryman and four artillerymen, are quoted from contributions to the Field Artillery Journal of August, October, and November of 1944.

In the August issue, Major E. C. Hatfield, Cavalry, presented operations of four TD units in the supplementary artillery role.⁴ They were the 630th, 776th, 803d, and 808th TD Battalions. He says,

The following missions were developed: a. Reinforcing the fires of field artillery battalions. b. Deepening and extending the zones of fire of the field artillery. c. Targets of opportunity. d. Counter-battery fire -- to a limited extent. e. Harassing missions. f. Interdiction missions.

...An example of the accuracy of the 3" gun was evidenced on the night of 14 January 1945 when "C" Company, 808th TD Bn, in the role of reinforcing artillery, was called upon to deliver emergency fires on a troop concentration. The target was over 800 miles outside the transfer limits, requiring a shift of 1612 miles, and over 12,000 yards in range. A K of 78 yards per 1000 was used. A check round fired at the target in the morning showed that the deflection was correct, range 100 short.

During a 24-hour period 21022 March 1945, Company "A" of the 630th TD Bn fired 17 harassing missions on a Rhine River bridge, a total of 4180 rounds of HE being expended.

The comparative cheapness of 3" ammunition in tonnage and transport, and the fact that TDs are highly effective in performing harassing and interdiction missions, were the reasons which caused a marked increase in their use as reinforcing artillery in Europe.

In the same issue of the Field Artillery Journal, Colonel F. B. Bell, Field Artillery, reported tank destroyers in the XIX Corps played a "prominent part" in providing fire support for the ROER River crossings.⁵ The value of TD guns on harassing and interdiction missions, according to the Colonel, "is too well known to require comment."⁶

The 90-mm. guns were used mainly for long range missions. Because they can be sited well forward, their fire can be placed on targets beyond the range of most of the Corps Artillery. It should not be assumed, however, that their value is limited to long range missions only. As an illustration, three 90-mm. platoons were called upon to place interdiction fire upon roads leading to a junction at STEINSTRASS, approximately 11,000 yards distant. . . PWs from a horse-drawn 150-mm. artillery battery, captured intact by the 30th Infantry Division, stated that they were unable to evacuate their materiel because of the terrific interdiction fire.

...A maximum degree of effect is obtained with tank destroyer ammunition, and the great saving in shipping weight and space (over heavier calibers) is evident.⁷

Statements of Lieutenant Colonel J. F. Barney, Jr.,⁸ Field Artillery, and Captain P. C. Meacham,⁹ in the November 1944 issue of the Field Artillery Journal, corroborate those of Colonel Bell and Major Hatfield under different circumstances of combat.

Major Edward A. Raymond, Field Artillery, author of "Brassing off Kraut," in the October 1944 Field Artillery Journal, concludes that

...The M10 is one of the most versatile weapons on the battlefield. It is a quadruple threat, not only doing its defensive job in spectacular fashion but also acting offensively as an infantry assault gun, as a mobile artillery weapon, and as an invaluable adjunct in tank attacks.¹⁰

Coordination of TD units with armor and infantry has been given detailed explanation in preceding chapters; however, two additional briefs on the operation of the TD-Infantry team are presented here.

It was developed on the battlefield, according to Colonel J. F. Barney, Jr., the artilleryman quoted previously, in an article written for the Infantry Journal of November 1944.

Infantry commanders saw, he reports, "in the heavy fire power of a TD battalion, a powerful weapon to help Doughboys when the situation called for their use in this way."¹¹

A study of the results of Infantry-TD action is well presented in an article on the "Proper Use and Abuse of Tank Destroyers," by Lieutenant Eugene T. Oborn, Field Artillery, published in the Field Artillery Journal of July, 1945. Lieutenant Oborn declares the success of the TD weapon depends on an understanding of its capabilities by the infantry commander to whom it

is attached for combat.¹² He produces a table showing a comparison of accomplishments and losses in component companies of the 899th TD Battalion, covering a period of seven months. During that time, gun companies worked with the same infantry regiments of the 9th Division under varying conditions of command and supervision.

Describing the background for his statistics, Lieutenant Oborn writes,

"A" Co was attached to a regiment which permitted use of the guns under company control. Recommendations of its commander have, in the main, been followed. This employment favors the present type of battalion tank destroyer organization; missions were assigned generally and the company officers and NCCs were permitted to use their own initiative in accomplishing these missions.

In the case of "C" and (particularly) "B" companies, also attached to regiments, recommendations of the respective company commanders were frequently not followed. The result was the use of their destroyers on missions which should and could have been accomplished by tanks, artillery, heavy weapons, or the riflemen themselves all of which were available.

A resume of the chart illustrating the article is as follows:

	<u>"A" Co</u>	<u>"B" Co</u>	<u>"C" Co</u>
Enemy tanks	22	17	10
Guns, all types	35	17	11
Fillbox and Strongpoint	33	12	17
MG nest	49	8	21
GP vehicle	4	7	4
PW	465	59	1173
Own M10 or M8 lost in action	2	13	9

Combat "Know-How"

The complete inactivation of TD units was accomplished in 1946. Whether they will be revived to fill another emergency role

cannot be foreseen. However, a certain amount of "know-how", learned by units in combat through sometimes bitter experience, may be repeated for its value to other Arms. These "tips" are as follows:

1. Gun positions must be changed often to secure the element of surprise. It was noted that the enemy would attempt any trickery which he thought might have even a remote possibility of bagging some of our guns. In several instances he would withdraw a knocked-out tank under cover of darkness and substitute a live tank in its place. Close observation on the part of the infantry and our gun crews exposed this trickery. It was found that the Kraut would re-man knocked-out tanks which had not burned and use them as pillboxes. It has become the policy of this TD unit to shell and setafire all enemy tanks knocked out.¹³

2. Hand grenades are not carried by experienced units, as they may be set off by enemy shells striking the sides of the destroyer.¹⁴

3. This TD battalion - like others in Italy - thinks that it should tie right in as a battalion to the divisional artillery when acting in its secondary role as artillery.¹⁵

4. Another artillery function of great importance to the division artillery has been the use of TDs as roving guns. . . . The battalion sends out two or three destroyers to fire a few rounds from each of a number of positions up and down the line, firing at definitely located targets (such as houses, dugouts, trails, etc.) which are known to be in current use. Firing is never done at random.¹⁶

5. The battalion wants the biggest gun it can carry.¹⁷

6. The comparison of self-propelled TDs with the towed antitank guns of the British in the northern sector emphasized the superiority of the M10. Our TDs could follow the advance of our infantry much more closely, and when enemy infantry infiltrated into Allied positions could withdraw in daylight. The thin-skinned prime-movers for the towed guns could, in general, only approach the front at night. The limited traverse of towed guns also proved a serious handicap. The chevron type rubber track was the only logical type to be used in combat.¹⁸

7. A roadside position for the emplacement of heavy weapons has two advantages. Muzzle blast will not show on the hard surface of the roadway, and extra elevation for increased range is readily obtained by placing vehicles on the slope of the ditch alongside the road.¹⁹

8. It is desirable, if the artillery can and will do it, to have the FA crew do all the survey work: this reduces the number of men milling around to draw enemy attention and fire upon the area.²⁰

9. I believe most tank destroyers would gladly swap the air compressor in the pioneer platoon for one bulldozer, and I know the field artillery working with us would have parted with some of their most prized possessions for even a pint-sized bulldozer.²¹

10. Ammunition, and the range table for firing shell, illuminating, up to ranges of 4000 yards, should be placed in each destroyer. This will permit one destroyer of a platoon to illuminate an area, while the other three bring direct fire on enemy armor, if the enemy attacks with armor at night.²²

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 7

¹FM 18-5, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 16 June 1942), Par 11.

²FM 18-5, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 18 July 1944), Par 6.

³Colonel Seither, "The Modern Antitank Gun," translated from Wehrtechnische Monatshefte for August, 1943, written in November 1942, translator unknown, Field Artillery Journal, 34 (March 1944) p 154.

⁴Major Ernest C. Hatfield, "Utilizing Tank Destroyers as Artillery," Field Artillery Journal, 35 (August 1945), p 495.

⁵Colonel Paul B. Bell, "Tank Destroyers in the Roer River Crossing," Field Artillery Journal, 35 (August 1945), p 497.

⁶Ibid, p 498.

⁷Ibid, p 498.

⁸Lt Colonel J. F. Barney, Jr., "TDs Approach Maturity," Field Artillery Journal, 34 (November 1944), pp 775-778.

⁹Captain F. C. Meacham as told to Lt. R. L. Barnhill, "A New Fighting Team," Field Artillery Journal, 34 (November 1944), pp 778-780.

¹⁰Major Edward A. Raymond, "Brassing Off Kraut," Field Artillery Journal, 34 (October 1944), p 698.

¹¹Colonel J. P. Barney, Jr., "Tank Destroyers," Infantry Journal, LV (November 1944), p. 17.

¹²Lt Eugene T. Oborn, "Proper Use and Bause of Tank Destroyers," Field Artillery Journal, 35 (July 1945), p 399.

¹³Major Edward A. Raymond, Op cit, p 697.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Lt Colonel J. P. Barney, Jr., "TDs Approach Maturity," Field Artillery Journal, 34 (November 1944), p 776.

²⁰Ibid, p 777.

²¹Captain F. C. Meacham, Op cit, p 780.

²²Lt Eugene T. Oborn, Op cit, p 399.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings in this chapter are derived from two sources - an analysis of battle experiences of four TD battalions in the European Theater during the period from May 1944 to June 1945, and general observations on the subject of TD combat activities written by military authors of the same period.

It should be noted that other aspects of TD employment, those factors outside actual tactical operations, are not incorporated in Conclusions and recommendations. Such factors play an important part in determining the overall usefulness of a military Corps or Arm. They include problems of training and logistics and, as in the case of TDs, a comparison of the efficiency and usefulness of the TD unit over other types of antitank equipment and personnel combinations.

For the purposes of this study, the form followed in the presentation of Conclusions and Recommendations is as follows: Each conclusion is numbered and listed separately, with a brief descriptive explanation, followed by the Committee's recommendation.

1. Offensive and Defensive Capabilities of TDs

The initial conclusion of this study is that TD units successfully fulfilled their primary mission, that of defense against armored attack, and in addition proved to be capable of assuming the offensive against hostile ground forces, including armor, by operating

as highly-mobile, lightly-armored and heavily-gunned assault units.

In the offensive against tanks, TDs relied on mobility and heavy firepower to offset the disadvantage of their light protective armor. They operated on the offensive in conjunction with friendly armor and were utilized to supplement the speed and firepower of the slower but more heavily armored vehicles. They were particularly adapted to this role when soggy terrain would not support the weighty tank. The TD vehicle, with less ground pressure, could maneuver through friendly units, outmaneuvering hostile armor as well, using this capability to attain an advantageous position, accomplish its fire mission, and move to the flank or rear for another strike.

The Committee recommends that the characteristics of the TD self-propelled vehicle, high mobility, light armor and a large gun, be fully exploited; and that this vehicle be incorporated in an organization to operate with or as a part of armor, infantry or reformed TD units, to realize on its dual capabilities on the offensive as well as in a major defensive role against hostile forces.

2. TDs Can Be Used As Artillery

Inherent in TD organizations was their ability to accomplish many fire missions of a type normally performed only by artillery. It was artillerymen who first realized and developed this capability and applied their specialized knowledge and individual ingenuity to work out successful methods of employing TDs on typical artillery tasks.

Artillerymen-authors, who wrote on the use of TDs to

supplement their Arm, mentioned the following fire missions as having been successfully accomplished by TDs:

Direct or indirect fire to reinforce or supplement that of artillery units.

Roving gun and roving battery missions.

Deepening and extending the zones of fire of artillery.

Targets of opportunity.

Counter-battery fire.

Harassing missions.

Interdiction missions.

In connection with deepening and extending the zones of artillery fire, several writers pointed out that TDs, because of their mobility and armor protection, were sited well forward of artillery emplacements and from that position placed fire on targets beyond the range of most Corps Artillery.

It was also emphasized that the comparative cheapness of TD ammunition, in tonnage and transport, was a great saving in shipping weight and space over ammunition normally required by heavier type artillery to do the same long-range job.

It is recommended that the possibilities of the lightly-armored, self-propelled gun for use by artillery be considered in the future development of weapons for that arm; and should assault units be formed in the future, employing a vehicle similar to the TD mount, that they be well trained in a secondary mission of reinforcing and supplementing artillery.

3. Employment Against Pillboxes and Defensive Works

The high-velocity gun employed by TD organizations, coupled with the armored protection its vehicle offered gun crews, gave TD units a natural weapon to use in direct fire against fortified areas. The mobility of the gun permitted crews to capitalize on the element of surprise in attacking pillboxes and defensive works. Guns were quickly placed in firing position, completed their mission of placing rounds in embrasures or giving protective fire to units on the ground, and withdrew before effective hostile fire could be placed on them.

In recommending that this capability be retained as a secondary mission for units with characteristics of TD organizations, the Committee does not infer that mobile, direct-fire weapons are the best means of reducing emplacements.

4. TDs Posed Quadruple Threat to Enemy

The self-propelled, hard-hitting weapons used by most TD units during the latter part of World War II made these organizations one of the most versatile antagonists on the battlefield. They were a quadruple threat to the enemy, being capable of maintaining a stiff defense against armor, could operate on the offensive against all hostile ground arms, supported the infantry as an assault gun, and were successfully employed as mobile artillery. The primary factor in their successful employment was the mobility inherent in the TD vehicle.

It is a general recommendation that in the future design of vehicular gun mounts, stress be placed on the mobility of the mount under all conditions of terrain and weather.

5. Considerations of Command and Employment

TD units attached to major commands in combat performed most successfully under commanders who had a knowledge of the techniques of TD operation, or who, lacking that knowledge, accepted the staff guidance of the attached TD unit commander. It was the rule (correct or not) that destroyer organizations were broken down to platoon-size units for combat, particularly on the defense against armor.

This procedure did not utilize the full capabilities of the TD company or battalion on the defensive (particularly in the counter-attack) and more often placed small TD elements under junior commanders who were not remotely acquainted with their techniques, and, in addition, were not amenable to staff advice from an attached, subordinate commander.

This general situation was a cause for constant complaint by TD organization officers and non-commissioned officers, many of whom wrote, in service papers and elsewhere, that they were inefficiently employed.

There is merit to the assertion they could have been used more effectively. Statistics prepared on a small scale by a TD unit show, over an extended period of actual combat, major organization commanders who took advantage of the technical advice of

attached TD personnel had a more valuable weapon at their disposal than commanders who did not. Those commanders using the technical advice of their subordinate TD leader had working for them units which inflicted more than twice as much damage to the enemy, while suffering one-fifth the casualties as those who did not consider this source of professional assistance.

As a compromise between command authority and the best, overall utilization of troops trained for specific missions, it is recommended that such units be made an organic part of major commands, preferably at regimental or divisional level.

6. Self-propelled Weapon Superior to Towed Gun

TD organizations equipped with the armored, self-propelled, antitank gun attained greater success in combat than those equipped with the towed antitank gun. Using organizations considered the superiority of the mobile mount so apparent that written remarks on the difference are scarce. It was so obvious it could be taken for granted.

In countless operations, mobile guns with armor protection used these characteristics to their decided advantage. They could move in or out of position freely; in combat, towed weapons waited for nightfall (except in extreme emergency) before moving, and once committed had little opportunity for their thin-skinned prime-movers to change them to another position. Towed guns had a limited traverse, compared to the vehicular weapon, and their prime-movers were of little assistance in altering their traverse. The vehicular

weapon could follow the advance of infantry or armor, or become a part of the forward elements of the assault, all well beyond the capability of the towed gun.

The self-propelled weapon is recommended as the best type for use by TD units or organizations charged with a similar mission.

7. Mobile Gun Mounts
Should Have Overhead As Well As Side Armor

Several author-users wrote that TD self-propelled vehicles would have attained greater combat efficiency had they carried overhead as well as side armor. They also wrote that because it had not been provided, most units improvised their own. The improvisation ranged from a canvas spread, to deflect grenades, to metallic sheeting providing protection against overhead artillery bursts.

In constructing vehicles with characteristics and capabilities similar to those of the TD vehicle, it is recommended that overhead cover be provided for gun crews.

APPENDIX I

628TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

Training

On 10 July 1941, the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion was organized as a provisional antitank battalion at Indiantown Gap Military Reservation. It owes its conception to Lieutenant General Hugh Drum, who then commanded the First U. S. Army, and decided that his divisions should test antitank battalions in the Carolina Maneuvers of 1941. This battalion was a divisional unit formed from the artillery, infantry, engineers, and medical troops of the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, Keystone Division. Initially the battalion was commanded by Major Carl L. Peterson and consisted of a Headquarters Battery, six lettered batteries, and a medical detachment. Attached was a company of the division engineers.

The battalion's first tactical field training was in July 1941 at A. P. Hill Military Reservation, Virginia, as a part of the 28th Infantry Division. At this time the main armament consisted of towed mock guns made of miscellaneous pieces of pipe, wood, etc., towed by $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton weapons carriers.

Early in November, while participating in the Carolina Maneuvers, Major William M. Hernandez assumed command. On 15 December 1941, shortly after its return to the Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, the battalion was reorganized into a permanent organization, absorbing D and E batteries, redesignating the remaining

batteries as companies, and redesignating the unit as the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

In January 1942 an additional company originally known as the Pioneer Company, but ultimately to become the Reconnaissance Company, was added. Also during this month the battalion was moved to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, where training continued until September. Again it moved, this time to the newly formed Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood, Texas. Here, after fifteen months of training with dummy guns, the Battalion first fired live ammunition, using borrowed 75mm guns on half-tracks, the original TD vehicle and weapon.

Early in December 1942 at Camp Bowie, Texas, the Battalion successfully completed its first Army Ground Force tests.

In January 1942 the Battalion entrained for Camp Carabelle, Florida, (later designated Camp Gordon Johnston) where it rejoined the 28th Infantry Division for intensive amphibious training.

After receiving its first combat vehicles, 36 M10 tank destroyers, the Battalion moved to Camp Rucker, Alabama, where driver training was stressed prior to participation in the 1943 Tennessee Maneuvers.

Periods of amphibious training at Camp Bradford, near Norfolk, Virginia, and Army Ground Force Firing Tests in the West Virginia Maneuver Area were completed before the Battalion departed for Camp Dix and the Port of Embarkation in December 1943.

After leaving the U. S. by way of Camp Shanks on 28 January

1944, the Battalion arrived at Greenock, Scotland, on 6 February 1944 and from there entrained for Puckingham, England, (located between Birmingham and Coventry).

After extensive range firing in Wales, the Battalion was moved to Dorchester, England, to run Marshalling Camps for the Normandy Invasion troops.

Relieved of its Marshalling Area assignment, the Battalion embarked on Navy LSTs on 28 July for France and the combat zone.

APPENDIX II

628TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

Combat History

The 628th TD Battalion left from PUDDLETOWN, England, on 26 July 1944 and loaded on Navy LSTs for France on 28 July 1944. They landed on Utah Beach on 30 July, and within a few days were assigned to the 5th Armored Division, XV Corps, Third Army.

The normal procedure in combat was to attach one platoon of the Reconnaissance Company to each of the gun companies of the battalion, which in turn were attached to each of the combat commands and to the reserve command of the Division. The remainder of the 628th was attached to Headquarters, 5th Armored Division Artillery.

Falaise-Argentan Gap

On 10 August 1944, still assigned to the Third Army, XV Corps, and 5th Armored Division, the Battalion moved out of the bivouac area in the vicinity of LE MANS, France, to participate in the attempt to close the Falaise-Argentan Gap. Route of column passed through BRIOSNE and LE MELSE, arriving in the vicinity of SEES, France, at 2145 hours, 12 August 1944. During the march on 11 August 1944, 2d Platoon, Company A, was acting as rear guard to CCA's column. Sometime during the night an unidentified column approached the route of march of CCA's column from the west. .S/Sgt. Koczan, Company A, challenged the leading vehicle; and when it failed to stop, Sergeant Koczan fired his .45 caliber pistol and

killed the driver. He then destroyed the next two vehicles with hand grenades and brought .50 caliber and .30 caliber machine gun fire on the remaining five vehicles, while the M10's opened fire on the rear of the column with three-inch H.E. to prevent a withdrawal. In all, eight enemy vehicles and 240 enemy troops were destroyed.

Battle of the Seine River

The Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Hernandez, went out to contact Company A on 29 August 1944; and while directing fire on enemy tanks, was killed at 1630 hours near DOUAINS, France. Major William J. Gallagher, Battalion Executive Officer, assumed command of the Battalion at 1700 hours, same date. In the same action in which Lieutenant Colonel Hernandez was killed, Corporals O'Brien and Tartaglia, 3d Platoon, Company A, each destroyed a Mark V tank at 1700 yards range just west of DOUAINS, while the platoon had one M10 Tank Destroyer knocked out.

Drive to the Belgian Border

On 27 August 1944, the 5th Armored Division with the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached was relieved of assignment to Third Army and XV Corps. On 30 August 1944, the 5th Armored Division was given the mission of marching direct to the Belgian border with the least possible delay. The Battalion left bivouac near GUERVILLE, France, at 0730 hours on 30 August 1944, with CCB. It passed through the outskirts of PARIS and continued on through SENLIS, COMPEIGNE

Forest, NOYEN, GUISCARD, VILLENEUVE, and VALENCIENNES, arriving at CONDE, France, on the Belgium border at 2330 hours on 2 September 1944.

Battle of the Hurtgen Forest

On 23 October 1944, the Battalion moved to the vicinity of KALTERHERBERG, Germany, where for the first time since entering combat civilian homes were utilized for billets, a policy which was continued from that date until the end of hostilities. On 1 November 1944, the new M36 Tank Destroyers equipped with the 90mm guns arrived to replace the M10's with the three-inch guns in the three firing companies.

On 3 December, CCA with Company A attached, was further attached to the 4th Infantry Division in their attack on STRAUSS, Germany, while Company B was attached to CCB on indirect fire missions. The battle of the HURTGEN Forest in Germany was by far the most intense period of combat experienced by any unit in this Battalion, and full credit can be paid to CCR and Company C for their outstanding combat record in this engagement. This was the area that the enemy had been able to strongly fortify and were determined to protect, as it controlled the approaches to the vitally important network of dams which fed into the ROER River area. To the north, British and American units were approaching the west bank of the ROER but could not cross until the network of dams in the hills above their positions were held by our forces. It was known that the German plan of defense was based on their ability to hold these dams to the last possible minute, and then release this vast supply

of water to flood the entire ROER River area.

Enemy artillery employment in the HURTGEN-BERGSTEIN area was the heaviest encountered. The artillery fire was such as to confine tank crews to their tanks for hours at a time, and air bursts and shrapnel caused many casualties to the men in the open M36 turrets. One M36 of Company C hit a mine in the vicinity of BERGSTEIN on 6 December 1944, and the crew climbed into another M36 for protection. Shortly afterwards, however, this other M36 with both crews aboard received a direct hit in the open turret with a white phosphorous shell. As the result of this experience, plans were immediately started to build an armored turret top for all tank destroyer vehicles. This modification for all M36 Tank Destroyer vehicles was finally completed in January 1945 and proved invaluable in combat on a number of subsequent occasions.

Battle of the Ardennes

Upon the arrival of all units in the new area around 1400 hours on 24 December 1944, Company A took up a defensive position in SOY, Belgium; Company B was attached to the 83d Reconnaissance Battalion, 3d Armored Division, and took up defensive positions in the vicinity of GRANDMENIL, Belgium; Company C, Reconnaissance Company, and the Battalion Forward CP were established in EREZEE, Belgium; and Headquarters Company and the Battalion rear echelon elements moved into BOMAL, Belgium. No one knew just how near the enemy had approached, but it did not take long to find out. Company A's position in SOY, Belgium, came under artillery fire shortly after

their arrival, and the enemy launched a small infantry counterattack which approached to within 200 yards of Company A's position before withdrawing. At 0130 hours, 25 December 1944, the 2d Platoon, Company B, had a road block established in GRANDMENIL, Belgium, when an enemy armored column was heard approaching the concealed position. Sergeant Moser, Tank Destroyer Gun Commander, permitted the leading enemy vehicles to come up to 25 yards of his position before opening fire, and then in quick succession knocked out the first two tanks at almost pointblank range, both of which were later identified as Mark V's. This caused the other vehicles in the enemy column to withdraw, and no further attempt was made by the enemy to utilize this GRANDMENIL-EREZEE-SOY road network which they needed to properly protect their northern flank. Later in the same day, members of Company B found two Mark V tanks abandoned by the German crews because they were out of gas; and these two enemy tanks were also destroyed.

The Roer to the Rhine River

Company B attached to CCB was the first unit of the Battalion to cross the ROER at LINNICH, Germany, on 25 February 1945, and the remainder of the Battalion followed the next day with Company A attached to CCA, Company C to CCR, and Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Reconnaissance Company, Headquarters the Pioneer Platoon, and Medical Detachment moving with Division Artillery Headquarters. The initial assembly area east of the ROER River was in the vicinity of KOFFERN-HOTTORF, Germany. All elements of the 5th

Armored Division then swung to the north, capturing RATH, ERKELENZ, HARDT, RHEINDALEN, RHEYDT, bypassing MUNCHEN-GLADBACH and continuing through VIERSON, ANRATH, HULS, TONISBURG, AND VLUYNHEIDE where the Battalion CP was established on 4 March 1945. Company A in the meantime had proceeded with CCA in the attack against KREFALD, while Company C continued with CCR in the attack on REPELEN and ORSOY on 7 March 1945.

APPENDIX III

704TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

Training

The 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion was probably better known to the Germans than it was to the people within the United States.

The nucleus of the 704th was formed on 15 December 1941 from Battery D, 22d Field Artillery Battalion of the 4th Armored Division at Fine Camp, New York, where it was attached to the 4th Armored Division for training.

The first commander of the 704th was Lieutenant Colonel Storck who relinquished the command to his executive officer, Major Oden, who soon received his promotion and commanded the battalion until Orleans, France.

After receiving its basic training with the 4th Armored Division at Fine Camp, New York, the 704th packed its equipment in early September 1942 and proceeded to the Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood, Texas, for a three months training period where a fuller knowledge of tactics and the use of equipment could be gained.

During this three months period, the battalion put emphasis on gunnery, camouflage, cover and concealment, and the employment of tank destroyer companies and platoons with armored units.

Specifically, great emphasis was put on fire and maneuver and individual tank destroyer versus tank tactics. These tactics involved agile maneuvering by a tank destroyer so as to place it in

a position to fire at enemy tanks in their most vulnerable areas-- their sides, suspension systems, or their rear.

From January to August 1943, the 704th maneuvered with the 4th Armored Division in the California Desert. During these maneuvers, it was found that in the majority of problems the battalion could be better utilized if the companies were attached to the major combat elements, such as a combat command. In many instances, platoons were attached to reinforced tank battalions.

It was thought that by using the tank destroyer companies or platoons decentralized from battalion control, a better dispersion of the tank destroyers would be brought about, thus giving the tank destroyers a better opportunity to be used in their primary role-- that is, antitank.

In late August 1943, the 704th moved with the 4th Armored Division to Camp Bowie, Texas, where it underwent physical conditioning training and the Army Ground Force combat tests. The latter consisted of small unit problems where a platoon leader would be given a situation such as that of a German tank attack against a defended position. The tank destroyer platoon leader and his platoon would then be graded on the following techniques used in deployment: setting up firing positions; maneuvering to the enemy flanks; and the degree of chance taken in a simulated tank destroyer versus tank action.

A considerable amount of attention was given the tank destroyer versus tank technique, inasmuch as the tank destroyers were

simply 76mm guns mounted on a medium tank chassis with only three-eighths inch armor plate for protection against small arms fire. Since the gun crews had no armor or a turret for protection, this meant that they would be completely at the mercy of any enemy weapon of .50 caliber or larger. Also, the crews would be exposed to any type of overhead fire in their open vehicles.

On 18 February 1944, the 704th left the States and arrived 15 days later at Liverpool, England. From there the battalion entrained for Trowbridge, England, where the next four months were spent in final preparation for the job ahead.

This preparation consisted mainly of review training of everything learned in the States. From time to time, the tank destroyer companies maneuvered with the 4th Armored Division which was nearby. These maneuvers consisted mainly of small unit problems similar to those in the California Desert.

APPENDIX IV

823D TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

Training

The 823d Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated 25 July 1942 at Camp Carson, Colorado. Major (now Colonel) Charles B. McClelland was the battalion commanding officer; Captain (now Lieutenant Colonel) Robert W. Rayburn was the battalion executive officer. A small officer cadre and a 77 enlisted men cadre was furnished by the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Fifteen new officer graduates of the Cavalry School were assigned from Fort Riley, Kansas.

The battalion remained at Camp Carson for about six weeks, conducting cadre training and orientation of newly commissioned officer personnel. The unit participated in a good amount of mountain-climbing during this period for the purpose of physical conditioning. The battalion climbed Pikes Peak in August 1942 and claims to be the first military unit to accomplish this, in formation.

On 9 September 1942 the 823d moved to Camp Livingston, Louisiana. At this time it was still in a cadre status, with only the minimum essential items of TO&E equipment. On or about 1 October it received 250 fillers from Camp Robinson, Arkansas, plus its general purpose vehicles. Basic training was then conducted until about 1 January 1943, when it received 400 newly inducted men from Texas and California. On 5 January the battalion was transferred to the Basic Unit Training Center, Camp Bowie, Texas. This center was a

subordinate command of the Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood, Texas.

Individual training, basic and advanced, was completed at Camp Bowie, and on 13 April the battalion moved to Camp Hood, coming under control of the Advanced Unit Training Center, the Tank Destroyer Center. At this time, the outfit was converted to a towed tank destroyer battalion (3-inch gun) and received its first major items of equipment, a few 3-inch guns and halftracks. At this time, a strenuous 3-month training program, including weapons and tactical training, was undertaken. During May, McClelland was transferred to command the 101st Cavalry Group, and Lieutenant Colonel Paul B. Bell, FA, assumed command of the battalion.

The battalion completed its proficiency firing tests with the highest score then recorded for a towed tank destroyer unit. Other proficiency tests culminating the end of the training period at Camp Hood were accomplished in an excellent manner, and on 31 July 1943, the battalion moved to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana.

At Camp Claiborne, the battalion was given additional training tests by Headquarters, 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade. Then came the series of 6, 12, 18, and 25-mile road marches. In September the battalion left for Third Army maneuvers in the Louisiana Maneuver Area where it was attached to the 84th, 99th, 102d, and 103d Infantry Divisions, respectively. The battalion completed maneuvers around the 15th of November with an overall rating of Excellent, the only tank destroyer battalion to receive this rating during this particular

phase of maneuvers.

Upon return to Camp Claiborne, it was given the mission of preparing for AGF tests - tactical, physical, equipment, etc., and getting every individual qualified for POM. About this time, Bell was transferred, and the battalion executive, Major Edward A. Costomiris, assumed command. In January 1944 the battalion took its various AGF tests, which it passed with high scores, particularly the AGF physical tests. Around the 1st of February, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Stanley Dettmer assumed command. During February Major General Frank W. Milburn, Commanding General, XXI Corps, with representatives of the Inspector General, U.S. Army, inspected the unit.

Late in February the battalion received its alert orders from the War Department. All equipment other than that prescribed as minimum essential by POM instructions was turned in, last-minute personnel changes were effected, and on or about 8 March it moved by rail to Camp Miles Standish, near Taunton, Massachusetts. The advance detail consisting of two officers had departed for England in late February. The battalion was scheduled to sail during the latter part of March, but the ship earmarked for it developed mechanical trouble. It did sail from Boston aboard the "SS Sea Porpoise" on 6 April 1944.

APPENDIX V

MAPS

1. Germany, 1:100,000 GSGS 4416, Sheet No. S-1 -- Bonn .. omitted.
2. Germany (Central Section), 1:25,000 GSGS 4414, Sheet No. 5503 --
Elsenborn .. omitted.