

Several Tank Destroyer Officers have been returned to Camp Hood on rotation, or after recovering from wounds, and are putting their practical experience to use in the army's training program.

The Officer with broadest experience in this field is Col. J. P. Barney, Jr., a New Yorker, who twice was awarded the Silver Star and once the Bronze Star for his gallantry under fire in Italy and North Africa.

Colonel Barney commanded the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion in both North Africa and Italy. His M-10s were the first to go into action in Africa when the Americans broke out of Kasserine valley in March, 1943.

His battalion was at Maknassy with the First armored division and first had its chance to revise the high command's estimates of the various uses to which TDs might be put. . . . other than seeking out and pot-shooting tanks.

Here many dangerous enemy installations were out of range of the "organic artillery" and Colonel Barney offered to prove to the division commander that his M-10s could do something about it. They had been practicing on indirect fire for weeks.

A six-gun battery high up in a pass was silenced by fire from one of his companies, and later a German column in a valley 14,000 yards distant was torn to pieces by TD fire. "Then," said Colonel Barney, "We started firing indirect fire on German positions until April, then marched north for the breakthrough at Mateur and 'covered' the First from then until the German surrender."

These experiences at Maknassy were the real birth of indirect fire for tank destroyers.

Besides more than 30 German tanks, his battalion knocked out artillery and anti-tank guns in its vital supporting role.

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"We were corps artillery in the landing at Salerno," Colonel Barney said. "We had polished off our indirect fire while on the desert and were used as artillery at the beginning. . . ."

"We were six months in the line. We were used for assault on pill-boxes, in supporting infantry, and in indirect fire missions."

Colonel Barney's battalion had been with the 34th division, the French Second Moroccan division and the New Zealand corps, before it went through Minturno with the 85th division in May, knocking out pill-boxes "and getting a lot of tanks." It went through Rome with the First Armored.

They all liked the TDs. The 776th received six commendations from six different commanders!

"All the tank destroyer battalions did marvellous work at the Anzio beach-head," he said. "They were splendid at Salerno, too. At Anzio they were fighting everything. Those European houses are really pillboxes. We saved losses to the infantry in knocking these houses out, and our own losses were not heavy, either.

In the Volturno river crossings, the TD battalion was used to destroy distant houses used as German observation posts, clearing the way for the advance. It was used to cover the infantry in many instances, such as the advance on the town of Ollivetta, and in the attack on Montaguilla across the Volturno when no artillery had yet crossed the river.

At Cassino, Colonel Barney's battalion performed many tasks, none stranger than one instance which proved how much confidence the infantry had in the TDs.

"There was a very prominent three-story house in the north west corner of the town," he tells. The lieutenant commanding the platoon "received a message from the infantry that there was a German 50 mm anti-tank gun in the third floor firing through the west window. **OUR INFANTRY WAS IN THE GROUND FLOOR!** Would he please knock the gun off? As the tank destroyer commander recounted it, he crossed his fingers, said yes, put four rounds in the window, destroyed the gun, killed the crew and never scratched a doughboy!"

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