

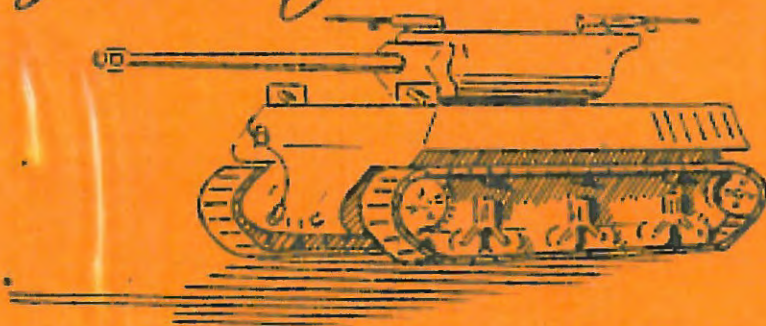


5<sup>TH</sup>

TANK DESTROYER

GROUP

*History*



1<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 1942  
TO  
VE DAY 9<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1945

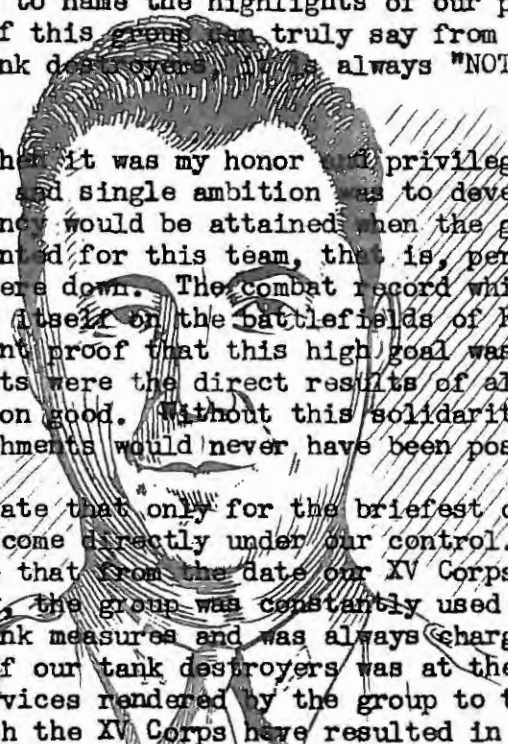
# Foreword

On 1 September 1942 when the 5th Tank Destroyer Group was activated, our country had been at war for nine months. From the Group's birth, its history was one of war, if not from the enemy then from the pressure of time, the unpredictable climate of Camp Hood, Texas, the many and varied requirements of Advanced Unit Training Center, the scorching heat of California-Arizona deserts, the multiple tribulations of POM, the touches of "Mal de Mer" on the Atlantic, the drab darkness of blackout nights in Ireland with the ever-present rains, the V bombs of London which were no respectors of personnel even on pass, the special infiltrating style of landing on Utah Beach to name the highlights of our pre-combat experiences. The charter members of this group can truly say from their own personal knowledge that for tank destroyers there is always "NOTHING NORMAL AND NOTHING STATIC."

On 2 June 1943 when it was my honor and privilege to assume command of this group, my aim and single ambition was to develop and mold a unit whose highest efficiency would be attained when the going was the toughest. Money players were wanted for this team, that is, personnel who would produce when the chips were down. The combat record which the 5th Tank Destroyer Group made for itself on the battlefields of France and Germany is gratifying and eloquent proof that this high goal was attained. Its successes and achievements were the direct results of all personnel pulling together for the common good. Without this solidarity of thought and action, its accomplishments would never have been possible.

We were unfortunate that only for the briefest of periods did tank destroyer battalions come directly under our control. On the other hand we were indeed fortunate that from the date our XV Corps became operational to the end on V-E Day, the group was constantly used to insure field coordination of anti-tank measures and was always charged with insuring that the combat strength of our tank destroyers was at the highest peak of efficiency. The many services rendered by the group to tank destroyer battalions operating with the XV Corps have resulted in inflicting more losses on the enemy while conserving the blood of our own American comrades. The highest compliments ever received by myself have been the frank and open declarations of tank destroyer battalion commanders, after they have departed from the jurisdiction of XV Corps, on the superior cooperation and initiative shown by the staff officers and enlisted personnel of this group in the furtherance of the war efforts of their battalions.

As your commanding officer over the major portion of the existence of the Group, I am sincerely proud of each individual member, and I congratulate you. The future history of the group is still unwritten, but whatever may be its future task, one thing is certain ----- it will be met with confidence, dispatch and efficiency, and will be completed with success.



L. E. JACOBY  
Colonel, FA  
Commanding

HISTORY  
OF  
FIFTH TANK DESTROYER GROUP

FROM ACTIVATION 1 SEPTEMBER 1942

TO

V-E DAY, 9 MAY 1945

The Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Tank Destroyer Group, came into being on 1 September 1942 at the Tank Destroyer Center established at Camp Hood, Texas, adjacent to the little town of Killeen and 18 miles west of Temple. Major General A. D. Bruce, Commanding General, TDC, the stalwart founder of the principles of Tank Destroyer employment in a major role, issued the orders activating the 5th Tank Destroyer Group in compliance with an Army Ground Force communication initiated by the late Lt. General Leslie J. McNair.

The original cadre for this organization was furnished from the personnel of the 633rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. 1st Lt. John Gray Paul, Jr. in charge of 19 enlisted men arrived 4 September 1942. Installations were occupied in the vicinity of 55th Street and Battalion Avenue. The late Colonel Harrison Herman, killed in action in the Ardennes campaign, initially commanded the Group per verbal orders of the Commanding General, TDC. Colonel Herman's successor, Lt. Colonel Samuel R. Browning, took over the Group from 24 September 1942 until 24 November 1942.

The Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 5th Tank Destroyer Group was organized under Tables of Organization 18-10-1, dated 5 January 1942 which authorized a complement of 16 officers and 115 enlisted men. This T/O held forth until reorganization was effected under T/O & E 18-10-1, dated 20 December 1942 at Camp Hood, Texas, which cut the strength of the unit to 8 officers and 40 enlisted men. Soon after the Group's arrival at the Desert Training Center, T/O & E 18-10-1, dated 26 May 1943, occasioned another change which was in force until a revision dated 30 December 1943 was received in Ireland and was made effective 5 April 1944. The latest and only change during the course of hostilities occurred while the unit was located at Fenetrange, France. The above numbered T/O was revised under the date 31 October 1944 and was ordered to become effective 7 March 1945. This latest publication set forth a strength of 17 officers and 63 enlisted men for the Group organization which, on V-E Day, was still in effect.

Camp Hood, then, was the first milestone in an itinerary that was destined to carry the 5th TD Group *nom de guerre*, "Hellcat", to the scenes of bitter and historic conflict. The campaigns of Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland and Central Europe were to be unfolded in all their great scope and display of over-whelming power with the Group an active participant in the above mentioned campaigns over a ten-month period from 12 July 1944 to V-E Day, 9 May 1945.

First, however, the basic instruction, then the preliminary groundwork and finally the intensified advanced training had to be absorbed to prepare the staff and unit for the manifold responsibilities that loomed ahead. Camp Hood's famed area and admirable facilities presented the ultimate in a training center designed primarily for the adaptation of revolutionary measures to counteract the powerful mechanized Panzer tactics employed by the Germans in their famous "blitz" campaigns.

Four Tank Destroyer Battalions, 602nd, 628th, 706th and 801st were assigned to the Group on 21 September 1942 and a comprehensive training program instituted. Group problems, CPX's and demonstrations were planned, maneuvered, critiqued and accentuated so as to embody new tactical techniques and methods of training.

One of the highlights of this training period from 1 September 1942 to 21 April 1943, which will always be remembered by those participating, was Camp Hood's world-famed "Commando Course". Under supervision of Major Ralph Slater and Major Gordon Kimbrell, AUTC, this area was the scene of intense training and activity for the unit from January 4 to 6 inclusive. All personnel not utilized in the performance of essential, routine duties engaged in this vigorous three-day program. Close combat fighting, street fighting technique and commando tactics were impressed on the Group. During the major part of the course classes were conducted during an excessively rainy period and the resultant, typical Texas quagmire added a realistic background to simulated combat conditions unusually enlivened by prolific use of demolitions, dynamite bombs, barbed wire entanglements and obstacles. The successful culmination of this training was indicative of the fine physical condition of the Group personnel. Further evidence of this fact was pronounced when the unit passed the rigorous, required AGF Physical Fitness Test on 22 January 1943 with the excellent score of 93.2%

With this phase behind the unit the wheels controlling the military training program ground anew. Orders were published transferring the unit, in its first permanent change of station, to Desert Training Center, Camp Young, California. This was the land of legend, withering heat and mesquite which occasioned the remark credited to a dour, "burned out Joe", "Only a coward would ask to be transferred from here to combat."

The "Hellcat" contingent departed from Camp Hood on 20 April 1943 and entrained at Temple, Texas on the morning of 21 April at 0200, arriving at Yuma, Arizona on April 23rd. Itinerary of the rail movement was: Temple, Brownwood, Sweetwater, El Paso, Douglas, Tucson, and Yuma, the final destination; a distance of approximately 1350 miles. The organization was entrucked to Camp Laguna, its new home for the next six months, about 30 miles north of Yuma. Following a period of acclimitization the Group rapidly assumed normal duties and routine operations in preparation for the huge maneuvers scheduled as a climactic phase of the desert training period.

Our present commanding officer, Colonel Leslie E. Jacoby, arrived at Camp Laguna and assumed command of the organization on 2 June 1943. Colonel Jacoby relieved Lt. Col. Joseph K. Gibson, Hq. 8th Motorized Division, who had been designated temporary Group Commander in the absence of Colonel Clinton S. Berrien who was relieved to attend Army & Navy Joint War College, Newport, R.I., 14 May 1943.

Initially the Group was attached to the 8th Motorized Division but was later attached to the 4th Hq, Special Troops, DTC, for administrative functions on 7 June 1943. The Group was affiliated with this headquarters until 21 August 1943 when the unit was assigned to the direct control of DTC, Camp Young, California.

Preliminary to Desert Training Center's large scale June - July maneuver the Group and attached battalions, 643rd, 706th and 811th TD Battalions settled down to training in earnest. CPX's, battalion problems and short maneuvers were planned, supervised, critiqued and participated in by the 5th TD Group in preparation for this critical phase of training.

The Group column left Camp Laguna the afternoon of 27 June and closed in the concentration area at the north end of Palen Pass, California, 28 June. Troops participating with the "RED", or defensive force, consisted of the 8th Infantry Division, 6th Tank Group with the 742nd and 743rd Tank Battalions, 5th Tank Destroyer Group with attached Tank Destroyer Battalions,

643rd, 706th and 811th. The "BLUE" offensive force was composed of the 77th Infantry Division, 7th Armored Division, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 76th FA Brigade and 6th Tank Destroyer Group with the 704th, 629th and 607th Tank Destroyer Battalions attached.

The first phase of the maneuvers lasted until July 3rd. The problem embodied the tactics involved in the attack of a fortified position (Palen Pass) defended by the "RED" force. The "BLUE" and "RED" forces then withdrew to prepare for the second phase of the maneuvers. The concentration area for the "BLUE" force was in the vicinity of Ogilby, California near Yuma, Arizona. "RED" forces bivouaced in an area just south of Highway 66 in the "Old Woman Mountain" valley. The action for the remainder of the maneuver was featured by the gradual withdrawal of the "RED" forces until the conclusion of the second phase 15 July 1943. Following a critique of the action the 5th TD Group and attached battalions reconcentrated and on 16 July began the return march to Camp Laguna, closing in on 17 July.

The 5th TD Group and attached battalions performed and executed their mission in an exemplary manner throughout the entire period. The 811th TD Battalion, commanded by Major Albert R. Brownfield, displayed superior tactical skill and received commendations from Colonel Jacoby and Major General McMahon to that effect. The "kill" credited to the tank destroyer battalions of the 5th Tank Destroyer Group during the maneuver period totaled:

Medium Tanks	138	Armored Cars	70
Light Tanks	106	Other Vehicles	19
Tank Destroyers	<u>54</u>	Personnel	311
Total Tanks and TD's	298		

With the exception of two Division Field Exercises in the vicinity of "NEVER SWEAT MOUNTAIN" participated in by the Group in conjunction with the 81st Infantry Division at Camp Horn, Arizona in preparation for later DTC maneuvers, which were subsequently canceled, the above concluded the activities in coordinated training at Camp Laguna.

It was here at Camp Laguna, amid the sand dunes, rattle snakes, and 140 degree temperature that "Hellcat" observed its first Organization Day on 1 September 1943. The usual ceremonial holiday and program was the order of the day. The activities, while not elaborate, were certainly ambitious due to the compact athletic schedule arranged by the over-zealous recreation officer. One event weary contestant wryly observed, "My Gawd, this is worse than the AGF Physical, and they say this is a day of rest." Little did the unit know that impending events would see the next Organization Day being observed in far distant climes and under decidedly different circumstances.

Special Orders 63, Letter, Hq, AGF, Washington, D.C., 14 October 1943, Subject: Exchange of Units in DTC, ordered the 5th TD Group and 811th TD Battalion to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. The Group closed Camp Laguna on 13 November 1943 and spent four joyful days at East Yards, Yuma, leaving there 17 November, arriving at Braggs, Oklahoma (Camp Gruber) 20 November.

The unit had hardly set its feet on the ground in this new location when the Group was placed, by telephone, on an "Alert" status. There "POM" (Preparation for Overseas Movement) became a byword. An immediate schedule of intense training and tests were enforced in conjunction with complying with the innumerable and extra special "THIRD ARMY POM" requirements. As a final qualification the Group was given the AGF Physical Fitness test and exceeded their former official rating of 93.2% with a superior 97.5% score on 11 December 1943. By 13 December 1943, all requirements were fulfilled to complete satisfaction of X Corps and AGF, although readiness date had been changed from 1 January 1944 to 20 December 1943 to 13 December 1943.

The "Hellcat" was about ready to roll, and with the overseas move imminent, an advance detachment consisting of Major William V. Giles, 1st Lt. Albert W. Wolfe, T/4 Parks and T/5 Meyers cleared Camp Gruber on 6 December 1943. They arrived NYPOE, Ft. Hamilton, New York, 8 December 1943 and boarded the famed luxury liner, HMT Queen Elizabeth on 12 December 1943. After an uneventful voyage it docked at Firth of Clyde, Scotland, 21 December, where the party transferred to the "Ben My Cree" which arrived in Belfast, 22 December. The detachment entrained there for their final destination, Lurgan, N.I., located about 20 miles southeast of Belfast.

Christmas Day meant first, turkey with all the trimmings and second, the beginning of a long trek for the Group main body at Camp Gruber. The unit departed from that station at 1430, 25 December 1943 and arrived at POE, Camp Kilmer, N.J., 27 December. The next holiday, New Year's Day, meant just another move for the boys, and following a short rail and ferry trip they boarded the HMS Aquitania at 2135, 1 January 1944. The ship docked at Gourach, Scotland, in the Firth of Clyde, 11 January 1944. Thence to Belfast, N.I. where the contingent was met by the advance detachment and escorted to Flush Factory, Lurgan, which was to be the home of the "Hellcat" for the next four months.

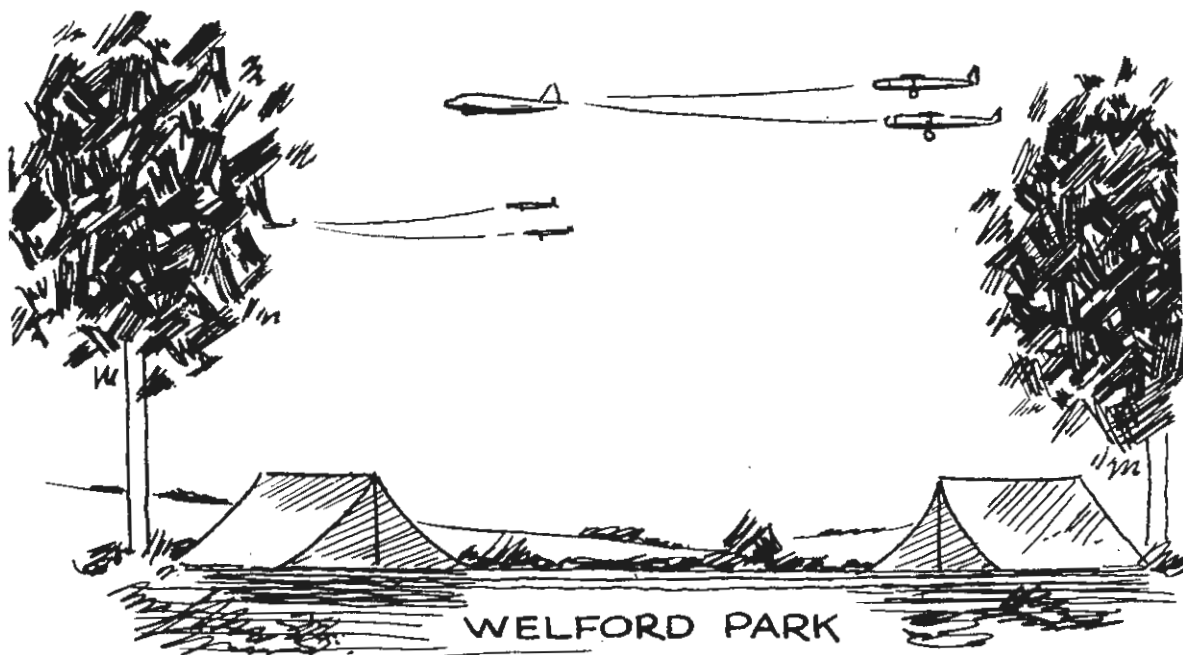
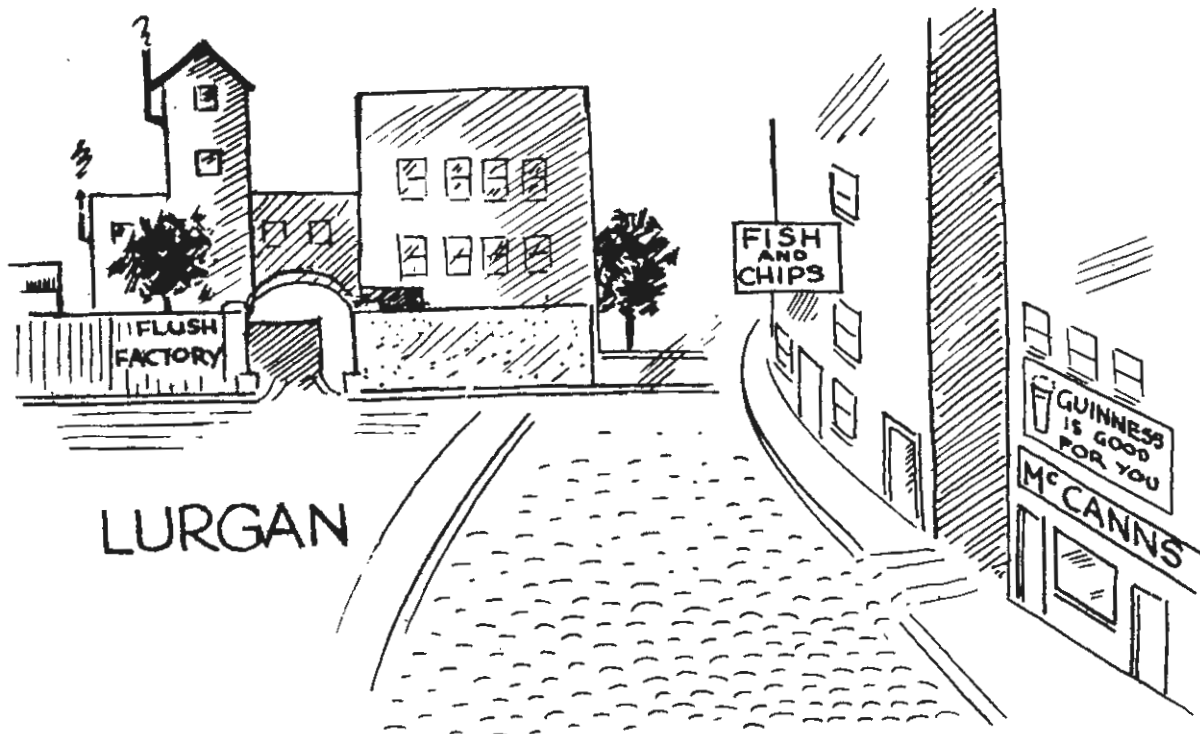
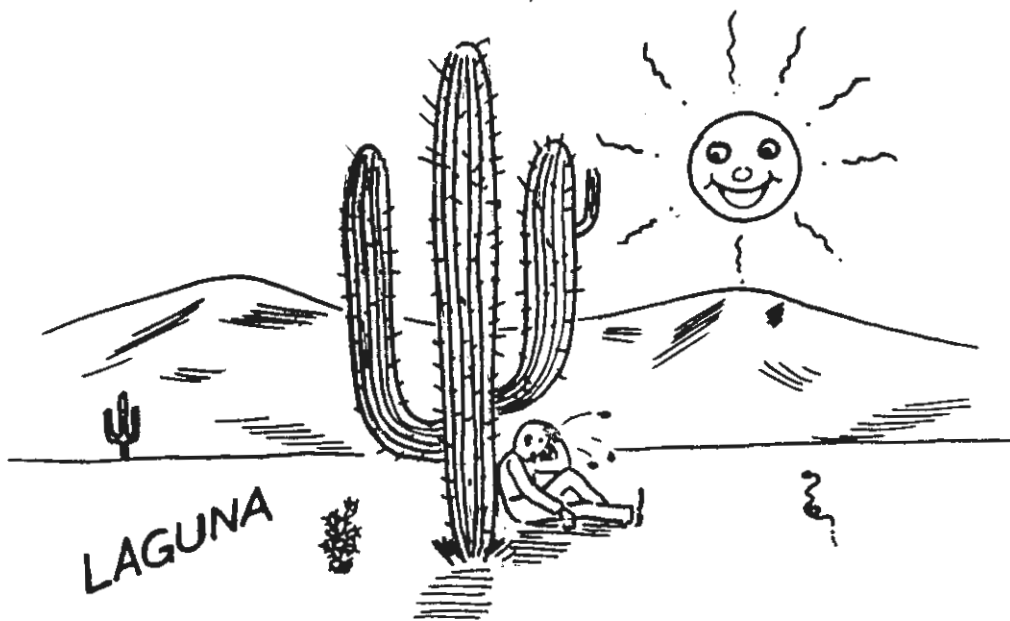
There was more for the unit to do besides admiring the scenic beauties of the "Emerald Isle" and "making" with the beautiful Irish colleens. The Group was assigned to the XV Corps, under command of the then Maj. General Wade H. Haislip, with Headquarters established in the famous old Brownlow Castle, Lurgan. The 644th, 654th and 818th Tank Destroyer Battalions were attached to the Group.

To counteract lack of T/E equipment and suitable maneuver areas, the XV Corps instituted a training program with a series of "Mapex" and "CPX's". Colonel Jacoby was appointed Director of Mapex II, held from 20 February 1944 to 25 February inclusive. The Group engaged in CPX I, from 8 March to 11 March with battalion participation being simulated. Two CP moves were made to Rasharkin and Ballyscullion for this exercise. CPX II, from 12 April to 16 April was participated in by the Group and attached battalions, 644th, 654th and 818th, with the Group CP being located in Cookstown (Desert Creet Camp).

A highlight of the unit's stay in Ireland was their attendance at a review for the then Lt. General George S. Patton on the Mall of Armagh. The assembled units were given a typical, brief address by the colorful General in which he reminded the troops that every effort to achieve perfection must be made to prepare for the coming invasion of the continent. Following the address General Patton then inspected the assembled units.

On 24 April 1944 the unit was once again put on an "Alert" status. The ultimate destination was Welford Park, Berkshire, England. Captain Robert B. Heston and 25 enlisted men, in charge of Group transportation, departed from Lurgan on 30 April 1944. The main body in charge of Major Harold W. Busch departed from Lurgan on 7 May and arrived in Newbury, England, on 9 May 1944 and were convoyed to the bivouac area in Welford Park. All of the Group personnel had the opportunity of visiting London and acquired first hand knowledge of the ravage wrought by the enemy's terrific but futile mass bombing attacks. The V-1 had just recently materialized. Certain members of the unit observed the harrassing, but devastating, affect of this new terror weapon, conceived in a desperate attempt to balance the weight of air power flung against the Germans by the Allied Command.

Two months later, 7 July 1944, to be exact, the "Hellcat" was ready to go! They stood assembled in the center of their bivouac area in a gentle rain awaiting final orders to "mount up" on their combat loaded convoy. Camp Hood training days, the burning sands of Camp Laguna, Camp Gruber's



"POM" confusion, the POE, Ireland and now England were to be relegated to the lost limbo. Ahead loomed France and the test for which the long period of training had prepared the unit. D-Day was "plus 31" when Colonel Jacoby addressed his assembled Group and flatly stated, "This is it." A brief, concise orientation on the current situation and the convoy moved out to the marshalling area at Beaulieu, Hants, England. The Group left the area 9 July 1944 and elements of the command disembarked on Utah Beach, of D-Day fame, on the 12th of July.

Following a brief stay in a transient area, near the beach, the Group moved into a bivouac area in the vicinity of St. Pierre D'Artheglise, France, with the final elements closing in 14 July 1944. In preparation for operational activities the unit was alerted and moved to Marchesieux, 8 kilometers east of Pierre, 30 July 1944. 5th TD Group, attached to XV Corps, became operational along with the Corps on 31 July 1944.

The Group experienced its first taste of combat activity on 5 August while bivouaced in the vicinity of Avranches. Early on this morning a 500 pound bomb was dropped about 200 yards from the CP. Outside of a new appreciation of the advantages of a deep foxhole no damage or casualties resulted.

The next brush with the enemy occurred three days later on 8 August when a billeting party from the Group had a skirmish with about 30 Germans in the vicinity of St. Denis, France. In the ensuing fire fight Captain Robert B. Heston, leading the party, and T/5 Marcel A. Vachon were both wounded. Both were subsequently evacuated and later returned to the States for further convalescence. Another member of the party, Captain Edward N. Stiver, was recommended for the Silver Star for gallantry in this action which was approved 13 September 1944 and awarded by Maj. General Wade H. Haislip, CG, XV Corps on 10 September 1944. Award of the Croix de Guerre to Captain Stiver, Captain Heston, and T/5 Vachon are in the process of promulgation.

Later decorations awarded members of the Group include the Silver Star presented to Colonel Leslie E. Jacoby for gallantry in action on 20 August 1944 in the vicinity of Chambois, France. At a formal ceremony, 6 November 1944, in the Group CP area in Luneville, Lt. General Wade H. Haislip (then Maj. General) awarded this decoration to Colonel Jacoby and inspected the Group personnel. Lt. Colonel William V. Giles (then Major) was the recipient of the Bronze Star award at this ceremony for meritorious service in connection with military operations against the enemy during the period 14 August to 22 August 1944 in France. Captain Albert W. Wolfe (then 1st Lt.), absent at this formation, was awarded the Certificate of Merit for meritorious and outstanding performance of military duty on 20 August 1944 at Chambois, France. At a later ceremony Colonel Jacoby was awarded the Croix de Guerre with one palm and the Legion of Honor in the grade of Chevalier, presented by Commandante St. Quentin on 10 April 1945 at XV Corps Headquarters at Neustadt a.d. Saale for exceptional military service during operations consistent to the liberation of France.

Technician Fifth Grade Frank E. McAlevy was awarded the Bronze Star as set forth in G.O. No. 61, Hq, XV Corps, dated 21 May 1945 for meritorious service during the period 12 July 1944 to 8 May 1945. For wounds sustained in action against the enemy 8 August 1944 in the vicinity St. Denis, France, Captain Robert B. Heston and Technician Fifth Grade Marcel A. Vachon were given the Purple Heart. A recent addition to the staff from the 636th TD Battalion, veterans of Africa, Italy, Southern France, and Germany, Captain Linley W. Gerring, is the possessor of the Silver Star awarded for gallantry in action against the enemy in vicinity Pusey, France, on 12 September 1944. Captain Gerring was also awarded the Purple Heart and two clusters for wounds received in action North of Rome, 24 June 1944, Montelimar, Southern France, 26 August 1944, and Pusey, France, on 12 September 1944.

The published citations, describing the action and circumstances for which these decorations were awarded, appear in substance in an annex to this history.

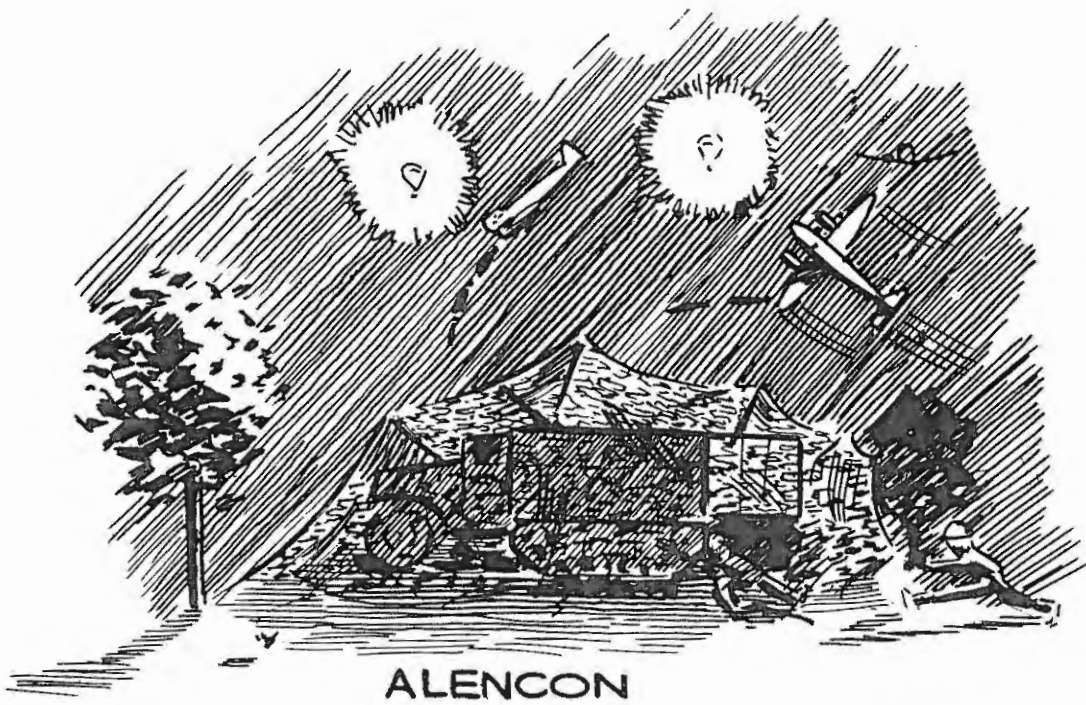
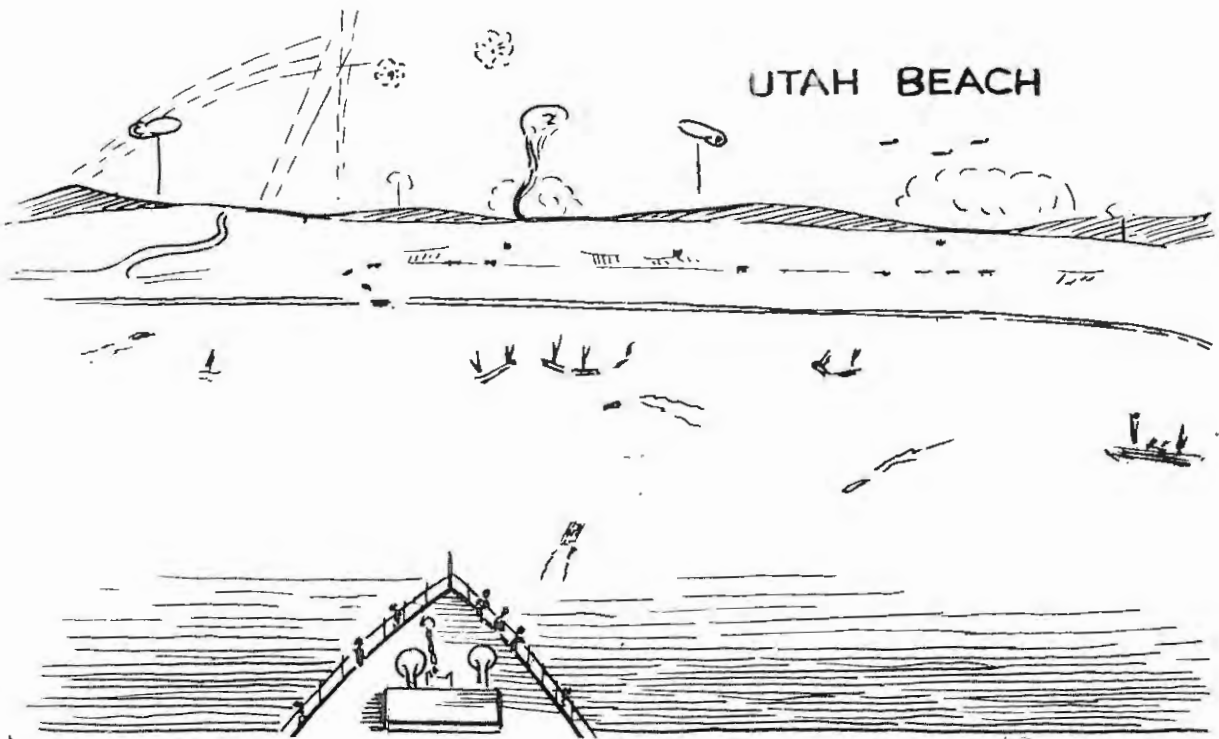


On 12 August 1944 the Group was bivouaced in the vicinity of Alencon when that area was subjected to a heavy night bombing attack. The Luftwaffe was endeavoring to destroy a bridge in the town of Alencon in an effort to cripple our lines of communication. Enemy planes lighted the area with flares at approximately 2350 hours. Despite heavy AA fire an estimated force of 45 - 50 planes bombed the area for a period of about 20 minutes. Personnel of the organization had not yet "dug in" and were forced to take to the cover of their vehicles. Although several bombs fell in the near vicinity of the bivouac area no casualties were suffered by the Group.

Pushing rapidly out of the hedgerow country of Normandy south and east into the open country of Northern France through Avranches, Laval, LeMans and Alencon the 5th TD Group moved with the advance of the XV Corps. 14 August the 773rd TD Battalion was attached to the 5th TD Group. At Alencon the strategy changed and instead of racing eastward to Paris the XV Corps turned north to meet the British elements driving south to trap the fleeing German Seventh Army. Just south of Argentan the 5th TD Group and attached 773rd TD Battalion was relieved from the XV Corps and became part of the 3rd Army Provisional Corps whose mission was to meet the British Forces and close the Argentan - Falaise Gap and destroy the encircled enemy forces. At this time the 5th TD Group with the attached 773rd TD Battalion held a portion of the front near Argentan, vacated by the 5th Armored Division. Later the mission of the 5th TD Group was to support the 90th Infantry Division in its attack north to close the pocket. On 17 August, V Corps took over the sector and directed that the attack north be made at daylight on the 18th of August. On 20 August the trapped German forces made several desperate attempts to break through the pocket. Severe fighting ensued and after the smoke had cleared, what is believed to have been the greatest kill made by tank destroyers operating in support of, and within an American division sector, on any single day during the present war had taken place. Recapitulation listed the destruction of 44 tanks, 15 SP guns, 142 other vehicles, 10 artillery guns, 2 machine guns and 432 PW's taken by the 773rd TD Battalion. The 607th towed TD Battalion, also in support of the 90th Division, took a heavy toll of the Nazi armor in this action. On this date their guns destroyed 24 tanks, 19 SP guns, 9 artillery guns, and 41 other vehicles and bagged 275 PW's. Truly a magnificent victory and ample proof of the fine tactical maneuver coordinated by the 90th Infantry Division, Colonel L. E. Jacoby, Lt. Col. Sundt and Lt Col. Frank G. Spiess, Commanding Officers of the 607th and 773rd TD Battalions respectively. For this action Colonel Jacoby was awarded the Silver Star and presentation was made by General Wade H. Haislip as previously mentioned. By General Orders No. 22, War Department, dated 2 April 1945, the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion received a Presidential Citation for their outstanding and heroic action during the period 17 August to 22 August 1944.

Following this action the Group and 773rd TD Battalion made several moves, namely: Chailloué, Brezolles, Longnes, Conde, and finally closing into Rosay-en-Brie on 30 August 1944.

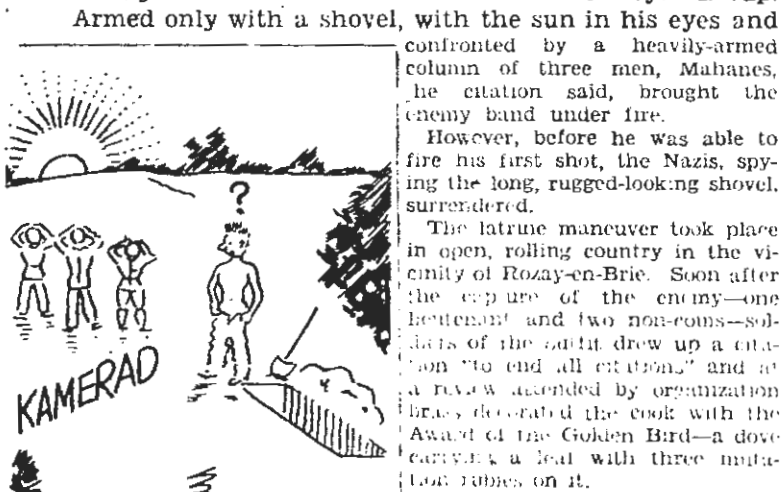
Several significant events occurred in this area during the period 1 - 7 September inclusive where the Group and battalion engaged in rehabilitation, maintenance and administrative functions. 1 September marked the second Organization Day anniversary observed by the Group with appropriate ceremony and entertainment insofar as practical. Early on the morning of the first, a humorous incident occurred which started the day off with a "Bang". Tec 4 Oscar T. Mahanes, cook, was the captor of 3 German PW's including one officer, under very peculiar circumstances. Subsequent publicity appearing in the "Stars and Stripes", reproduced in its entirety herein, made this a standout event in the activities of the Group. An annex to this history depicts the "Order of the Golden Bird" bestowed upon him by his proud comrades in arms. The Group CP was located approximately 30 miles from Paris, which had just been recently liberated, and following a drawing a la Colonel Jacoby's unique lottery system a portion of the Group had the opportunity to visit the "Gay City" as part of the Organization



Day schedule. The remainder of the Group who were slated to visit the city the next day were awarded with a gratuitous issue of "Eau de Vie". Those who indulged in the solace of this celebrated French concoction will readily attest to its potency and resultant effects! Truly a "red letter" day in the annals of the 5th TD Group. Needless to say, Paris met with the enthusiastic approval of all and will occupy a prominent page in their memory book as it did with their predecessors of World War I.

## Cookie Leaves the Latrine, Flushes 3 Nazis With Shovel

For capturing three Germans while he was returning to his cook-house from the latrine, T/4 Oscar T. Mahanes has been awarded the Award of the Golden Bird with three clusters by the members of the Fifth Tank Destroyer Group.



Armed only with a shovel, with the sun in his eyes and confronted by a heavily-armed column of three men, Mahanes, the citation said, brought the enemy band under fire.

However, before he was able to fire his first shot, the Nazis, spying the long, rugged-looking shovel, surrendered.

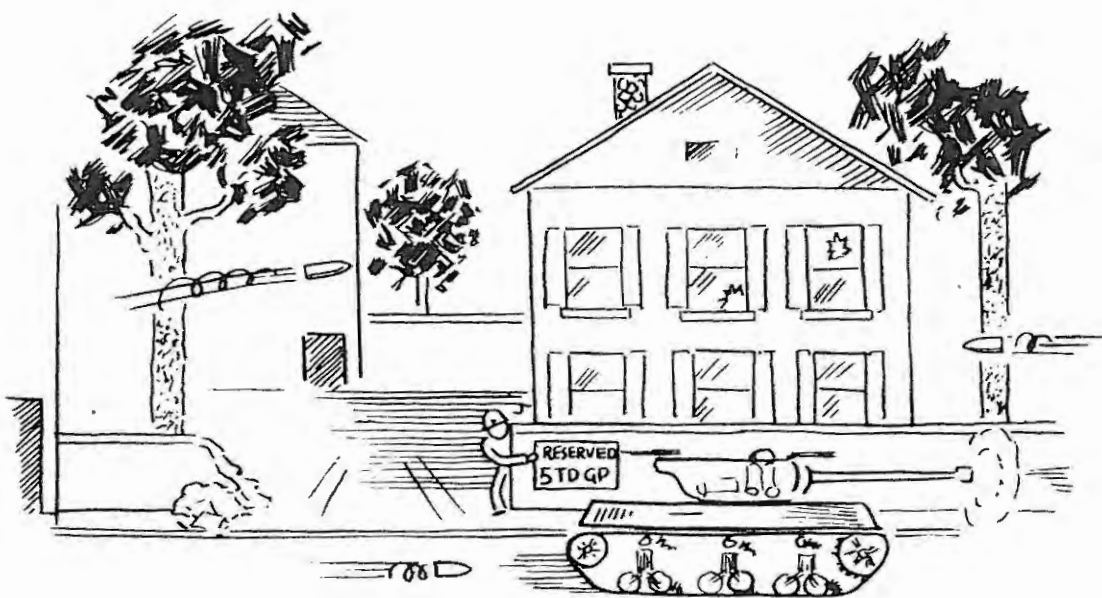
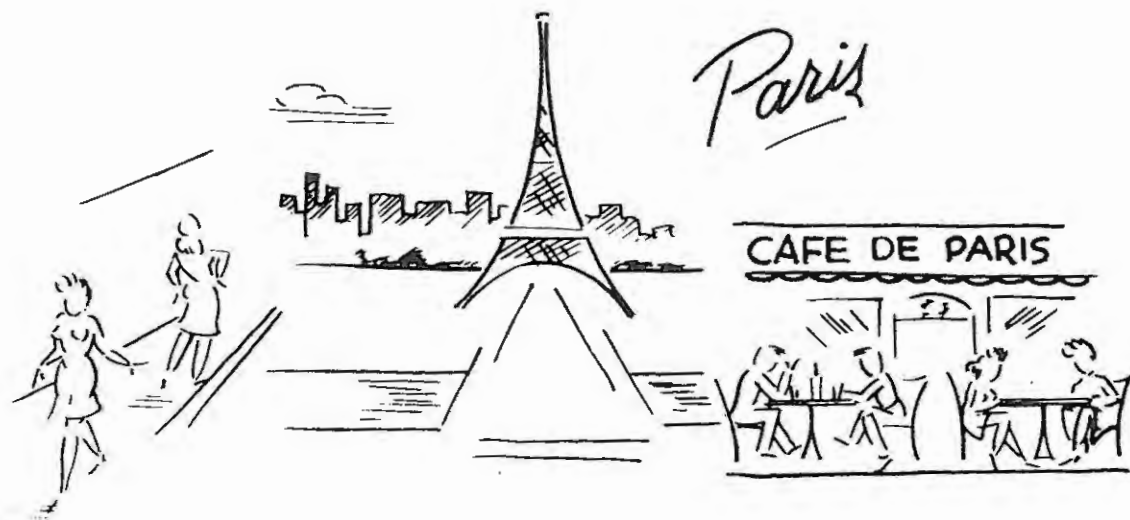
The latrine maneuver took place in open, rolling country in the vicinity of Rozay-en-Brie. Soon after the capture of the enemy—one lieutenant and two non-coms—soldiers of the outfit drew up a citation "to end all citations" and at a review attended by organization brass decorated the cook with the Award of the Golden Bird—a dove carrying a leaf with three mutation tubes on it.

The three PW's corraled by Tec 4 Mahanes, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, were the first of the final tally of 108 PW's, including 3 officers and 105 enlisted men to be ultimately bagged by the Group. The "high" for PW's captured by the unit occurred on 22 March 1945 at Zweibrucken, Germany when Major Thompson, M/Sgt Slocum and T/5 Colbert rounded up 70 disillusioned supermen.

Even the Group Chaplain, Captain Charles L. McEachern, figured in this highly entertaining sport with the capture of one German, Hitler issue, T/E equipped with rifle (1) and grenades, potato masher type (2) on 26 September 1944. Chaplain McEachern was on D/S with the 813th TD Battalion in the vicinity of Stephansfeld, France, near Brumath, and while on his mission of "saving souls" in this area was approached by a very voluble woman who, gesticulating vigorously, kept repeating "Boche, boche". Chaplain McEachern casually strolled in the direction indicated and confronted a stalwart member of the opposing forces. Unperturbed and also unarmed, in compliance with the best traditions of the Geneva Convention, he convinced the errant Nazi to follow him. The German complied and Chaplain McEachern informed Captain Parkin, the S-2 of the TD Battalion, that he had "a friend" he would like the S-2 to meet. After a hurried appraisal of the situation the momentarily nonplussed "host" immediately "dehydrated" this unusual guest and initiated the necessary action to sidetrack that individual's misdirected search for Lebensraum!

Movement orders were received 8 September and the Group and 773rd TD Battalion closed at Rozay-en-Brie and moved to the vicinity of Vendevre. The mission of the XV Corps, to which the Group and battalion were attached, was to protect the south flank of the 3rd Army from Montargis to the Marne River and to seize the line of the Moselle River in the zone; later to seize Karlsruhe and secure a bridgehead over the Rhine River, or to move through bridgeheads secured by the XII or XX Corps.

The 813th TD Battalion, commanded by the late Lt. Col. Clymer D. Jefferies, fresh from the Belgian frontier, reported to Colonel Jacoby 9 September 1944. To enable them to accomplish necessary maintenance it was recommended that the 773rd TD Battalion be attached to the 79th Infantry Division, relieving the 813th. The CG, XV Corps, approved this plan and



LUNEVILLE



29TH MARCH  
1945

THE RHINE

the 773rd was attached to the 79th Infantry Division on 10 September. In support of the 79th Infantry Division the 773rd TD Battalion was utilized not only on TD mission but also in tank assault roles. In the course of this hectic action in the vicinity of Neufchateau and Mirecourt it was estimated that half of the German 16th Infantry Division was annihilated. In furtherance of this activity the organization moved quite frequently from 11 September to 26 September. CP's were established at Morancourt, Removille, Fraignes-en-Santois, Floremont and Luneville, closing in the latter area 26 September.

Confronting the XV Corps and attached troops in the vicinity of Luneville was the Forêt de Parroy, a heavily wooded area roughly 45 kilometers square. It was here that our tank destroyers were first successfully utilized in such terrain. Destroyers of the 773rd TD Battalion entered the woods with the infantry and despite this unorthodox employment and limited fields of fire proved of high tactical value and definitely aided the infantry. The 813th TD Battalion figured prominently in beating back a powerful German attack launched 29 September against the 4th Armored Division in the vicinity of the Rhin - Marne Canal just north of the Forêt de Parroy. The TD's destroyed two Mark V tanks, thirteen Mark IV's, four SP guns, and four other vehicles in this action without loss to the tank destroyers.

Following the clearing of the Forêt de Parroy, "Hellcat" and the 773rd TD Battalion drew back for a short period of rest until 13 November. On that day the XV Corps "jumped off" in a coordinated push to close up to the Rhine. The "Hellcat" CP made up for the long stay at Luneville and moved rapidly to Ancerviller and then to Sarrebourg in the heart of the Alsace - Lorraine region, the scene of memorable dispute among the European powers for centuries.

The 813th TD Battalion moved through the Vosges Mountains with elements of the 2nd DB, those fighting sons of France, and the 79th Infantry Division. They closed up to the Rhine which was expected to be a definite barrier in the Allied path of progress. Suddenly the Hun struck a counter-blow. Out of the north, the crack 130th Panzer Lehr Division drove south with the mission of cutting the Sarrebourg - Saverne highway and isolating the troops east of the Vosges. The Corps Chief of Staff conferred with Colonel Jacoby and a plan of action was swiftly evolved. The 776th TD Battalion and elements of the 645th TD Battalion were rushed to the scene of the action. As the fog lifted in the early-morning hours of 25 November the 776th clashed with tanks from the 130th Panzer Lehr and destroyed 9 Mark V tanks, while the 157th Infantry supported by elements of the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion stopped the Boche advance at Rauwiller. This turned the tide and averted what could have developed into a disastrous blow to the XV Corps.

Exploiting their success, the XV Corps drove relentlessly and rapidly northward through the Maginot Line, only halting on the very borders of the German empire. It was here that the 776th TD Battalion rose to the occasion and was especially effective in repulsing several massed tank attacks in the 44th Infantry Division sector early in December. The 17th SS Panzer Division and the 11th Panzer Division, the famous "Ghost Division", received a terrific mauling for their efforts and were forced to retire to lick their wounds. The 776th was instrumental in insuring the fall of the great Maginot bastion, Fort Simserhof, during this period. The TD's effective direct fire was of immeasurable value in the removal of this obstacle in our advance. But circumstances developed that curtailed further advance in the form of the historic Ardennes "Battle of the Bulge" that broke on the early morning of 16 December. The critical nature of this desperate, all-out German offensive necessitated the immediate transfer of some XV Corps troops to the scene to confine this threat. This situation caused a major shift in the strategy of our high command. For the first time since D-Day major preparations had to be rushed for the formulation of defensive measures to hold the now overly extended XV Corps front until the drastic threat up north had been beaten back and destroyed.

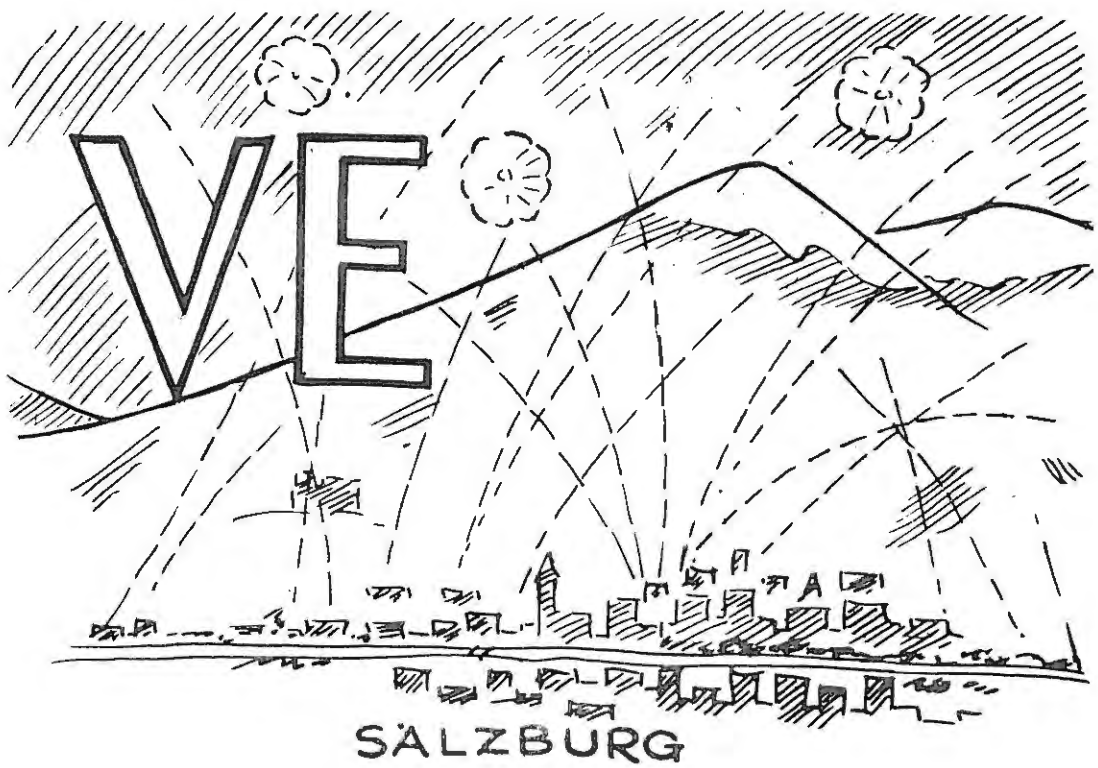
As Anti-Tank Officer of the XV Corps, Colonel Jacoby skillfully manipulated the meager anti-tank defenses left at his disposal and successfully thwarted enemy attempts to penetrate our "thin skinned" perimeter during this critical period. Commencing early on the morning of January first the Germans exerted pressure on the XV Corps front, apparently attempting to find a weak spot and affect a penetration. Leading this attack was the crack 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division. As a result of one of these probes the SS troops pushed forward on a narrow front shoving through to Gros Rederching thence to Achen. CCL, 2nd French Armored Division, attached TD's and with the assistance of elements of the 100th Infantry Division drove this advance back by the evening of January 1. In this action the enemy had 6 tanks destroyed. The third and final attempt by the Germans to crack our defenses in this area occurred in the vicinity of Rimling. The 17th SS Panzers again pushed forward and recaptured Rimling and held the town until February 15 when the XV Corps drove forward to straighten out their front lines as part of the preliminary strategy for the March "jump off". For the major portion of this action the Group CP was located at Fenetrance, closing in at this site 15 January and departing 14 March.

Early in March plans were conceived for a gigantic attack designed to penetrate the Siegfried Line and advance rapidly in zone to the Rhine and secure crossings in the vicinity of the ancient religious city of Worms. In preparation for this drive Colonel Jacoby once again coordinated the XV Corps anti-tank defenses and ample proof of his well laid plans was evidenced in the destruction of 45 tanks and 25 SP guns in this drive to the Rhine. In this unstoppable surge forward the town of Bitche, a tenaciously defended sore spot in the side of the Corps troops, was stormed and resistance liquidated. The Siegfried Line fortifications, believed by many to be virtually impregnable, proved highly vulnerable to the devastating and accurate fire of the powerful 90-mm. guns of the M-36 Tank Destroyers of the XV Corps. Pillbox after pillbox succumbed to the intense pounding they were subjected to by these destroyers which proved an invaluable aid in the penetration of these defenses. In rapid succession XV Corps troops passed through Zweibrücken, Hombourg and Kaiserlautern and broke out into the plains, flooding up to the banks of the historic Rhine.

Without breaking stride, bridging was accomplished and the enormous tide of traffic continued its flow eastward. The 5th TD Group aided in the swift crossing of the Rhine by furnishing a party of four officers and seven enlisted men to aid in expediting and controlling the crossings. In the preparation and completion of this bridging and crossing the tank destroyers of the 601st and 645th TD Battalions covered this vulnerable operation by demolishing enemy installations and flak wagons on the East bank of the river. Within 36 hours all combat elements of the assaulting tank destroyer battalions of the XV Corps had crossed the Rhine and were relentlessly aiding in the pursuit and annihilation of the disorganized, fleeing Boche. During the initial period the Group was located in a factory at Pfeddersheim. On 29 March the Group Headquarters made the long cherished crossing of the great Rhine River, the last natural barrier blocking the Allied advance to the inner Reich. Following the crossing the command post was established at Bensheim, later moving to Gros Umstadt.

Moving North and Northeast in their zone the XV Corps moved steadily until they rammed into the ill-fated town of Aschaffenburg. There the fanatically resisting Nazis subjected themselves and the inhabitants of this stubbornly defended city to a foolish doom that was to go down into the annals of World War II history as the criterion of the utter destruction that was to befall any city that failed to capitulate in the path of the irresistible Allied surge. Punishing, direct fire from the hot tubes of the 645th TD Battalion and 191st Tank Battalion guns were instrumental in eliminating myriad strong points in the town and pulverizing building after building housing defiant enemy troops.

The XV Corps juggernaut swept onward into the heart of Nazi-land. Bamberg fell with slight resistance but Nurnberg, the scene of many party ral-



lies offered sharp resistance which in the main consisted of stubborn defensive action by enemy barricaded across the ancient moat and behind the walls of the old "inner city". But on 20 April 1945 the city fell and the huge Nazi Zeppeliner Stadium was the scene of reviews and ceremonies held by and in honor of the triumphant American troops. As an ominous gesture to the fading and hopeless German cause the huge, gold-painted swastika towering above the rostrum from which Hitler and his cohorts harangued admiring followers was "banged" into bits, portending the fate soon to befall the Party and all it stood for.

The pace quickened with the "kill" in sight and the victory in the air! By now a familiar sight was the appearance of doughboy laden M-36 tank destroyers rushing forward to maintain the accelerated pace of the drive and continue the inexorable pressure on the routed remnants of the once mighty German Army. On to Munich, the orders read! This town, the home of the "beer hall putsch", fell as did its predecessors to the roaring onslaught of an Army that was not to be denied. The Group crossed the "blue Danube" on 28 April and closed in at Staudheim but stayed only long enough to "wrinkle the sheets" then moved on to Aichach to keep up with the rapid advance.

Thus in the waning moments of the war the Group entered the town of Dachau. Here the infamous concentration camp of Dachau was liberated and its inconceivable atrocities were exposed as ample proof to an unbelieving world. The ravaged inmates, victims of a despicable existence, the railroad cars filled with the dead bodies of victims, the gas chamber and crematory need no photographic evidence to remain forever indelibly imprinted in the minds of those who inspected this scene of abominable degradation.

Following a brief respite the XV Corps resumed the march, crossing the Inn River and continuing southeast, entering the heart of the much publicized but ineffectual National Redoubt area. The death rattle could now be clearly heard. One of the final convulsive gasps expired when the 20th Armored Division knocked out two German Mark V "Panther" tanks in their advance. These were the last tanks to be liquidated by the XV Corps and sounded the death knell for the once highly touted German armor. From the time XV Corps and the 5th TD Group became operational, back on 31 July 1944, until the cessation of hostilities, Colonel Jacoby served as Anti-Tank Officer for the Corps. With the Group he was responsible for the coordination and employment of all anti-tank facilities in the Corps sector. The success with which Colonel Jacoby and the 5th TD Group fulfilled this mission is attested to by the grand total of 1066 tanks and SP guns destroyed since the Corps became operational. Following appears a monthly record of the official "kill" tabulated by the XV Corps:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Total Tanks and SP Guns Destroyed during Month</u>
August.....	478
September.....	130
October.....	53
November.....	44
December.....	37
January.....	78
February.....	42
March.....	70
April.....	127
May.....	7
	Total 1066*

\*This total does not include 89 tanks and SP guns knocked out by the 5th TD Group and 773rd TD Bn vicinity of Chambois, France, 17 - 22 August 1944, while on temporary duty with the V Corps.



Salzburg proved no obstacle for our elements as the impetus of our momentum was not to be denied and the final major objective, Berchtesgaden, was taken on the afternoon of 4 May 1945 at 1330 by the 3rd Infantry Division, with a platoon of the 601st Tank Destroyers spending the night on the site of Hitler's personal residence.

Members of the Group on 5 May 1945 visited this citadel of Nazi might and witnessed the devastating affects of the mighty RAF air raid suffered previously. The once elaborate set-up retained but little semblance of its former grandeur due to the ripping, smashing havoc wrought by the British 6-ton bombs. Hitler's house lay in ruins and the SS barracks next to it were practically demolished, and Herman Goering's and Martin Boermann's houses in the same area were heavily hit. Thus, with the destruction of this Nazi lair, "FINIS" was about ready to be written into the records, wiping out the futile, World War II effort of Hitler and his "Gang".

When the news of the signing of "unconditional surrender" terms at the historic town of Rheims, France, was officially released, announcing that hostilities would cease at 090001 May 1945, the Group was comfortably ensconced in their sumptuous CP in the town of Salzburg, Austria. The transition from combat to peace was not very noticeable with the exception of the hordes of prisoners streaming to the PW cages and designated areas in accordance with the surrender terms. At the designated hour of surrender, one minute after midnight, an impromptu victory salute rent the air. Guns of every caliber and description sped their projectiles in every direction. The resultant ear-splitting roar, the screaming ricochets and dazzling tracer streams proclaimed the release of the pent up emotions of the men who touched off this "off the record" Order of the Day acclamation. When the din had subsided the quiet became more apparent than ever, and V-E Day had come and gone. If one listened closely he could almost hear phantom voices whispering, "What now?"

"How many points do you have?" became the official greeting, redeployment loomed in the offing and "Hallcat", with their brothers-in-arms, anxiously scanned the horizon in an effort to gain a faint clue as to their future destiny.

Salzburg, Austria  
10 May 1945

ALBERT W. WOLFE  
Captain, FA(TD)  
Group Historian