

HEADQUARTERS
601st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
A. P. O. # 1, U. S. ARMY

28 March 1943



SUBJECT: Battle Operations Report

TO : Commanding General, II Corps, APO # 302, U. S. Army

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1. Pursuant to verbal instructions received from the Artillery Officer, your Headquarters, the following report is submitted covering the attack by the German 10th Panzer Division on the 1st Infantry Division positions, four miles southeast of EL GUETTAR on March 23, 1943.

A. Events prior to the attack.

- (1) For approximate initial positions see situation overlay marked Inclosure No. 1.
- (2) After the strong defensive position occupied by the Italians three miles Southeast of EL GUETTAR was captured by the 1st Infantry Division at about 0730 hours on March 21, 1943, I ordered 1 platoon Reconnaissance Company to push rapidly East along the GAGES Road to maintain contact. This required breaking defilade. The platoon came under heavy artillery fire and suffered casualties. One 75mm destroyer was hit. Daylight reconnaissance in the valley could only result in high losses and was unnecessary, since the enemy could not advance except under the same conditions, due to our artillery positions with excellent OP's established. Since our infantry was not committed in the valley along the GAGES Road, I decided to patrol the valley for tank threats only at night. This was accomplished without incident during the nights of March 21st and 22nd.
- (3) About 2130 hours, March 22nd, verbal orders from the Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, required the following: Part of the Division Artillery would make a night displacement East of the hill mass (defensive position) to the vicinity of Y-2969 in order to increase ranges for infantry support.

Mission: 601st TD Bn.

- a. To cover and protect the Division Artillery East of the hill mass.
- b. To prevent a tank penetration or envelopment which would cut the supply axis of CT-26 or CT-18.
- (4) The Battalion reduced in strength by previous battle losses, consisted of the following combat units;

Reconnaissance Company, reinforced with three 75mm guns. Companies "B" and "C" with complete materiel (12 destroyers each), 75mm S. P.

less some personnel and vehicles. Company "A" (4 - 75 mm guns) less 2 platoons. This gave a total of 6 - 37 mm guns and 31 75 mm S.P. guns available for combat.

- (5) It was decided to use Companies "B" and "C" and the Reconnaissance Company, less 1 platoon East of our strong defensive position (see overlay). Company Commanders of "B" and "C" Companies were ordered; to select, occupy positions (see overlay) and dig in destroyers and machine guns, to establish lateral patrols and protect artillery units East of hill mass. formation; 2 platoons abreast with 1 platoon echeloned in depth in each company. Mass of guns to be North and Northeast of the GABES Road. Company "A"; Defend pass on GABES Road, protect right flank and be prepared to move as a Battalion reserve. Reconnaissance Company; 2 platoons cover movement of Companies "B" and "C" into position (see overlay); withdraw to pass at daylight, assist Company "A" and be prepared to move on Battalion order.

One (1) platoon; Initial position on right of Company "A", reinforce Company "A" and be prepared to move on Battalion order. An advance Battalion CP and ammunition dump had already been established about 600 yards East of the pass on the North side of the GABES Road. Battalion CP south of pass on GABES Road, Y-275686.

- (6) A recommendation was made to the Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, that at least one company of the 899th TD Bn. be moved South of GAFSA and East of EL GUETTAR to the vicinity of RJ (Y-231729). Hq., II A C, decided to keep the 899th TD Bn. Northeast of GAFSA. The time that this Battalion was later released to the 1st Infantry Division for employment Southeast of EL GUETTAR is unknown.

- (7) Weather, etc.:

Atmosphere; Clear. Visibility; Excellent. Full moon at 2445 hours when contact was established.

- (8) Character of terrain;

East of our defensive position and North of the GABES Road are wadis and gentle rolling ridges with some knolls. It is favorable tank destroyer terrain with dry, sandy soil. South of the GABES Road the terrain is very flat and around our right flank was at that time very soft and boggy. Previous reconnaissance had proved that even jeeps could not maneuver out of range around our right flank. This ground condition proved invaluable. No over-head cover existed East of EL GUETTAR.

- (9) Enemy planes had bombed and strafed our positions during the afternoon of March 22nd. Without doubt their air observation had reported that our front lines extended only to the East base of our strong defensive position occupied by a Battalion of the 16th Infantry and TD units (see overlay).

- (10) Patrols had been established at dark, and 1 platoon, Company "C" was in position East of the pass. Upon receipt of orders from Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, and after conference with G-3 and the Artillery Commander, I issued verbal orders to accomplish the battalion missions. Units moved rapidly to positions as ordered without gaining contact.

B. Events after contact as remembered or estimated by the undersigned:

- (1) Contact was first gained by the 1st Platoon, Reconnaissance Company (Lt. Gioia) when 2 motorcyclists came down the GANES Road at 0445 hours and called out "Panzer, Panzer". One man was shot and the other soldier (German) captured. Radio air warning was given and all units were alerted. The prisoner later stated that his unit had arrived at 0400 hours and was ordered to attack at 0500 hours. The 1st and 2nd platoons of Reconnaissance Company fought a fine delaying action under the command of their Company Commander and Platoon Commanders. The result was many dead Germans and time to alert units of the Division.
- (2) The actual combat operations of units employed east of our defensive position, together with recommendations, is contained in inclosures No. 2, 3, 4 and 5, submitted by Company Commanders and supplemented by reports of their respective subordinates.
- (3) Certainly such a large enemy attack was not indicated or expected by our G-2 information.
- (4) Two platoons of Company "B" withdrew without orders under intense enemy infantry and tank fire, thereby failing to cover friendly artillery. These platoons were immediately ordered to counter-attack North and Northeast. Due to unserviceable guns only, one platoon (Lt. Lambert's) could be used to correct this error and continue on the original mission of protecting the artillery. The Company Commander stated that he did not order this withdrawal and did everything he could to stop it. The Platoon Commanders stated that they were being surrounded by enemy infantry and were greatly outnumbered by enemy tanks. Their decision to withdraw was no doubt sound under the circumstances and would have been in accordance with my plan had they withdrawn North in the direction of Company "C", the 1st Platoon of Company "B" and the artillery instead of along the GANES Road. The withdrawal mentioned above operated somewhat in our favor as it drew in many enemy tanks. They were taken in the right flank by fire from the concealed positions of Company "C"'s platoons and the 1st Platoon of Company "B" resulting in heavy enemy losses.
- (5) The enemy attempted to envelop our right flank, using 22 tanks. Since the terrain was known to be impassable, except within fairly close gun range, mostly mined areas, this enemy effort was expected to fail. These tanks came within ranges of 2200 to 2800 yards from our right reserve TD guns and used smoke shell to screen their advance. Two enemy tanks were destroyed and six disabled. The range for TD guns was too great to expect many hits or good penetration. (Required bracket adjustment) The fire of our guns was pingping which gave less effect and required a large ammunition ex-

penditure. At this stage of the action, the indirect fire from artillery battalions slackened and then ceased due to a shortage of ammunition. Since only about 15 rounds of AP per TD gun remained on hand, I ordered all guns in my immediate vicinity to cease firing until enemy tanks approached within 1000 yards or until more ammunition (then on the way) arrived at the gun positions. The enemy took advantage of this lull in fighting to withdraw to the east out of range and then moved north to assist the attack against our left elements. Before withdrawing they hooked on to four disabled tanks, towing them away. This wonderful target could have been easily destroyed by 4 to 6 high velocity guns such as was mounted on the M-10 destroyers had they been in position prepared to take the enemy under fire.

- (6) The fight between units of my Battalion, north of the Gabes road had developed into a slugging match. I could see many disabled or burning tanks (about 16) and some tank destroyer guns knocked out of action.
- (7) One American half-track towing a gun which appeared to be about the size of a 37mm moved fast in our direction on the GABES ROAD. I gave orders to guns in my vicinity not to fire as I felt sure it was an American AT gun escaping from the enemy. Some of my subordinates insisted on opening fire. I told them to wait. The gun was unlimbered on the hard surfaced road. About this time Company "A" on my left opened fire with great effect. The gun and vehicle were destroyed. Capt. Fuller (who was at that time wounded) jumped in a jeep, raced to the position where he found 5 dead Germans and captured 2 Germans in a wadi. The AT gun was a small towed German 75mm. The enemy continuously took our position under fire using medium artillery and tank cannon. One gun, 75mm, destroyer and one platoon Commander's half-track, with radio, were destroyed in the immediate vicinity of my OP. Both vehicles were in defiladed positions when hit by enemy artillery fire.
- (8) The Commanding Officer, 899th TD Bn., arrived at my OP and reported for orders. I ordered that he employ one company immediately to counter attack N and NE with a mission of assisting Companies "B" and "C" 601st TD, to defend the exposed artillery batteries. I pointed out friendly mine fields on the ground and described how they were marked. This company moved very slowly and stopped on the pass where they drew intense enemy fire for about ten minutes. The leading M-10 cut off the road too soon and hit the mine field causing more delay. The rest of the company passed the mine field safely, but failed to reach their objective. The Company Commander later claimed he was pinned down by fire. In my opinion he maneuvered poorly making an easy target and after losing 3 or 4 M-10's took up a defiladed defensive position where he remained until withdrawn to a supporting position at about 1600 hours. The balance of the Battalion was placed in position or in TD Reserve as enemy tanks still greatly outnumbered our remaining TD guns. Since enemy tanks never again came within range, the leading company of the 899th TD Bn. was the only unit engaged in action to my knowledge.

- (9) Radio reports, etc., indicated that most of my guns east of the hill mass were out of action after a great fight and that the artillery had abandoned their guns. Many officers and men of my units were coming out on foot reporting their actions and losses. The Assistant Division Commander desired that no further commitments of TD units be made. Since the enemy's intentions and capabilities were not known (although limited) and his strength great, I had no intention of committing more TD units to offensive action at this time.
- (10) At 1520 hours I had radio communication with only one platoon Commander, Lt. Mann of Co. "C" (East of hill mass). He reported that he had one servicable gun and that 9 enemy tanks were within 1100 yards of his position in a defiladed position. This officer asked for personal advice. I talked to him and advised that he remain concealed until dark and not fire unless he had to. I also told him to use his own judgement as to whether or not he should abandon this gun and come out on foot, thereby saving valuable trained personnel. Later radio communications were established with Lt. Yowell's platoon. He reported that he had two servicable guns and 70 rounds of ammunition. I advised that he move North and North-east after dark and try to contact friendly Infantry. I found out later that the contact recommended had been established. The following day Lt. Yowell rejoined his command.
- (11) A message received from G-2 about 1520 hours, stated that a radio intercept clearly indicated an enemy attack would be launched at 1600 hours. A later intercept indicated that the attack would be delayed until 1640 hours. The enemy formed in the open at almost the above stated time. Formation appeared to be two Infantry Battalions astride the Gabes Road moving West. Enemy tanks formed behind the initial line of departure which was about 5000 yards west of our defensive position. I gave orders not to fire until tanks were within effective ranges.
- (12) Enemy Infantry advanced to within about 1500 yards. TD guns opened direct fire with deadly effect. Artillery concentrations broke the attack, inflicting heavy casualties. Enemy tanks milled around near the L.D., never advancing behind their infantry. The range to enemy tanks was estimated at 5000 yards. TD guns did not fire at these tanks. Thus ended the battle of EL GUETTAR (4 miles SE) at approximately 2100 hours, March 23rd. Proper defensive measures for the night were taken. No further action occurred except active patrols who found that the enemy had withdrawn along the valley to the East.

2. ENEMY LOSSES:

The undersigned personally observed 12 destroyed enemy tanks left on the battle field. Other disabled tanks were removed by the enemy. An exact count cannot be made at this time. The Battalion Maintenance Officer who has been recovering our vehicles for three days reported that he counted over 30 enemy tanks, including 3 or 4 believed to be Mark VI German tanks, burned or abandoned by the enemy. Another Officer stated that he counted 40. This Battalion does not desire to claim credit for all destroyed or disabled enemy tanks but it certain

that the fire of our guns left at least 30 tanks on the field and disabled a few that were recovered by the enemy. In addition, I estimate that the Battalion killed or wounded 200 enemy infantrymen by machine gun, 37mm (HE and cannister) and 75mm (HE) fire. The 37mm cannister at short ranges proved very effective. The enemy also suffered high losses in tank personnel.

3. BATTALION LOSSES:

a. MATERIEL:

8 guns (75mm) were recovered which have been or will be serviceable. 13 (75mm) guns were a total loss.
 1 (37mm) gun recovered and 1 destroyed by fire.
 3 cars, half-track, M-2 and 1 carrier, half-track, personnel, M-3 totally destroyed.
 8 - 1/4 ton trucks (Jeeps) destroyed or missing.
 1 - 3/4 ton truck destroyed or missing.

b. PERSONNEL:

Killed in action 14
 Missing in action 9
 Wounded 49
Total Casualties 72



4. AMMUNITION EXPENDITURES:

Since many vehicles did not return and a great deal of ammunition was destroyed by enemy gunfire, the following figures were obtained by consulting all platoon commanders and their respective NCO subordinates:

UNIT	75mm				37mm			MG		T.S.M.G.
	AP	HE NORMAL	HE SUPER	SMOKE	AP	HE	CANN- ISTER	.50	.30	45
Co. "A"	120	---	160	---				2000		
Co. "B"	453	461	89	61				16475	2750	3190
Co. "C"	521	132	451	87				5000	1300	----
Ren. Co.	85	96	---	8	16	137	34	9920	8000	500
TOTALS	1179	689	700	156	16	137	34	33395	12050	3690

The above figures constitute loads for 10 trucks, 2 1/2 ton, while only 3 trucks, 2 1/2 ton, are allowed in the present T/O for ammunition. This should be increased to 6 trucks, 2 1/2 tons. Each platoon should be issued an armored M-3 half-track for ammunition.

5. COMMENTS:

5. CONCLUSIONS:

- a. German armored forces may be expected to move many miles and attack in force on moonlight nights. The attack will often be launched against a weak force before the moon is bright.
- b. Tank and machine gun fire (tracer) at night is a terrifying sight to the average soldier. It will have little effect against well-prepared, dug-in AT positions and well-sighted anti-personnel weapons. To dig in properly and provide all-around night security TD Battalions require a company of Combat Engineers assigned to and trained with the Battalion.
- c. The half-track (M-3) 75mm gun is capable of rapidly destroying moving tanks at ranges of 1500 yards or less.
- d. Adjustment of fire down to a 25 yard bracket is necessary to obtain the maximum number of hits with this gun. Platoon Commanders, Platoon Sergeants, Chiefs of Sections and Assistant Chiefs of Sections, as well as their respective under-studies, must be masters at adjusting fire and using rapid bracket methods.
- e. Quadrants should be issued for each gun which at present are not TBA equipment. This Battalion obtained some quadrants in England and has on many previous occasions and did in this battle use indirect fire methods effectively.
- f. The M-3 is not a good AT mount because it is incapable of firing to the rear, is not as fast as a tank, cannot maneuver over difficult terrain as easily as a tank, and has too large a turning radius. However the gun itself is quick firing, easily serviced and accurate.
- g. When the half-track is headed toward enemy tanks, the gun crews of this battalion have demonstrated that they are far superior in speed and accuracy to the German tank crews. When outnumbered and forced to withdraw, thus exposing vulnerable gas tanks, our losses have been greatest.
- h. Personnel losses in these light armored vehicles have been amazingly low in the number of men killed. Many escape unscratched or with only slight wounds.
- i. The M-3 (75 mm) can easily inflict heavy losses to enemy foot-troops, infantry heavy-weapons and artillery placements by direct fire methods without little battle loss as long as the destroyers keep moving or take defiladed positions when not firing.
- j. TD Battalions have enough small-arms fire power to fight off enemy infantry but not enough men or tools to properly prepare the positions and man all available weapons. A few 81 mm mortars would be very useful for defense against defiladed infantry and dug-in M.G. positions.
- k. TD units on outpost duty, especially at night, need artillery



support. Prepared protective artillery fires are essential and overlays showing where numbered concentrations may be expected to fall, on call or rocket signal, should be furnished by the supporting artillery commander.

1. Artillery Liaison Officers and forward observers with radios could often be used to great advantage. TD units have many artillery officers capable of adjusting fire of supporting artillery provided radios are issued with sufficient range and channels for fire commands. Lts. Perry and Mann could have operated in this manner during this fight, as well as other officers of this organization who are graduates of the field Artillery School, Ft. Sill, Okla.
- m. The best way to fight enemy tanks is with fire and movement. When outnumbered the gun or TD unit which sits still too long will be enveloped and destroyed unless a solid line of guns can be formed with well-protected flanks. To destroy a large number of enemy tanks, use a few destroyers for bait to draw the enemy tanks forward where concealed TD guns can fire into their flank or maneuver on their flanks and rear.
- n. The maximum defensive employment of AT rifle grenades, rocket AT guns and 50 cal. machine guns, (the latter directed at tank tracks and bogie wheels) is not being accomplished by units due to poor advance planning or instruction on the part of officers. At night these weapons, dug in and properly employed, may prove more effective than the M-10 destroyer, which makes a large target and is incapable of accurate direct fire at night because the gunner cannot accurately locate his target on cross hairs of his sight.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a. I concur in the recommendations incorporated in the reports of my subordinates.
- b. Since the Germans rarely attack seriously with less than 60 tanks and will employ many more if possible, it is recommended that the following units trained as a group be assigned to each Infantry Division:

2 TD Battalions, M-10's.

1 self-propelled 105mm howitzer artillery battalion.

2 Companies of Combat Engineers.

This force should be completely equipped and then allowed one month to train together under one commander. This group will afford more protection and give greater offensive power to an Infantry division than the present 4 artillery battalions assigned by tables of organization. The M-10 is equipped with a panoramic sight and is capable of indirect.



fire as well as direct fire at extremely long ranges. It will have more dead space than the howitzers but the increase in the number of guns together with the added mobility will more than compensate for this disadvantage. It is desirable, of course, to keep all of the present Division Artillery. If road space, etc., does not permit, the experiment of dropping 1 or 2 artillery battalions and adding the above mentioned Group is deemed worthy of trial.

- a. The employment of self-propelled 105mm howitzers in close support of TD battalions or medium tank battalions to shell and smoke 88mm guns or 90mm guns is highly recommended. Such employment will greatly reduce our armored losses, permit rapid and earlier attacks on enemy positions before they are highly organized for defense.

6. COMMENDATIONS:

- a. It is desired to commend the following named officers:

(1) For displaying outstanding leadership and command in the order named;

(a) Lt. Yowell, C. O., 1st Pl., Co. "B".

(b) Lt. Munn, C. O., 3rd Pl., Co. "C".

(c) Capt. Paulick, C. O., Recon. Co.

(d) Lt. Gioia, C. O., 1st Pl., Recon. Co.

(2) For displaying outstanding executive ability or for staff duty well performed:

(a) Lt. Perry, Executive, Co. "C".

(b) Capt. Fuller, Battalion S-3.

(c) Capt. Hinman, Battalion S-2.

- b. Individual acts of bravery were numerous. Appropriate recommendations for awards to enlisted men and officers will be forwarded at a later date.

7. GENERAL STATEMENTS:

- a. The Battalion was employed as a unit directly under the command of Major General Terry Allen, Commanding General, 1st Infantry Division, which permitted the entire power of a T.D. Bn., greatly assisted by other 1st Division units, to be employed in successfully turning a serious enemy armored attack. Although reduced in personnel, strength and guns, the battalion was more powerful than in previous battle operations because no attachments of T. D. platoons or



companies were made after the capture of GAPSA. In the past when T. D. units have been attached to battalions, an additional attachment was subsequently accomplished by attaching small T. D. units to infantry companies or tank companies. The T. D. Bn. thus dispersed entered a fight greatly reduced. The attached small T. D. units were often improperly employed or assigned impossible missions, or worse still, received no orders or instructions.

- b. This battalion, reduced by 1 reconnaissance platoon and 8 - 75mm guns, is now ready for combat and desired early assignment to the 1st Infantry Division, its parent organization. We understand how the commanders of all units of this division and their staff officers function. We have the greatest confidence in their ability, and feel that we should be part of their team. Many officers and men now assigned to this battalion are former members of the 1st Infantry Division.
- c. When practicable, it is requested that this organization be equipped with the new M-10 gun and allowed a period of one month for organization and training.

H. D. BAKER,
Lt. Col., 601st T. D. Bn.,
Commanding.

