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HEADQUARTERS 644TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

APC 339
8 October 1944

SUBJECT: Monthly Report of Operations for September 1944

TO : The Adjutant General,
Washington, D C

1. Co "A", 644th TD Bn, remained attached to the 29th Infantry Division from the beginning of the month of September until 21 September 1944, performing close support missions with the infantry attacking BREST and with Task Force Sugar in fighting along the coast west of BREST.
2. Companies "B" and "C", 644th TD Bn, were attached to the 13th Infantry Regiment and the 121st Infantry Regiment respectively until 11 September 1944 when they were released to battalion control for movement to the CROZON PENINSULA. On the CROZON PENINSULA, Co "B" was attached to the 26th Infantry Regiment and Co "C" was again attached to the 121st Infantry Regiment. Later, on 19 September 1944, company "C" was attached to the 13th Infantry Regiment.
3. Reconnaissance Company fired long range harrasing missions with 37mm guns from 15 September 1944 through 17 September 1944.
4. The battalion was assembled in a bivouac area in the vicinity of TRÉFLEW NEZ, France, on 24 September 1944 in preparation for movement to the east. This movement was begun on 27 Sept 44, when the battalion moved with the 3th Infantry Division to an area northwest of RAINES. Movement continued until the end of the month, the battalion being in bivouac near ESCHEFORD, Luxembourg, during the night of 30 September 1944.

For the Commanding Officer:

Harry L Goddard, Jr.
HARRY L GODDARD, JR.
Capt., PA
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U S Army
24 September 1944

SUBJECT: Operations of the 64th Tank Destroyer Battalion in the Reduction of Brest and the Crozon Peninsula

TO : Commanding General
VIII Corps
APO 808, US Army
(Attention: Anti-tank Officer)

1. In the paragraphs following, the operations of this unit in the reduction of BREST and of the CROZON Peninsula are discussed. The period covered is 23 August to 19 September 1944.

2. Organization:

a. The Battalion, less three (3) destroyer companies, was attached to the 8th Division Artillery.

b. One destroyer company was attached to each of the two (2) active infantry regiments of the 8th Infantry Division and the third destroyer company was attached to the 29th Infantry Division.

c. To each of the two (2) destroyer companies functioning with the 8th Division a section of the pioneer platoon was attached.

3. Communications and Liaison:

a. The Battalion had radio, and whenever practical, wire communication with the division artillery and with the companies of the Battalion.

b. The destroyer companies maintained wire and radio communication with the infantry regiments to which they were attached.

c. The destroyer platoons had radio communication with their companies and on occasion wire communication with the infantry companies or battalion with which they were operating.

d. Liaison was maintained with the division artillery at all times by the Battalion. The destroyer companies maintained liaison with the regiments to which attached and on occasion the platoons maintained liaison with the infantry battalion supported.

4. Tactics:

a. Realization of Situation:

(1) No serious tank attack was possible because the enemy lacked the necessary tanks.

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(2) The terrain was of the close hedgerow variety that made direct fire from the M-10s impossible except from positions well forward. Also the terrain made movement of the M-10s difficult, especially where bridges were destroyed, because of the poor standing usually found in the areas.

b. The destroyer platoons habitually supported the leading infantry battalions, engaging targets as pointed out by the infantry, artillery observers, or selected by the platoon commanders. The targets generally consisted of gun and machine gun installations, pill boxes, or houses being used as cover by the enemy; on some occasions area neutralization and direct fire at personnel was done.

c. Movement:

- (1) Whenever possible movement was confined to the hours of darkness.
- (2) Daylight movements were usually screened by smoke when suitable routes were not available.
- (3) Movement was habitually over carefully reconnoitered routes.

d. Positions (Fire, alternate, cover, supplementary):

- (1) Fire positions were selected and prepared as far in advance as possible. The usual position was behind a hedgerow, where the destroyer was given hull defilade.
- (2) Alternate positions were usually in the case field of the primary position but at a different point along the hedgerow.
- (3) Cover positions were selected in sunken roads or in other recesses of the terrain if available. However, it was frequently necessary to construct a cover position by excavating near the fire position so that the destroyer, having completed its firing, could drop back into the excavation in complete sight and ground defilade. This kind of digging was a big dividend in that no destroyer could sit idle in such a position. Further, it was possible at all times to move quickly into the fire position when targets appeared. The attached annex section is devoted entirely to the preparation of all type positions.
- (4) Supplementary positions were usually available for use in firing in adjacent fields. To cover as they receded it was often invariably necessary to make a decision at cover when the situation.

e. Exercises:

- (1) Interdiction firing was done at night with high accuracy.



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Although the destroyer companies of this unit operate fire direction centers the firing in this operation was usually by platoons.

(2) Targets were fired on by direct fire during daylight, the quadrant and azimuth indicator reading recorded, and these data used for delivering fire against these same targets at night.

(3) One occasion when the moon was so bright as to make enemy observation of a projected movement of destroyers possible white phosphorus was employed to screen the move. However, the illumination from the white phosphorus more than counteracted the screening effect. The use of white phosphorus at night for screening is not recommended on the basis of this one experience.

(4) The enemy did little if any firing from forward positions at night. Therefore, no firing by direct fire at flashes was undertaken.

f. Reconnaissance Company:

(1) Division reconnaissance missions were performed by the reconnaissance company with success.

(2) The 37mm guns of the reconnaissance company were employed to deliver harassing direct fire from forward fire positions.

(3) The reconnaissance company was forced into two (2) fire fights with enemy patrols. Although effecting casualties and property destruction against the enemy and taking prisoners the reconnaissance company had no losses of personnel or vehicles.

g. Security Sections:

(1) Their principal mission was to keep the destroyers supplied.

(2) They gave security (local) to destroyer platoons.

(3) They maintained liaison between the tank destroyer platoon and the infantry supported.

5. Effectiveness of fire:

a. The 3" Gun, M-7, was effective against all heavy installations which we encountered in this operation.

b. Against the type pill box where several inches of steel is surrounded with concrete and a dirt layer the gun is effective only against the coverings.



c. Against light concrete placements (three or four feet of concrete without armor underneath) the gun is effective. The APC-400 ammunition was used on this type target.

d. Against hedgerows it was found that delay high explosive is most effective. This allowed the round to penetrate the hedgerow and then to explode above on the top side.

5. Remarks and Recommendations:

a. Close cooperation with the infantry supported and unassisted by armor was achieved without additional radios.

b. The anti-tank guns of the division were used to block roads, protect command posts and to prevent the use of armored vehicles of the enemy from overrunning the front lines. It felt that they were used effectively. They were well forward when possible.

c. The HE rounds now available to tank destroyer units is practically worthless. It does give a slightly different burst from HE but is little easier to pick up, if at all. I recommend white phosphorus be made available to tank destroyer units.

d. In this special situation where tank attack was inevitable on any scale of importance the destroyers performed what, in effect, was an assault gun mission.

e. Noteworthy was the ineffectiveness of the German artillery fire directed against the destroyers. Not once was an adjustment made on a firing position with a following concentration, although the destroyers fired from positions visible to the enemy. I can explain this only by surprise. I believe that our continual pounding of the German positions rendered ineffective their communication between their OPs with the front lines and the artillery.

f. In event that the 90 mm gun is available to replace the 4.2" gun it is felt that the replacement should be accomplished as soon as possible so that this weapon will be familiar to all concerned before the next operation. The increase range and striking power of the 90 mm gun makes this gun desirable for tank destroyers.

g. It appears desirable to have a self-propelled tank destroyer unit organic in each infantry division.

Ernest F. ...
Lt Colonel, ...
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c. Against light concrete placements (three or four feet of concrete without armor underneath) the gun is effective. The APC-50F ammunition was used on this type target.

d. Against hedgerows it was found that delay high explosive is most effective. This allowed the round to penetrate the hedgerow and then to explode close on the far side.

6. Remarks and Recommendations:

a. Close cooperation with the infantry is vital. The infantry should be able to accomplish their mission without additional aid.

b. The anti-tank guns of the division were used to block roads, protect the flanks and to prevent the enemy armored vehicles from overrunning the front line. I felt that they were used effectively. They were well forward when possible.

c. The HC racks now available to tank destroyer units is practically worthless. It does give a slightly different burst from HE but is little easier to identify, if at all. I recommend white phosphorous be made available to tank destroyer units.

d. In this special situation where tank attack was not possible on any scale it is obvious the destroyers, oriented what, in effect, was an assault gun mission.

e. Noteworthy is the ineffectiveness of the German artillery fire directed against the destroyers. Not once did the enemy make use of a firing position with a following concentration, although the destroyers fired from positions variable to the enemy. I can explain this only by surmise: I believe that our continual pounding of the German positions rendered ineffective their communication between their line with the front line and the artillery.

f. In event that the 80 mm gun is available to replace the 57 mm gun it is felt that the replacement should be accomplished as soon as possible so that the weapon will be familiar to all concerned before the next operation. The increased range and striking power of the 80 mm gun makes this gun desirable for tank destroyers.

g. It is recommended to have a self-propelled tank destroyer unit organized in each infantry division.

Major General J. H. ...
Lt Colonel ...
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