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HEADQUARTERS
701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 464 U. S. ARMY

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ARMOR IN SUPPORT OF INFANTRY ON LAGO DI
GARDA, ITALY (F5090)

(AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION)

During the latter part of April 1945, the 10th Mountain Infantry Division was attacking north against light and scattered resistance along the east shores of Lago Di Garda. The 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (-"B" Company), with "C" and "D" Companies of the 751st Tank Battalion attached, was in support of the division attack; which progressed north along the single road paralleling the lake. Thus, on the left of the attacking forces was some thirty-five hundred (3500) to twelve thousand (12000) yards of water, while on the right was an impassable barrier of hills up to 1034 meters in height. The area was entirely impassable for armored or other vehicles except along the main road to the north.

Initial enemy demolitions were encountered at F543943 early on the morning of April 28th. This caused some delay to the armor but the infantry proceeded on to the village of Navene (F545947) which they occupied and awaited support of armor. When the engineers had completed the fill, the TD's proceeded on forward to the village, where at its north edge an armored car of the reconnaissance company was taken under fire by enemy 4.2 inch gun. The infantry proceeded on forward, but found further demolitions at F556958. At this point they suffered considerable casualties from enemy twenty (20) mm. fire from the mouth of a tunnel on down the lake. When TD's were brought forward, the crews of the enemy 4.2 and 20mm guns evidently deserted their guns, for not a round was fired.

The demolitions at F556958 put an end to further advances to the north. The road had been dropped into the lake for a distance of some one hundred and fifty (150) feet and just beyond, the road tunnel mouth (where the road passed through the steep mountainside that ran down to the water edge) had been closed where the extensive demolitions had dropped the tunnel roof onto the floor. This tunnel was one of many between Navene (F545947) and Torbole (F578023) on the lake shore road. Engineer estimates were seven (7) to ten (10) days to clear the road.

As visual reconnaissance proved the other tunnels to be still intact, the division commander decided upon an amphibious operation to go around the demolished area to secure the other tunnels intact.

"DUKW'S", being available, were immediately brought forward and a battalion of infantry was landed in the vicinity of F5698. This landing was supported by the direct fire of "C" Company of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion.

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When this landing had been secured, (the remaining tunnels were taken intact), support troops were landed, and an attack was launched to secure the towns of Riva (A552044) and Torbole (A578023). It was then that the commanding general decided to attempt to use barges to ferry tanks and tank destroyers north on the lake to support the advance of the infantry; or if this were not possible, to advance on to the north with the infantry after it had reached the initial Riva - Torbole objective.

Unfortunately, the necessary "QUONSETT" barges were not immediately available for the operation, and the infantry was on objective (Riva - Torbole) long before the first of the armor arrived.

A ferry point was established at F547950, and by afternoon of the 1st of May the "QUONSETT" barges were in the water and ready to receive.

It was decided by agreement between the commanding officer, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion and G-3, 10th Mountain Infantry Division to move the armor in the following order:

- 1 a - - 2 M-8's (701 Rcn)
- 2 M-10's (A/701) - RIVA
- 1 b - - Engineer Equipment. - RIVA
- 2 a - - 2 M-8's (701 Rcn)
- 1 M-5 (D/751) - TORBOLE
- 1 M-4 (C/751)
- 2 b - - Engineer Equipment. - TORBOLE
- 3 a - - 2 M-10's - RIVA
- 4 - - All remaining armor to TORBOLE in the following order:
Medium tanks, light tanks, TD's of "A" and "C" Companies, 701st TD Battalion, and 701st Reconnaissance Company.

This order was brought about by the fact that the vehicles in classes 1, 2, and 3 were to be used initially on road blocks in the Torbole - Riva area.

Two unforeseen factors entered the picture. First, although the "QUONSETT" barges were said to be of the seventy (70) ton class, their actual load limit was not in excess of fifty (50) tons. This meant twice the originally scheduled number of runs. Next, the motor on the "QUONSETT" was not mechanically operative, and it was necessary to propell the barge by tying "dukw's" to the port and starboard side and using the "dukw" power to move the "QUONSETT." This added to the minimum time limit of each trip up the lake.

Nonetheless, the ferry was in operation by 1430 hours, 1 May, and by 1715 hours the first load had arrived at Riva. (The entire ferry trip consumed some two and one-half (2½) hours time. This meant a maximum of twelve (12) tanks could be handled each day). The ferry continued in operation throughout the night, and by 021700B May the following vehicles had arrived at destination:

- 1st Platoon, Rcn. Co., 701st T.D. Bn.
- 3rd Platoon, Rcn. Co., 701st T.D. Bn.
- 1st Platoon, "A" Co., 701st T.D. Bn.
- Co. Hq's, Rcn., 701st T.D. Bn.

- 2 Medium Tanks of "C" Co., 751 Tank Bn.
- 1 Light Tank of "D" Co., 751 Tank Bn.
- 4 Quonsett loads of heavy engineer bridging equipment.

This list shows that the contemplated schedule of movement was not followed to the letter. It was learned that although the barge could not handle two (2) tanks each trip, it could nonetheless carry additional light vehicles. A model load was one (1) medium tank and one (1) M-8 armored car. 1/4 ton, 4 x 4's of the reconnaissance company could also be added to the load as available. Thus, the vehicles of the reconnaissance company presented no problem.

A change in the priority of equipment was made the next day in that engineer equipment was given load priority over the armor, so that by 031800B May only five (5) additional medium tanks of the attached "C" Company, 751 Tank Battalion had been ferried.

No further trips were made with the armor. The road to the north was opened at 0800 hours on the 4th of May and the ferry was put out of operation.

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Although the quonsett barge was only in operation for a matter of four (4) days, and although only a portion of the available armor was transported by this ferry, the operation was nonetheless deemed a success. The use of quonsett barges in such operations is tactically a sound proposition, and their use in future operations by commanders faced with similar circumstances should be seriously considered. The operation just described could have been carried out in the face of enemy fire and, had the quonsett barges been available, tanks and tank destroyers could have landed with the infantry.

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In any similar operation, the following factors must be taken into consideration:

1. Effective control must be exercised at the embarkation point. Only vehicles to be immediately available for loading must be in the area. (This battalion placed an officer at the embarkation point with radio and telephone contact with battalion headquarters. The loading officer then called for vehicles as desired for loading).

2. Effective control must be exercised at the debarkation point. When only a limited number of quonsett barges are available, small portions of armored units may become lost after debarkation.

3. When quonsett barges are to be used to carry armor in the assault a thorough map-study must be made of the landing area, to insure adequate landing points.

4. Quonsett barges are engineer equipment that are used only for short periods of major operations. For this reason, through long standing without use, the power motors are liable to become inoperative. Two motors were tried

in the last operation, and neither one worked. If such a heavy piece of engineering equipment is worth hauling all the long way up Italy, it is worth being kept in an operative state.

5. A sufficient number of the quonsett barges must be made available to the armor. In the past operation, it would have taken two (2) weeks to ferry the combat vehicles of this battalion. The use of quonsett barges for units larger than battalions is almost out of the question.

6. In assault operations, some form of protection from enemy fire must be afforded the crews of the quonsetts.

7. In operations in which it is contemplated to use tanks in quonsett barges in the assault, it must be planned to land as soon as possible after daylight. Tanks on the slow moving quonsetts present a most favorable target to enemy gunfire.

8. When it is contemplated to use quonsett barges in an operation, some forethought must be given to the matter, and the quonsetts must be kept far enough forward to be immediately available. In the past operation three (3) days were lost because the barges were not on hand.

/s/ Albert B. Morrison
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