

LOUISIANA NATIONAL GUARD



THE 773RD TANK BATTALION

COAT OF ARMS

SHIELD: Tenne, on a fess enhanced sable, fimbriated or three plates, on a triangle issuant from base point to fess gules, fimbriated of the third, a tiger's head affronte, snarling of the last, eyed azure, langued of the fourth.

CREST: That for regiments and separate battalions of the Louisiana National Guard.

MOTTO: "Fit Via Vi" (The Way is Made by Force)

The Battalion's Coat of Arms, approved 11 September 1942, is the heraldic representation of the history, traditions, spirit, and loyalty of the unit. The tinctures of red and gold in the shield represents the Battalion's origin from components of field artillery units. The black fess, taken from the arms of William Penn, honors the two batteries of the Pennsylvania National Guard which, together with two batteries of the 141st Field Artillery, honored by the tiger's head, formed the original 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion from which the 773rd Tank Battalion descends. The motto, "Fit Via Vi", succinctly states the purposeful determination of this armed unit.

THE 773rd TANK BATTALION LOUISIANA NATION GUARD

The official lineage of the 773rd Tank Battalion of the Louisiana National Guard begins with that of the Washington Artillery of New Orleans which, at that time, was the 141st Field Artillery Regiment (155mm How).

During the latter part of 1939 and the early months of 1940, German armored units overran a large part of Europe and forced the capitulation of Poland, Belgium, and France within a matter of months. As a means of combating these amazing German tank successes, the United States Army directed that one antitank battery be organized and activated within each field artillery battalion. Two such batteries were organized within the 141st Field Artillery Regiment of New Orleans.

WORLD WAR II

The growing hostility of the Axis Powers required the United States to ready itself for any emergency. Pursuant to Executive Order No. 8618, dated 23 December 1940, issued by the President, the 141st was inducted into federal service on 13 January 1941 and proceeded to Camp Shelby, Mississippi for training and maneuvers.

In preparation for the Louisiana Maneuvers the antitank batteries of the 141st Field Artillery Regiment of Louisiana and of the 166th Field Artillery Regiment of Pennsylvania were combined, and supplemented with the antitank platoons of the battalion headquarters batteries of the 141st and 166th Regiments and with antitank personnel of the Regimental Headquarters Battery of the 190th of Penn-

sylvania, to form the 73rd Provisional Antitank Battalion.

On 15 December 1941, eight days after the Japanese bombed and strafed Pearl Harbor and at the end of 4 months of field maneuvers in Louisiana and North Carolina, the 73rd Provisional Antitank Battalion was reorganized and redesignated the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Prior to the Battalion's embarkation for Europe in January of 1944, it had been on three field maneuvers, spent 10 months in the field, and covered 14 states from coast to coast. During this time the 773rd acquired the full track M-10 tank destroyers mounting the 3-inch gun.

In England the Battalion continued its training until August 1944, when it boarded 2 LST's (Landing Ship Tank) and 4 LCI's (Landing Craft, Infantry) at Portland Harbor, crossed the Channel on the 7th, and debarked on the Coast of Normandy.

Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Spiess, the Battalion, minus C Company and part of B Company, landed on UTAH BEACH near St. Germain De Varreville at 2200 hours of the 7th of August. The remainder of the Battalion landed at 1245 hours the same day, on OMAHA BEACH near St. Laurent-Sur-Mer. Assembling at La Haye Du Puits, the Battalion made a 91 mile march to St. Eliers Du Maine. By the 14th the unit had closed in a few miles south and east of enemy held Argentan relieving the 5th Armored Division. On the 17th, action in the memorable Argentan-Falaise Pocket began.

ARGENTAN-FALAISE

Into the rolling hills SE of Argentan, near LeBourg St. Leonard, the 773rd destroyers took up positions on the south tip of the 'pincers' around an estimated 75-100,000 Germans trapped within an iron ring of armor. For one day, and until the 90th Infantry Division arrived, all personnel of the Battalion including Headquarters Company, filled in the line. From then and until the 21st, furious fighting took place as the Battalion held courageously and counter-attacked relentlessly against the overwhelming odds. As a result of the courageous determination and conspicuous heroism, so often displayed by each member, the 773rd was awarded the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION.

On the 17th Companies A and C were given the mission of moving North to cover the main roads into Le Bourg St. Leonard. Under concentrations of enemy artillery and mortar fire, two platoons of C Company supporting the 2nd Battalion of the 359th Infantry Regiment, attacked Le Bourg from the West, as A Company with the 1st Battalion of the 359th moved into town from the South. The town fell and a German counter-attack was repulsed.

Passing through town, the 3rd Battalion of the 359th with the 3rd Platoon of C Company in support, moved NW of Fougy with Hill 129 as one of the objectives.

Between 0900 and 1300 on Sunday the 20th of August, a desperate enemy made a futile attempt to escape SW of Chambois near Hill 129. C Company's Platoon ran out of ammunition and the 1st Platoon of A Company was dispatched to relieve them. Nearing Hill No. 129, the 1st Platoon un-

expectedly came face to face with a mixed column of enemy tanks and vehicles. At point blank range and under a hail of fire, they slugged it out for three hours. Farther north the 2nd Platoon of C Company made their stand at Chambois.

After a short rest at Chaillou, the Battalion moved to the Seine River at Mantes-Gassicourt. There Company B and the 2nd Platoon of Reconnaissance Company were attached to the 79th Infantry Division. After the bridgehead was successfully established by the 79th and the 30th Infantry Divisions on the 27th, the Battalion was relieved and moved S and E around Paris closing in at Bernay-En-Brie on the 30th.

Joining the 79th Division on the 10th of September at Thonnance-Les-Joinville on the Marne River, meant supporting the XV Corps' effort on the Moselle River. "A" Company operated with Combat Team 3 (313 Infantry), B Company with CT 4 (314 Infantry), and C Company with CT 5 (315 Infantry). Company C supported CT 5 as it swept through Neufchateau, Chateouis, Oellville to Poussey, by the 13th of September. CT 4 with B Company thrust East to Charmes, with the 2nd Platoon entering the town on the 20th. Heavy resistance from road blocks, mines and enemy machine gun nests was overcome and the town fell.

While B Company and C Company were fighting eastwards, A Company with CT 3 captured the towns of Puzieux, Poussay and Ramecourt to take and hold positions overlooking Damvillier and Mirecourt.

The important bridgehead over the Moselle at Charmes was established and CT 4 and B Company

crossed on the 15th, clinging stubbornly to the small toe-hold on the east side, while the other TD Companies supported them by direct fire. They were soon relieved, and with units crossing to the north at Bayon on the 18th, all companies closed in on Luneville by the 22nd. B Company forded the Meurthe River near Houainville and moved into the town of Gerberviller on the 21st. After the capture of Luneville and the clearing of Foret de Parroy, the Battalion moved southwest of Metz.

THIRD CROSSING OF THE MOSELLE

Metz, the famed fortress city, which for centuries had never fallen, had to be taken. Since frontal assaults proved too costly, the Corps' attacks were to outflank the city and seal off the enemy garrison. Two crossings were selected over the rain-swollen Moselle at Chattenom and Malling under the frowning guns of Fort Koenigsmacher. The Infantry assault boat crossings were in dire need of armored support but the rushing waters repeatedly swept away the engineer bridges. On the 12th of November, the ferry that had safely carried over the company jeeps and one destroyer of A Company was grounded by the slowly-receding waters. A pontoon bridge at Malling was built and carried two MIO's of C Company over before it, already weakened by enemy artillery fire, parted and dropped a 3rd Platoon MIO into the stream. The two TD's safely over arrived at Petite-Hettange, just in time to roar eastward down the road toward Kerling repulsing the strong German counter-attack from that town. After the Engineers had rigged another ferry, and completed a bridge at Cattenom, the remainder of the Battalion crossed.

The 90th Division to which the Battalion was

attached, attacked astride the impregnable line of Maginot Forts, an despite enemy mine fields, road blocks and anti-tank guns smashed south. On the 19th, the 3rd Platoon of B Company made contact with the 5th Division Troops south of St. Barbe, closing the last escape corridor of the doomed Metz garrison. At Bockange, on the 21st, Task Force Spiess came into being and was assigned a covering mission of the long stretches of the Nier River around Bouzonville. The Division crossed and fought its way to the Saar River, establishing a firm line on the west bank between Merzig on the north, and Wallerfangen on the south.

SAAR RIVER AND DILLINGEN

On a cold and rainy 10th of December, at 0400 hours, the first destroyers were ferried over the Saar in support of the small bridgehead the Infantry had established a few days earlier. The Germans strongly resisted this penetration of the formidable Siegfried Line. In spite of this, all destroyers crossed the river and joined the hard pressed Infantry on the west edge of Dillingen, the "Pittsburgh" of the industrially rich Saar region.

On December 15th, a co-ordinated attack by the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 358th Infantry crossed the fortified railroad tracks into the town proper. The 3rd Platoon of B Company moved up the tracks in advance of the 2nd Battalion as each destroyer took on previously assigned pill boxes and kept them buttoned up. The Infantry moved forward pill box by pill box to the accompaniment of earth shaking roars as the Engineers blew up the German strong points. Company C's 3rd Platoon and the one remaining gun of the 1st Platoon of B Company used the same tactics while supporting the 1st Battalion on the right.

LUXEMBURG-ARDENNES

Due to the mounting German offensive and break through in the Ardennes Sector, the Battalion pulled back over the hard won Saar River on the 22nd of December when it became necessary that additional troops be withdrawn to stem the surge of Von Runstedt's crack Panzer Armies. Initially the 773rd settled and prepared defensive positions in the Saar-Moselle Triangle. But the alert for movement came about noon on a cold, cloudy 6th of January, and the Battalion moved out making a hazardous day and night march over iced roads, to Saeul, Luxembourg. Throughout the next month, the 773rd was to encounter its bitterest weather in the mountainous snow-blasted country of the little Grand Duchy of Luxemburg.

On the 9th of January, the Battalion launched its attack against the terrain protected south flank of the enemy 'Bulge'. On the morning of the 12th the 2nd Platoon of A Company took the town of Doncols and moved on to Sonlez, contacting the 357th Infantry. These towns were astride an important East-West road that the enemy planned to use as an escape route. Late the same day, this action was successfully completed without Infantry support. C Company was in position on the right flank, along the road leading southeast into Wiltz when an enemy armored column began to withdraw along this route. In the ensuing fire fight that lasted all day, the enemy was cut to shreds by the accurate gunnery of the destroyers.

On the 17th, the decisive stand at Oberwampach took place. As the Battalion pushed ahead the enemy tried desperately to dislodge our troops from this town. Savage counter-attacks by the elite 1st SS

Panzer troops aimed at the 90th Division positions in Oberwampach, were repulsed time and again by the accurate 3-inch gunnery. Enemy tanks destroyed in these actions brought the Battalion total to 102 marking the 773rd as the first American TD Battalion in any theater to exceed the century mark.

After failing at an 0400 hour attack and having his four "tank probes" dispersed by B Company guns, Jerry attacked in force with 10 to 12 tanks and supporting Infantry preceded by an intense artillery barrage. But the 2nd and 3rd Platoons of B Company knocked out the German tanks, and our forces were able to hold strategically important Oberwampach, controlling one escape highway from the untenable Ardennes pocket. This also marked the turning point and the enemy began to hurriedly withdraw from the 'Bulge'.

THE SIEGFRIED LINE AGAIN AND THE RHINE

The Battalion moved to Biwisch on the 26th of January, and was attached to the VII Corps. Preparations for crossing the small, but stoutly defended Our River began. The frigid weather was not as bitter an enemy as the Germans, as the battalion crossed the Our into Germany and the Siegfried Line again, on the 30th.

From February 7th on, the fighting was unusually bitter and the unit received its share of casualties, but in turn exacted a heavy toll on the enemy. Winterspelt, Habscheid, Brandscheid and Litenborn fell as the maze of pill boxes crumbled under the combined weapons of the attackers. The hard-won experience at 'Busting' fortifications in the Saar was put to excellent use.

On the 21st, Task Force Spiess was once more

activated. Its first mission was to protect the 90th Division's right flank as it pushed south and east between the Our and Prum Rivers.

Other Army units were slashing at the foe from the South and many of the towns and important hills taken by the Task Force aided them considerably in their mission. By the 25th, TF Spiess had accomplished the mission and was relieved after taking 16 towns and much enemy equipment.

March came with its spring rains, making communication lines more difficult. The 90th and the 6th Armored Divisions were preparing to attack to the Kyll River. Small task forces were formed with units of the 773rd as part of each. These task forces were to probe ahead of the infantry and secure routes and important terrain features. How well they succeeded is evidenced by the rapidity of American movement, despite resistance.

Moving swiftly, the Unit found itself looking across the Moselle for the fourth time. Again an assault crossing was made as the 90th hacked a bridgehead in the stony vinyarded hills of the far bank. Again TF Spiess was reactivated and on March 16th. Colonel Spiess, leading elements of the battalion, reached the Rhine, to place and fire the first guns across the river above its confluence with the Moselle. Then the TF spearheaded the 90th Division up the east bank of the Rhine stopping just short of Maintz which was captured a little later by the 90th.

GERMANY

On the 23rd and the 24th of March, the Rhine was crossed at Nierstein (Oppenheim), while our Ack-Ack shot down many of the desperate Luft-

waffe planes making futile attempts to destroy the pontoon bridge.

The next day, TF Spiess was given the mission of capturing Darmstadt, a city, normally with a population of 100,000. Rcn Company took the city and excepting for a roadblock fight and some enemy bazooka and machine gun nests, the city was taken without difficulty. The TF then reconnoitered in front of the 90th Division as it advanced Northeast towards the Main River. Frankfurt and Hanau on the Main were captured, and after crossing, the Division had the job of mopping up resistance, bypassed by the rapidly moving 4th Armored. In late March the Division sped northward to Hersfeld with the confused German Army giving ground more rapidly and with less organized defense . . . the end was in sight.

PURSUIT AND THE END

Everywhere the German Wehrmacht was failing. By April 1st, the Division had reached Hersfeld and swung east towards Czechoslovakia. The towns of Vacha, Bad Salzungen, Zella Mehlis, Merkers, fell with clock-like precision. "A" Company remained in Merkers, to guard the much publicized Salt Mine in which the major wealth of the German Reich had been hidden. The bulk of the many millions consisted of about 100 tons of gold bullion, plus some 400 billion dollars in the currency of many nations, and valuable art treasures.

On April 12th, the Inter Defense Command under Colonel Spiess, was formed within the 90th Division with the mission of protecting important installations and roads within the Division zone.

As part of the IDC, the Rcn Company escorted

Division supply trains and kept the Division Main Supply Routes safe. B Company operating with the 2nd Bn, 358th Infantry, led the Division advance and performed the major share of the fighting, although in general, limited to smaller engagements.

By the middle of April, the Saale River and the Lake Region near Lobenstein had been cleared. On the 18th, a 90th Division task force with the 2nd Platoon of B Company, entered Czechoslovakia. This was the first penetration by American troops.

As the last week in April approached, the Division was advancing southeast paralleling the Czech border, clearing the zone and protecting the VII Corps' left flank. Daily the PW count rose as opposition continued light except for some defended road blocks and enemy strong points.

After being in Corps reserve for 12 hours, the Division on 5th May attacked south to seize the Regen bridgehead, through which the 4th Armored was to pass. On the 6th, the attack swung northeast into Czechoslovakia to the general vicinity of Susice and Petrovice, and there the drive halted as the softening war echoes died away. War in the ETO ended 0900IB May 1945.

The 773rd left Czechoslovakia on May 14th for Tirschenreuth, Bavaria in Germany, to take up its duties as occupation troops and Border Guards.

During its 254 days in combat, in direct fire contact with the enemy, the Battalion, with 8219 rounds of direct fire, knocked out 113 tanks, 25 SP guns, and 105 pill boxes; they also captured 1970 prisoners of war. For this impressive record the 773rd suffered 301 battle and 55 non-battle casualties. Concluding its occupational duties, the Battalion returned to the United States during the

latter part of 1945, and was inactivated at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia on 23 October of that year.

1946 - 1955

With the reorganization of the National Guard following the Second World War, the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was allocated to Louisiana as the 773rd Heavy Tank Battalion and assigned to the west central part of Louisiana. On 18 October 1949, the various elements were organized and activated as Federally recognized troops under the command of Major C. G. Turner.

On 25 June 1950, a little more than a month before the 773rd left for its summer encampment, tank-led communist troops invaded the Republic of Korea. On 27 June, President Truman ordered General Douglas MacArthur to assist the Republic of South Korea. The sudden and urgent need for a large number of United States troops in this campaign resulted in the decision to order some National Guard units to active duty.

Less than one year since reactivation after the end of World War II, the 773rd was alerted on 5 September 1950, for induction into Federal service service.

Two years after the 773rd had been inducted into Federal service and while the unit was still in the service, another organization — the 773rd Tank Battalion (Heavy) (NGUS) was organized under authority received from the National Guard Bureau. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Walter D. Ledig, Jr., this NGUS Battalion served as an interim unit in the Louisiana National Guard until the original

773rd returned to the State of Louisiana.

After four years of very commendable service at Camp Polk, Fort Benning, in special training in California, and again at Fort Benning, the 773rd Tank Battalion, less men and equipment, was released from active Federal service and reverted to State Control on 2 November 1954. During these four years, a large number of the Battalion's officers and enlisted men departed the unit for overseas service.

Units of the 773rd Tank Battalion, all located in Central Louisiana, consist of Hq, Hq & Sv Co and Med Det in Alexandria, Co A in Leesville, Co B in DeRidder, and Co C in Ville Platte.

BATTLE HONORS

(Campaign streamers authorized to be borne by
the 773rd Tank Battalion)

WORLD WAR II

Northern France
Ardennes-Alsace
Rhineland
Central Europe

UNIT DECORATIONS

Distinguished Unit Streamer embroidered AR-
GENTAN-FALAISE

Streamer in the colors of the French Croix de
Guerre with Palm, embroidered MOSELLE AND
SARRE RIVERS