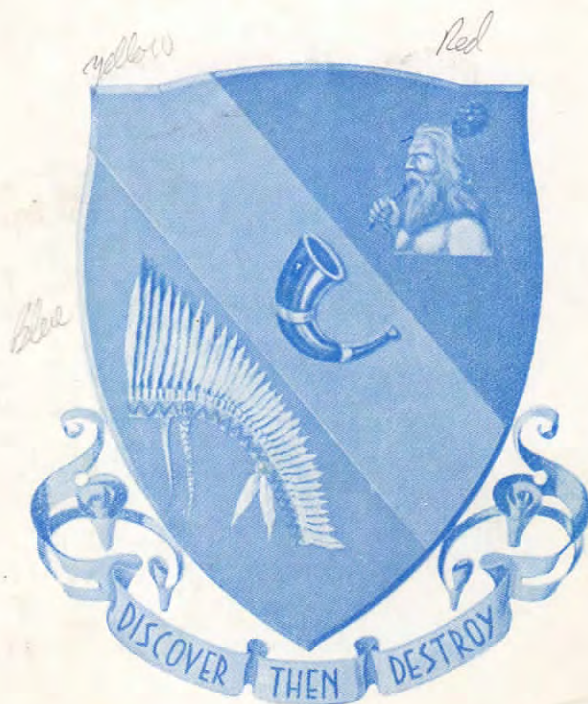
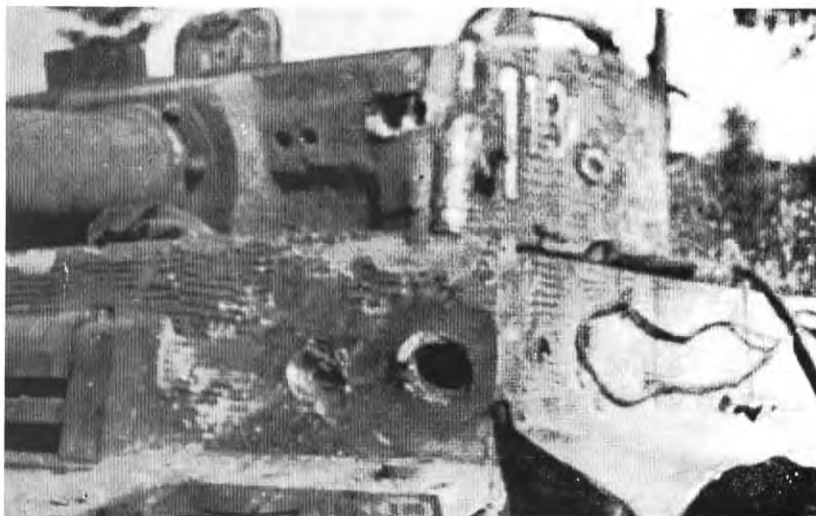




AN INFORMAL HISTORY
OF THE
776th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

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Mission Accomplished

IN MEMORIAM

Pfc. Ardine M. Harstad
 Pfc. Nils Eidsness
 T/5 Lloyd Holland
 Sgt. Robert F. Jones
 S/Sgt. James G. Newman
 1st Lt. Edward S. Kafka
 Pvt. Robert H. Burns
 T/5 Kurt Wasel
 S/Sgt. Doyle D. Grimm
 T/5 Harold H. Stickel
 Sgt. Millard E. Stigen
 Sgt. Raymond E. Larson
 S/Sgt. Harold T. Brown
 T/5 Jesse L. Anderson
 1st Lt. John P. Hughes
 Cpl. Donald F. Ramhorst
 Pfc. Norman Togstad
 Pvt. William R. Hanson
 T/4 Albert Colaanni
 Pvt. Carl A. Applequist
 S/Sgt. Oscar E. Lystad
 T/5 Gustave Hager

Sgt. Harold F. Mooney
 Cpl. Henry G. Popp
 Sgt. Ernest E. Parris
 2nd Lt. John B. Haywood
 Sgt. Sigval M. Carlson
 Sgt. Francis M. Zerr
 T/5 Norman C. Dutoit
 Pvt. Dale H. Ellingson
 Pfc. Woodrow Milligan
 Pvt. Edward P. Paddock
 Capt. Paul R. Brunt
 Sgt. Arthur Mygland
 1st Lt. Harold O. Weiswever
 Cpl. Clarence A. Larsen
 Pvt. Ferdinand J. Schmidt
 T/5 Arnold E. Freeland
 S/Sgt. Eric A. Antonson
 Sgt. Robert C. Elijah
 Cpl. Stanley E. Hams
 S/Sgt. Alvin K. Waggoner
 Sgt. Arthur B. Rossland
 Pfc. Henry O. Stenberg

ACTIVATION

On 14 July 1941 official orders were received by Headquarters, 76th Field Artillery Brigade at Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming from Headquarters IX Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington to form a Provisional Antitank Battalion to become an active part of the 76th Field Artillery Brigade.

Lieutenant Colonel Frank E. Meek of the 183rd Field Artillery Regiment was designated as Battalion Commander of the new Battalion and Major Ira M. F. Gaulke of the 188th Field Artillery Regiment assigned as Battalion Executive Officer.

The appointment of the Battalion Commander and Executive Officer completed, the following assignments were made on the Battalion Staff:

Captain Harry W. Nelson	Plans and Training Officer
Captain Ernest H. Oman	Communications Officer
1st Lt. Daniel M. Carter	Adjutant
2nd Lt. Louis Gill	Supply Officer

The Battalion Staff now complete, Battery "G" of the 183rd Field Artillery Regiment, an Idaho National Guard Unit which entered into active Federal Service from Pocatello, Idaho became Battery "A" of the Provisional Battalion, Battery "H", which entered into active federal service from Rexburg, Idaho became Battery "B", Battery "G" of the 188th Field Artillery Regiment, which entered into active Federal Service from Minot, North Dakota, became Battery "C" and Battery "H", which entered into federal service from Lisbon, North Dakota, became Battery "D" of the new Battalion.

It was now necessary to activate a Headquarters Battery for the new organization. Cadres of enlisted personnel were taken from Headquarters 76th Field Artillery Brigade, the 183rd Field Artillery Regiment and the 188th Field Artillery Regiment. The complete personnel composition of the new Battalion was now accomplished.

The principal arm on formation of the Battalion was to be the 75mm towed piece with four each such guns assigned to Batteries "A", "B", "C" and "D". Equipment and supplies in small quantities necessary for the initial functioning were on hand and the first phases of anti-tank training were entered into.

Pole Mountain, a hilly reservation southwest of Cheyenne, Wyoming, was the locality designated for the Battalion to practice indirect firing at selected targets and direct fire at towed targets. Training moved ahead methodically with a great degree of success.

21 July 1941, written orders were received by the organization that it would be ordered to move in the month of August, 1941 to Fort Lewis, Washington to participate in the Pacific Coast maneuvers. Time was short and the unit worked rapidly to be ready for their first long overland march as an organization.

The morning of 4 August 1941, with the lead vehicle passing through the main gate of Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming at 0730 hours, the Battalion moved out and was on its way to the West Coast. Holding the honor of being the only troops of the entire 76th Field Artillery Brigade to be called for the maneuvers.

Bivouacs enroute were occupied at Rawlins, Wyoming, Pocatello, Idaho and Puyallup, Washington and on the morning of 11 August 1941 at 0905 hours, the convoy entered the limits of Fort Lewis, Washington. The long move had been accomplished in ideal weather conditions with no accidents involved. Billets were in the 41st Division cantonment area in North Fort Lewis, Washington and the next days were spent in readying vehicles, guns and personnel for the fast approaching maneuvers.

On the opening of maneuvers, in the vicinity of Centralia, Washington, the Battalion was assigned to the Blue forces, the defending army, and given the assignment of selecting positions bordering enemy territory to ward off any attempted breakthrough by simulated tanks of the opposing Red force, whose objective was Olympia, Washington. This was the first introduction to the then newly proposed tactics for the destruction of tanks. Action went on under all types of weather conditions and at the culmination of the maneuvers, which found the invading Red army being pushed into the sea, the Battalion comprised one of the many units of the winning Blue force.

Returning to Fort Lewis, Washington billets were reoccupied in the 41st Division cantonment area and study of the principal arm went forward.

2 September 1941, by official orders from Headquarters IX Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington, the unit was detached from IX Corps and ordered to return by motor convoy to Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming.

In the early morning hours of 5 September 1941, the organization departed from Fort Lewis, Washington and in seven days completed the return journey, arriving at Fort Warren the afternoon of 12 September 1941. The complete overland march covering 1200 miles had been completed without an accident of any nature. An admirable record, indeed, for a new organization.

Once again in Fort Warren, Wyoming, the personnel of the Battalion, commenced training, profiting by the experience gained in the maneuvers.

Training continued through windy, wet and snowy weather at the Pole Mountain maneuver area with high accuracy in the firing of the 75mm gun being attained. Individual time off the range was spent with long hours in many class rooms, gaining knowledge of first aid, scouting, patrolling, map reading and nomenclature of individual weapons.

On 7 December 1941, when the Battalion was barely four months old, came the news of the infamous stab in the back by Japan against Pearl Harbor and we were at war.

9 December 1941, orders were received from Headquarters, 76th Field Artillery Brigade that the Battalion would move as a part of the Brigade from Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming to Fort Lewis, Washington.

On the morning of 11 December 1941, the second overland march for the organization began. Upon arriving at Rawlins, Wyoming, the night of the first day's march, telephone orders were received that the Brigade would make a forced march to arrive at Fort Lewis in the shortest possible time.

Movement out from Rawlins, Wyoming was immediately made and after traveling night and day for four days through weather conditions that varied from cold, whipping winds to flurries of snow

on ice covered roads, the Battalion arrived at Fort Lewis, Washington on 15 December 1941. The unit, together with the entire 76th Field Artillery Brigade, was quartered in a tent camp at Camp Murray, Washington, a sub-station of the main Fort Lewis reservation.

On 21 December 1941, orders were received from Headquarters, IX Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington, that the unit, still a Provisional Anti-tank organization, would be activated as of that date as the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Reorganization comprised Battery "A", with enlisted personnel of the Provisional Headquarters Battery, becoming Headquarters Company, Battery "B" designated as Reconnaissance Company, Battery "C" became Company "A" and Battery "D" becoming Company "B". Commissioned personnel which heretofore had been on detached service with the Provisional Battalion, were now assigned to the new Battalion.

Captain Holmes H. Bevington, formerly Commanding Officer of Battery "A" was appointed to the Battalion Staff and designated Intelligence and Operations officer replacing Captain Harry W. Nelson who was transferred to another command. The Battalion Staff and Commanding Officers of the new companies were now:

Lieutenant Colonel Frank E. Meek	Battalion Commander
Major Ira M. F. Gaulke	Executive Officer
Captain Holmes H. Bevington	Intelligence and Operations
1st Lt. Daniel M. Carter	Adjutant
1st Lt. George H. Potter	Headquarters Company
2nd Lt. Louis Gill	Supply Officer
Captain Pyrdith E. Owen	Company "A"
1st Lt. Jewell C. Christensen	Company "B"
1st Lt. Walter B. Swope Jr.	Reconnaissance Company

The principal arm of the new Battalion under the Tables of Equipment was to be the self-propelled 75mm piece but replacement of the towed weapon, of the same calibre, now in use by the unit was not expected until some future date.

At this time, the Battalion, now a separate unit, left the 76th Field Artillery Brigade in their tent camp at Camp Murray, Washington and moved to the 41st Division Cantonment area where barracks were occupied, becoming General Headquarters Reserve troops and an assigned element of IX Corps.

Occupation of barracks completed, the Battalion performed continual guard duty at strategic points on the reservation.

On 24 January 1942, the unit was given the mission of making a road march to the vicinity of Carlisle, Washington, there to take up defensive positions along the coast. Occupying billets in the small town of Carlisle, the Battalion put guns into positions on the rocky



Lt. Col. Barney and Major Shirley

cliffs near Pacific Beach and Copalis Beach, Washington which afforded full observation of the assigned sector of coast. In addition, vehicular patrols throughout the sector were carried out constantly. Throughout the period 24 January 1942 to 12 February 1942 the Battalion maintained this assignment. On 13 February 1942, the unit was relieved of its mission and returned once again to Fort Lewis, Washington.

Unit training continued and further development of the then new tactics of a tank destroyer battalion.

In order to complete the new organization of the unit as to troop complement the next plan was to form an additional firing company to become Company "C" in order that the Battalion would have three firing companies. Enlisted personnel from the other companies within the Battalion were designated and assigned to the new company with First Lieutenant Daniel M. Carter, Battalion Adjutant, appointed as the Commanding Officer. During January 1942 1st Lieutenants John S. Fulton and Jack Kraning reported for duty with the Battalion.

On 14 March 1942, four officers and twenty-eight enlisted men were placed on special duty from the companies within the Battalion with the Tank Destroyer Training Center which had been set-up by the Unit in conjunction with the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion and 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion to train recruits who were arriving from Fort Snelling, Minnesota.

During this month March 1942, Second Lieutenants Elton W. Gray, Robert A. Hale, Jack T. Prescott and William C. Weir, who were previously on detached service with the Battalion from the 183rd Field Artillery Regiment, were assigned to the unit from that regiment.

March 20, 1942, Major James P. Barney Jr., reported to the Unit from Headquarters IX Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington as the new Battalion Commander replacing Lieutenant Colonel Frank E. Meek who was transferred to another position in the Western Command.

Further additional commissioned assignments in March and April 1942 were made to the organization bringing the officer personnel nearer the required quota. Second Lieutenants Jack H. Rothschild, Louis J. Wadle, Jess L. Cusick Jr., Edmond T. Ferguson, Wilson E. Andrews, Edwards S. Kafka, Sheldon L. Thompson, Donald N. Anderson and Robert E. Sternfels arrived from Camp Roberts, California, Second Lieutenant Frank J. Occhipinti reporting for duty from Fort Francis E. Warren, Wyoming, and Second Lieutenants Vernon F. Hovey Jr., and Paul R. Brunt reporting from Fort Riley, Kansas.

Orders were received by the Battalion Commander from Headquarters IX Corps that the unit would send one company to the vicinity of Bandon, Oregon to patrol the coast in that sector against possible invasion attempts and to maintain security over vital war

installations located in that area. Company "A", under the command of Captain Pyrdith E. Owen, was designated for that duty and on 5 April 1942, the organization moved by motor from Fort Lewis, Washington to that vicinity to execute its mission. On this date, another officer assignment brought Second Lieutenant Willis F. Cole Jr., to the Battalion.

At long last, the long awaited arrival of the half-tracked, self-propelled 75mm piece was realized during the month of April 1942. Operations and training of the Battalion now centered on the training of personnel as gun crews for the new piece. From 'dry firing' of the new piece, training of the crews went on to the live firing ranges. In addition to training on the 75mm piece, instruction on the 37mm gun was carried out. Individual marksmanship was strengthened by long, vigorous dry firing drills and was carried from the aiming at barracks walls to targets on the live firing range.

Materiel and individual arms training shifted to open terrain problems in the form of intricate map courses, strenuous night patrols and perfection by the drivers and crews in the maneuvering of the new guns. Problems were planned by the Battalion Commander for three firing companies, "A", "B" and "C" and Reconnaissance Company which were carried out in the territory adjacent to the reservation.

On 22 May 1942, the training of the new men at the Tank Destroyer Training Center in north Fort Lewis was completed and as a climax to their long, strenuous program, the new members of the Battalion staged an impressive review parade before the Battalion Commander and his staff. The officers and enlisted personnel of the Battalion who had served as instructors at the highly successful training center now returned to their former companies within the unit.

On 23 May 1942, Second Lieutenant Jack T. Prescott was relieved from assignment with Reconnaissance Company to assume command of Headquarters Company in place of First Lieutenant George H. Potter who became the new Commanding Officer of Company "A" replacing Captain Pyrdith E. Owen who left the Battalion in a cadre which included First Lieutenants Jack Kraning, Lyle W. Clark and Second Lieutenants Robert Sternfels and George Fields together with enlisted men from the various companies who were promoted as cadre personnel prior to their departure to form the 817th Tank Destroyer Battalion at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.

On 2 June 1942, Major James P. Barney Jr., Battalion Commander, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and departed for Camp Hood, Texas to enroll in an orientation course on new tactics of a tank destroyer battalion which were being elaborated on at that location, the Tank Destroyer Headquarters of the United States Army. During the absence of Lieutenant Colonel Barney, Major Ira M. F. Gaulke, Executive Officer, assumed command of the organization.

On 26 June 1942, Lieutenant Colonel James P. Barney Jr., returned from Camp Hood, Texas reassuming command of the Battalion and new additional tactics were immediately laid out for the companies and steps progressed towards their successful development.

The 22nd of July 1942, orders were received by the Battalion from Headquarters IX Corps, Fort Lewis, Washington, that the unit would move by rail to Camp Hood, Texas on 24 July 1942, for additional training in tank destroyer operations.

Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James P. Barney Jr., the Battalion entrained on 24 July 1942, by two separate trains to begin the trek to the state of Texas.

Arriving at Copperas Cove, Texas in the evening of 29 July 1942, the unit detrained and moved the equipment, which had arrived the same day by the first special train, to the vicinity southeast of Copperas Cove, Texas.

The next days were spent in the construction of a tent camp and training began on the tactical problems sent down by Tank Destroyer Training Center Headquarters to the Battalion for execution in the various cactus studded maneuver areas popularly known as Cow House Creek, Anderson Mountain and Pid Coke Crossing.

Rapid progress forward was made through concentrated work in mastering the operation of the self-propelled 75mm weapon and the planning and execution of problems against opposing forces were carried out in the territories of Gatesville, Kileen and Lampasas Texas. Emphasis was placed on perfection of anti-aircraft defense and familiarization of the tactics which were employed by simulated enemy forces against the Battalion. In the execution of the majority of problems, the unit moved out of its assigned area under cover of darkness and conducted radio silenced, black-out driving road marches toward their designated assembly area. Reaching the assembly point,

battle dispersion of equipment and personnel was made with slit trenches dug for protection of the individual. Anti-aircraft and security sections outposted the area to repel attack by opposing force patrols. At dawn, the Battalion moved to previously reconnoitered positions in the direction from which the enemy would come. With the Battalion Commander directing the disposition of his command by radio, the problems were executed in a realistic, proficient manner.

The entire Battalion next moved through a gruelling schedule of Commando training which constituted the individual crossing deep streams, climbing slippery barbed wire laid banks, scaling steep walls and movement through barbed wire entanglements made hazardous by smoke screens and exploding demolitions.

Exactness was expected from the individual in the mastering of demolitions, and the detection of dangerous booby traps. Necessity for expert marksmanship with the individual weapon was stressed and confidence was built up under live fire in machine-gun infiltration courses. Dark firing by the individual with his weapon in a blackened tunnel was a demanded requisite and group patrols in night reconnaissance work went ahead. The culmination of the Commando training found the Battalion proceeding through a realistic Nazi village which was constructed to demonstrate every known enemy booby trap. Sharpness of reaction was demanded and the training when completed, found the entire Battalion a hardened, alert unit.

From Commando training, operation once again returned to the firing ranges and through long, heat laden hours the respective companies became masters in the use of the self-propelled 75mm gun. Firing at towed targets, at different distances, the long tedious hours of tracking, which had been carried out preparatory to moving to the ranges, showed results as round after round went on its way 'busting' targets with unerring accuracy. The 37mm weapon mounted on the weapons carrier and the 50 calibre machine-gun came into much use as all personnel fired thousands and thousands of rounds in mastering these weapons against moving targets.

Changes in sections and companies of the command at this time found Captain William O. Shirley Jr., Commanding Officer of Company "A", departing for the tactical school at Camp Hood proper with Lieutenant Louis J. Wadle assuming that command. Captain Holmes H. Bevington was again assigned to the Battalion from the Tank Destroyer Center and was designated Battalion Exe-

cutive Officer replacing Major Ira M. F. Gaulke, Battalion Executive Officer since the Unit's activation, who was assigned as an assistant in the operations branch at the Tank Destroyer Center. Captain William O. Shirley Jr., returning from school at Camp Hood joined the Battalion Staff as Operations Officer succeeding Captain John S. Fulton who then left the Battalion for assignment to a unit in the West. In the Medical Detachment of the Battalion, First Lieutenants Edgar C. Brantly and Walter V. Stone reported for duty with Lieutenant Brantly becoming Battalion Surgeon in the place of Captain James H. Carlock who was assigned to the staff of the Station Hospital in Camp Hood, Texas. Lieutenant Walter V. Stone assumed his duty as Battalion Dentist.

As the time in Texas entered the first week in September 1942, Second Lieutenants Paul D. Pattinson, Gordon E. Hoover, Ethar A. Henningsen, and Ronald A. Hutchins, reported to the Battalion from Camp Roberts, California. From the Cavalry Replacement Training Center at Fort Riley, Kansas on 21 September 1942 came Second Lieutenants Bernard L. Kanoza, Burnell F. Peter, John C. Welch, King C. Culp, Donald E. Jones, Clement P. Kujawski and J. R. Merritt.

Camp work in the Battalion had progressed with numerous buildings constructed, tents walled and floored, all with the anticipation of the colder weather that was now evident. As this work neared its completion the Battalion was informed that it would move into barracks at Camp Hood Texas proper.

On 20 November 1942, the organization began its movement, leaving behind the 'tent city' and returned once again to civilized living conditions. Barracks were made immaculate, motor parks installed and administration of the command was now in a compact group.

Further operations of the Battalion consisted of demonstrations put on for visiting high ranking army officials bringing out the degree of development the Battalion had attained in mastering the tactics of tank destroying. Continuation of occupying bivouac areas by black-out driving under cover of darkness and moving out to battle positions at early dawn were two of the many types of problems executed.

In this month, November 1942, the new gun designed for tank destroyer battalions, the M-10, was received by the Battalion. A self-propelled, full tracked, open turret vehicle, mounted with a high velocity three inch gun, it was capable of destroying any enemy armored vehicle or tank.

Commissioned changes in the unit in November and December 1942, found Second Lieutenant Edward A. Mishkin replacing Second Lieutenant Burnell F. Peter as Personnel Officer with Lieutenant Peter going to Company "A". Second Lieutenants Phillip E. Cameron and Theodore L. Fawcett joined the Battalion from the Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood, Texas.

The many months of hard, continuous training made the feeling prevalent in the Battalion that soon it would know the reality of war. It had rounded into a polished fighting machine, untested, but confident as to its ability.

On 20 December 1942, the long awaited word was given the Battalion. We were to prepare to move to Fort Dix, New Jersey on 24 December 1942, preparatory to leaving the United States for service overseas.

The morning of 22 December 1942, an advance party, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James P. Barney Jr., Battalion Commander, entrained for Fort Dix, New Jersey to make preparations for the arrival of the rest of the Battalion.

Movement work quickly drew to a rapid conclusion with loading and crating of items from heavy wreckers to intricate office machinery speedily completed.

The 24th of December 1942, under the command of Major Holmes H. Bevington, Battalion Executive Officer, the entire complement boarded two special trains at Gatesville, Texas and our journey was underway.

After three days travel, which found Christmas Eve and Christmas Day spent aboard our securitized trains, the Battalion arrived in Fort Dix, New Jersey at 0230 hours the cold, dark morning of 28 December 1942.

Barracks in the staging area, that had been designated by the advance party, were occupied and last minute inspections as to proper equipment, personnel records were minutely gone over to the end of erasing the barest possibility of any last minute delay.

On 7 January 1943, one complement, consisting of Company "B", moved from the staging area to Staten Island, New York, Port of Embarkation for loading on the transport 'Santa Elena'. January 12, 1943, another component, Company "C", moved from the area to the terminal and also boarded the Santa Elena. On 13 January 1943, the remainder of the Battalion departed from the staging area and arrived at the Staten Island Terminal at 1930 hours that evening. Detraining, the component was swiftly transferred through the terminal, which was guarded by New York police, to board a ferry for transport out to the vessel that would carry us from the United States to our awaited duty.

Anchors went up on the luxurious 'Monterey' and 'Santa Elena' at 0130 hours, 14 January 1943, and the voyage was underway. Our destination, to officers and enlisted men alike, remained a mystery.

I T A L Y



AFRICA



Africa — Dust and Sand

A F R I C A



Time enroute on the ship was spent making queries as to our probable destination, viewing the assembly of the convoy, the mammoth naval escort protecting us and the wonder of whether or not possible attack would be made on us before we reached our destination.

The morning of 25 January 1943, after eleven days of travel, the call of 'Land Ahoy' went up and in the distance were visible the white domed buildings of the city of Casablanca, French Morocco, our destination, and also the scene two months before of heated fighting during the American landing at that point.

Debarkation completed that night, the Battalion moved by foot through the dark, bleak streets of Casablanca to a bivouac area located in the northwestern part of the city. The complements of Company "B" and Company "C" had arrived safely and the entire personnel component was once again complete.

Our equipment, which included new destroyers secured at the Port of Embarkation in New York, arrived safely and time was spent on minute checks for any failure of it that might mean the difference between successful or unsuccessful fulfillment of any assignment we would be called to carry out.

Refresher courses were conducted in the hills bordering Casablanca, giving us the first opportunity to fire the 3 gun with excellent results and range firing with all other organic weapons was conducted. Much individual attention was centered on the conduction of classes in maps of the terrain we would possibly encounter and periods devoted to learning a minimum number of phrases of French which would be invaluable to us.

On 22 February 1943 the unit was ordered to move to Phillipville, Algeria and then to Tunisia — the territory where heated battles were then in progress.

The Battalion's destroyers were loaded on ships in Casablanca harbor for transporting to Phillipville and the morning of 25 February 1943, the rest of the Battalion moved out from Casablanca by wheeled vehicles. The journey towards actual combat had begun.

Bivouacs enroute were occupied at Meknes and Oujda in French Morocco, Sidi Bel Abbes, Orleansville and L'Arba in Algeria. Upon arriving at Beni-Monsoura, Algeria in the evening of 2 March 1943, tension seemed to come over the unit. For now after five days of travel, the Battalion was within easy range of attack by enemy aircraft.



Ready to Roll

Departing from Beni-Monsoura, Algeria on 3 March 1943, we arrived at Constantine, Algeria at 1615 hours that afternoon. At this location, the Battalion was directed to establish bivouac until further instructions were received to continue the march.

While at Constantine, Algeria the Battalion was notified that the design it had composed and submitted as the Battalion lapel insignia and Coat of Arms had been approved by the Quartermaster General in Philadelphia, Penn.

The destroyers and track vehicles, which had arrived at Phillipville had debarked and were brought from that locality to the present location of the Battalion. Further time was spent in maintenance of equipment with additional time put in by personnel on the machine-gun range bordering our bivouac area. Destroyers and vehicles next donned their 'battle dress' and the Battalion waited with great anticipation of the coming meeting with the enemy — the veteran Afrika Corps commanded by German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

On 15 March 1943, the Unit moved from Constantine, Algeria to Tebessa, Tunisia. Strict vigilance against enemy air attack prevailed throughout the march.

Resuming the march, the Battalion moved into Haidra, Tunisia where we were ordered to halt until assigned a mission. At this time, Company "B", was detached from the Battalion and attached to an armored force as a supporting element. Maintenance of equipment again held the spotlight and everything made ready for the "top secret" order which would send us off.

At this location the Battalion was assigned to the American II Corps commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton and made an attached unit of the First U.S. Armored Division commanded by Major General Orlando Ward.

Battle orders were received on 16 March 1943 that the organization would proceed to Bir El Hafey, Tunisia, there to be assigned a mission. Alertness as to the nearness of our approach to the enemy was evident as we proceeded to the North. The route of march taken sent the Battalion through famed Kasserine Valley, known as 'Stuka Valley' by reason of the heretofore extensive concentration on that vital road by the German air force. As the march proceeded, Company "B" which had been attached to another force, rejoined the unit and the Battalion was now once again complete.

Arriving at Bir El Hafey, Tunisia in a torrential rain, positions were taken to the north of that village. Upon completing the move in, two enemy reconnaissance aircraft flew over the Battalion column but continued on to the north. The enemy had been seen, he knew we were there, what would be his next move? The Battalion waited with determination and confidence. Added knowledge as to the close presence of the enemy became known when this terse message came into the command radio from our Reconnaissance Company which moved at the head of the column, 'enemy patrol of unknown strength

sighted at Point 57, patrols seeking contact'. The much read and heard about enemy was now a reality to the Battalion both in the air and on the ground.

The assignment given the Battalion at this time directed it to cover the open valley and passes to the North of Bir El Hafey, Tunisia against a possible breakthrough by elements of the Tenth and Sixteenth German Panzer Divisions, Field Marshal Rommel's crack armored troops, from aiding the German and Italian forces in the defense of Gafsa, Tunisia, in the South, the objective of the American II Corps. With the destroyers of Companies "A", "B", "C" in position, Reconnaissance Company sending out patrols which were augmented by the security sections of the firing companies, the area to our front was continually covered but no movement of the enemy was noted.

On 17 March 1943, a roving vehicular patrol consisting of Staff Sergeant Floyd G. Severson, Private James J. Caywood and Private Walter Birkholz of Reconnaissance Company proceeded over their assigned territory and upon entering the valley to the South met enemy machine-gun and mortar fire and were never seen again. Patrols diligently searched the vicinity but to no avail. The men were entered as 'Missing in Action'. The Battalion had experienced its first tests of the full meaning of War.

While at Bir El Hafey, First Lieutenants Jack H. Rothschild, Rowland R. Martin and Louis J. Wadle advanced to Captain and Second Lieutenants John C. Welch and King C. Culp to the grade of first lieutenants.

The attack on Gafsa, Tunisia had succeeded in forcing the defenders out of that city and as the American II Corps advanced, the Battalion was ordered to move to Maknassy, Tunisia to reinforce other armored elements of the First U. S. Armored Division who were preventing the forces of German General Jurgen Von Arnim from breaking out of the mountains in the North where they were now being held in that vicinity.

The British attack in the South, under the Command of General Bernard L. Montgomery had successfully broken through the line at Mareth, Tunisia and was forcing Field Marshal Rommel's enemy forces to the North.

The importance of the Battalion's assignment would advance by the day as the enemy forces moved to the North towards Maknassy where we were now in position.

General Jurgen Von Arnim's troops must break through our defense and attempt a flanking movement against the American elements coming from the South at El Geutar, Tunisia and the British forces which were on the move further South. All American forces in the vicinity of Maknassy, of which the Battalion was one, were determined that the enemy would be held and in the end suffer annihilation or be forced to withdraw.

Company "C", under the command of Captain Daniel M. Carter, was detached from the Battalion on 23 March 1943 to reinforce elements on the southern flank of the defense line. As the company moved into position near the village of Maknassy, they were repeatedly dive bombed by the German Luftwaffe resulting in two casualties and a jeep knocked out. Later, while supporting an infantry attack to secure high ground east of Maknassy, one destroyer was knocked out by direct fire from an 88mm anti-tank gun resulting in the death of Private First Class Nils Eidsness.

The remainder of the Battalion on 25 March 1943, moved to the right flank of the line, rejoined by Company "C", detaching Company "A" and one platoon of Reconnaissance Company to remain on the left of the defensive position to ward off any attack in that sector.

Patrols from Reconnaissance Company and the firing companies continually probed the enemy positions to the East in order to furnish the Battalion command with possible enemy moves and new positions. No Axis tanks would move into the open for destroyer to tank engagements and the Battalion employed for the first time a new use for the tank destroyer, the role of indirect firing from dug-in, selected positions. Enemy retaliation caused duels to rage on through the day and night. German aircraft continually ranged over our positions, repeatedly bombing and strafing in an effort to reduce our holding strength.

March 27, 1943, in the sector defended by Company "C", the German made his awaited move. Infantry, mortars, artillery, air attacks and five Mark IV tanks were used in an effort to break through. Salvo after salvo was exchanged as Company "C" punched

back furiously in a battle that continued throughout the afternoon. The line held with heavy losses inflicted to the enemy both in materiel and personnel. Two destroyers were lost in the action by Company "C" with Sergeant Robert F. Jones being killed in action and Technician Grade IV Lloyd Holland, destroyer driver, missing in action.

Acts of gallantry that afternoon were many. Sergeant Robert F. Jones, with one destroyer of which he was in command, destroyed three enemy tanks and neutralized four 88mm pieces before his destroyer was hit by enemy fire resulting in his death. First Lieutenant John C. Welch, Platoon Commander, under fire against a veteran enemy, rallied his platoon to accelerated efforts to throw the enemy back, the successful evacuation by First Lieutenant William C. Weir, Company "C", Captain Hermon L. Monroe, Battalion Surgeon, Staff Sergeant Guerny C. Caddy and Private First Class Henry G. Wobbema in moving through heavy enemy artillery and machine-gun fire to reach burning vehicles and destroyers and rescue the casualties.

Change in command of Company "C" found First Lieutenant William C. Weir replacing Captain Daniel M. Carter who together with Second Lieutenant Gordon E. Hoover, Company "C", left the Battalion for assignment to another command.

Activity on the front resumed with patrol activity and spasmodic shelling by both forces and air attacks by the enemy continued.

During the morning of 30 March 1943, Captain Rowland R. Martin, commander of Company "B", was wounded when enemy aircraft strafed the positions of his organization. First Lieutenant Donald N. Anderson, company Executive Officer, assumed command.

On 1 April 1943, Staff Sergeant James G. Newman Company "B" was killed in action when that company's positions were subjected to enemy artillery bombardments throughout the entire day. Still another death in the Battalion resulted on 5 April 1943, when First Lieutenant Edward S. Kafka, Reconnaissance Company, while on a foot reconnaissance in forward territory, tripped an enemy teller mine resulting in his immediate death.

Enemy air attacks on the Battalion's positions continued and pressure increased along our front as the American and British forces

in the South drove towards the North. General Jurgen Von Arnim's position to our front was becoming precarious. A breakthrough or retreat were now his only remaining alternatives.

Increased shelling vollied back and forth with intermittent air sweeps by the Luftwaffe continuing on the positions of our destroyers and patrols. During the shelling on 7 April 1943, Private Robert H. Burns, Reconnaissance Company, was killed in action.

American and British forces continuing their advance from the South, captured the village of Masouna, Tunisia and General Von Arnim's forces had to leave their mountain positions in retreat with Field Marshal Rommel's men to the North.

The evening of 8 April 1943, the Battalion moved once again to the North to Bir El Hafey, Tunisia to protect Faid Pass against attempted flank movements by the enemy. Retreat by the enemy was so fast that no attempt to dislodge our positions was made.

The course of battle having by-passed the Battalion, we now moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of much shelled and bombed Sidi Bou Zid, Tunisia to await further orders. Time here was spent in a much needed rest and maintenance of equipment with orientation by the Battalion Commander informing the command of its position in the rapidly approaching final drive.

On 19 April 1943 the Unit moved to Le Kef, Tunisia and then to Ghardimaou, Tunisia arriving at that location on 20 April 1943.

On 22 April 1943, march orders were received by the Battalion Commander to move the Unit to the vicinity of Beja, Tunisia.

Our movement, which started from Sidi Bou Zid, Tunisia necessitated a march up the back of the entire Allied line in order to reach our assigned sector.

Composition of the forces opposing Field Marshal Rommel's last defense line found the Free French under the command of General Henri Girard in the extreme North, the American II Corps under the command of Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, of which the Battalion was a part, on the right of the Free French and to our right were the British forces under the command of General Bernard L. 'Monty' Montgomery.

Arriving at Beja, Tunisia in the afternoon of 23 April 1943, the firing companies and Reconnaissance Company of the Battalion went into stationary positions overlooking the hills in the North. Unique changes in personnel took place on 24 April 1943 when Staff Sergeant Donald B. Alfreds, First Sergeant Robert H. Young and First Sergeant Thomas F. Floyd, were appointed directly from the enlisted ranks as Second Lieutenants by reason of outstanding performance of duty during actual combat. These were the first such appointments in the history of the Battalion. An additional promotion elevated First Lieutenant William C. Weir, commander of Company "C" to the rank of Captain.

Movement orders were received on 28 April 1943 for the Battalion to move under cover of darkness to Oued Zarga, Tunisia. During the march Technician Grade V Kurt Wasel, Company "B", was killed when the destroyer in which he was riding rolled over a steep crevice pinning him underneath.

Upon completion of the move, the unit's position in the vicinity of Oued Zarga was to the right of Hill 609 and once again the Battalion's role was confined to indirect fire at enemy fortified positions in the mountains. No enemy aircraft attacks were attempted on our positions and the fighter and bomber forces of the U. S. Air Corps provided us with our first experience of air superiority.

On 2 May 1943, Staff Sergeant Doyle D. Grimm, Headquarters Company, died heroically when he, in the company of six other members of the Battalion, attempted to aid in the extinguishing of a fire in a vehicle loaded with explosives.

The 3rd of May 1943, the Battalion moved through the famous 'Mouse Trap' with the First Armored Division to the vicinity of Mateur, Tunisia where we went into position for the place in the final drive.

Direct firing by the destroyers from stationary positions were the tactics employed from 4 May 1943 through 5 May 1943. During this time the Luftwaffe bombed the Battalion twenty-one times in twenty-four hours wounding fifteen enlisted men.

In the early evening of 5 May 1943, field orders were received that the Battalion would move out on an offensive mission as a part of the First U. S. Armored Division with an ultimate objective as

Ferryville, Tunisia to cut off German troop and materiel concentrations there while the remainder of the American II Corps drove to Bizerte, Tunisia. The British Eighth Army was to feint a breakthrough to Tunis, Tunisia from Mammamet, Tunisia while the British First Army, under the command of General Anderson, drove on Tunis.

At 0600 hours, 6 May 1943, the preliminary attack moved out to find how much of an enemy force confronted them. Probing enemy positions, the force of which the Battalion was a part, met heavy fire and was forced to return to their original positions. From stationary positions throughout the morning of 6 May 1943, the Battalion employed direct fire at lodged enemy positions. During these operations Captain Louis J. Wadle, Company "A", and two enlisted men were wounded in action. First Lieutenant Jess L. Cusick Jr., company executive officer, assumed command of Company "A".

At 1600 hours that afternoon after the completion of an intense artillery barrage a smoke screen was laid down by the supporting artillery and the main attack was on.

Covering the advancing infantry, the destroyers sent round after round into known enemy anti-tank positions, machine-gun and mortar crews, shattering the enemy defensive positions. The enemy broke and fled in confused retreat, white banded prisoners began streaming down from the hills in surrender as the attack gained momentum.

After two days of this vicious offensive on the morning of 9 May 1943 the German commander asked Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, U.S.A., for terms of surrender. The terms issued at the historic Casablanca Conference 'Unconditional Surrender' were demanded by the American general and were accepted.

At 1105 hours, Sunday, 9 May 1943, the 'cease firing' order reached the Battalion positions. Forty thousand prisoners were taken in our sector, immense quantities of materiel and the touted theory of the Nazi supermen had been exploded all over the Tunisian plains. Months of hard continuous training, combat in all types of weather conditions, an ocean crossing through thousands of miles of enemy infested waters had brought the Battalion to great initial victory, and we had come through our first great test of fire.

The French in the North had effected surrender of hostile forces in that sector and the American II Corps had secured the great naval base of Bizerta, Tunisia.

On the British flank, General Bernard Montgomery's British Eighth Army by feinting an attack at Mammemet, Tunisia, drawing the majority of the enemy concentration to that point, enabled General Anderson's First Army to sweep through to capture Tunis, Tunisia splitting the enemy forces and forcing the German and Italian to flee to the Cap Bon peninsula, tiny outpost southeast of the city of Tunis, Tunisia.

On 13 May 1943, the last of the Axis forces surrendered with sixteen generals being taken prisoner, including German General Jurgen Von Arnim whose forces the Battalion had fought against in the South at Maknassy, Tunisia on up to the North. Two hundred and fifty thousand 'Alamonds' and 'Eyties' were erased from the armies of fanatic Adolf Hitler and boastful Benito Mussolini.

The culmination of the final drive for the Battalion found it at El Alia, Tunisia where relaxation from the tension we had been experiencing from the months of combat was the order of the moment.

Trophies of war were many and on 12 May 1943, the march to the First U. S. Armored Division assembly area in the vicinity of Ferryville, Tunisia was made.

On 17 May 1943, on the sloping plains near Ferryville, Tunisia, in a Memorial Service conducted by Battalion Chaplain James Flaherty, solemn tribute was paid to the officers and men of the Battalion who had given their lives in order that our mission could succeed.

Detached from the First Armored Division on 18 May 1943, the Battalion prepared to move to Sebdou, Algeria, the location that had been selected for the Unit to rest and aid in the instruction of other tank destroyer battalions that had recently arrived overseas.

Destroyers were loaded at Ghardimaou, Tunisia, with crew complements, and sent by rail to join the Battalion again at that location.

On 20 May 1943 the march elements moved out and on 27 May 1943, arrived at Sebdou, Algerie. The return march of the Battalion was made through Ghardimaou, Tunisia once again, Ain-M-Alia, Beni Monsoura, L'Arba, Orleansville, Sidi Bel Abbes in Algerie, all thronged with joy crowded inhabitants.

During the return rail movement of the destroyers, Technician Grade V Harold H. Stickel, Company "A", was killed when he was electrocuted by an overhead power line.

In Sebdou, Algeria organized camp was once again established by the Battalion and duties relegated to near garrison life.

Presentation ceremonies were held in which members of the Battalion were decorated for acts of heroism in the recently completed campaign. For his act of gallantry above and beyond the call of duty in the Maknassy sector, Sergeant Robert F. Jones, Company "C", was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Good news was received during the month of June 1943, from Headquarters NATOUA that Staff Sergeant Floyd Severson, Reconnaissance Company, missing in action since 17 March 1943, stating that he was a prisoner of war in the hands of the Italian government. Hope heightened that his two companions on the patrol, Private James J. Caywood and Private Walter F. Birkholz, would also be soon reported safe.

Personnel changes in the Battalion while at Sebdou, Algeria found Captain Hermon L. Monroe, Battalion Surgeon, leaving the organization with that position being taken over by the assistant Battalion Surgeon, First Lieutenant Edgar C. Brantly, First Lieutenant Walter V. Stone, Battalion Dentist, left the command with vacancies in the Medical Detachment being filled with assignment of First Lieutenant Sidney Edelson as assistant Battalion Surgeon and First Lieutenant Kirk A. Dutton as Battalion Dentist. Other assignments were Captain Carlin L. Wilson reporting from the Tank Destroyer Center, Camp Hood, Texas replacing Captain Walter B. Swope Jr., who returned to the United States for duty in Camp Hood, Texas, Second Lieutenants Albert Vergano, Edward W. Ira, Frank Wilson, former enlisted men of the Battalion, Second Lieutenants Harold O. Weisweaver, Gerald W. Dotson, Leon F. Sanford,

George H. Ritter, Frank F. Stoltz, Butler H. Lager and Luther L. Lewis.

Training in the Battalion found the unit putting in long hours on the firing ranges which were located in the dust choked hills in the vicinity of Sebdou working with nearby artillery units in coordinating massed fire on specific targets.

As the warm summer months drew to a close and with the series of events in the zone of combat comprising the subjugation of Pantelleria by Allied air power, the invasion of Sicily in which eighteen enlisted men of the Battalion participated as radio operators and military police, the victory on that Island by the American Seventh Army and the British Eighth, stepping stones were made secure for the assault on the Fortress Europa.

The Battalion was now completely reequipped with new destroyers and the predominate thought was whether or not we would be used in the initial wave against the mainland ruled by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Time was marked before the jump off would be a reality.



P X at San Pietro

On 19 July 1943 the world was electrified by the fall of Benito Mussolini as the Premier of Italy. King Victor Emanuel appointed Marshal Pietro Badoglio as the new Premier and hopes ran high that this might prove to be a turning point for the ultimate elimination of the Italian forces from the conflict.

Orders were received by the Battalion on 17 August 1943 that the Battalion would move in three serials to staging areas in Algiers and Oran preparatory to making a movement by water to a destination unknown to all personnel of the Unit at that time.

On 19 August 1943, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel James P. Barney Jr., Battalion Commander, nine officers and one hundred and sixty-seven enlisted men departed from Sebdou, Algeria by motor convoy for Algiers, Algeria.

Arriving at the First General Depot in Algiers, immediate preparations went ahead for the water movement. Vehicles were water-proofed, equipment checked and on 5 September 1943, the first serial of the Battalion boarded three different British vessels the Tarantia, Derwint Hall and the Buckingham.

As we waited in the Algiers harbor for our ships to pull anchor we felt sure that the initial wave was about to strike.

September 3rd, 1943 the British Eighth Army under the command of General Bernard L. Montgomery landed on the southeast tip of the Italian mainland at Reggio Calabria. The invasion was on for the Allied Forces but no Americans were with the British and Canadian landing forces.

Italy was to be our destination, we knew, but where we would land on the Italian mainland was a shrouded, tense question.

On 8 September 1943, as we waited in the harbor of Algiers, news came that Italy had surrendered unconditionally to the United Nations. The news rocked the world but optimism was cut short when we realized that the Germans still remained in Italy and regardless of the fact that the Italian government had surrendered, they had

to be driven out. As the first serial of the Battalion moved out in convoy on the Mediterranean on 11 September 1943, it knew that it was in for hard, tough days until the German was pushed from within the Italian mainland towards his center of inhumanity — Berlin.

The American Fifth Army under the command of Lieutenant General Mark W. Clark, landed in the Gulf of Salerno, Italy on 9 September 1943, and were battling savagely for the establishment of a beachhead. The pincer movement that had proved so successful on the plains of Tunisia was now in employment again. The composition of the forces found the British and Canadian forces in the southeast, with the mission of moving up the center of the Italian 'boot' and along the eastern and western shore-lines, while the Americans drove into the center of the German line in the west and north to cut off the retreat of the enemy withdrawing from the south and the ultimate consolidation of the two armies for the sweep to the north.

Fierce fighting raged in the Salerno area for four days with the American forces throwing back German counter-attack after counter-attack to make secure their beachhead.

As the first serial of the Battalion moved closer to the Salerno area the American and British navies could be heard sending salvo after salvo into the German positions to aid the land forces in their movement inland. The Fifth Army had wrested the initiative from the Germans and was slowly pushing the enemy deeper into the center and to the north.

On 16 September 1943, seven days after the initial American landing on the European continent, the first serial of the Battalion moved into the Salerno Gulf just to the west of Cappaci, Italy. The convoy was immediately greeted by the German Luftwaffe in the strength of eight raiders but the anti-aircraft power of the protecting battle ships and shore batteries shot four of the aircraft into the sea and no damage resulted from the bombs they were able to let down. Our refresher course, after the months of battle in Tunisia, was now over and we set ourselves for some trying moments before we set foot on the mainland.

Activity was great in the improvised harbor with barges, amphibious trucks and landing craft of all types hurriedly transporting

supplies to shore for the use of the men who were fighting so desperately.

On 19 September 1943 after three days of waiting for our turn to debark, during which time we went through nineteen air raids, the first serial of the Battalion went down the ship ladders of their three ships into landing barges for transporting to shore.

At 1830 hours, 19 September 1943, we waded from the stopping point of our Navy craft and stepped onto European soil, into the impregnable Fortress Europa and back into combat as an attached unit of the American VI Corps and as an assigned part of the American Fifth Army.

From the beaches our first serial moved by truck to the vicinity of the Cappaci, Italy airfield where we bivouaced for the night.

The first assignment for the serial on Italian soil was to be a Reconnaissance Detachment for the American Fifth Army until the remaining two serials of the Battalion arrived.

From Cappaci, Italy the Battalion detachment moved the next day, 21 September 1943, to the vicinity of Pastum, Italy where we awaited orders for our mission.

The day of 21 September 1943, the second serial of the Battalion arrived and one component was now all that remained to complete the movement from Africa.

A combat team under the command of the Commanding General of the 34th Division consisting of the 100th Battalion of Japanese-Americans spearheaded by the Reconnaissance Company of the 776 T D Bn. was given the mission of outflanking the German positions around Naples by capturing Benevento.

The mission proved a pain-staking assignment of sweeping enemy mine laid roads and supplying information to the Division as to hostile gun positions and enemy troop concentrations.

On 29 September 1943, First Lieutenant Shelden L. Thompson, Reconnaissance Company Commander and one other officer and four enlisted men of that company were wounded when the halftracks in which they were patrolling an advanced area hit enemy teller mines. With the evacuation of First Lieutenant Thompson, First Lieutenant

Paul R. Brunt assumed command of Reconnaissance Company. Our first casualties in Italy had been slight — added consideration for mines had been learned and the mission of the Combat Team went forward.

In the evening of the same day, 29 September 1943, Sergeant Millard E. Stigen, Reconnaissance Company, a member of a foot patrol, was hit by enemy machine-gun fire and was evacuated with serious wounds which later proved fatal. The patrol, reinforced, soon revenged their leader.

Our activity moved farther to the North and the British Eighth moved ahead on our right taking Foggia, Italy and its nest of airfields to strengthen the Allied already proven air superiority.

To Lieutenant Colonel James P. Barney Jr., Battalion Commander, Technical Sergeant Dominic Manfredo and Technician Grade V Arthur J. Whelan, went the honor of being the first Americans to enter the hotly contested city of Benevento, Italy which was accomplished when they went in as a patrol to detect any enemy positions around that city.

The Battalion's destroyers, which had been on ships in Salerno Bay, had been debarked and moved to the area near Pasteum, Italy which was occupied by the second serial of the unit, and were now ready to move.

Reconnaissance Company was relieved from their mission with the 34th Infantry Division on 5 October 1943 and the detachment moved back to Montemorono, Italy to join with the rest of the combat components which had moved from Pasteum, Italy to that assembly position. During the completion of the movement of the destroyers, Sergeant Raymond E. Larson, Company "A", was killed in action, when the destroyer, of which he was the commander, slid towards a deep crevice and rolled over him as he attempted to escape from it.

On 9 October 1943, the fighting elements intact, the Battalion moved to the North to Rotondi, Italy to await assignment to a sector. The move was completed through a pouring rain, over bypasses constructed near blown bridges and by agonizing blackout driving. No accidents were reported when we arrived at Rotondi, Italy at 0330 hours, 10 October 1943.

The day of 10 October 1943, orders were received for the three firing companies, "A", "B", and "C" to move forward to be attached for fire missions with the 175th, 125th and 151st Field Artillery Battalions. The many hours spent during the summer months in Sebdou, Algeria, adapting and perfecting fire power in coordination with Field Artillery units was already going to be exploited. The confidence of the firing companies as to the success of their missions was great.

The troop disposition which now centered to the South of the Volturno River found the British Tenth Corps, a part of the American Fifth Army on the left, the American elements of the Fifth Army in the center and the British Eighth Army, including Canadian forces, on the right. The German stand was on strong positions on the northern side of the swift Volturno River.

Reconnaissance Company of the Battalion had moved up and their patrol activity in search of river crossings was continuous.

During patrol duty on 11 October 1943, the company lost one light tank when it hit an enemy mine, wounding one enlisted man and forcing the remainder of the crew to evacuate their mobile fighter. As they returned on foot to join the Battalion, they encountered enemy machine gun fire which forced them to lie in the open until darkness when they were able to make their way back. As a result of the enemy fire, two more enlisted men of that company were wounded.

Another officer assignment at this time found Second Lieutenant John T. Galvin joining the Battalion.

At 0120 hours, 16 October 1943, the order to open fire came from the command and the heretofore tense, pitch darkness was broken as blast after blast was sent toward the holed in Germans. The infantry, which had moved out as the merciless, friendly barrage went on unabated, succeeded in gaining a foothold on the opposite side of the river in the face of determined Nazi resistance. The Volturno, the great natural defense line for the enemy south of the mountains was bridged.

When the engineers were unable to get a bridge over the river because of the enemy artillery fire on the bridge sites, one platoon of Company "C" forded the river in the early morning of 17 October

1943 and proceeded to the North to contact the infantry commander in that sector for fire missions.

18 October 1943 found all the companies except two platoons which were attached to the 135th and 168th Infantry Regiments, returned to the Battalion, which was now in the vicinity of Limatola, Italy.

On a mounted patrol for the purpose of selecting proposed gun positions during the afternoon of 19 October 1943, one officer and four enlisted men of Company "A" were wounded by enemy mortar fire.



Mines

The firing companies next moved up into positions and the role of overhead firing support used at the Volturno River crossing, now reverted to indirect volleys into crevices and sides of the enemy held mountains to our front.

On 21 October 1943, news was received that Staff Sergeant Harold T. Brown, Company "A", seriously wounded by mortar fire on 19 October 1943, had died as a result of the wounds received.

During their firing missions of 22 October 1943, Company "B" was credited with destroying a German Nebelwerfer and Company "C" eradicated an enemy manned observation post.

In continued operations, Company "C" and one platoon of Reconnaissance Company forded the Volturno for the second time to support the 135th Infantry Regiment in the attack on Alife, Italy and then were in direct support of the 133rd Infantry Regiment in the capture of San Angelo D' Alife, Italy.

The Luftwaffe, which had not shown itself for sometime, dive-bombed the area of Company "C" on 29 October 1943, and killed Technician Grade V Jesse L. Anderson and seriously wounding two other enlisted men of that company.

Major Holmes H. Bevington, Battalion Executive Officer, who had been with the Battalion since its formation, which included the prewar antitank days, left the unit on 30 October 1943 to assume command of another tank destroyer battalion in the theater. Captain William O. Shirley Jr., Operations Officer, assumed the new duties of Battalion Executive Officer. 894th

Intermittent fire missions and slow moves forward located the Battalion in the vicinity above Alife, Italy.

Additional honors were received by personnel of the Battalion when on 31 October 1943, the entire Pioneer Platoon of Reconnaissance Company, was cited in orders issued by Major General Charles W. Ryder, Commanding General of the 34th Infantry Division for skillfully performing mine sweeping operations during the initial days of the campaign.

Movement continued slowly northward against the mountain hidden enemy with the firing companies of the Battalion adding support to the artillery in the destruction of positions but always on the alert to carry out the primary mission of a self-propelled attack to crush any enemy armor thrust.

November 8, 1943 found the German airmen stalking the Battalion in attacks on the areas of Company "B" and Company "C". Concentrated anti-aircraft fire drove them off with no damage resulting from bombs which fell wide of their targets.

Continued movement to the North found the villages of Caprieti and Pratella, Italy passed through.

The Battalion now became part of a task force with a mission to aid additional armored units, cover the advance of the infantry, afford tank destroyer protection for an American parachute regiment and prepared to direct massed fire on Colli, Italy.

During the fulfillment of this mission, Company "B" was shelled by enemy artillery with one officer and three enlisted men were lightly wounded in action and Corporal Donald F. Ramhorst killed. The holed enemy was still determined against our advance.

The Battalion's firing continued to attempt to reduce that determination and in a counter-battery assault by the enemy two enlisted men of Company "A" were seriously wounded.

The weather, which had decidedly favored the Battalions advance by staying clear, now changed to a torrential downpour along the entire front. Though conditions became nearly unbearable, the Battalion continued firing night and day with added intensiveness against the mountain positions of the German.

Clearer weather on 12 November 1943 found the German Air Corps in another dive-bombing attack on the Battalion's position with a result to the intruders of one of his aircraft shot out of the sky by anti-aircraft fire.

Movement forward of the Battalion centered it in positions to the East of Roccaravindola, Italy with the destroyers of the firing companies having missions to support artillery units and provide covering for infantry regiments to the north.

Demolitions, booby traps and harassing ingenuities of the enemy which had made our progress to the North slow from the initiation into the Italian operation struck forcefully on 28 November 1943 when one officer and four enlisted men of Company "C" were wounded by the explosion of enemy mines laid on the outer edge of their bivouac area.

On 29 November 1943, while returning his armored vehicle to the rear from the front lines for repair, Private First Class Norman Togstad, Company "A", was accidentally killed when his vehicle fell through a bridge he had to pass over on his way to the rear.

Casualties again resulted in the Battalion the afternoon of 1 December 1943 when three enlisted men of Headquarters Company were wounded in a sneak bombing raid by nine unidentified aircraft flying from the east over our positions southwest of Roccaravindola, Italy. Concentrated shelling from the guns of the enemy in the area occupied by a detachment of Reconnaissance Company claimed the life of Private William R. Hanson late that same afternoon and wounded the assistant Battalion Surgeon, First Lieutenant Sidney Edelson, who was in that area administering aid to personnel wounded by the concentration.

Fire missions of the Battalion relegated to observed and unobserved harassing shelling of enemy held roads to the west of Ceresuolo, Italy with the destruction of components of an enemy pack train reported as a result of one mission and restricting the use of this road to the enemy — so badly needed to supply his troops in the mountains, and the destruction of a three gun battery of 88's was later confirmed.

On 12 December 1943, the 34th Infantry Division, to which we were an attached Unit was replaced in position by the Second French Moroccan Infantry Division. Though the 34th Division went into a rest period, the Battalion was selected by the French Division to remain in the line with them as supporting artillery and to furnish protection against enemy tanks.

After ninety two consecutive days of continuous action, the Battalion was ordered to return to Alife, Italy on 23 December 1943 for a rest and so came the opportunity to forget the innumerable rigors of combat we had faced.

Relaxation was interrupted when the Battalion was directed to reorganize under new tables of organization and equipment, a declaration which necessitated the transfer of one hundred thirty six members of the command on 26 December 1943 to meet the personnel requirement.

The new year of 1944 was ushered in in a flurry of rain, snow and powerful gales of wind. On 3 January 1944, the order came for the Battalion to return to the front, reattached to the 34th Infantry Division to support them in a new sector — the drive to wrest Cassino, Italy from the enemy.

The afternoon of 5 January 1944, Company "B", detached from the Battalion, moved to the vicinity of San Pietro, Italy to support operations against that village with the remainder of the Battalion remaining in its present position. The evening of 13 January 1944, all other elements of the Battalion moved out and proceeded to the West of Venafrò, Italy, moving into firing positions adjacent to Company "B" which reverted to Battalion control.

Missions to the Battalion found the three firing companies, "A", "B" and "C" firing observed indirect fire on the road leading to Cassino, Italy.



Changing Tracks

The evening of 16 January 1944, one enlisted man of Company "A" was wounded when the half-track he was driving hit a teller mine. In the early morning hours of 17 January 1944, in an attempt to retrieve the demolished armored vehicle, the huge wrecker of Headquarters Company, commanded by Technician Grade IV Albert Colianni hit a cunningly concealed box mine resulting in the death of Technician Grade IV Colianni and wounding the driver of the vehicle.

The Battalion's firing missions continued with targets still being the roads into and east of strongly fortified Cassino. Enemy artillery retaliation was persistent.

San Pietro, Italy, which had been the scene of bitter fighting fell and as the attack continued in intensity the enemy was forced back. Company "A" and Company "C" moved forward and Company "B" occupied a position in the vicinity of Cevaro, Italy on 23 January 1944.

With General Charles W. Ryder's 34th Infantry Division now attacking the Rapido River, Company "A" and Company "C" of the Battalion moved into position in close support of those troops sending hundreds and hundreds of rounds of high explosive across the Rapido into enemy positions. Ferocity increased in the intensity of the attack with the infantry attempting crossings only to be turned back by vicious enemy counter-fire from elaborately planned positions in the high ground overlooking the Rapido.

In an enemy shelling on 28 January 1944 laid on the position of Company "A", three enlisted men of that company were wounded with wounds suffered by Private Carl A. Applequist later proving fatal.

Company "C" and Company "A" continued their shelling of enemy positions in the Saint Angelo and Rapido River areas with excellent results. Company "B", which had been performing missions in the vicinity of Cevaro, Italy returned to Battalion control and joined with the other two firing companies in support of the Rapido River operations.

The day of 31 January 1944, one platoon of Company "C" crossed the Rapido River to support the 756th Tank Battalion in the area southeast of Cassino, Italy, near the famous barracks.

In the morning of the next day the rest of the Battalion moved forward with Companies "A" and "B" positioned and firing harassing fire around the Liri Valley sector, with the remaining components of Company "C" moving to support the tank elements in the vicinity between Cairo and Cassino.

In a move on 2 February 1944, Company "B" went into position on the forward slope of Mount Trocchio, with the order not to fire until directed because of its exposed position. The remainder of the Battalion's guns continued the pounding of the enemy positions around the Liri Valley, a sector we would exploit should Cassino fall.

Throughout the next day Company "A" and Company "C" continued firing on objectives bordering the Liri Valley. In the evening of that day one enlisted man of Company "C" was wounded by an enemy artillery concentration.

Despite the battering we kept up on the German, our gains were negligible. Again on the evening of 6 February 1944 another enlisted man of Company "C" was wounded. The costliness of the attainment of our objective was mounting.



Ball Game

In close support of the 756th Tank Battalion in their attempt to enter Cassino the following day, Company "C" knocked out, by direct fire, one enemy tank and a hostile Nebelwerfer — the "screaming meemie", a six barreled mortar.

The Battalion's main action continued to be borne by Company "C" with that organization firing 1200 rounds of high explosive in covering tanks of the 756th Tank Battalion and supporting the 133rd Infantry Regiment in a direct assault on Cassino.

Hard fighting in and around Cassino continued with fanatical resistance by the Germans. Despite continued heroic attempts by American forces, which saw divisions reduced to regiment size and battalion's to company size, the enemy from his positions on Hangman's Hill and Monte Cassino Abbey, held his control of Cassino.

On 12 February 1944, Company "C" was subjected to an intense enemy artillery barrage taking the lives of Staff Sergeant Oscar E. Lystad, Technician Grade V Gustave Hager and wounding two other men of that organization.

In the month of February 1944, additional enlisted men of the Battalion advanced to an officer status when Master Sergeant Donald M. Kolbo, Headquarters Company, was appointed as a Warrant Officer (j.g.) assuming the duties of Battalion Personnel Officer with Staff Sergeant Martin Tobiassen, Company "A" being commissioned a Second Lieutenant as was First Sergeant Clarence Bauer of Company "C".

The remainder of February and the first weeks of March 1944, the Battalion continued in fierce fighting in the Cassino sector with gains along the front being measured in feet. The 34th Infantry Division, to whom the Battalion had been attached, had been relieved for a rest, but the Battalion remained on the line in support of New Zealand troops and British Indian troops.

On 15 March 1944, beginning in the morning until early afternoon, hundreds of allied fighters and bombers approached from all directions with one aim and one objective — the pulverizing of Cassino in order that ground troops could effect its capture and move on to the North. Despite the thousands of tons of bombs dropped on the city, which saw the Abbe Monte Cassino reduced to rubble and the city virtually in ruins, fanatical Nazi paratroopers barred the entrance of Allied troops.

After months of bitter fighting the Battalion was relieved from the line and moved to the vicinity of Camigliano, Italy for a rest.

While at this location another enlisted man was given a battle-field promotion with Staff Sergeant John B. Haywood, Company "A" advancing to Second Lieutenant. Other additions to officer personnel found Second Lieutenants Clifford Holmes, Arnold Cohen, James Claffey joining the Battalion.

Beginning on 13 April 1944, the unit sent destroyers from the three firing companies up to the front on roving fire missions. In a mass displacement of troops, to the complete unawareness of the Nazi command, allied armies were moved from one sector to another preparatory to staging an all-out assault to join the Anzio beachhead which had been established in January and then to Rome. The Fifth Army, of which the Battalion was a part, moved from the center of the line to the west coast and the British Eighth Army spread out to the left, augmented by Polish troops. French forces took over the zone of action between British and American troops.



Rome — First Day

On 28 April 1944, Lieutenant Colonel James P. Barney Jr., in compliance with orders from Fifth Army, left the Battalion and returned to Camp Hood, Texas to be an instructor at that station. Major William O. Shirley Jr., Battalion Executive Officer, assumed command of the Battalion with Captain Rowland R. Martin, Commanding Officer of Company "B" coming to the staff as Executive Officer with First Lieutenant Donald N. Anderson assuming command of Company "B".

The eleventh of May, 1944, the entire Battalion moved back into position southwest of Minturno, Italy to furnish direct support

to the 85th Infantry Division in the new offensive. Company "A" was in support of the 339th Infantry Regiment, Company "B" with the 338th Infantry Regiment, Company "C" with the 337th Infantry Regiment while Reconnaissance Company was to be used as Division reconnaissance.

At 2300 hours, 11 May 1944, with the Battalion's destroyers along with hundreds of other guns along the entire front laying down a murderous artillery preparation the southern offensive was opened. In the Battalion sector, the preparation was directed on the vaunted Hitler Line. The preparation over, the infantry elements moved forward and attacked the line.

With the Battalion providing direct support to the 85th Infantry Division, the portions of the line in the sector we were engaged was breached and the offensive gained momentum. Delivering round after round into enemy pill-boxes and laying the vicious firepower of all the destroyers to the immediate front of the fast moving infantry, the offensive rolled into high gear. Castellnorato, San Angelo, Monte Camino, Trivio, Formia, Itri, Fondi, Terracina, Cori and Frascati fell in rapid succession and on the morning of 4 June 1944, the Battalion stood on the threshold of the Vatican City — Rome. Moving in with elements of the 85th Infantry Division, the unit passed on through a joy maddened city, across the Tiber River and on to the North.

In the amazing offensive of the past twenty four days, the Battalion had travelled nearly one hundred and fifty miles. The fighting, though swift, was not without cost to the Battalion. The battles in the sweep from the South had taken the lives of Sergeant Harold F. Mooney, Company "C" on 18 May 1944, Corporal Henry G. Popp, Reconnaissance Company on 19 May 1944, Sergeant Ernest E. Parris, Reconnaissance Company on 20 May 1944 and three officers and seventeen enlisted men had been wounded in action. This period of time found Staff Sergeant Adler H. Bratland, Company "B" commissioned as a second lieutenant on 21 April 1944.

The remaining days of the month of June 1944, found the Battalion steadily moving to the North, over roads strewn with wrecked and abandoned enemy equipment.

In this advance casualties again were sustained by the Battalion. On 7 June 1944, Second Lieutenant John B. Haywood, Company "A",

was killed in action by enemy artillery fire and the day of 25 June 1944, found the lives of Sergeant Sigval M. Carlson, Sergeant Francis M. Zerr and Technician Grade V. Norman C. Dutoit, all of Company "B" being taken as a result of enemy action. In addition, eleven more enlisted men of the Battalion had been wounded.

During this time also, First Sergeant Clarence W. Byrne, Headquarters Company, was commissioned a Second Lieutenant and Captain Louis J. Wadle, Company "A" was added to the Battalion Staff as



Forum Mussolini Rest Center

Operations Officer with First Lieutenant Willis F. Cole Jr., taking command of Company "A".

The Battalion's advance had carried it through Cecina, Italy, then to the right in the vicinity of Miemo, Italy.

On 3 July 1944, in this vicinity, while on a reconnaissance in forward territory for company positions, Private Dale H. Ellingson, Reconnaissance Company, was seriously wounded by enemy sniper fire. Despite every effort by his companions to remove him from

the hostile territory, they were driven from the ground by a large enemy force.

In a bitter fight that went on through five days, one platoon of Company "C", with elements of Reconnaissance Company, held off the attacking enemy. Three light tanks of Reconnaissance Company were destroyed by enemy action. The ground once taken, a search for Private Ellingson was immediately made but he could not be found and was entered as missing in action.

During the heated fighting in the vicinity of Miemo, Italy, other than the loss of Private Dale H. Ellingson, two officers and eight enlisted men were wounded in action.

Again on 10 July 1944 another missing in action entry went on the Battalion casualty register when First Lieutenant Sheldon L. Thompson was reported as missing while discharging his duty as a patrol leader.

Working with the 34th Infantry Division, the 91st Infantry Division and the First Armored Division the Battalion was continuously engaged in the drive from Rome to the Arno River.

On the 27th of August 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Dwight E. Moorhead, assumed command of the Battalion with Major William O. Shirley Jr., becoming Battalion Executive Officer. Major Rowland R. Martin, who had advanced to that rank in July became Operations Officer with Captain Louis J. Wadle assuming the duties of assistant Operations Officer.

On 3 September 1944, the Battalion Commander received orders that the Battalion would be relieved from assignment with the Fifth Army and would become assigned to the Seventh Army commanded by Lieutenant General Alexander M. Patch as of 9 September 1944. Movement orders stipulated that Naples, Italy would be the port from which we would embark for operations in France.

On 6 September 1944, the destroyers and half-tracks, complete with crews, moved out as the first of the Battalion's serials to make a march to Piombino, Italy where they would be embarked on ships for water shipment to Naples, Italy.

In the late afternoon of 7 September 1944, the remainder of the Battalion, mounted in wheeled vehicles, began the road march

to the South. Travelling the entire night the Battalion arrived in Rome where a one day delay was made for rest and maintenance.

Arriving in Naples, Italy at 1400 hours, 9 September 1944, the Battalion moved to a sub-staging area in the vicinity of Ippodromo, Italy. The next event of the day found tents springing up throughout the area, vehicle parks established and liaison set in motion with our newly assigned Army headquarters. Materiel transported by water arrived and maintenance of equipment went forward.



Lt. Col. Moorhead

The Battalion then learned that it would be equipped with the new M-36 tank destroyer. Another full tracked, open turret vehicle, with a weight of 32 tons but in place of the three inch gun that was on the M-10 destroyer, it was mounted with a high velocity 90mm piece. These new, powerful guns were drawn and training of the destroyer crews as to the working of their new piece went into operation. Firing of the guns was completed on ranges near the Battalion area.

F R A N C E



G E R M A N Y

&

A U S T R I A



Picnic in the Woods