



801<sup>st</sup>.

TANK DESTROYER  
BATTALION

ORIGIN & HISTORY

OF THE

801 ST.

TANK DESTROYER

BATTALION

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Back in February 1893 the Signal and Telegraph Corps of the 3rd Brigade was organized in Albany, New-York. During January 1902 this corps was redesignated Troop "B", 3rd Squadron, 1st New York Cavalry. Between 1902 and 1911 Troop "B" was joined by Troop "C" of Utica and Troop "D" of Syracuse. Today these troops are respectively Companies "B", "A" and "C" of this battalion.

In 1916 the 1st New York Cavalry was ordered to the Mexican border and stationed at McAllen, Texas, where it served for about nine months. In October 1917 the regiment was transformed into the 104th, 105th and 106th Machine Gun Battalions of the 27th Division of World War I fame. With this division, these units served nobly in France and Belgium, participating in the Flanders, Ypres-Lys and Somme Offensive campaigns. After returning to the United-States in 1919 the division was demobilized. Shortly thereafter the 1st New York Cavalry was reconstituted as the 121st Cavalry, New York National Guard. The usual peacetime routine of a National Guard unit was followed until October 1940, when the regiment was broken up and Troops "A" of Utica, "B" of Albany and "K" of Syracuse, plus a Headquarters, Headquarters Company and Medical Detachment from Albany were organized into the 101st Anti-Tank Battalion under the command of Lt. Col. Reginald H. Wood. This battalion was federalized and inducted by order of the President of the United States 6 January 1941.

At Fort Benning, Georgia, the battalion learned its anti-tank tactics under the tutelage of the 94th Anti-Tank Battalion (now the 894th Tank Destroyer Battalion). In June 1941 the battalion was ordered to the Louisiana Maneuvers with the 74th and the 94th Anti-Tank Battalions. While there, these three units were placed under the command of the 1st Provisional Anti-Tank Group, under which they operated throughout these and the subsequent Carolina Maneuvers. Late in November the group was disbanded and the units returned to their original stations.

On 15 December 1941 the battalion was redesignated the 801st Tank Destroyer Battalion (Heavy); one of the original tank destroyer battalions formed. On the same day Major Ralph A. Glatt, the Battalion Executive officer took command of the battalion. In February he left and command was taken over by Major Harry C. Larter, Jr. After a change of station to Camp Sutton, North Carolina, in March, the battalion was equipped with the new destroyer (75-mm gun mounted on the half-track). During the fall of 1942, the battalion participated in the Carolina Maneuvers under the 1st Provisional Tank Destroyer Group. Following these maneuvers, the battalion moved to Camp Hood, Texas, for advance unit training. In October 1942 Major Elmer B. Horsfall, the Battalion Executive Officer, assumed command. Upon completion of advance unit training, the battalion was assigned to the Tank Destroyer Training Brigade as school troops, in which capacity it functioned for almost a year. During this period it assisted in the development of the rocket launcher, the 3-inch gun, both towed and self-propelled, the M-10 and M-18 destroyers and the M-8 armored car. It also had a hand in the preparation of numerous training films. All this was in addition to the regular training and demonstrations for the Tank Destroyer School. Furthermore, over 200 men were sent to officer candidate schools.

On 15 February 1944 the battalion entrained at Camp Hood for the Boston Port of Embarkation, from which it sailed 28 February on H. M. S. "Britannic", landing at Liverpool, England, on 11 March 1944. From there it was moved to southern England and attached to the VII Corps, which shortly thereafter further attached it to the 4th Infantry Division, necessitating a move to Chudleigh. Here the battalion underwent a period of intensive training in one of the secondary roles of tank destroyer units, indirect artillery fire. On completion of this, it took part in the invasion maneuvers.

The 4th Division spearheaded the attack on "Utah Beach" (near Ste. Mere Eglise, Normandy) 6 June 1944. Seven days later the 801st joined it on the continent and participated in the liberation of Montebourg, Valognes and Cherbourg. Company "A" was attached to the task force under the command of Brig. Genl. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., with the mission of taking the city of Cherbourg, while Companies "B" and "C" were assigned the task of knocking out the three forts guarding the port: Forts Central, De L'Ouest and De L'Est. After the liberation of Cherbourg, the division turned south through Carentan. During the first abortive efforts to take Periers, the guns of "C" Company put the first artillery fire on the town and "A" Company knocked out its first German tank, a Mark IV. The division was then relieved from this mission and ordered to take up position north of the Periet—St. Lo Road in preparation for the Breakthrough which was launched on 25 July. The division fought its way southward through Villedieu-les-Poels to Fougeres. This operation was characterized by the overcoming of fairly stubborn enemy resistance by day, followed by long blackout marches as the enemy will to resist seemed to collapse with nightfall. In the vicinity of St. Pois the advance was interrupted for about five days as the division joined in disrupting the German attempt to split the American forces by breaking through to Avranches.

At Fougères the division turned east to Carrouges where it assembled while the Falaise Pocket was closed and liquidated. On 23 August the advance on Paris was again taken up. The outskirts of the city were reached on the 25th and contact with the enemy regained. On the 27th the division assembled in the Bois de Vincennes while the Parisians went mad with joy at the liberation of their city. The next day the division was off again, resuming the advance on Germany. At Wassigny a section of "C" Company passed a wild but profitable night at a roadblock. During the hours of darkness it liquidated a personnel carrier, two staff sedans and one self-propelled dual 20-mm gun, killing twenty, wounding two and capturing twelve of the enemy, at the price of the superficial wounding of but one member of the section. On 8 September "A" Company crossed the Belgian border and five days later "B" Company entered Germany.

At the Siegfried Line the advance was halted to give supplies a chance to catch up. Defensive positions were assumed, with occasional changes in sectors, until late in November, when the division moved into the Hurtgen Forest to lend a hand in the bitter struggle there. During this operation the long and pleasant association of the battalion with the 4th Division was terminated and the battalion was transferred to the 99th Infantry Division at Butgenbach, Belgium. The battalion occupied positions in the Honsfeld-Bulingen-Krinkelt area and was manning them on 16 December when von Rundstedt launched his frantic and desperate counterattack. During the following days the 801st "fought like crazy men" (according to Stars & Stripes) and was credited with the destruction of twenty enemy tanks and selfpropelled guns. So far as is known, the first word of the counteroffensive reached the division through Sgt. James Gallagher who had a reconnaissance section in the vicinity of Honsfeld. Well before daybreak he had heard the rumble of approaching tanks and had gone forward to investigate. The tanks proved to be German and he was captured but in the dark he succeeded in escaping and brought back the story.

In the reorganization which followed the stabilization of the lines in the sector of the V Corps, the battalion was split up with "A" Company attached to the 9th Infantry Division assuming positions covering the approaches to Hofen, "B" Company attached to the 2nd Infantry Division going into position in the vicinity of Berg and "C" Company attached to the 99th Infantry Division covering the approaches to Elsenborn. All guns were sited well forward, some even in front of the infantry, and almost all under direct enemy observation. During this period, command of the battalion was assumed by Major Robert I. McKesson.

Early in February the battalion was transferred from First U. S. Army to Ninth U. S. Army, attached to the 2nd Tank Destroyer Group of the XIX Corps and moved into an assembly area at Sors, just north of Aachen, Germany, where it remained for about two weeks, protecting the corps command post, laying plans for the crossing of the Roer River and doing intensive training in methods of counteracting German mining operations. Towards the end of the month, the battalion moved up to the vicinity of Aldenhoven, where an advance fire control center was established. The companies dug in their fire direction centers and their gun positions in the vicinity. At 0245 hours 23 February, the battalion joined in the crescendo of the artillery preparation for the river crossing. It fired some 3000 rounds in the next four and a half hours, thereby setting a record for sustained tank destroyer fire. A couple of days later the battalion was attached to the 30th Infantry Division and followed it across the river. The next day the battalion was attached to the 113th Cavalry Group with the mission of covering the right (south) flank of the corps. This mission was continued until the Rhine River was reached, when the group was given a sector of the river front about ten miles south of Düsseldorf. Here the battalion was given the dual role of digging-in direct fire positions on the west bank to fire on any activity on the river or the opposite shore and of supporting the group with indirect fire. A few days later word was received that the battalion was to prepare itself for conversion from a towed to a self-propelled unit to be equipped with M-18 tank destroyers. Accordingly a provisional reconnaissance company was formed by borrowing the personnel and equipment from other companies. Two M-18's were received and an intensive training program instituted. Hardly had this been started than the new Reconnaissance Company was given the mission of patrolling a part of the sector, so that it had to learn by doing. All of these missions were successfully accomplished by the battalion.

On 29 March the 801st crossed the Rhine near Wessel with the group and was given the mission of protecting the left (north) flank of the corps as it swept past the industrial Ruhr section and on to the Elbe River. On reaching Oerlinghausen the battalion was detached from the group, attached to the 83rd Infantry Division and given the mission of protecting its right (south) flank as it raced across the Weser and Leine Rivers towards its goal. After crossing the Weser, Company "C" was attached to the 125th Cavalry Squadron

and sent with it to the 30th Infantry Division on the left (north) flank of the Corps. When the Harz Mountains were reached the battalion (minus "C" Company) was further attached by the 83rd Division to its 330th Infantry with the mission of clearing out that part of the mountains in the corps zone of advance and of maintaining contact with the VII Corps coming up on the right. Although enemy resistance throughout this period was comparatively light, the problem was considerably complicated by the fact that the advance had been so rapid that small fanatical S. S. groups lurked everywhere to ambush lone vehicles or small groups, the civilians in the area were rabidly Nazi and had hardly felt the chastening effect of war and because the area was filled with displaced persons and freed prisoners-of-war of all nationalities who had to be protected from the civil population and the S. S. and whom the Germans had to be forced to feed. Not the least problem was the vast numbers of prisoners taken.

On 20 April the 801st was detached from the XIX Corps and ordered to assemble in the vicinity of Immenrode for the long-awaited conversion, which was to be accomplished by the 25th in order that the battalion might leave on that date to join the 13th Armored Division of the XX Corps, Third U. S. Army. This was done and the battalion joined the division on the evening of the 27th, after a march of over 300 miles in two days. The next night the division set out to cross the Danube, the Isar and the Inn Rivers and effect a junction with the Russians advancing from Vienna. In this operation the battalion was again split up. A reconnaissance platoon was attached to each gun company and "A" Company was attached to Combat Command "A", "B" Company to Combat Command "B" and the remainder of the battalion to Combat Command "R". Each combat command was given a different route and the race was on. Again enemy resistance was very weak and disorganized except at the rivers where all bridges were systematically blown, so that advance consisted of a race from river to river, with a pause at each river while bridges were constructed. By the time the Inn River was reached the supply lines had become so long and the supply of gasoline so short that it was decided to halt the 13th Armored at that point and use the limited supply of fuel to rush the three infantry divisions of the corps eastward. May 8th, the day on which the armistice went into effect, saw the units of the battalion still poised on the north bank of the Inn awaiting further orders.

It would be nice if a glowing list of the enemy equipment and personnel accounted for by the battalion could now be compiled and appended hereto. Unfortunately, in the heat of combat the collection of accurate statistics is almost impossible. "Don't you know we're fighting a war"?

However, to the three streamers currently bedecking the battalion standard, may now be added five more for the following campaigns of World War II: Normandy, 6 June to 24 July 1944; Northern France, 25 July to 14 September 1944; Rhineland, 15 September 1944 to 21 March 1945; Ardennes, 16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945; Central Europe, 22 March to about 9 May 1945 (final date as yet unannounced.)

The battalion crest consists of Hendrick Hudson's ship, the "Half-Moon," on a wreath of blue and gold, as the authorized crest for all New York National Guard Units. One-quarter of the shield is that of the 121st Cavalry Regiment, the parent organization. The shield of gold signifies Cavalry origin; the wavy chevron of infantry blue represents the Rio Grande, for Mexican Border service; the white star stands for the State of Texas where the unit was stationed at that time. The fleur-de-lis represents service in France, while the black lion rampant signifies service in Belgium. The remaining three quarters of the shield is open to our new battle blazonry.

The battalion motto: "Always Up" originates from the early anti-tank days, when the loader called "Up" to inform the gunner that the piece was ready to fire. A new meaning has been given this motto by the positions occupied by the guns of the battalion during von Rundstedt's counter-offensive in the Ardennes. In some cases they were up in front of the forward infantry positions.

There are, of course, innumerable incidents, comic and tragic, which have never been recorded but are only in the hearts and minds of the members of this organization. It is hoped that the foregoing synopsis will recall these to you and to serve to remind you that you are a member of a battalion with an honorable history.

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IRISH SEA

NORTH SEA



Anglesey

Liverpool

WALES

Birmingham

Bristol

London

Minehead



Exeter

Chudleigh

Plymouth

"Moor" and "Moor" rain

Parkstone

Poole

Weymouth

Isle of Wight

Sailed for France  
12 Jun 44

ENGLISH CHANNEL

**Remember** — arrival in England — Liverpool at night — the English blackout — the English trains — Parkstone pubs — "Any gum Chum?" — Mild & Bitter — English money — those famous Moors — the trip to Minehead — the Marshalling area — the LST

# ENGLISH CHANNEL



Remember — Hedgerows — Battle of Mortain — the race to Chartres — the FFI — entry into Paris — each GI a hero — the woods & the zoo — St. Quentin — crossing the Meuse — On into Belgium — spearheading with the "Famous Fourth" — capture of St. Vith — dashing into Germany & out again — Bucking the Siegfried line



