



## WWII TANK DESTROYER FORCE

### *VALOR- VICTORY- VANISHED*

THE UNITED STATES ARMY'S RESPONSE TO DESTROY ENEMY  
ARMOR

ON EACH OF THE BATTLEFIELDS OF THE WORLD WIDE  
CAMPAIGNS.

INITIATED 1941. BY ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL GEORGE  
C. MARSHALL.

DEVELOPED BY ARMY GROUND FORCES GENERAL LESLIE J.  
McNAIR.

IMPLEMENTED BY GENERAL ANDREW D. BRUCE AT CAMP  
HOOD, TEXAS

1941 \* ONE HUNDRED SIX BATTALIONS ACTIVATED \* 1946

Background. On July 10, 1940, the War Department issued an order to establish the Armored Force, at Fort Knox, Ky. The Armored Division, as the main fighting unit, was organized to engage in fast moving offensive warfare: breakthrough to the enemy-rear... using the combined arms concept. Implemented expertly by General George Patton.

The mission to destroy enemy tanks was left to anti-tank units, the Field Artillery and the U.S. Army Air Corp. The M4 Sherman, the basic tank battalion weapon in 1943-45 was armed with the short-barreled 75MM field gun. The M4 was no match against the German tanks thick armor, high velocity, flat trajectory, long barreled 75MM and 88MM guns.

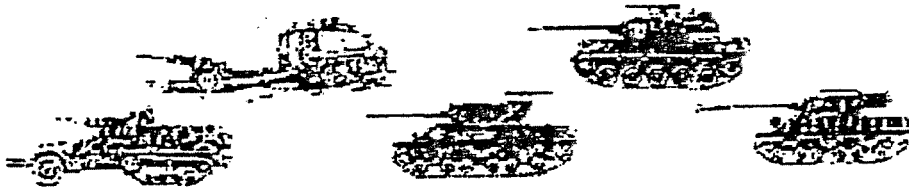
Call to Arms. On November 27, 1941 the War Department activated The Tank Destroyer Force to carry out the mission to ~~SEEK, STRIKE AND DESTROY~~ enemy tanks in defensive and offensive action. Tank Destroyer Battalions entered combat in the Tunisian Campaign in November 1942 equipped with the expedient 75MM Gun Motor Carriage M3 (Halftrack).

The M3 was phased out as the campaign ended in Tunisia, North Africa, in 1943.

In the Homeric Battle of El Guettar, Tunisia, March 1943, the new full-tracked M10 Tank Destroyer saw baptism of fire, with an open turret, armed with a high powered, long barrel 3 inch gun to challenge the German panzers.

A new full tracked vehicle, the M18 "Hellcat", designed from the ground up as a Tank Destroyer, armed with a high velocity 76MM gun was the fastest armored fighting vehicle in World War II. The "Hellcat" first saw action in Italy in June 1944, and was in combat until the end of the war.

The M6 3" AT Gun with Prime Mover M3A1 Halftrack, a high velocity anti-tank gun was mounted on a split traileed carriage (modified from the 105 howitzer), with a sloped armor shield. Weighing in at 5,850 lb. the 3" gun required careful coordination and teamwork to operate and maneuver. It's gun crew consisted of a Gun Commander, a Gunner, a Driver, and seven Cannoneers. 27 Towed Battalions were employed in the ETO. All but four were converted to Self-Propelled TD Battalions by March/April 1945.



By 1942 the U.S. Army Ordnance Bureau took action to strengthen the firepower of the Tank Destroyers to meet the challenge of the expected mass employment of the superior German tanks, which the Americans would encounter after the Normandy invasion. Toward the end of the M10 production, a new, more potent 90MM cannon was developed to mount on the hulls of the M10 TD. In September 1944, the M36 Tank Destroyer reached the front and proved to be the only American armored fighting vehicle that could match the heavier German tanks in firepower. (1400 of the famous M36 Jacksons fought in Europe.)

The Tank Destroyer Force of WWII was organized into Groups, Brigades and Battalions. Each battalion was composed of 36 Tank Destroyers. A total of 70 battalions were deployed overseas. The basic combat operations concept was to support each Infantry and each Armored Division with one TD Bn. Wartime strength was about 100,000 troops.

The Tank Destroyers knocked out approximately 2,600 German Armored Track Vehicles, including 300 in the Battle of the Bulge.. with an estimated sacrifice of 5,000 Tank Destroyer Men killed in action. The key Tank Destroyer contribution was helping the United States Army conquer the fear of the panzer and gain confidence to meet the challenge of the German blitzkrieg

**Farewell to Arms.** A turning point in the future role of the Tank Destroyers occurred at the Remagen Bridgehead on March 7, 1945. The M26 Pershing Tank Platoon, 14th Tank Bn, 9th Armored Division, armed with the 90MM gun, burst into combat action. A group of high ranking general officers, including General Patton, had been advocating the abolishment of the Tank Destroyer Force as far back as 1943. The main argument was that the Tank Destroyer Force had not accomplished the mission of massing to defeat the German panzers, except at the Battle of El Guettar, Tunisia when the 899th TD Bn joined the 601st TD Bn and stopped Gen Rommel's 10th Panzer Division. The Germans failed to mount a blitzkrieg due to the heavy tank losses in Russia And Allied control of the air space over the battle field, until the Battle of the Bulge. Hitler assembled 2,100 tanks and assault guns for the Ardennes blitzkrieg. The 25 Tank Destroyer Battalions were too spread out over the 80-mile front to mass according to Tank Destroyer doctrine of defense of the blitzkrieg.

***The demilitarization of the Tank Destroyer Battalions began in the fall of 1945, without fanfare. Tank Destroyers were no more.***

**Vanished 1946- 1981.** During the 35 years of oblivion and obscurity, Tank Destroyer Battalions held separate annual reunions around the United States. (They continue to do so). Members of several west coast TD Battalions activated **The Tank Destroyer Association**. In 1981. They built up a roster of 14,000 WWII Tank Destroyer Veterans, and mailed out a periodic newsletter. *They memorialized the Tank Destroyer Force*

**Memorization.** In 1982 the first National TD Association Reunion was held at Ft. Hood, TX, the Tank Destroyer Training Center in WWII. At the 1983 Reunion, again at Ft. Hood, the Association dedicated a large monument to the memory of the TD Force of WWII. In 1985 The Military Museum of Southern New England was established, recreating "A" Co. 643rd TD Battalion. In 1986 The Tank Destroyer Forces joined the Patton Museum. The third and last national TD Reunion was held at Fort Knox, KY in Oct. 1989. (The National Tank Destroyer Association began phasing out in November 1990). A Tank Destroyer Force Monument located in the Armor Memorial Park, Fort Knox, KY was dedicated on October 12, 1989. The Military Museum of Southern New England arrived at Fort Knox, KY with an operational Tank Destroyer... the M18 Hellcat.

On the National Level the Armored Forces Monument was dedicated on November 11, 1991, located on Memorial Drive "Avenue of Heroes", Arlington, VA. The Tank Destroyer Forces exploits of WWII are clearly depicted on this most impressive monument at the entrance of the Arlington National Cemetery. The numerical designation of eighty-five (85) Tank Destroyer combat formations in the European and Pacific theaters are engraved in stone.

In 1992 the outstanding history of the Tank Destroyer Forces WWII was published and distributed. The highlight of 1993 was the permanent display of one M10 "Wolverine" Tank Destroyer in the Patton Museum of Cavalry and Armor. A second 3" Gun M10 was located outside near the entrance to the Armor Memorial Park of the Patton Museum.

A second plaque on the Tank Destroyer Forces Monument and the 899th TD Bn Monument were dedicated at a joint ceremony 9 Sept 1995. at The Armor Memorial Park, Fort Knox, KY, where at the latest count 24 TD Battalion monuments are located.

**The Tank Destroyers-WWII-Fort Benning Association** (14 TD Battalions) funded and dedicated an appropriate 50th Golden Anniversary Tank Destroyer Monument on 9 Nov 1995 on the grounds of the National Infantry Museum, Ft Benning, GA., and in January 1996 became national as the **WWII TANK DESTROYER SOCIETY**. The organization publishes the PANTHER PRESS, three times a year. A reunion was held at Fort Sill, OK, on the fourth of July, 1997 to dedicate a Tank Destroyer Monument with four plaques: The Tank Destroyer Society met at Fort Knox, KY around 11 November 1999 to dedicate the addition of two more plaques to the 1989 Tank Destroyer Association Monument, one reflecting 85 Tank Destroyer combat formations, and other the five Medal of Honor Tank Destroyer Men.

(Prepared by COL. Cecil R. French, US Army Ret. 30 Jan 96, and revised 1 June 2002)



*Veterans Day*

*VFW - People who really do care...*

**2002**