

H.E. Sandstrom

Upon reflection we were first called the First Anti-Tank Battalion (Provisional).

According to my records the 601st was activated on December 20, 1941 at Ft. Devens. I was transferred from the 5th FA Bn to the 601st TD Bn on that date. I assume this was the date the new battalion was formed. We had been "D" Battery, 5th FA Bn which was noted as being Alexander Hamilton's battery carrying the only special guideon in the U. S. Army (at that time). Thus "C" was mostly artillerymen.

Then follows the usual state-side training ending up at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. Departed NY aboard the Queen Mary with most of the 1st Division. The Queen made most of the voyage without escort. The explanation being that at a speed of 29+ knots an escort could not keep up. "C" was assigned to man the top side anti-aircraft weapons. This was a blessing as the ship was so heavily crowded that with 24 hour feeding we got just 2 meals a day. Rendezvous with British destroyers in heavy fog resulting in a near collision at sea. Into the Firth of Forth and off to a night in Scotland. We then went to Tidworth Barracks on the Salisbury Plain.

I was in command of a detail of 3 jeeps and a 2½ ton which was to go to London and get our instructions from Grosvenor Square (Eisenhower's HQ) for a highly valuable shipment. It was to the Bank of England. We peeled smartly off in a protective pattern and the 2½ ton was put onto an elevator and lowered several floors. At about this time a call reached us from HQ that we were creating a sensation on Threadneedle Street. I quickly moved the jeeps to the ruins along the route out. We loaded about 30 small strong boxes (safes) and headed to II Corps Headquarters. This sounds simple but it required extreme skill as all traffic signs had been removed and one had to read the maps rapidly. When we unloaded the safes, the Finance Officer asked me if I would like to know what we had been carrying. He said it was \$5 million in gold bullion which was to be used to support the financial structure in North Africa.

Boarded the TMS (Transport Motor Ship) DEMPO and headed for North Africa. Through Gibraltar with Tangiers on the starboard brightly lighted as compared to the blacked-out Rock. We were expecting air attacks but got the Mers-El-Kebir without loss. I believe that "C" was D plus 2. Unloaded, expecting to get right into it but the French had been subdued.

Though I was not along we understood that Reconnaissance Company had been dispatched to the borders of Spanish Morocco in case Franco decided to join the Axis in the fight. This is Recon's story. It soon became apparent that Spain was staying out of it and Recon returned to the battalion.

A few days outside Oran and then off to Tunisia. By prearrangement we entered Stuka Valley at night and bivouaced in the valley. Early next morning a single Italian plane swept into the valley and strafed the battalion. One man was killed -- the first for the 601st. Not 30 minutes later a Spitfire came over the mountain to a hail of AA fire from our people. Wagging his wings frantically was of no avail and he spun in. It was panic which Ben Fuller and others tried to stem. It was a sad beginning.

"C" was sent to support the 18th Infantry, 1st Div. It was the beginning of a long series of moves by separate companies as they were placed under different commands and task forces. Now we were on British rations which featured that great delicacy "Ox tail stew". It also contained Scotch for the officers and a thick, black rum ration for the men. By now "C" was moved to Fondouk to support a French Battalion. These were Moroccan troops led by French non-coms. These were not the Goumiers who were so feared by everyone. In a local attack, the French tried to dislodge the Germans from the commanding peak. A platoon of mortar-men from 1st Armored and a platoon for "C" fired but the attack was unsuccessful. My impression of the French was very favorable.

By now the Germans had formed a ring on the Eastern Dorsale around Tunis and Bizerte holding the key passes. There were small, local forays on both sides. "C" moved into the Ousseltia Valley along with 1st Armored Infantry. All through this period, the air was in German control. No movement of any size during daylight; night fighters which sometimes chased single jeeps up the roads. "C" lost a kitchen truck at Fondouk to a strafing attack. With it went the company fund and 1,000 fresh eggs collected to give the men some respite for standard rations.

I am not sure of the date, but in January "C" was assigned as security for 1st Division Headquarters under Terry Allen. Abruptly near February 14th the Germans attacked at Faid-Fondouk and the route was on.

Note on air attacks. Everyone rode with 3 men to a jeep. The driver; Right hand front seat for forward observation and a man in the rear facing backward to cover the rear sightings. Windshields usually removed (no covers available early).

Big Red One Headquarters left us with a small force of French troops to hold the passes at the Western Dorsale, abandoning Ousseltia. We had not been alone for more than a day when we got word to proceed to Kasserine Pass. Leaving the French to screen the mountains we took off in a blinding rain, blacked out and in a hurry. By the time we arrived near Thala, the action was subsiding. Thus I explain where "C" was at Kasserine. "A" and "B", so I understood where in the thick of it. We took up positions and nothing happened. Then came a staff meeting of the 1st Division during which Terry Allen planned a raid by Darby's Rangers and "C". It was designed to harass the retiring Germans. The raid was called off.

We followed the German retirement and finally drew fire from Faid as we occupied Djebel Lessouda again. "C" advanced to protect the left flank during an attack on Faid Pass. The Germans did not sortie from their positions and Faid was taken. By now the Germans were feeling Montgomery's pressure from the south.

Now the action moved to Sened Station and El Guettar. The battalion was united as a unit again. The plan was for the 601st to move into the valley and form a screen for the artillery which was to support a general advance to squeeze the Germans. Since the ground we were

occupy was under enemy control we were not able to reconnoiter our gun positions. During the night we moved up the road and, as I recall "C" took the left side of the road. I know that we had two platoons stretching from the road to tie into the mountains. The third was directly behind the roadside platoon ready to move or back up any position. I am almost sure that "B" was on the right hand side of the road tied into the salt marsh. I was just trying to get some rest after 3 days and nights of preparation when we got a "CQ" from our outstanding Recon Company. At the most forward position they had captured a lost cyclist who told them a division was attacking. It seems that we had hardly gotten word when the tracers started flying. The 10th Panzer was attacking from march position. I could not imagine anyone mounting such a fierce attack without some sort of preparation. They were committing their people piecemeal and with usual vigor. "C" took the brunt as the best maneuvering terrain lay directly in front of us. "C" fought on until out of ammunition and held. Col. Baker (601st) was given the 701st which was armed with the new M10's and it was committed and chewed up. Copy of Presidential Unit Citation attached. *see citation*

The battalion was assembled and moved to the airport near Thelepte. We provided security to the air field while reforming and re-arming. A short time later the fronts were shifted. II Corps was given the coastal area and the British took over the southern field. I believe that II Corps consisted of 1st; 3rd and 34th Divisions plus 1st Armored. "C" was attached and participated on the march to Bizerte. Germans were surrendering in masses and soon overwhelmed MP Capabilities. "C" was called to round up stragglers and get the prisoners inside the fences. This was at a camp between Tunis and Bizerte. Shortly thereafter, "C" was relieved and made for a beachside camp outside Bizerte. Here we were to receive our own M10's.

We found that the 601st had acquired a reputation with the Germans. At a medical-dental clinic, a German prisoner approached my jeep driver and said: "Ah, the Black Y, we know you and respect you". One part of the German order-of battle had us listed as a division. This had to be because of our Recon Company which did such an outstanding job over the front.

We were poised for Sicily but the nearest we got to being involved was sending men to serve as prisoner of war guards. In the meantime, the invasion of Italy was moving forward. We moved to a staging area near the port city. On a memorable day we were assembled on the airport under a blistering sun for an inspection by Gen. Mark Clark. When he asked me if the men were ready I countered by saying some of my men were stuck in Sicily (one didn't talk to generals that way). I had my men back in time for departure.

We boarded our destroyers at the inside docks and then the men. Our LST then moved out to the roadstead outside of the harbor and to a night time bombing. Damage was slight. Then, the departure to Salerno. We were H + 2 hours (as I recall) and arrived to be stuck on a sand bar much to the disgust of the beachmaster who was guiding craft around it. A harrowing hour or two while the skipper drug us off the hidden bstacle. All the time there was sporadic air raids; shellings; etc. Also we had our first guided bomb sighting. It flew over the fleet; the motor cutout and it plunged into the sea -- no hit this time.

Finally we debarked. Our mission was to block the sea road coming from the South. We set up with the ubiquitous Recon out front and nothing happened. We watched in horror as the twin-boomed P38 tried to land at the new air strip and promptly fired on by US AA units (not us). **SHADES** of Stuka Valley.

At about dusk I was ordered to fill a gap that had been forced in the 36th Division front. We fought the traffic jams and then moved into the so-called "gap". Advancing carefully, we reached our assigned area without drawing fire. Just about that time we heard airplanes approaching from the coast and saw planes with lights flashing. We had not been notified of this drop and the first we knew of it was when we heard the flutter of parachutes. It was a regiment of the 82nd Airborn. Colonel Tucker told me that the front was collapsing and his men were expecting a drop into a fight. We co-ordinated and this fine group sent out patrols to make contact. The Germans had broken off contact.

Now started the tortorous move northward. Naples, then to the Volturno River. Attached to the 3rd Division, we participated in the assault crossing. They had given us the exhaust shrouds to be installed in the rest area. The sealings could not withstand the heat generated on the long approach and they were useless. However, Lt. Richardson in a display of bold thinking devised a plan to ford the river by revving the motors and speeding across. The blast from the motors kept the water from drowning the motors. Slow going until the approaches to the Rapido River when things came to a stop at Monte Longo. Just before the kickoff to Casino the battalion was moved to a rest area.

Here Mike Paulick, Recon commander, chose an infantry assignment opening up the II Corps, AT and TD Officer for me. I decided to take it.

There ends my connection with the Black "Y". Many times homesick I saw the 601st move out. Anzio was next.

R E S T R I C T E D

HEADQUARTERS THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION
APO #3

18 June 1944.

GENERAL ORDERS)
:)
NUMBER 125)

E X T R A C T

* * *
I - AWARD OF SILVER STAR. Under the provisions of Army Regulations 200-45, as amended, a Silver Star is awarded each of the following named individuals:
* * *

HERBERT E. SUNDBROM, O-362416, Captain, Field Artillery, ** Corps Artillery (Formerly Company "C", ** Tank Destroyer Battalion). For gallantry in action. On 23 March 1943, near El Guettar, Tunisia, during a daylight enemy tank attack, Captain Sundbrom dismounted from his destroyer tank, despite intense artillery and mortar concentrations and machine gun fire kicking up dirt all around him, ran 200 yards to the crest of a hill. He remained for 30 minutes in this exposed position from which he so skillfully deployed his destroyers that they were able to knock out 15 enemy tanks and stop the attack. Residence at appointment. Pittsburgh, Pa.
* * *

By command of Major General O'DANIEL:

CHARLES E. JOHNSON
Colonel, GSC
Chief of Staff

OFFICIAL:

/s/ B. C. PRICE
B. C. PRICE
Lt Col., AGD
Adjutant General.

A TRUE COPY:

Hubert P. Yarnell
HUBERT P. YARNELL,
Lt Col., Field Artillery
Acting Adjutant

R E S T R I C T E D