

*From Your Sherman 3/17*

On the offense from the Anzio beachhead "A" Company was attached to the 3rd. Division and were assigned to the 601st. T.D. Bn. We joined them late in the afternoon on May 23rd. on the road from Anzio to Cisternia. The T.D.'s were moved into a sheltered position behind a railroad bed. I was told by the Battalion Commander that our mission the next morning was to move into defensive positions on each side of the road after the 601st. attacked in case the Germans repulsed their attack and counter attacked. We took our positions the next morning after the Third Division moved out before day break. About two hours later their Liaison Officer informed me that they had taken their objectives.

Around 1100 hours I received a message that "A" Company had been detached from the 3rd. Division and was ordered to report to the 34th. Division at a Co-ordinate about seven miles south of our position. We had to go back about five miles toward Anzio and then south to a road next to the Mussolini Canal. We advanced on that road toward Highway Seven and reported to the 34th. Division about 1500 hours. I was informed that we would support a regiment that would move through the First Special Service Force and take the possession of Highway Seven and a railroad about one hundred yards east of the highway.

We moved up to the area occupied by the regiment and I deployed a platoon of T.D.'s on each side of the road with my T.D. on the road and one platoon held in reserve. The First Special Forces were dug in along a ditch which ran across an open field about eight hundred yards in front of us. On the road and in the field were nine T.D.'s and fifteen Sherman tanks that had been destroyed by fire from German tanks and disabled by anti-tank mines. The enemy tanks were dug in the railroad bed across highway seven. The Regimental C.O. wanted me to take the T.D.'s around the tanks that had hit mines to relieve the Special Service Troops. I requested that he have the mines cleared as it would be foolish to move down a mined road, he had his engineers clear the mines. During this time period we were receiving heavy mortar and artillery fire. The Germans knew that we were T.D.'s and a high percentage of the shell burst were high burst however we were getting good counter battery from our artillery and were being covered by smoke shells.

The 34th moved up and the First Special Service troops pulled back to our position. I then moved out T.D.'s up to a position about one hundred yards back of the Infantry. Lt. Reeves platoon was deployed two hundred yards north of the road in a grove of small trees. My T.D. was in the road and Lt. Long's T.D.'s were next to the road behind what was once a farm house. Lt. Goldman was south of the road next to the canal behind a farm house and out buildings where there were knocked out Sherman tanks. A detachment of engineers were in the area with him. The Germans opened tank fire on him and set one of the disabled Sherman tanks on fire. They ceased fire thinking they had destroyed the T.D.'s.

I was ordered by the Infantry C.O. to move my T.D.'s forward at 1700 hours up to the Infantry line and they would move forward with us to take the highway and railroad bed. I instructed Lt. Reeves to cover us from his position and for Lt. Goldman's T.D.'s to fire on the German tanks if they opened fire on my T.D. and Lt. Long's as we moved forward up the road.

We moved out at 1700 hours past the infantry with my T.D. in the road and Lt. Long's T.D.'s on each side of the road about twenty-five yards apart. A German M-4 pulled out from defilade next to the railroad bed. My T.D. fired on it and three of Lt. Goldman's T.D.'s opened fire. His T.D.'s disabled it and the M-4 blocked the access road of the M-6 tank that was back of it and it could not get into position to fire on us.

The infantry did not move forward and I asked our radio operator with the Infantry C.O. what was wrong and was told that the enemy fire was too heavy and the attack was postponed until 1900 hours. We pulled back to our original position. I went forward to the Regimental C.P. and was told by the C.O. that he had requested a delay until daylight the next morning as he had suffered heavy casualties and he felt that he could not carry out his mission.

After dark I went to Lt. Goldman's position and we heard movement of German vehicles beyond the railroad bed and it was our impression (and hope) that the M-6 was retiring. I reported this to the 34th Liaison Officer.

At 500 hours the next morning I received word that Col. Frederick had requested that we be attached to the First Special Forces. I reported to him and he told me that he would move out in fifteen minutes. I told him what my plans had been the previous day and he told me that my plan was satisfactory as it would protect him in case of armored attack and for the T.D.'s to fire on any enemy positions. In about twenty minutes we had advances across Highway Seven. I took my T.D. along with Lt. Long's across Highway Seven and fired upon and knocked out two machine guns on the railroad and went across the railroad bridge with the Special Service troops. The Germans had pulled out. We measured the width of the track mark of the M-6 tank and it was forty-one inches.

I was standing with Col. Frederick on the highway when the Infantry Regimental C.O. came up and Colonel Frederick said he would like to keep the T.D. Company with him until he reached his objective. The Colonel said the T.D.'s had not reported, he hadn't seen any T.D.'s and I told him what they were. He said he thought they were tanks. He told Col. Frederick that he would release "A" Company to him.

We moved forward beyond the railroad for about three miles with the Service men until we reached a crossroad which was their objective. I then went with Colonel Frederick in his jeep on a reconnaissance of the area and it was his opinion that the area was clear. He reported this by radio and was told to hold his area until relieved by the 34th. Division and then to move to an airstrip near Anzio to prepare for a jump behind enemy lines. He was told that "A" Company had been ordered to report to the 636th. Battalion C.P. I went to the 34th. C.P. on Highway Seven and contacted Capt. Danzi by phone and was told to move to a co-ordinate near and east of Cisternia. We could not go down the highway as it had not been cleared. We went northeast across country and reached the designated area about 1700 hours. The area was in the British Zone. We were able to make contact with battalion headquarters by radio and were told that we were to go to a position on Highway Seven about two miles north of Cisternia. Near Cisternia the roads were congested and it was then 2200 hours and the

M.P.'s ordered me to pull off on the road. We contacted the Battalion on the radio and reported our position and were told they would send a guide to take us to our position. I told the men to post guards and try to get some rest as we had not any sleep for over sixty hours.

The guide arrived about 400 hours and we moved out in about thirty minutes. Major Dubose joined us after we were past Cisternia and he took up a position off the highway next to "C" Company. I was told that I had been attached to the 143rd. and I got in Capt. Danzi's jeep and we went north on the road looking for their C.P. It was barely daylight and foggy we missed the C.P. and went pass them until we came to a blown out bridge where we could see the town of Velletri, we knew we were in trouble, we went back at full speed. How we got back without being fired on I do not know as we had gone at least two miles beyond our lines.

We took positions on the west side of Highway Seven with "C" Company on the east side. We were told to hold our position which satisfied the men as they had found a cave full of Vino. Five gallon water cans were in a great demand.

About 1200 hours "A" Company was attached to the 141st. Regiment and were told to report to them on a road east of Velletri. We reached there about 1730 hours and were ordered to take defensive positions against armored attacks from the west and north.

The next morning the 141st. moved north about two miles through woods and vineyards to a road paralalled to the one we were on and had established and controlled about 300 yards along that road. I was ordered to move my T.D.'s to that position. The route used by the infantry was heavily wooded, mined and under sniper fire. Our men cleared a path through the mine field and with the help of the engineers tried to clear a road through the woods for the T.D.'s. Progress was slow and the officer with the engineers did not think a stone bridge across the railroad would support the T.D.'s. I ordered Lt. Reeves and Lt. Goldman to take their platoons through the Third Division area across the railroad and move west along the road to join the 141st. They went to the railroad and reported

back that the Germans occupied the area. I reported this to General Stack and he told me to give them orders to advance, I passed on the orders. Lt. Reeves, Lt. Goldman, and Sgt. Broussard went forward on foot to see if they could get the T.D.'s to the road. I was informed that the officers had been captured but Broussard had escaped. I instructed Lt. Davis to continue to work with the engineers and try to get a road for Lt. Long through the woods. I went to the 1st. and 2nd. platoon T.D.'s, I decided to take them down the railroad track to where the infantry had crossed and then take them north to join the 141st. advance position. I told them I would take my T.D. down the railroad track and for two other T.D.'s to follow at 200 yard intervals. If we made it the others were to follow. I told Tony Moriera I wanted him to set a record for a M-10 down the track. The only opposition we met was some rifle fire when we reached the area where we had to leave the railroad track. Eight T.D.'s made it and the other one threw a track coming off of the railroad bed.

We placed the T.D.'s in defensive positions to protect them from attack from both directions on the road. The infantry was receiving heavy fire from a two story house surrounded by vineyards. We tried to move a T.D. into position to fire on the house, it hit a mine and lost a track. We got another T.D. into position shortly before dark and were able to stop machine gun fire from the house but we could not move closer because of the mine fields.

A German M-4 came down the road from the direction of Velletri. It came within 300 yards of our position. Our T.D. did not fire upon the tank, it then retreated. I found out later the Corporal in command of the T.D. was not in the T.D. We rightly received criticism for what happened.

The next morning we fired several times on enemy positions designated to us by the infantry with effective results that stopped fire from these positions.

About 1000 hours the first platoon, now under the

command of Lt. Dutton was moved up to the forward position of the 141st. I opened heavy fire with H.E. on the Germans. He then took his T.D. and another T.D. on the north side of the road and made about a 200 yard circle back of and around the German positions. Seventeen Germans came out in front of his T.D.'s and surrendered. I followed in about ten minutes in the same area with my T.D. looking for positions to fire across the road on the Germans. Seven Germans stood up in front of the T.D. and walked back to our position and surrendered. This broke the resistance of the Germans on the north side of the road and ceased sniper fire on the engineers building the road up the side of the hill and permitted the 143rd. Regiment to pass through our position and move northward across the mountains and cut the German line between Rome and Cassino.

We received orders that at 1400 hours we were to move out toward Velletri with the infantry walking beside our T.D.'s. Lt. Long was in the first T.D. with the battalion Commander of the 141st. My T.D. was next and would pull up even with his on straight sections of the road. It took about forty-five minutes to go about the two miles to Velletri. When we reached the houses in the town the lead T.D.'s opened fire on the houses on each side of the road. As we advanced the Germans came out of the houses and surrendered with little opposition. By the time we reached the town square about two hundred had surrendered.

When we reached the town square there was some machine gun fire and Lt. Long's T.D. was fired upon from the right flank by a M-4. We pulled back about ten yards and were protected by a house on the corner. Several officers from Division Headquarters arrived at our position and said for us to move forward into the town square. I requested and said for us to move forward into the square and take possession of the town. They insisted that we move into the town square. Lt. Long moved forward and some of the personnel from division walked beside his T.D. We were fired upon by the M-4. The H.E. shell ricocheted off the front of his T.D. and exploded. It killed Lt. Col. Reese, Division G-2 and wounded three others with him. Shortly thereafter three German vehicles tried to make it across the square but my T.D. knocked out the first one and the small arms fire from the infantry disabled the other two killing and wounding the occupants. About fifty Germans then came out from the houses around the

square with a white flag and surrendered. The 141st. took possession of the town. The M-4 tank had been moved out. We moved through the town about an hour before darkness. We moved north on a road with the 141st. and when darkness came pulled off of the road into a large farm yard with four T.D.'s in firing position to cover the road.

The next morning the infantry had several fire fights with the Germans that were still in the hills surrounding us. Our men captured several Germans who surrendered when they realized they were cut off.

Several days later we were a part of the 5th. Army task force under Col. Ellis and were the first forces to enter Rome. Our experience with the Ellis task force is another story and I will not go into any details about that operation at this time.

This is how I remember what "A" Company did on the break out from Anzio. I am sorry that I do not recall all of the details and the names of the individuals that carried out the various missions. I feel that the Company carried out its assignments in an outstanding manner under almost impossible conditions. It was the first time that we were used in close support missions and our response was excellent. We had four T.D.'s disabled and many men wounded, several severely. Two officers were captured and were replaced by officers new to combat. We were under extreme strain and continuous contact with the Germans for six days. I am proud of the way "A" Company responded and the way everyone carried out their duties.

When the operation started we were assigned a thirteenth T.D. for the C.O. My volunteer crew for the T.D. were Melton, Thomas, Pritt, and Moriera. They were a fine crew and gave me excellent support as did the rest of the men of "A" Company. I am grateful to the men of "A" Company and honored to have been the Company Commander during this operation.

Robert E. Graham  
Capt FA  
Anzio Breakout Operation  
Co. A 636th TD Bn  
May 1944