

~~C O N F I D E N T I A L~~

HEADQUARTERS FIRST TANK DESTROYER GROUP

APO 302

U. S. ARMY

18 April 1943

COMBAT REPORT

- Section I - Period: 17-25 March 1943
- Section II - Period: 26 March - 8 April 1943
- Section III - Period: 8 - 11 April 1943

SECTION I

1. Composition of Group:

805th TD Bn.

2. Mission: Orders were received on 17 March at Group CP vicinity of KOUIF to proceed to THELEPTE airport and defend airport area against any armored force from direction of KASSERINE.

3. Execution:

a. 805th TD Bn. leaving bivouac vicinity AINE BEIDA at 0001A 17 March closed in assembly position (S-8052) at 0845A 17 March. Fire positions in the area (S-8647) - (S-8945) were reconnoitered. These were not occupied.

b. Group CP closed KOUIF at 0445A and opened FERIANA 0905A 17 March.

c. Subsequent orders received at 0600A from II Corps directed 1st TD Group to organize a defense for FERIANA with following elements:

- 805th TD Bn.
- Co. "F", 1st Ranger Bn.
- Plat. of "D" Btry. 443d CA (AA)
- Squad from Co. "B", 19th Engineer Regt.
- MP Det. II Corps.

Plan for the defense as shown on Overlay No. 2 atchd was executed PM 17 March. 701 TD Bn., atchd. 9th Div., took over airport mission from 805 TD Bn. 805 TD Bn. took over southern and eastern sectors.

No enemy contacted during this period.

4. Subsequent Developments:

a. Defensive plan remained in effect until 20 March when 805th TD Bn. was ordered by II Corps to march to vicinity SREITLA for attachment to 9th Inf. Div.

b. On 23 March II Corps order 701st TD Bn. relieved from attach

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ment 9th Inf. Div., atchd 1st Inf. Div. with a mission of marching to vicinity EL GUETTAR and relieving the 601st TD Bn. which had been heavily engaged 23 March with German tanks.

The 601st TD Bn. 23 March was relieved from attachment to 1st Inf. Div. and reverted to Group control. 601st TD Bn. closed in bivouac area vacated by 701st TD Bn 1800A 24 March and assumed the THELEPTE airport defense mission.

c. No contact with enemy by units under group control during this period.

SECTION II

1. Composition of Group:

701st TD Bn.
899th TD Bn.



Bulk of both battalions located initially 26 March in defilade fire positions W of EL GUETTAR along the line (Y-2971)-(Y-2667).

2. Mission: Group atchd 1st Inf. Div. effective 1430A 26 March with a mission of supporting the division in attack in the EL GUETTAR-GABES and EL GUETTAR-EL MAIZILA sectors.

3. Execution of Mission:

a. Group CP closed FERIANA 1114A 26 March and opened GAFSA 1335A 26 March.

Group CP closed GAFSA 1745A 27 March and opened 1800A 27 March vicinity EL GUETTAR.

b. Due to disposition of 894th TD Bn. (Atchd. 9th Inf. Div. see overlay #2), congestion in the Y-2971 Y-2667 area, and remoteness of hostile armored threat in force along the GABES-GAFSA road 701st TD Bn. was relieved of its mission in this sector and shifted to the EL GUETTAR-EL MAIZILA axis.

During its assignment on this mission the 701st TD Bn. occupied assembly positions in the general area (Y-2874)-(Y-2674) with fire positions in the area (Y-3974)-(Y-3676). Friendly artillery disposed in depth the length of the pass W of BOU HAMRAN prevented occupation of assembly positions closer to fire positions.

899th TD Bn. in static defense positions along the general line (Y-2971)-(Y-2667) behind friendly infantry elements continued its initial mission.

c. Periodically, commencing 27 March and until completion of the EL GUETTAR phase, group established OP's at the following points: Y-3476, Y-2982, Y-3070, and Y350685. Maintenance of these OP's provided group headquarters with immediate knowledge of movements of friendly forces and locations of enemy tanks, artillery, and AT weapons.

d. AT 1025A 30 March 899th TD Bn. was relieved from assignment to Group by II Corps order and attached to BENSON FORCE. It's mission with this force covered the zone north of EL GUETTAR-GABES road exclusive to foothills of the DJ MCHILTAT-DJ CHEMSI ridge line. Thus initially no change was made in dispositions of 701st TD Bn. in order to occupy positions vacated

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by 899th TD Bn.

e. Until 31 March no armored threat appeared. Any change in disposition of 701st TD Bn. hinged on progress of the BENSON FORCE which thus far was contained generally WEST of N-S grid 41.

f. On 2 April reliable intelligence reported 32 enemy tanks located vicinity of Y-415642. To meet this threat one company 701st TD Bn. was moved to positions north and south of the road at (Y-2769), one company in reserve at (Y-2373) with one company remaining in position at (Y-3676) covering the EL MAIZILA approach. The armored threat did not materialize.

Again on 4 April one company of 701st TD Bn. was moved to positions astride the GABES road, this time 2 miles east of old positions in response to probable enemy tank action from reported positions S of Hill 369 (Y-3764). This armored threat did not materialize.

On 8 April 701st TD Bn. was ordered by II Corps relieved from Group control and attached 1st Inf. Div.

SECTION III

1. General: 8 April 1943 II Corps ordered group headquarters atchd. CCA 1st AD, located E of SBEITIA. Group CP closed EL GUETTAR 1310A 8 April and opened (T-3273) (See overlay #3) 1800A 8 April 1943.

2. Composition of Group:

601st TD Bn. located in the DJ LASOUDA area, previously atchd CCA was already in position and executing missions ordered by CG of CCA.

805th TD Bn., located (T-5651) was already in position and executing recon. and pioneer missions ordered by CG CCA in vicinity SIDI BOU ZID and to the E.

3. Mission and actions:

a. Initially, according to orders issued by CG CCA, 1st TD Group was assigned no group mission. In effect the two TD battalions functioned directly under CCA.

b. On 10 April II Corps ordered the 776th (previously atchd. 1st AD) and the 899th (previously with BENSON FORCE) into the SIDI BOU ZID area under group control. Immediate subsequent orders issued by CCA assigned 776th and 805th TD Bns. missions in conjunction with a movement of armored elements E through a pass just S of FAID thence north. These battalions did not operate under group control.

c. At 0900 11 April II Corps orders forwarded through 1st AD released group from attachment to 1st AD and directed the group, consisting of: 701st (reld. attachment 1st Inf. Div.), 805th and 899th TD Bns., move at once to bivouac areas vicinity BOU CHEBKA.

601st TD Bn. was reld. by II Corps order from attachment 1st AD and ordered into bivouac vicinity MORSOTT (N-2513). 601st TD Bn. was relieved from group control.

Group CP closed (T-5661) at 1300A and opened (S-6966) at 2100A 11 April.

B. G. STEVENS,
Colonel, Inf., 1st TD Gp.
Commanding

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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U.S. ARMY



21 April 1943

COMMENTS ON OPERATIONS FOR PERIOD 17 MARCH - 11 APRIL 1943

1. a. General: Inasmuch as during the entire period covered by this report this headquarters did not control at any one time more than one TD battalion in contact with the enemy nor control any battalion engaged with hostile armored elements requiring TD action, no decisive conclusions concerning operations of a group can be made. Observation and study of terrain, dispositions of friendly and enemy forces and operations during the three periods constitute a basis for the following comments.

b. Command and Control:

(1) Group headquarters is best suited to control battalions actually working under Group tactically and to coordinate supply plans prior to and during combat. Group headquarters is also the proper agency for coordinating and forwarding to Corps recommendations on changes in T/O, T/BA, tactics, and technique. Administrative requirements comparable to those of a regimental headquarters cannot be fulfilled by a group headquarters under present organization for battalions attached to divisions. Information copies of battalion administrative reports and requirements of all TD battalions should be furnished group headquarters.

(2) Command communication with battalions by SCR-193 radio was generally most successful. Frequently wire communication was maintained. Generally this was made possible by imposing the group wire net on friendly lines, which practice, particularly in the EL GUETTAR sector, was obviously an overload on the friendly net. Particularly in defensive situations a group wire net is desirable. Present T/BA and T/O do not provide for such installations.

(3) Liaison officer and motor messenger service are most practical and valuable.

(4) Frequent changes in the composition of a group are not conducive to efficient teamwork. In addition to the tactical difficulty resulting from insufficient time for terrain and situations orientation, battalions which are frequently joining and leaving group experience difficulty in maintaining proper SOI's and communication arrangements to fit the plans of different higher headquarters. It is not feasible to maintain contact with TD battalions attached to other headquarters.

(5) An intelligence net on AM radio sets, tied in with battalion reconnaissance nets would be most desirable for simultaneous dissemination of all enemy intelligence, particularly for tank warning service. The imposition of intelligence reports on the command net creates an overload and causes excessive clearance time. Present T/BA does not permit establishment of adequate reconnaissance nets.



c. Operations.

The employment of a group in narrow corridors, is limited. In the open type terrain peculiar to this sector no more guns need be employed than fields of fire, dispersion, and defiladed positions permit. Massing guns for the sake of using all available AT weapons only creates congestion and results in excessive casualties from artillery and bombs. If the armored threat is in force, guns should be employed in depth.

Only where two battalions may be mutually supporting, where one battalion may catch an enemy on the rebound from or infiltration through another battalion, or where one battalion may maneuver behind or around other TD elements, is the employment of a group practical.

It is believed that the attachment of one TD battalion to an infantry division is normal.

Whether supporting infantry troops or protecting armored elements TD battalions should not be used as spearheads or bait. TD's are not tanks and if unduly exposed to hostile AT fire they will be unable to accomplish their intended TD mission.

d. Coordination.

Headquarters of Corps, division, combat command, or any other force under which group may operate should have an antitank staff officer. Some headquarters apparently have little conception of the proper employment of TD battalions. Frequently without advice from officers whose experience should prove helpful, such headquarters issue orders which are not commensurate with the capabilities of a TD battalion. In the absence of an AT coordinator in the staff of higher headquarters or of a coordinated Corps AT plan it is believed that the TD Group headquarters should be the coordinating agency. It is particularly observed that Ron. Co's of TD battalions are given direct general missions which are far beyond their scope. Over-taxing the Ron. Co. on distant ron. decreases its efficiency for aggressively playing its proper role. This Co. should not perform missions intended for division Ron. troops.

It is believed that in order to obtain the maximum value from all TD battalions in the Corps each division and TD battalion headquarters should know the disposition, mission, and plans of all TD battalions. Such dissemination could be effected through the medium of overlays which would further show the Corps' plan or plans to meet any armored threat resulting in coordination and economy of force.

Obviously such plan or plans would not dictate employment of TD battalions atchd. to divisions, but knowledge of intended employment of atchd. TD battalions by divisions, would be essential to forming the Corps' coordinated plan.

It is believed that this method would give all TD battalions sufficient orientation so that if suddenly shifted to a new sector each could effectively fit into the master plan.

Reference Section II of Combat Report, Hq. 1st TD Gp. (incl. #2) it is believed that the operations E of EL GUETTAR offered an excellent opportunity for a coordinated plan.

At one time the 701st and 899th TD battalions occupied the

same general fire position area in the foothills N and S of the GABES road at (Y-2769). At this time neither battalion knew of the plans for employment of the 894th TD Bn., atchd 9th Inf. Div., southeast of their positions.

Again on 27 March the 805th TD Bn. supporting 13 FA Brig. moved on order into the (Y-2769) position area which was already occupied by the 899th TD bn. This occupation was made by 805th without prior warning to 899th or Gp. Hq. This particular area was thus overcrowded and was already a popular target for German aircraft, and resulted in a duplication of effort.

Later, on 29 March, without notice to Gp. headquarters, the 899th TD Bn. was attached to BENSON FORCE. Investigation disclosed future disposition and mission for this battalion which materially effected employment of the 701st. At this time the 894th TD Bn. was uninformed as to missions of TD battalions N of the GABES road.

During the period and other periods it is believed that if group and battalions under group control had known the dispositions and missions of the 813th, 776th, 805th and other battalions distant from group and vice versa, any changes to meet the changing situation could have been made without difficulty or duplication of effort.

2. Battalion Combat Reports: The following comments pertain to comments, conclusions, and recommendations submitted in attached reports of TD battalions. Some conclusions drawn in these reports are already covered in par. 1 above.

a. The half-track M3 is unsuitable as a self propelled vehicle for an AT weapon due to:

- (1) Limited mobility in rough terrain.
- (2) Does not permit firing to rear or flanks.
- (3) Too large turning radius.

b. The 75mm gun is an effective AT weapon up to 1000 yards.

c. When there is no armored threat TD's may profitably be used on other missions such as firing at personnel and MG emplacements from defilade positions, provided that guns in their principal positions should not be employed against such targets. In any event the TD's should not remain in one place after firing. Difficulty of finding covered approaches to principal missions indicate the use of reserve TD guns for engaging these targets.

d. Close coordination with supporting artillery is essential. The TD battalion should be tied in with arty fire direction center. All TD officers and key NCO's in the Rcn. Co. should be qualified in sensing and adjusting artillery fire. Experience has shown that often TD elements have been able to call for and adjust fire on profitable targets.

e. Security sections properly employed furnish good close in security for TD's. The addition of two 81mm mortars per platoon would greatly improve the staying ability and would decrease losses from hostile infantry fire.

f. TD's should not be placed in position for any appreciable time in areas occupied by other troops. On defensive missions where fire positions are in congested areas such positions should not be occupied until necessary to meet a definite armored threat if covered approaches exist.

g. TD battalions, companies and smaller units should not be dissipated or employed piecemeal in a static defensive situation in order to provide static blocks for every possible tank approach. Attachment of companies and smaller units to other units in addition to complicating supply renders fire and movement (the TD's prime technique) difficult.

h. Considerable difficulty was experienced in supply by battalions attached to divisions. See particularly the reports of the 805th and 899th TD battalions. This was due largely to the frequent attachment of a battalion to different divisions. It is believed that the supply problems would be simplified considerably by making, insofar as possible, permanent assignments of TD battalions to group and divisions.

i. An increase in the number of AM radio sets over the number authorized by T/BA, particularly in the reconnaissance company, is desirable.

j. The 50 cal. machine gun mounted on the M10 destroyer is objectionable in that it raises the silhouette of the vehicle in the hull down position. Furthermore, the machine gun is so mounted that the gunner and his assistant must climb out of the turret to operate the gun. Therefore, since the destroyer vehicle is the principle target in a bombing and strafing attack, the casualties among machine gun operators has been high. It is believed that AA guns on ground mounts well dug in are more effective and will afford better protection to the personnel.

k. For information of battle experiences and of enemy tactics and installations see reports of battalions, particularly of 899th TD bn.

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Commanding.



HEADQUARTERS FIRST TANK DESTROYER GROUP

AFG 302

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14 April 1943

REPORT OF COMBAT ACTIVITY, 1ST TD GROUP

On 17 March 1943 at 0015 the Group CO, S-3, and Staff EM departed from bivouac area near LE KOUIF leaving instructions for the remainder of the staff and Hq. Co. to follow at 0445 and go into bivouac about five miles East from BOU CHEFKA.

At 0320 the Group CO, S-3, and Staff EM arrived at II Corps advanced CP at FERIANA and at 0600 Group CO received oral orders from General BRADLEY to organize defense of FERIANA. The Group CP was established 400 yds. SW II Corps CP located in FERIANA. The Group CO and S-3 left on a Reconnaissance of the area. At this time the units involved in the defense of FERIANA were the 805th TD Bn; 701st TD Bn; "F" Co. Ranger Bn; 2nd platoon "D" Btry. 443rd CA (AA); 1st Sq., 2nd platoon, Co. "B", 19th Engrs.; and MP Detachment, II Corps.

At 1350 Message sent to Ex. O. OP to send 2 sec. Security Platoon, S-4, Mtr. Off., Amm. Off., Comm. O., and 3 Ln. officers to report at once to Group advanced CP at FERIANA. These officers reported in at 2000 A.

At 1500 the CO, 805th TD Bn. came to Group CP and discussed defense plans, also at this time the Group S-3 left for the 701st TD Bn. for the same purpose.

On the morning of 18th March II Corp CP defense plans were formed and at 1730 overlays showing defense positions 701st TD Bn and 805th TD Bn were distributed to the interested units.

0900 19 March a telephone message came from G-3, Col. LAMBERT, to alert the 805th TD Bn. for support of 9th Division in a movement to S & SE. The Group CO immediately carried the message to the CO 805th TD Bn. The companies

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were to be alerted but remain in their present positions. At 1245, 20 March the 805th TD Bn. left for Vicinity of SBEITLA and were placed under control of 9th Division. Because of orders issued early that morning, the Group Rear Echelon moved to FERIANA and took up a position 300 yds. South of the Forward Echelon.

1130, 22 March, 1st Squad, 2nd Plat., Co. "B", 19th Engrs. released from Group control to own organization. At 1910 a telephone message was received from Major CHASE, Corp S-3, saying that two parachutists were seen dropped at T-C337. All units were immediately notified and Lt. KLETON took a patrol to reconnoiter area but no trace of any parachutists was found.

1655, 23 March, telephone message from G-3, II Corp, stating 601st TD Bn. had been shot up. 701st TD Bn. was to move out at once to vicinity of EL GUETTAR to replace 601st and 601st was to be withdrawn immediately and take the 701st place in the defense of FERIANA and THELEPTE air port. 1700 hours 601st TD Bn. was to be released from 1st Inf. Div. control and revert to Group control. 701st TD Bn released from Group control and attached to 1st Inf. Div. 1810, a listening post of 4 men, 1 half-track w/193 radio sent to establish listening post in area vacated by "A" Co., 701st TD Bn.

1800 hours, 24 March the 601st TD Bn. closed in their bivouac area and the following day Lt. Col. BAKER arrived at Group CP to contact Colonel STEVENS.

At 0835 hours, 26 March, Group CO issued oral orders that Echelon "A" would move to vicinity of GAFSA. Movement of vehicles by infiltration. 1335 hours, Echelon "A" closed in bivouac at GAFSA. 1430 hours, the Group CO contacted the C of S, IX Corp in GAFSA and received orders that the Group was attached to 1st Inf. Div. and that the 701st and 899th TD Bns. were to be under Group control in the EL GUETTAR section. In. officers were imne-

diately sent to 1st Inf. Div., 701st TD Bn. and 899th TD Bn. and Ln. Os. arrived at Group from the two TD Bns.

1745 hours, 27 March Group changed its CP to new location near Vic. EL GUETTAR, Y-2274 (Tunisia 1/200,000) 1920 hours, F.O. #6 published and distributed. (See annex). 2010 hours telegram from G-1, II Corp stated 45 EM for 805th TD Bn, 12 EM for 894th TD Bn, 58 EM for 601st TD Bn, and 1 officer for 805th TD Bn were available at once. Group S-1 was immediately notified and told to hold the replacements until they could be sent to the TD Bns.



0510 hours, 28 March Group CP established at Y-3476 and Group Ex. O. to observation post at Y-2982. 0610 hours, Group CO went ahead to reconnoiter and returned at 1000. 0839 Ex. O. reports that 899th is under heavy small arm fire and at 1026 reports no armored enemy. 1050 message received for 701st to push reconn. toward SAHEFIT and EL MAIFILIA. 1113 Ex. O. reports that ~~899th~~ ^{unit} right flank is under heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. Reconnaissance was pushed forward by 701st TD Bn. while 899th TD Bn. reports that enemy activity has practically ceased except for artillery fire. 1540, 899th reports no enemy activity. 1635, 899th CP moved from Y-3476 to Y-3275. 1646, 899th reports that unit on their right is moving forward under artillery fire, reconn. patrol reached Y-3867, fighting still continues on DJ EL MEHALTA, ^{request} propose to move gun Co. to Y 340685. ^(cancel 1000 hours by 899th) 1700, Recon. patrol, 899th reports advance to Y-3676 and at 1715 to Y 367670. 701st Recon. withdrawn at 1715 to Y-3576.

0526 hours, 29 March 899th notified to investigate report of enemy movement at Y-3865, at 0715 899th reports no enemy activity except artillery. Group CP moves at 0630 to Y-273693 near 899th TD Bn, CP. 0945, 701st Recon. patrols reached line 4379-4377. No enemy armor seen. The rest of the day the 899th and 701st shoved out Recon. patrols feeling out the enemy. 1641,

10 enemy tanks reported moving North at Y-4060 and about this time Group CP was heavily bombed by enemy aircraft. 1840, 9th Division reports firing on tanks at 361653. 1930, 899th patrols reached Y-48. No enemy armor reported seen by either TD Bns.



0812 hours, 30 March, 899th has reconn. line Y-360665-360675 but withdrawing immediately. 1025, 899th released from 1st TD Group and attached to Benson Forces. 2400, 701st Rcn. reports enemy shelling beyond Y-42.

0758, 31 March, S-2 reports from OP established Y-3070, continuous to our front. 1135, G-2 reports 6 tanks at 4366, 20 tanks east of F "L" in MACHELLA. 1246, CP moved to Y-1874. S-2 reports at 1340 that enemy artillery active only SE line Y-3964-Y-4168, guns vic. Y-3564 silenced. 1537, 701st reports forward elements at Y-3778 and Y-4375. 1625, S-2 reports all quiet till 1600, artillery on line Y355633-Y380643, no other movement seen. 1700, Rear Echelon moved from FERIANA to join forward CP bringing with it 150 TD replacements. 1710, 701st reports our artillery shelled enemy at Y-5278 with good effect. 1800, G-3 requests one TD Co. to go to south valley. 1030, 1 April, Telephone Message from G-2, 1st Inf. Div. that 6 enemy tanks were headed West at 4566, identified as enemy also 3 Btrys. enemy Artillery along line 43 between 67 and 66 and to shoot at all targets positively identified as enemy regardless of position. The 701st was immediately notified of this information. At 1720, G-2, 1st Inf. Div. was notified by telephone of the bombing on DJ EL ANK as reported from an OP at EL AYACNA.

0840, 2 April telephone message from 1st Div., 32 enemy tanks reported at Y-415642 moving west. The 701st was notified about the enemy tanks and was to execute previous defense plan on TINCHERS old stand (Previous locations of 899th TD Bn.). A telephone to G-3, 1st Inf. Div. informing him of moving one unit of 701st to Ridge at pass to S Valley, one at CR and one at BOU HAMRAN

0600, 4 April Lt. Col. FOREMAN, S-3, Hq. 1st TD Group, established a new

OP at high ground 350685. At 1045 Group received a telephone message from 701st of enemy infantry 8000 yds., Motor movement and upon questioning Arabs they said the Germans moved 3 Kms. SE 1 Rcn. Plat. 4270. This information was sent to G-2 by telephone and a written message.

At 1310, Col. GIBBS notified Group there would be an attack this PM the time and objective later. Upon receiving the word the 701st was immediately alerted. At 2340, Lt OLNEY, Ln. O. was sent to 701st to inform CO of the Provisions of 1st Div. overlay orders.

On 8 April, orders were issued to 1st TD Group to move to SBFITLA. The 701st would remain with 1st Div. The Group CP closed Vic. EL GUETTAR 1310. Upon arriving at SBFITLA, Group was attached to CCA (F.O. 17). The 805th and 776th TD Bns. were attached to Group.

0900, 11 April Capt. McCormick brought back to Group a message releasing Group from 1st A.D. and assigning them to II Corps and to move at once taking along 899th and 601st TD Bns. and move to BOUCHEBKA area. Group ~~closed in~~ ^{followed the line} new bivouac area 2100.

*About 2400 - 5 double 10.5 mm. were killed and
... .. when their vehicle*



Casualties:

- 1 man killed
- 2 men wounded

Vehicles lost:

- 1 jeep