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H.O.P.
28 Sept. 1943.

HEADQUARTERS
601ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 306 U. S. Army

27 September 1943

SUBJECT : Letter of Transmittal

TO : Commanding General, 36th Infantry Division, APO 36, U.S. Army.

1. Transmitted herewith are reports for the operation AVALANCHE as requested by letter Hq. 36th Infantry Division dated 24 September 1943, Subject, "Historical Records and Histories of Organizations"

2. Delay in transmittal was caused by bridge being washed out, preventing traffic from this sector on that date.

Walter E. Tardy
WALTER E. TARDY
Major, FA.,
Commanding

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REPORT

REPORT OF THE
"OPERATION AVALANCHE"

601ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
5 SEPTEMBER-20 SEPTEMBER 1945

94-6382

Alguno
LOADING COM... 25 July 1945

HEADQUARTERS
601ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
A.P.O. No. 300 U. S. ARMY

"BATTLE REPORT OF THE OPERATION AVALANCHE"

601ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

25 September 1943

Assigned to 5th Army and further assigned to VI Corps, the Battalion Commander, Major Walter E. Tardy, was informed that his operations would be with the 36th Infantry Division upon landing on an unknown hostile shore.

One complete gun company of 12 guns, one partial gun company of 6 guns, and one depleted gun company of 4 guns with additional necessary command vehicles, totaling 93 vehicles in all, were designated by higher headquarters as the complement to move on the original wave (D day). The remainder of the Battalion remained behind to arrive at the destination on D plus 6.

The first complement loaded on Landing Ship Tank 355 and Landing Ship Tank 378 at KAROUBA docks, BIZERTE PORT on 5 September 1943 under the command of Brigadier General Wilbur, 5th Army Staff. At that time, 2 Officers and 108 Enlisted Men, all valuable gunnery personnel, were still in SICILY on a Prisoner of War detail under 7th Army control by a former attachment. The Battalion's mission was not in an Anti-tank role but to fire as Artillery in coordination with the 151st Field Artillery Battalion.

The D-day convoy left Bizerte harbor on 7 September 1943 of which the advance elements of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, aforementioned, were a part. Very little occurred during the ocean voyage. The weather was excellent, and all available time was devoted to calisthenics and whatever training could be conducted aboard ship. On the morning of 9 September 1943, the ships entered Golfo Di Salerno and prepared to beach on call from shore control. At 1630, the forward elements of the Battalion landed on the United States Red Beach at PAESTUM, ITALY. The landing was in order except that the Battalion Commander's half-track, due to improper soundings of the beach by the Navy, drove off into 8 feet of water and was immediately rendered useless. The Battalion moved from the beach to an assembly area at coordinates N-046034, and commenced de-waterproofing operations. The Battalion Commander reported to the 36th Infantry Division Command Post, and in turn was told to report to the 151st Field Artillery Battalion Command Post, where he was assigned the mission of; (1) supporting the 151st Field Artillery firing to the South and on the right flank of the beachhead; (2) covering the road from OGLIASTRO against a possible enemy tank attack.

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BATTLE REPORT OF THE OPERATION "AVALANCHE" (cont)

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At 1700 hours on 10 September 1943, the Battalion Commander was ordered by the 36th Infantry Division Commander to attach "C" Company (12) guns to the 131st Field Artillery. At 0300 hours, 11 September, the Battalion Commander received orders to prepare the elements present of "A" and "B" Company for re-embarkation at 0600 hours on Red Beach to support the Ranger Operation on the AMALFI PENINSULA under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Darby. This operation will be explained in a later paragraph.

At 2130 hours, the Battalion Commander received information from the Navy that the Germans were to attempt a landing of Parachute Troops on the Airfield at N-847066 or on the Red Beach in the vicinity of PAESTUM. The Commanding General of the 36th Infantry Division directed that "C" Company be alerted to move M-10s to either position. The Company Commander, Captain H. E. Sundstrom, reconnoitered routes. At 0500 hours on 11 September, "C" Company moved on order of the Commanding General, 36th Infantry Division, to the vicinity of N-906085 with the mission of protecting that pass against an enemy tank thrust. The Battalion Commander went to the VI Corps Command post to confer with the anti-tank Officer on future anti-tank usages of the Battalion. Upon return to the Battalion Command post, he directed that the Command post be moved to the vicinity of "C" Company positions. Battalion Officers continued reconnaissance to locate friendly and enemy dispositions in the ALBANELLA sector.

In the meantime, the contingent of "A" and "B" Companies (12 guns) under the command of Major Edward L. Austin, Battalion S-2, participated with a task force comprising one company of tanks, one battery of Field Artillery, one company of Shore Engineers, one company of Infantry and assorted small units in the landing on AMALFI PENINSULA. The force under command of Brigadier General Wilbur loaded on Landing Craft Tanks at 1830 hours, 11 September with no orders. One M-10 of "B" Company was lost in the water because the Captain of Landing Craft Tank 422 (British) ordered the gun onto the beach saying that the water was shallow. It was not. Major Austin received orders at 0300 hours to follow Landing Craft Tank 27 to the new landing. Landing Craft Tank 27 lost its leader and most of the convoy remained off Red Beach for the remainder of the day and night. However, part of the vehicles and M-10s unloaded at MAORI about 1330 hours on 12 September. Heavy enemy bombing on the convoy continued throughout operations but no casualties were incurred by members of this Battalion.

On landing, the force was attached to the British 46th Division and moved to PASTENA, and had been hurriedly detached and attached to the British 128th Brigade at PONTECAGNANO FIANO. One platoon was placed in position and conducted fire on a position at a point 1 1/2 miles East of town. At 0700 hours, 11 September the force was attached to the 23rd Tank Brigade (British) and moved to N-775180.

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BATTLE REPORT OF THE OPERATION "AVALANCHE" (con't)

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Major Austin received orders that the force would be used on a reserve Tank Destroyer mission. At 1200 hours, 14 September, the following verbal order was received from the 10th British Corps via the 23rd Tank Brigade, "You will proceed at once to N-795156 and contact American Troops. With them you will make a counter-attack on your own initiative. You are attached to American VI Corps. "B" Company, 751st Tank Battalion is attached to you." The force moved to the designated point and an officer contacted the Commanding Officer 441st Infantry Regiment and advised him of orders received. He had no counter-attack in mind and gave orders for the force to remain in their present positions.

Major Austin had reported to the British 10th Corps to check authenticity of orders and after having received orders through VI Corps attaching the force to the 441st Infantry Regiment, reported to that Command Post for orders. He received a primary mission of anti-tank defense, employing tanks and M-10 Tank Destroyers. Reconnaissance was made by all officers and the plan as outlined in Overlay, 16 September, was approved by the Commanding Officer 441st Infantry Regiment. At 0830 hours, 15 September, Major Austin conferred with the Commanding Officer 133rd Field Artillery Battalion, and decided to place nine M-10s ("B" Company plus 2 guns attached from the 615th Tank Destroyer Battalion) in firing positions at N-785155. The guns were surveyed in by the 133rd Field Artillery Battalion, and one gun registered. Immediate orders were given to cease firing because counter-battery from the enemy had landed in the 133rd Field Artillery Battalion fire Direction Center.

In the afternoon, plans were made to coordinate anti-tank defense with the British on the left flank.

The second echelon of the Battalion (8guns from "A" Company, 4 guns from "B" Company, housekeeping vehicles, Reconnaissance Company and Headquarters Company) remained in BIZERTE to move on the D plus 6 Convoy. Every effort was being made to secure the return of 2 Officers and 108 Enlisted Men from the prisoner of war detail in SICILY.

At 1600 hours, 12 September, the 2 Officers and 108 Enlisted Men returned from the prisoner of war detail in SICILY. On 13 September, orders were received and the following vehicles were loaded on Landing Ships Tank 380 and 400 at KARCUBA docks; Reconnaissance Company, the remainder of "A", "B", and "C" Companies, and the Command Post Group plus necessary housekeeping vehicles from Headquarters Company. The remainder of Headquarters Company was to move for arrival at SALERNO on D plus 12. At 2100 hours, 13 September, the second Echelon left BIZERTE PORT.

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BATTLE REPORT OF THE OPERATION "AVALANCHE" (cont)

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The Convoy moved at a mean speed of eight knots, in a mean direction of Northeast. Weather was excellent, no enemy sighted.

After 40 hours on the MEDITERRANEAN, the convoy arrived at the GULF OF SALERNO and disembarked at 1830, 15 September at N-72240. It was subjected to enemy shelling while unloading. Elements of Major Austin's Force were immediately located and the 2nd Echelon closed in bivouac at N-791150 after marching a distance of five miles.

At 1030 hours, 16 September, a message was received from the 133rd Field Artillery Battalion, that a large enemy tank force was moving in the vicinity of N-825210. The force was alerted and Lieutenant Gioia, Reconnaissance Officer, went forward on reconnaissance. He found that 12 tanks had attacked friendly positions at ST. LUCIA, that three of these tanks had been placed out of action by British anti-tank guns and the remaining tanks had withdrawn. At 1400 hours, 16 September, "C" Company was moved to the vicinity of N-945090 to attack ALBALE LA with the 504th parachute Regiment and then to attack ALTAVILLA, N-957150.

At 1555 hours, 16 September, the Battalion Commander returned to the Battalion Command Post from the 45th Infantry Division Command post with information that the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, less "C" Company, is attached to the 45th Infantry Division Artillery and would operate under the control of Lieutenant Colonel Casey, Battalion Commander, 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the Division Anti-tank Officer, in the same sector as previously occupied by "A" Company, and "B" Company. At 1730 hours, the Battalion Command Post closed at N-780169 and moved to the new bivouac at N-792440 after marching a distance of 19 miles.

At 1900 hours, the Battalion Commander called the Company Commanders and laid out an anti-tank plan of operation for the Battalion in the sector N-702182 -- N-855280, N-808139 -- N-849169 with "A" Company covering the road N-702182 -- N-855280, two platoons of "B" Company covering the road N-808139 -- N-849169, one platoon of "B" Company covering the road N-808139--N-849169 and Reconnaissance Company conducting reconnaissance patrols on all three roads throughout the night.

At 0015 hours, 17 September, a message was received by radio, "To Commanding General, 45th Infantry Division -- Assemble Reconnaissance Company, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion without delay and move it to bivouac of 180th Regimental Combat Team vicinity of N-870000. Reconnaissance Company Commanding Officer at report to G - 3, VI Corps for instructions. At 0100 hours, the Battalion Commander, received orders to send one Reconnaissance Officer and one Gunnery Officer to VI Corps Command Post. The Battalion Commander ordered Lieutenant Yowell,

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BATTLE REPORT OF THE OPERATION "AV LANCHE" (cont.)

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"B" Company to VI Corps Command Post with instructions for Lieutenant Gioia to remain there. At 0400 hours, Reconnaissance Company moved to its new bivouac. At 1100 hours, Lieutenant Yowell returned to the Battalion Command Post with a mission for "B" Company and Reconnaissance Company to be a part of a special task force under Brigadier General Wilbur, composed of the 180th Combat Team, one Battalion 30th Engineers, one Company 120th Engineers, 189th Field Artillery Battalion, and attached Tank Destroyer, Anti-Aircraft and Tanks. The mission was to move a flying wedge around the right flank of the sector of operations through EBOLI and COMTURSI to BENEVENTO. At 1400 hours, the Battalion Commander returned to the Battalion Command Post from VI Corps Command Post with information that the operation was postponed indefinitely.

At 0900 hours, 18 September, the Battalion Commander, was ordered to report to the 45th Division Artillery Command Post for orders. At 1000 hours, a telephone message was received from the Commanding Officer 141st Combat Team for an officer to report for orders. The Battalion S-3, Captain B.A.G. Fuller, reported. At this stage, no one seemed to know to whom the Battalion was attached, having received orders from two different sources. At 1030 hours, the Battalion Liaison Officer arrived at the Battalion Command Post with the VI Corps list of Organization of Troops which clarified the present status of the Battalion. The Battalion was attached to the 45th Infantry Division under the control of and operating in the sector of the 141st Combat Team, which was also attached to the 45th Infantry Division, and under the control of Lieutenant Colonel Casey, Division Anti-tank Officer.

At 1100 hours, the Battalion S-3 returned to the Battalion Command Post with orders to place a platoon in position to cover the British advance to BATTIPAGLIA, (N-830235). The 1st platoon of "A" Company under the command of Lieutenant Matter, was assigned the mission. At 1230 hours, the Commanding General, 45th Infantry Division, ordered the Battalion to move to a new bivouac to the East to make room for the 3rd Infantry Division assembly area. At 1415 hours, orders were received for Major Edward L. Austin, Battalion S-2, to report to the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion and assume command of that Battalion. At 1430 hours the Battalion Command Post closed at N-792146 and moved to its new bivouac at N-805160, distance marched - 2 1/2 miles. At 1600 hours, information was received that the British had taken BATTIPAGLIA and that the 1st platoon of "A" Company under Lieutenant Matter had moved into position at N-827242. At 1630 hours the Battalion Commander returned to the Battalion Command Post with information that Reconnaissance Company had been ordered back to the Battalion. At 1745 hours, the Battalion Executive, Major Daniel S.T. Hinman, reported to the 141st Infantry Regimental Command Post on orders and after conferring with the Regimental Commanding Officer, changed the position of the 1st platoon of "A" Company to N-852224 with the remainder of "A" Company

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moved to N-813175 for coverage of the 41st Infantry Regimental advance on EBOLI.

At 1130 hours, 19 September, the Battalion received the mission of covering the 179th Combat Team on an attack of Hill 405 (N-804249). The Battalion Commander assigned the mission to "A" Company. Lieutenant Frederick C. Miner, the Company Commander, placed two guns at N-851222, two guns at N-840210, 3 guns at N-845221 and 3 guns at N-853208. At 2030 hours, the Battalion Commander returned to the Battalion Command post from VI Corps Command Post with information that "C" Company would return to the Battalion on 20 September.

At 1320 hours, on 20 September, orders were received from VI Corps that the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion is detached from the 41st Combat Team, the 45th Infantry Division, and the 50th Infantry Division respectively, and is attached to the 3rd Infantry Division; to assemble the complete Battalion at the present location of the Battalion Command post.

Officers and men of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion were rather perturbed by the usual attachments and detachments of companies and platoons to various organizations for support, not even in one division, but in several divisions, including British. As a result of operations in the TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN and as a result of discussions with commanders at the close of the TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN, Allied Force Headquarters and 5th Army Headquarters published training notes advising that Tank Destroyers Battalions be kept intact, at least in one division sector, to repel a possible large tank thrust in that sector. All major units are equipped with anti-tank weapons found to be most effective in operation against small tank thrusts.

More leeway should be given the Battalion Commander of the Tank Destroyer Battalion even utilizing him as Division anti-tank Officer, as does the 45th Infantry Division in control of the anti-tank features in a divisional sector. During most of the operations the Battalion Commander and Battalion Staff were used as messenger boys between higher headquarters and the various gun companies and platoons detached from the Battalion. In some cases, the Battalion Commander was left completely out of the picture. At various times, even Company Commanders were overlooked.

No battle casualties were incurred by the Battalion during the operation due to the fact that no actual contact with the enemy was gained by any element of the Battalion.

James C. Grimes
JAMES C. GRIMES
1st Lt. 601st T.D. Bn.
Adjutant.

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