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HEADQUARTERS
628th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP)
APO 403, U. S. Army

16 October 1944



SUBJECT; Report After Action Against Enemy - Month of August 1944.

TO : Commanding General, Hq. 5th Armored Division, APO 255, U. S. Army.

1. Campaign of Western Europe.

2. Commanding Officers were;

a. Battalion Commander: William M. Hernandez, Lt. Col., F.A., O-191305, from 0001 hours 1 August 1944 to 1630 hours 20 August 1944 when he was KIA at Douains, France. Battalion Executive Officer, William J. Gallagher Major, F.A., O-384952, assumed command of Battalion from 1700 hours 20 Aug. 1944 until 2400 hours 31 Aug. 1944.

b. Hq. Company Commander: John S. Wright, Jr., Capt., Inf., O-405078, from 0001 hours 1 August 1944 until about 0930 hours 27 Aug. 44, when he was relieved of above assignment and assigned as Bn. S-2. Daniel L. Thomas, Capt., F.A., O-422582 relieved of assignment as Co. Comdr., Co. "A" and assigned as Co. Comdr., Hq. Co., from about 0930 hours 27 Aug. 44 until 2400 hours 31 Aug. 1944.

c. Company "A" Commander: Daniel L. Thomas, Capt., F.A., O-422582 from 0001 hours 1 Aug. 44 until relieved of above assignment about 0930 hours 27 Aug. 44 and assigned as Co. Comdr., Hq. Co. James H. Lloyd, Capt., F.A., O-409517 relieved of assignment as Bn. S-2 and assigned as Co. "A" Comdr. from about 0930 hours 27 Aug. 1944 until 2400 hours 31 Aug. 1944.

d. Company "B" Commander: Paul L. McPherran, Capt., F.A., O-317706 from 0001 hours 1 Aug. 1944 until 2400 hours 31 August 1944.

e. Company "C" Commander: Hal A. Burgess, Jr., Capt., FA, O-1168588 from 0001 hours 1 Aug. 1944 until 2400 hours 31 August 1944.

f. Res. Company Commander: Douglas H. Ketchum, 1st Lt., FA, O-405209, from 0001 hours 1 Aug. 44 until 2400 hours 31 August 1944.

g. Medical Detachment: Francis T. England, Capt., M.C., O-1683058 from 0001 hours 1 August 1944 until 31 August 1944, 2400 hours.

3. Losses in action were as follows:

a. Killed in Action:

(1) William M. Hernandez, Lt. Col., FA, O-191305, Bn. Comdr. at 1630 hours 20 August 1944 at Douains, France.

(2) John J. Devine, Jr., 2nd Lt., AUS-1D, O-1822679, Plat. Ldr. Company "A", S&A at night 12 Aug. 44 in vic. of Argentan, France. Died at 75th Med. Col. Co. on 12 August 1944.

(3) Clyde C. Broom, T/5, FA, 34388824, Co. "A", S&A on 20 Aug. 44 in vicinity of Douains, France. DOW on 26 Aug. 1944.

TOTAL KIA - AUGUST - 2 OFFICERS - 1 EM.

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b. Wounded and Injured Men in Action

- (1) George F. Morgan, T/4, PA, 34110685, Co. B, SWA, Evac.
- (2) Jacob (NMI) Goodman, Sgt. PA, 32084795, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (3) Isaac Iacona, Pfc, PA, 32085528, Co. B, LWA, Ret. to Dy.
- (4) Wm. B. Forthoffer, 1st Lt, AUS, 0-1822691, Co. C, SIA, Evac.
- (5) John W. Sord, Pvt, PA, 33011631, Co. B, LWA, Evac.
- (6) Alphonse Witkowski, Pvt, PA, 34527901, Co. B, LWA, Evac.
- (7) Wm. T. Tomlin, Pfc, PA, 34100876, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (8) Joseph S. Drost, S Sgt, PA, 20315042, Co. C, LWA, Evac.
- (9) Lawrence D. Ainslie, Pvt, PA, 31302477, Co. A, SWA, Evac.
- (10) Michael (NMI) Flora, T/5, PA, 33161321, Hq. SWA, Evac.
- (11) Edward W. Barth, Sgt, PA, 35121874, Co. B, LWA, Evac.
- (12) Ashley C. Long, Cpl. PA, 34386198, Co. C, LWA, Ret. to Dy.
- (13) Wm. J. Beam, Pvt., MC, 34386366, Med. Det., LWA, Evac.
- (14) Harold N. Gibson, Sgt. PA, 33161348, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (15) Roland A. Eubank, 1st Lt., AUS, 0-1824156, Co. B, LIA, Dy.
- (16) Pete Kanischak, Cpl., PA, 32065262, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (17) Harvey N. Sharpe, T/5, PA, 34386022, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (18) Frederick J. VanVoorst, Pfc, PA, 36400068, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (19) John J. Kurkowski, Cpl, PA, 36527535, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (20) Daniel C. Trench, 1st Lt., PA, 0-373068, Co. A, LIA, Evac.
- (21) Jessie G. Hunter, Pfc, PA, 34038568, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (22) Joe W. Gibson, Pvt., PA, 34371165, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (23) Salvator Volpitta, Pvt. PA, 32154525, Co. A, LWA, Evac.
- (24) Roy Haupt, T Sgt., PA, 32084484, Hq. Co., LIA, Ret. to Dy.
- (25) Donald F. Hayward, Sgt., PA, 32154535, Co. A, LIA, Duty.

TOTAL SWA -	AUGUST -	0 Off.	3 EM
"	SIA -	- 1 Off.	0 EM
"	LWA -	- 0 Off.	15 EM
"	LIA -	- 2 Off.	4 EM

c. None Missing in Action during month of August 1944.

d. None captured during month of August 1944.

4. Battles:

a. This Unit participated in the 5th Armored Division's drive across France taking part in all battles and actions encountered enroute. The Battalion did not engage in combat as a complete organization, but with the separate companies with one reconnaissance platoon of Reconnaissance Co. attached, normally one to each Combat Command of the 5th Armored Div. It is necessary to refer to the G-2 reports of the 5th Armored Div., 5th Armored Div. Arty. and Combat Commands for unit identifications and for the exact enemy situation in any one situation.

(1) The state of enemy preparedness, training and preparation varied considerably as this unit was in action against Panzer Units, Wehrmacht Infantry, GAF ground troops fighting as infantry, service troops and battalions of conquered personnel ranging thru all the Balkan countries, Russia and even including some Mongolian men serving in the German forces as aid men. Panzer men were well trained, aggressive, employing their tanks boldly and using clever camouflage and employing constant fire and movement combined with excellent use of terrain. Wehrmacht and SS Units fought aggressively and retired in good order. Service troops and units of high percentage foreign personnel fought poorly and large numbers of men straggled

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or remained behind to surrender to our units. Even in the case of low grade personnel the German NCOs employed available weapons very effectively until their ammunition gave out. Morale of enemy units was often high among Panzer and SS Units but others were often weary of the war and abandoned equipment and left large numbers of stragglers to give themselves up.

(2) The first time elements of this Bn. encountered natural obstacles was on 4 Aug. 44 near St. Martin, France. It consisted of trees felled across the highway. Some of these had been felled by demolition charges.

(3) Previously on 2 Aug. 44, two members were injured by shrapnel from anti-personnel mines in the trees along the highway near Millieres, France. These were exploded by the radio aerial passing through the branches causing the mines to explode. Land mines were encountered frequently, being planted chiefly in the shoulders of roads at turns, defiles and fords where vehicles would leave hard surface or regular path to encircle obstacles or pass wrecked vehicles. The first incident was on 4 Aug. 44 when a reconnaissance party encountered a squad of Germans planting mines in the road shoulders near St. Martin, Fr. Subsequently the Bn. Commander's vehicle, while enroute to visit a company struck a teller mine in a narrow lane leading off the main road on 14 Aug. 44 near La Courbett, France, causing serious injury to the driver.

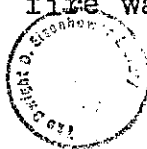
(4) One method of the enemy to impede our progress was to fortify a house in a town allowing the advance guard to pass thru and opening fire on subsequent vehicles with machine guns causing confusion to our columns. On 7 Aug. 44, near Poille, Fr., German snipers occupied the railroad station but were effectively silenced by direct fire of our M-10's. One machine gun was knocked out and three prisoners were taken. Again on 11 Aug. 44, near Argentan, Germans occupied a house commanding a road junction but three rounds of 3 inch HE silenced the enemy fire and killed 16 of the enemy.

(5) Demolitions were used to fell trees for road blocks and obstacles but were not observed to be used in any other manner in the vicinity of our units.

b. (1) During the month of August this unit was hit by enemy air action only two times when the rear vehicles of our column were strafed near Fonville, France by one FW 190. No damage or casualties to us.

(2) Enemy armor was never used against elements of this unit in any amount of force. Only one or two tanks, or forces of at the most seven tanks were encountered at once. They often employed these with infantry support and as advance flank or rear guards for columns of unarmored vehicles such as personnel and supplies in trucks. Enemy armor was usually well disposed in excellent firing positions and their camouflage technique was superior. On several occasions natural foliage and brush was affixed to the enemy tanks in such a manner that even in motion, if not in the open, it was difficult to discern the position of the vehicle. When so camouflaged they waited for good targets of opportunity such as armor and did not fire on exposed personnel and light vehicles. Due to the use of flashless powder by the enemy it was extremely difficult to locate their position. They move to alternate positions immediately after firing, moving slowly so as to make it appear as trees moving in wind. Tanks were often employed singly in delaying action.

(3) Enemy artillery was characterized by its piece-meal employment against our units, never more than a battery concentration was encountered. Direct fire was mainly encountered from tanks, S.P. guns and

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emplaced dug-in 88 mm used as AT guns. Interdiction fire was encountered from time to time.

c. Tabulation of Enemy Losses Inflicted for August.

(1) Tanks and SP Guns

Bn. Materiel Destroyed

(a) Pz. Kw VI	1
(b) Pz. Kw V	2
(c) Pz. Kw IV	2
(d) Unidentified	0
(e) Armd. Car w/20 mm gun	1

(2) Transport

(a) Armd. Pers. Carrier	1
(b) Cmd. Cars (sedan type)	0
(c) Gen Purpose (1 to 3 tons)	8
(d) Motorcycle	0

(3) Towed Guns

(a) 88 mm	1
(b) 40 mm	1

(4) Enemy Installations

(a) Pillboxes	1
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(5) Miscellaneous

(a) MG (Emplacement)	3
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Enemy Personnel

(1) Officers	
(a) Killed	0
(b) Captured	0
(2) Enlisted Men.	
(a) Killed	260
(b) Captured	52

d. Prisoners of war - see journal - relatively few were taken.

e. Elements affecting action.

(1) The enemies apparent information and reconnaissance were usually poor as he was often cut off or isolated and blundered into our positions at night as when one platoon shot up and knocked out eight German trucks and killed 240 men on 11 August 1944 near LeMesle, France.

(2) French civilians and FFI were very helpful and often supplied accurate information to our units and acted as guides and interpreters.

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(3) Terrain. In the Cotentin Peninsula, Hedgerow country made it difficult for our operations. In north central and northeastern central part of France hedgerows diminished offering excellent terrain for armor operations.

f. Action.

(1) Battalion attached to 5th Armored Division from 2 Aug. 44 to 31 August 1944.

(2) The mission primarily was to provide AT defense and secondly, indirect fire for Division and elements of the Division. Companies were assigned to different combat commands and provided road blocks, AT defense and flank protection as the Division moved from one objective to another. In some instances companies supported small task forces of infantry, combined infantry and tanks in seizing small strong points and securing them. Companies were rotated so as to give them rest where possible. Indirect fire support was given to Division Artillery on different occasions.

(3) No special weapons were used. M-10s were the primary weapons.

(4) Radio communications were used throughout all operations. Communication was adequate and satisfactory except when companies were attached to combat commands and intervening distances became too great for our type of radio equipment. Messenger service was used to supplement the radio communications.

(5) No supporting units.

(6) No bayonets, flame throwers, were used by this unit.

(7) Supply for August. Difficulty was experienced during the latter part of the month due to Class I & III cumps being so far to the rear as a result of the fast moving situation. Initial shortages, i.e., shortages not received prior to leaving United Kingdom, were not received after initial reports and requisitions were submitted. Sometimes difficulty was experienced on coordination of supply to units attached to combat commands. It should be a policy that the supported unit furnish fuel, ammunition and rations for the supporting unit. This had been ironed out by the end of the month.

(8) Evacuation; During the month of August the Medical Aid Men attached to the various companies evacuated casualties through the 75th Medical Col. Co. which was usually 3 to 4 miles from the front. Evacuations were made with 1-4 ton trucks equipped with racks to carry two litters. Due to the fact that the companies were usually attached to Combat Commands, it was impossible for the Company aid men to evacuate through the Battalion Aid Station. Supplies for the Battalion Aid Men and Station were obtained by requisitions submitted through Bn. S-4 Section. Supplies were adequate and no shortage of any items noted.

(9) Casualties: Types of casualties handled by Company Aid Men for the month of August are as follows:

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Battle Casualties		
Extremities	Head & Neck	Chest & Abdomen
20	2	2

Non-Battle Casualties	
4	- Disease.
2	-, GSW self inflicted (IOD)
2	- Combat Fatigue.

5. Summation.

a. This unit became operational two days after debarkation, necessitating a fast shakedown of personnel and materiel. This was accomplished with the unit going into action with full strength in men and officers and with all 36 of the M-10s rolling.

b. The M-10, with the 3 inch gun, proved to be an excellent weapon and vehicle for tank destroyer operations. However, three disadvantages became apparent as the unit continued in action.

(1) The muzzle blast and flash often hampered observation, and disclosed the position of the M-10. This in part was countered by the Destroyer Commander observing from the up-wind side of the destroyer---and by t the destroyer never staying in the same position for more than three or four shots, thus emphasizing the soundness of having a pre-planned alternate position to go to.

(2) By actual combat, it has been learned in this unit that the hand operated turret is entirely too slow for quick shifting from one target to another. This condition will become more critical as the winter months approach, for in its experiences in the West Virginia mountains in November of 1943, this unit has discovered that it is almost impossible to turn the traversing handwheel, manually, so frozen and stiff does the grease in the turret ring become. Even the use of the lightest lubricant possible merely alleviates, and does not remove, this condition.

(3) The position of the .50 cal. M.G., as presently mounted on the turret, is almost worthless as an AA weapon for the traverse is greatly limited, necessitating the gunner to fire the gun while standing on the back deck of the vehicle, thus exposing himself entirely. What is needed most is an offensive weapon against ground troops, but again because of its present mount, it is impossible to bring the fire of this weapon against enemy infantry who might be trying to close in on the vehicle. Some sort of ring mount, with all ground traverse, and with a low enough search or depression, would correct this condition. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this .50 cal. mount as now exists, is inadequate for fire against ground troops. This unit, because of some of its attachments with front line infantry, can write of the deficiencies in this mount from actual combat experience. Even a coaxially mounted .50 cal. MG would be preferable to the present mount, but the ring mount is the first choice in this unit.

c. Operations as a Battalion or under Battalion control were not performed at any time. The companies were detached from the Battalion, and attached to the various combat commands in the 5th Armored Division, necessitated by the fact that this Div. usually had missions which required its combat commands operating separately, in two or three pronged advances. The companies were usually employed for AT defense, as road blocks, occasionally as flank guards, often in direct assault on fortified strong points with all of the firing companies being used at one time or another to reinforce elements of the Div. Artillery, at which times they were given the mission of harrassing or interdiction fire. Sometimes, the companies were in turn further broken up by the Combat Commanders, with individual

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TD Platoons being attached to small task forces. In a few instances, commanders of small task forces had a tendency, in the earlier days of this Unit's attachment to this Division, to use the TDs offensively, as tanks. This worked somewhat of a hardship on the TDs both because the weapon as such is not a tank, and because of the lack of training of the unit in armored tactics. However, as time went on, there came a mutual understanding between TD and Armored Officers, and an appreciation of the limitations and capabilities of each other's weapons. In the few instances where the Battalion, less one company, would be attached to any one Combat Command, the Battalion Commander and his staff acted as advisory staff members to the Combat Commander, recommended various missions for the attached TDs and helped materially the communications efficiency of the higher unit, by putting at the disposal of the Combat Commander the TD radios as an alternate means of communications for the Combat Command. This was particularly true in the case of the Reserve Command, which in an Armored Division, does not have as complete a Staff, under the present T/O, as do the Combat Commands A and B. In the situations where each Combat Command would have a TD Company attached, the Bn. Commander himself, or his staff, daily visited the companies, with a view to inspecting the operations and ironing out any difficulties which might arise between the Co. Comdr. and the Combat Command. In conclusion, it is the opinion of this officer and his staff, that the doctrine of never-splitting-the-Battalion, as taught in the TD school of tactics, could not have been followed in the operations of the Campaign of Western Europe for the following reasons; The tactics of the Germans were such that, in most cases encountered by the Division to which this unit was attached, they (the Germans) almost invariably employed their tanks piecemeal as road blocks and as delaying forces in the manner of dug-in guns, and then never in enough strength to warrant the employment of a TD Bn. against them. Thus, had the Bn. been kept together, as advocated by the TD School, it would not have been nearly so useful as it was in being broken down for multiple and simultaneous uses. For instance, often one Co. would be engaged in indirect fire while another was on road block and the other perhaps moved towards the head of another armored column, ready to repel enemy tanks. Also, in the absence of enemy armor, the TDs have a use as direct support weapons against enemy ground personnel; this unit having inflicted approximately 260 casualties on the enemy when engaged in missions of this character in August.



William J. Gallagher
 WILLIAM J. GALLAGHER,
 Major, F.A.,
 Commanding.

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