

# 628 Tank Destroyer Battalion

*The following Combat History was compiled in 1945 and is the official history of the 628th T.D. Bn. It was submitted by Tony Simas*

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TO : Commanding Officer, Headquarters,  
628th T. D. Bn., APO 339 U.S. Army

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James A. Robbins  
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# VICTORY TD



THE HISTORY OF THE 628TH TANK DESTROYER BN. IN  
TRAINING AND COMBAT, PREPARED BY AND FOR THE  
MEN WHO SAW ACTION WITH THE BATTALION IN FRANCE,  
BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG, HOLLAND, AND GERMANY.

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## Dedication

To those former members of this Battalion  
who gave their lives that Freedom of Speech,  
Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want,  
and Freedom from Fear might be attained  
by the men of all Nations, this book is hereby

Dedicated.

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Headquarters  
628th Tank Destroyer Battalion  
APO No 758 U.S. Army

9 May, 1945

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE BATTALION:

As I write this little message to you, my comrades of the 628th, the war in Europe has just ended; and in my heart there is both joy and sadness. There is great joy for those of you who have gotten through this hell, sound of mind and body; but there is deep sadness for our men and officers who have fallen. In all humility, I salute our lads who are no longer with us. In all instances, they died willingly, as do men for a cause that is just and right; and they died bravely as can only an American soldier. We, their buddies who served by their side, shall always remember them with a sweet reverence which can be felt only by comrades in arms. It is my earnest prayer that the peace, for which the Conference at San Francisco strives, will be so lasting and honest, that none of our splendid men shall have died in vain. And I salute, too, those of you who have gone through the many strenuous months of combat with the Battalion. The amazing amount of enemy material and men which you blasted out of the war is but a tribute to your courage and skill at arms. The Break-through in Normandy...the Falaise Gap...EureSeine Pocket...Compeigne Forest...Sedan...Wallendorf...Hurtgen...the Ardennes...the Rhineland...the crashing offensive to the very banks of the Elbe River...all these and countless minor battles and campaigns you can, in the years to come, remember with a quiet pride. Whether it is your destiny soon to return to civilian life, or to help finish off our remaining enemy, the Jap, I wish you luck and Godspeed. Believe me, it has been a grand privilege and an honor to have commanded such a fine Battalion in combat. Again, I salute you all...and I shall never forget you.

William J. Gallagher  
Lt. Col., F.A., Commanding

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**"LEST WE FORGET"**

.....The world will little note nor long remember,  
what we say here, but it can never forget what they did  
here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated  
here to the unfinished work which they who fought here  
have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to  
be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us  
-that from these honored dead we take increased devotion  
to that cause for which they gave the last full measure  
of devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead  
shall not have died in vain - that this nation, under God  
shall have a new birth of freedom - and that government  
of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall  
not perish from the earth.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

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**LEST WE FORGET**

**William M. Hernandez**  
0191305, Lt. Col. F.A.  
Killed In Action Douains, France  
Aug. 20, 1944

|                                                                                                |                                                                                            |                                                                                              |                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pfc. Samuel A. Augustine</b><br>33028869, A Co. KIA<br>Werbomont, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945    | <b>T/5 William Mayers</b><br>34385822, B Co. KIA<br>Manhay, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945         | <b>Cpl. Herman Harth</b><br>20315041, C Co. KIA<br>Hurtgen, Germany<br>30 Nov. 1944          | <b>T/4 Donald F. Beck</b><br>36400303, A Co. KIA<br>Simmerath, Germany<br>30 Jan. 1945        |
| <b>T/4 William L. Boswell</b><br>34173763, Hq. Co. KAI<br>Wallendorf, Germany<br>19 Sept. 1944 | <b>Pvt. Thomas W. Bowman</b><br>34371375, A. Co. KIA<br>Osterath, Germany<br>15 March 1945 | <b>T/5 Clyde C. Broom</b><br>34386824, A Co. DOW<br>Douains, France<br>26 Aug. 1944          | <b>Pvt. Wellington E. Brundage</b><br>36400080, B Co. KIA<br>Conde, France<br>4 Sept. 1944    |
| <b>Cpl. Floyd E. Burge</b><br>33034922, A Co. KIA<br>Werbomont, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945         | <b>Pfc. Randy B. Carpenter</b><br>34425461, B Co. KIA<br>Manhay, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945    | <b>Sgt. George A. De Lia</b><br>33161296, B Co. KIA<br>Haute-Bodeaux, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945 | <b>2nd Lt. John J. Devine Jr.</b><br>01822679, A Co. DOW<br>Argentan, France<br>13 Aug. 1944  |
| <b>T/5 Louis P. Di Orio</b><br>20315035, C Co. KIA<br>Hurtgen, Germany<br>11 Dec. 1944         | <b>Sgt. Lawrence W. Elmore</b><br>20315803, B Co. KIA<br>Manhay, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945    | <b>Cpl. Henry Goffart</b><br>33161233, C Co. KIA<br>Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944        | <b>Pvt. Willie B. Greene</b><br>34371005, C Co. KIA<br>Hommerdingen, Germany<br>19 Sept. 1944 |
| <b>Pfc. Earl F. Higley</b><br>33161282 C Co. KIA<br>Horsdorf, Luxembourg<br>23 Sept. 1944      | <b>Pvt. Charles W. Hill</b><br>33161172, B Co. KIA<br>Manhay, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945       | <b>Cpl. John A. Hydu</b><br>33028902, C Co. KIA<br>Horsdorf, Luxembourg<br>23 Sept. 1944     | <b>Sgt. Gerald W. Joner</b><br>39396408, Rcn. Co. KIA<br>Wallendorf, Germany<br>19 Sept. 1944 |
| <b>Sgt. John Kalis</b><br>36015718, B Co. KIA                                                  | <b>T/5 Peter Kowalchik</b><br>33161252 C Co. DOW                                           | <b>Cpl Chester W. Kuta</b><br>26016238 B Co. KIA                                             | <b>Sgt. Stanley J. Lada</b><br>32071189, A Co. DOI                                            |

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stockem, Germany<br>17 Sept. 1944                                                            | Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944                                                        | Manhay, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945                                                            | Kalterherberg, Germany<br>3 Nov. 1944                                                                 |
| <b>Sgt. Martin P. Lally</b><br>32084601, C Co. KIA<br>Werbomont, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945      | <b>Pvt. John I. J. Lawler</b><br>33028880, C Co. DOI<br>Hurtgen, Germany<br>10 Dec. 1944 | <b>Sgt. Charles A. Leo</b><br>35020246, C Co. KIA<br>Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944    | <b>Pvt. John P. Loncaric</b><br>33161105, Rcn. Co. DOW<br>Stockem, Germany<br>17 Sept. 1944           |
| <b>Cpl. Ashley C. Long</b><br>34386198, C Co. KIA<br>Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944       | <b>Sgt. Tames W. Luvender</b><br>20317374, C Co. KIA<br>Hurtgen, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944  | <b>Pfc. Mario A. Mastro</b><br>33029156 B Co. DOW<br>Odrimont, Belgium<br>4 Jan, 1945     | <b>Pfc. James A. McClintock, Jr.</b><br>34386127, B Co. KIA<br>Begelbach, Luxembourg<br>21 Sept. 1944 |
| <b>Pfc. Edward Mickacinich</b><br>33035715, B Co. KIA<br>Sedan, France<br>6 Sept. 1944       | <b>T/4 George F. Morgan</b><br>34110685, B Co. DOW<br>France<br>4 Aug. 1944              | <b>Pfc. Frank L. Mozina</b><br>33161228, C Co. KIA<br>Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944   | <b>Pfc. William Nicholson</b><br>33161356, Rcn. Co. KIA<br>Stockigt, Germany<br>15 Sept. 1944         |
| <b>T/5 Jesse A. Pannell</b><br>34425825, A Co. KIA<br>Osterath, Germany<br>15 March 1945     | <b>T/5 Floyd J. Robinson</b><br>32046621, A Co. KIA<br>Krefeld, Germany<br>3 March 1945  | <b>1st Lt. Ben J. Smith</b><br>01824384, C Co. KIA<br>Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944   | <b>Pfc. Theodore Spalte</b><br>32065342, B Co. KIA<br>Werbomont, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945               |
| <b>Sgt. Doyle E. Swilley</b><br>36014268, A Co. KIA<br>Tangermunde, Germany<br>12 April 1945 | <b>Pvt. Leo Tovar</b><br>39564912, A Co. KIA<br>Werbomont, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945        | <b>T/5 Thomas Vender Veen</b><br>36400270, C Co. KIA<br>Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944 | <b>T/Sgt. Nicholas Van Handel</b><br>32154633, A Co. KIA<br>Krefeld, Germany<br>3 March 1945          |
| <b>Pvt. William T. Walden</b><br>34370625, Rcn. Co. DOW<br>Odrimont, Belgium<br>4 Jan. 1945  | <b>T/5 William J. Walters</b><br>34386105, B Co. KIA<br>Manhay, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945   | <b>Pfc. Earl V. Ward</b><br>34071761, C Co. KIA<br>Hommerdingen, Germany<br>19 Sept. 1944 | <b>Pfc. Michael H. Welsh</b><br>33161359, Rcn. Co. KIA<br>Neukirchfeld, Germany<br>4 March 1945       |
| <b>Pfc. Cecil Wilson</b><br>34707801, A Co. KIA                                              | <b>Sgt. Woodrow W. Woods</b><br>34071626, C Co. KIA                                      | <b>Cpl. Casimer A. Wydrzenski</b><br>33161329, C Co. KIA                                  | <b>Pfc. Joseph G. Yakaitus, Jr.</b><br>31038937, C Co. DOW                                            |

|                                                                                          |                                   |                                  |                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Osterath, Germany<br>15 March 1945                                                       | Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944 | Hurtgen, Germany<br>26 Nov. 1944 | Bergstein, Germany<br>6 Dec. 1944 |
| <b>T/5 Arnold B. Zeigler</b><br>34425469, A Co. KIA<br>Berbomont, Belgium<br>7 Jan. 1945 |                                   |                                  |                                   |

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## HISTORY OF THE 628TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

### INDIANTOWN GAP PENNSYLVANIA

In 1941 General Drum, then Commanding General, First United States Army, decided to form six provisional anti-tank battalions for experimental purposes to be tested in the First Army Maneuvers held in North and South Carolina in October and November, 1941.

The 28th Infantry Division Pennsylvania's National Guard, Keystone Division, which had been federalized and on active service at Indiantown Gap Military Reservation since 17 February 1941, was one of six Divisions ordered to form a provisional anti-tank battalion.

General Martin, Commanding General, 28th Infantry Division, issued orders whereby the personnel of the 53rd Field Artillery Brigade Headquarters, 107th Field Artillery Regiment, 108th Field Artillery Regiment, 109th Field Artillery Regiment, 110th Field Artillery Regiment, 111th Field Artillery Regiment, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 103rd Engineer Regiment and 103rd Medical Regiment were transferred for this purpose. On 10 July, the 28th Division Anti-Tank Battalion (provisional) was formed under the command of then Major Carl L. Peterson, and moved into its first quarters at Tent City, Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

In addition to Major, now Colonel, Carl Peterson, 112th Infantry, as Battalion Commander, the original Battalion Staff was composed of Captain, now Lt. Colonel, William P. Davis, III, 108th Field Artillery, Battalion Executive Officer and S-3; 1st Lt., now Lt. Colonel, Thomas B. Roelofs, 112th Infantry, Adjutant and S-1; Captain now Lt. Colonel John J. Gilfilan, Headquarters 28th Infantry

Division Intelligence Officer, S-2; and 2nd Lt., now Captain William Young, 107th Field Artillery, Supply Officer, S-4.

Headquarters Battery was commanded by 1st Lt., now Major Joseph A. Patlive 108th Field Artillery, who was both Battery Commander and Battalion Communications Officer. Other officers were 2nd Lt., now Captian Richard H. Reeve, 108th Field Artillery, Battalion Motor Officer, and 2nd Lt., now Capt. Robert H. Meisenbelter, 108th Field Artillery, Battalion Personnel Officer.

"A" Battery had 1st Lt., now Major Marcus L. Hoover, 111th Infantry; as Battery Commander, with 2nd Lt., now Captain Eugene Swanheart, 109th Field Artillery, 2nd Lt. Robert I. Ivey, 107th Field Artillery, and 2nd Lt. Richard J. Fitzgerald, 111th Infantry, as Battery Officers.

"B" Battery was formed with 1st Lt., now Lt. Colonel Charles A. corcoran, 107th Field Artillery, as Battery Commander, assisted by 1st Lt., now retired, Leonard Dotson, 108th Field Artillery, 2nd Lt., now Captain Daniel L. Thomas, 109th Field Artillery, and 2nd Lt., now Captain Jessie B. Schooley, 109th Field Artillery.

"C" Battery had 1st Lt., now Major Robert Gaynor, 109th Infantry, as Battery Commander, with 1st Lt., now Captain Thomas W. Scott, Jr., 110th Infantry and 2nd Lt., now Captain John S. Wright, 55th Infantry Brigade Headquarters, as Battery Officers.

"D" Battery included Captain, now Major Harry A. Overholtzer, 108th Field Artillery, as Battery Commander, and 1st Lt., now Lt. Colonel William J. Gallagher, 108th Field Artillery, 2nd Lt., now Captain James H. Lloyd, 108th Field Artillery.

"E" Battery had Captain, now Major William B. Munhall, 107th Field Artiller, as Battery Commander, assisted by 2nd Lt., now Major Hampton C. Randolph, 108th Field Artillery, and 2nd Lt., now Captain James Clement, 108th Field Artillery.

Medical Detachment included Captain Donaldson, 103rd Medical Regiment as intial Detachment Commander, assisted by 1st Lt., now Major Eugene W. Hodgson, 103rd Medical Regiment, who later became Battalion Surgeon, and 1st Lt. Charles Perleman, 103rd Medical Regiment, as Battalion Dentist.

Early in the Battalion's history Company "B", 103rd Engineer Regiment under Captain Maurada and assisted by 1st Lt. Forrest Bocock and 2nd Lt., now Captain Stanislas Starzinski, were attached to the Battalion. In January 1942, Headquarters Battery, 109th Field Artillery was transferred on toto to the Battalion and formed the original Pioneer Company which ultimately was redesignated as Reconnaissance Company. Lt. Bocock and Lt. Starzinski were also transferred to the Battalion in January 1942, and became Pioneer

Company Commander and Company Executive Officer respectively.

Other officers who hoined the Batalion shortly after it was formed were 2nd Lt., now Major Paul L. McPherran and 2nd Lt., now Captain Lawrence W. Merz, both Reserve Corps Officers, who were initially assigned as Liaison Officers, Headquarters Batter, also 2nd Lt. Benjamin C. Manderville, 112th Infantry, initially assigned to C Battery, and 2nd Lt. Nathan N. Tyson, 108th Field Artillery, who replace 2nd Lt. Meisenhelter as Battalion Personnel Officer when Lt. Meisenhelter was transferred back to the 108th Field Artillery.

## **A. P. HILL MILITARY RESERVATION, VIRGINIA**

At the end of July 1941, the Anti-tank Battalion moved to A.P. Hill Military Reservation near Fredricksburg, Virginia, for its first tactical field training which was a two week problem conducted by the entire 28th Infantry Division. Equipment at that time consisted of 3/4 ton weapons carriers as prime movers, with towed guns made out of miscellaneous pieced of pipe, wood, and other materials to represent an Anti-tank gun. No ammunition was expended, but the Battalion did raise a lot of dust on the back roads of Virginia, and soon became known as an up and coming organization that was going places, a prophecy, which was fulfilled as time marched on.

After Labor Day, 1941, the Battalion returned to Indianatown Gap, and then in the latter part of September 1941, moved with the entire 28th Infantry Division to the Carolina Maneuver Area, establishing a base camp near Wadesboro, North Carolina.

## **CAROLINA MANEUVERS**

Early in November 1941, Major Peterson left the Battalion, and Major William M. Hernandez, 108th Field Artillery, assumed command. Carolina Maneuvers ended after two active months, and the Battalion was on its way back to the Gap when word was received on Sunday, 7 December 1941 near South Boston, Virginia, that the Japs had attacked Pearl Harbor and that War had been declared.

After returning to Indiantown Gap and enjoying a period of furloughs and leaves, orders were received to reorganize the provisional 28th Division Anti-tank Battalion as of 15 December 1941, into a permanent organization officially designated as the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The re-organization involved absorbing D and F Batteries into A, B. and C Batteries, and redesignating all Batteries as Companies, effective 3 January 1942.

## **CAMP LIVINGSTON, LOUISIANA**

Shortly after the first of the year 1942, the entire 28th Infantry Division moved by motor convoy from Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, to Camp Livingston, near Alexandria, Louisiana, which at that time was regarded as one of the longest motor convoy movements undertaken by the Army.

In March 1942, the first group of new men totaling approximately 240, arrived direct from induction stations and were welcomed to the Battalion by the 300 "old men". A basic training program was established, and the work of whipping the Battalion into shape for combat began in earnest. Twenty-five mile hikes in the boiling Louisiana sun were merely a part of this training.

## **CAMP HOOD AND CAMP BOWIE, TEXAS**

In September 1942, the entire Battalion was moved by rail to the newly formed Tank Destroyer Center, Camp Hood, Texas, to undergo advanced unit training in Tank Destroyer tactics. After progressing thru the infiltration course, street and village fighting to platoon and company tactics, a Battalion field problem was finally held and successfully passed. It was here in November 1942, after fifteen months of diligent training with dummy guns, that the Battalion gun crews had their first opportunity to fire live ammunition, using borrowed 75 mm guns on half tracks, the original TD vehicle and weapon. It was here also that the Battalion received its last large group of inductees, over 300 in all, for basic training and assignment in the Battalion.

Early in December 1942, the Battalion moved to [Camp Bowie](#), Texas, for additional tactical training and for completion of the first Army Ground Force test. It was successfully passed after the most complicated "dead reckoning" motor march thru Texas sage brush ever experienced by a Battalion.

On January 3, 1943, the Battalion furnished a complete officer and enlisted cadre of about 85 men who later formed the 648th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

*Webmaster's Note: The term cadre refers to a nucleus of trained personnel around which a larger organization can be built and trained. Example: a cadre of corporals who train recruits.*

## **[CAMP GORDON JOHNSTON](#), FLORIDA**

On 8 January 1943, the Battalion entrained at Camp Bowie, Texas, and after one of its most enjoyable train trips, arrived three days later at Camp Carrabelle, sixty miles S.W. of Tallahassee, Florida, later designated as Camp Gordon Johnston. Here the Battalion returned once again to the control of the 28th Infantry Division for intensive Amphibious Training in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Amphibious training was successfully completed by the end of March 1943, and after a period of leaves and furloughs, during which time the Battalion received its first combat vehicles, 36 M-10 Tank Destroyers. The entire Battalion moved to Camp Rucker, Alabama, in May 1943. Just prior to moving, however, the Battalion furnished a small cadre of eight men to the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion all volunteers, who immediately left for overseas duty, the first members of the Battalion to enter combat.

At Camp Rucker an intensive period of M-10 driver training was initiated for all officers and enlisted men, and preparations commenced for the impending Tennessee Maneuver period which commenced July 4, 1943.

## **TENNESSEE MANEUVERS**

Tennessee Maneuvers lasted until 28 August 1943, and furnished an excellent opportunity for the men to learn how to use the M-10's over various types of terrain, and simulated combat conditions. After the first few problems, the Battalion Billeting party and the Battalion Commanders party also learned how to avoid being captured, a well learned lesson.

After completing Tennessee Maneuvers, the Battalion returned to Camp Rucker for a period of artillery range practice, where both direct and indirect firing methods were taught and executed on the firing range.

Early in October, 1943, the Battalion moved to [Camp Pickett](#), Virginia, and then left for Camp Bradford, near Norfolk, Virginia, for a week of Amphibious training which was principally devoted to the technique of loading LST's.

After Bradford the Battalion returned to Camp Pickett and then within a week's time left for the West Virginia Maneuver Area, arriving at a bivouac on top of Mt. Canaan near Davis, West Virginia early in November 1943. The purpose of this assignment was threefold, first, to have experience in mountain driving, second, to become toughened to winter conditions, and third, to take another Army Ground Force test. In due time all three purposes were successfully fulfilled, as the Battalion lived on a mountain and was completely surrounded on all sides by the Blue Ridge mountain range. Then almost immediately after the Battalion's arrival, it snowed and continued to snow most of the remainder of the time there, and finally after spending days building a corduroy road over swamps,

the Battalion managed to move its M-10's to the firing range and successfully passed its AGF firing test. In spite of these various and sundry difficulties, however, the hospitality of the people of Thomas and Davis, West Virginia was such that the men of the Battalion will long carry a warm feeling in their hearts for them.

## **CAMP DIX, NEW JERSEY**

The Battalion left West Virginia early in December 1943, and proceeded to Camp Dix, New Jersey, the last Camp in the United States before arrival at a Port of Embarkation staging area. All heavy vehicle equipment was turned in, and new clothing issued, then after final leaves and furloughs over Christmas and New Years, the Battalion moved to Camp Shanks, N.Y., on 17 January 1944, awaiting shipment overseas on the [R.M.S. Aquitania](#), which left New York on 29 January 1944.

## **PACKINGTON PARK, ENGLAND**

On arrival at Greenock, Scotland on 6 February 1944, the Battalion moved by rail to Packington, England, located midway between Birmingham and Coventry. New M-10's and other necessary equipment were received, and all men and officers were kept busy on all phases of military training, particularly field artillery indirect fire, as the secondary role of a T.D. Battalion in combat.

## **SUB-AREA X, DORCHESTER, ENGLAND**

At the end of March 1944, the Battalion moved to the vicinity of Hirwaun, Wales, where it enjoyed two weeks of artillery firing on the Brecon Range. The battalion returned to Packington Park early in April, and on 11 April 1944, moved to Dorchester, England, on special assignment, to handle the Marshalling Camps for the invasion troops. The Battalion was assigned to Sub-Area X, Marshalling Area D, and from 15 April 1944 to 4 July 1944 operated Camps [D-4](#) (Camehouse) D-7 M (Marabout) and D-7 P (Poundbury). It was in these camps that the troops of the 1st Infantry Division and the 29th Infantry Division lived 'til the time of their D-day landing on the Normandy coast.

On 5 July 1944 the Battalion was relieved of its Marshalling Areas assignments and moved to Camp D-2, Piddlehinton, near Bournemouth, England. There, last minute preparations were completed and after celebrating the Battalion's Third Anniversary at a banquet held in Bournemouth on 10 July 1944, the Battalion moved to Camp D-3, Puddletown on 26 July, and loaded on Navy LST's and embarked from England on 28 July 1944. After three years of training, the Battalion was finally on its way to combat.

## **BAPTISM OF FIRE:**

Having landed on Utah Beach in Normandy, France, on 30 July 1944, this Battalion was peacefully bivouaced in an apple orchard near LeValdecie, France until 1730 hours, 2 August 1944, when word was received that the Battalion was assigned to the 5th Armored Division, XV Corps, Third Army, and would prepare to move at once. At this time the Battalion was Assigned the Code name "Victory" which was used throughout the period of combat.

It was for this moment that the Battalion had trained since 10 July 1941, and once tactically committed on 2 August 1944, there were very few days when some members of the organization were not on a combat status in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland and Germany, until the unconditional surrender on 9 May 1945.

Initially the entire Battalion was kept intact, however, as orders were received to commit one company after another, it became normal operating procedure to attach one Reconnaissance Company Platoon to each of the Tank Destroyer Gun Companies, which in turn were attached to each of the three Combat Commands, Co. "A" to CCA, Co. "B" to CCB, Co. "C" to CCR. Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Medical Detachment and Reconnaissance Company Headquarters, with Pioneer Platoon, being attached to Headquarters 5th Armored Division Artillery. The Battalion Personnel Section was attached to Administrative Center in Division Rear Echelon.

The initial mission of the 5th Armored Division, given after the Battalion arrived in the Division rendezvous area at 2145 hours, 2 August 1944 in the vicinity of Perier, France, was the taking of Fougères, with the main objective of Laval. Battalion route of march went thru Noirlieu via St. Martin to St. James. On 4 August 1944, Lt. John J. Devine, Jr., Platoon Leader, Co. "A", went on a Reconnaissance mission in vicinity of La Pelerne, France, and made the first contact by a member of this Battalion with an enemy force. Lt. Devine subsequently died of wounds received in the Argentan, France on 12 August 1944.

The Battalion left bivouac near St. James, at 0930 hours, 6 August 1944 and proceeded thru Fougères, Vitre, Meral, Crosse-Le-Vivien to Houssay, France. Near Meral the column was fired on with small arms by enemy snipers and three German prisoners were captured by the Reconnaissance Company, in vicinity of Crosse-Le-Vivien. The following day the march was through Poille, where an enemy machine gun nest was encountered and subsequently knocked out by direct fire from two M-10's from Company "A". From Poille, France, the column proceeded thru Louplande, Arnage, Maingne to Les Sommeres, in vicinity of Le Mans, France. At Arnage sniper fire and enemy 88 mm Artillery fire was directed against the column, and Maingne was the first of many towns to be seen completely

on fire. Thus, at this early stage in its progress across Europe, did the Battalion receive its baptism of fire in combat, a baptism which continued in an ever increasing crescendo until the banks of the Elbe River in Germany were reached.

## **FALAISE ARGENTAN GAP**

On 10 August 1944, still assigned to the Third Army, XV Corps, and 5th Armored Division, the Battalion moved out of the bivouac area in the vicinity of Le Mans, France, to participate in the attempt to close the Falaise-Argentan Gap. Route of column passed through Briose, and Le Melse, arriving in the vicinity of Sees, France, at 2145 hours, 12 August 1944. During the march on 11 August 1944, 2nd Platoon, Company "A" was acting as rear guard to CCA's column. Sometime during the night an unidentified column approached the route of march of CCA's column from the west. S/Sgt. Koczan, Company "A" challenged the leading vehicle and when it failed to stop, S/Sgt. Koczan fired his .45 caliber pistol and killed the driver. He then destroyed the next two vehicles with hand grenades and brought .50 caliber and .30 caliber machine gun fire on the remaining five vehicles, while the M-10's opened fire on the rear of the column with 3 inch H. E. (High Explosive) to prevent a withdrawal. In all, eight enemy vehicles and 240 enemy troops were destroyed. For this action S/Sgt. Koczan was awarded the first Silver Star Medal presented to a member of this battalion and subsequently was decorated with the Croix de Guerre by the French Government, the only award from a foreign government received by any member of this unit.

First reports of enemy tanks in the area were received on 10 August 1944, in the vicinity of Bonnetable, although no contact was made on this date. On 11 August 1944, however, S/Sgt. Flynn, Platoon Sergeant, 1st Platoon, Company "C", acting as gunner, engaged a Mark IV tank at 500 yard range in the Battalion's first direct fire duel in the vicinity of Le Mesle, France, and successfully destroyed the first of a total of 56 enemy tanks credited to the Battalion. Other successful tank duels followed in quick succession. At 0630 hours, 12 August 1944, Cpl. Koetje, Tank Destroyer Gunner, 2nd Platoon, Company "A", destroyed a Mark IV tank at 150 yard range in the vicinity of Ballon, France. At 1100 hours 12 August 1944, 4 miles northeast of Ballon, Cpl. Kee, 1st Platoon, Company "A", the Battalion's only Tank Destroyer Gunner from Chinatown, New York City, one of the best trained gunners in the organization, engaged two Mark IV tanks at the same time at 1200 yard range and destroyed both enemy tanks with direct hits.

On 14 August 1944, while on Reconnaissance, the Battalion Commander's armored car was fired on by heavy artillery in the vicinity of Bourq St. Leonard, France at 1345 hours, and at 1500 hours in the vicinity of La Corbette, this vehicle struck a German Teller mine at a curve in the road injuring T/5 Flora, driver, and Capt. England, the Battalion Surgeon. The Battalion Commander escaped injury. These were the first casualties sustained from enemy mines experienced by the Battalion. 1st Platoon, Company "B", attached to CCB knocked out one Mark IV tank at 300 yards at 1430 hours, 15 August 1944 in the vicinity of Vitre.

## **BATTLE OF THE SEINE RIVER**

At 1730 hours, 15 August 1944, still attached to Third Army, XV Corps, 5th Armored Division, the Battalion left the bivouac area in the vicinity of Sees, and then moved east enroute to the vicinity of Dreux, France. After arriving in the vicinity of Dreux, all of the units then swung north to prevent the enemy from crossing the Eure and Seine Rivers. The Battalion left the bivouac area near Faymontville, France, at 1230 hours, 18 August 1944 and proceeded through Germainville and Le Hay, to Les Bossus. On 17 August 1944, 3rd Platoon, Company "B", working with the 47th Infantry moved north and crossed the Eure River near Bourg L'Abbe and knocked out two Mark IV tanks and one 88 mm anti-tank gun at ranges from 1600 to 1800 yards near Muzy, France, then returned south of the river. From Les Bossus, the Battalion CP was moved north to Cravent, arriving there at 1650 hours, 19 August 1944. The Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. William M. Hernandez, went out to contact Company "A" on 20 August 1944, and while directing indirect fire on enemy tanks was killed at 1630 hours near Douains, France. Major William J. Gallagher, Battalion Executive Officer, assumed command of the Battalion at 1700 hours same date. In the same action in which Lt. Col Hernandez was killed, Corporals O'Brien and Tartaglia, 3rd Platoon, Co. "A", each destroyed a Mark V tank at 1700 yard range just west of Douains, while the Platoon had an M-10 Tank Destroyer knocked out. This was the first of 18 Tank Destroyer vehicles which this Battalion totally lost as a result of enemy action. Gun Companies attached to Combat Commands continued to advance generally north, destroying enemy vehicles and personnel fleeing from the Falaise-Agentan Gap trapped between the Eure and Seine Rivers. On 21 August 1944, 3rd Platoon, Company "A" reported knocking out at 1800 yard range one Mark V and one Mark IV tank, one truck and one anti-tank gun four miles north of Douains. On the 23 of August 1944, the Battalion CP move north from the Cravent to Gallion, France. It then moved southeast arriving at a new bivouac area at Guerville, France at 0200 hours, 25 August 1944.

Thus the Battle of the Seine River was completed, and for five days the Battalion saw no action except for an indirect artillery fire mission which "B" Company drew. This breathing spell was used well by the men. They got some much needed rest and also made the equipment ready for the next mission.

## **DRIVE TO THE BELGIUM BORDER**

On 27 August 1944, 5th Armored Division, with 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached, was relieved of assignment to Third Army and XV Corps. On 30 August 1944, 5th Armored Division was given the mission of marching direct to the Belgium border with the least possible delay. The Battalion left bivouac near Guerville, France at 0730 hours on 30 August 1944, with CCB. It passed through the outskirts of Paris and continued on through Senlis, Compiègne Forest, Noyen, Guiscard, Villeneuve and Valenciennes arriving at Conde, France on the Belgium border at 2330 hours on 2 Sept. 1944.

On arrival at the Belgium border, orders were changed and the Division was instructed to clear the area for the pending arrival of British troops. The Division was given the new mission to move south and seize Sedan, France and then east to capture Luxembourg. The Battalion left Conde at 1300 hours on 4 September 1944 and moved generally south to La Romagne, France arriving there at 2200 hours on 4 September 1944.

The entire Battalion was detached from CCB and attached to CCR on 5 Sept. 1944 and left the bivouac area at La Romagne at 1200 hours on 5 September 1944 arriving at the new bivouac area near Mezieres-Charleville at 1430 hours the same day. On 6 September 1944 Company "A" was attached to 10th Tank Battalion, Company "B" to 47th Infantry Battalion, Company "C" to CCR trains while Battalion Headquarters, Reconnaissance Company Headquarters and Medical Detachment were attached to CCR Headquarters. Left bivouac at 0845 hours on September 6, 1944, and moved through Mezieres-Charleville, Le Theux and arrived in a new bivouac area near Sedan, France, at 1630 hours the same day. Then proceeded to a new area near Florenville, Belgium, 8 September 1944, with the mission of liberating Luxembourg.

## **LIBERATION OF LUXEMBOURG**

The Battalion's diary continues: Left Florenville, Belgium, at 0800 hours on 9 Sept. 1944 arriving at new assembly position southeast of Useldange, Luxembourg, at 2100 hours same day. Column was fired upon by enemy anti-tank guns and machine guns in the vicinity of Metxert, Belgium, but no casualties were sustained. Left Useldange, Luxembourg, at 0835 hours on 10 Sept. 1944, had temporary halt northeast of Mersch at 1000 hours when the leading elements ran into enemy resistance. Advance continued at 1800 hours to the new area at Schronndweiler, Luxembourg, arriving there at 2045 hours on 10 Sept. 1944. Left Schronndweiler, Luxembourg, at 1915 hours on 11 Sept. 1944 for new area northwest of Ermsdorf, Luxembourg, (Brucherhof Farm) arriving at 2100 hours same day. Plans for the breaching of the Siegfried Line at Wallendorf, Germany, on the Luxembourg border were started.

## **FIRST PENETRATION OF THE SEIGRIED LINE**

On 13 Sept. 1944, CCR announced the mission of breaching the Siegfried Line installations at Wallendorf, Germany, and advancing east in an effort to capture Bitburg. CCB was to assist and cover the advance of CCR with artillery support. Company "A" was attached to CCB for this purpose, the rest of the Battalion was attached to CCR. Prior to the launching of the attack, artillery fired both direct and indirect missions on targets in Germany. On 12 Sept. 1944 3rd Platoon Reconnaissance Company, established an OP in

Luxembourg overlooking the Siegfried Line installations 1/4 mile west of Ameldingen, Germany. Enemy patrols crossed the Our River and passed within 100 yards of the OP, however, the OP did not open fire as it would have revealed the position. On 13 Sept. 1944, 2nd Platoon, Company "B" in position on hill near Bigelbach, Luxembourg, used direct fire methods at 2000 yard range on German pill boxes and other enemy targets in the vicinity of Wallendorf and Biesdorf. On the same day, 2nd Platoon, Company "C", moved across the Moselle River and fired on enemy pill boxes northeast of Hoesdorf, Germany. Direct fire methods were used and six pill boxes were knocked out, after which the Platoon returned to the bivouac area.

On 13 September 1944, Company "B" with Reconnaissance Platoon attached, moved with the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion into firing positions on high ground east and northeast of Reisdorf, Luxembourg, on direct fire support, for 47th Armored Infantry Battalion, attacked fortifications of the Siegfried Line northeast of Wallendorf. Company "C" with Reconnaissance Platoon, still attached to the 10th Tank Battalion move to an assembly area 5 miles east of Gilsdorf at 1315 hours. 1st Platoon, Company "C" then moved to Wallendorf, Germany, crossing the Our River, and set up road blocks to protect the main body of CCR. 2nd Platoon, Company "C", assisted 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division also attached to CCR., in the seizing of Reisdorf, Luxembourg, and the establishing of road blocks there. 3rd Platoon Company "C" moved to a position one mile north of Wallendorf, Germany, to guard the right flank of CCR. Pioneer Platoon, Reconnaissance Company, was attached to Company "C", 22nd Armored Engineer Battalion for a bridge building mission. Company "C" was in Germany and to Major Burgess, then Captain, go the honors of being the first man in the Battalion to set foot on German soil. The remainder of the Battalion, except Company "A" working with CCB, crossed into Germany on 15 September 1944 and at 1700 hours the Battalion CP was established on Hill 408, one mile east of Frelingen, approximately six miles into Germany, and which later proved about the deepest penetration CCR was able to make on this mission.

About 1030 hours on 16 Sept, 1944, the CCR area in which Battalion Hq., Reconnaissance Company Hq., and the Medical Detachment were also located, came under enemy artillery fire so these units withdrew to a new bivouac area west of Frelingen, Germany. Company "A" with CCB moved into Germany this day, and went into direct and indirect artillery positions protecting CCR lines of communication and flanks. 1st and 3rd Platoons, Company "B", in position southeast of Hill 408, 2nd Platoon Company "B" in position supporting 1st Bn., 112th Infantry Regt., 28th Infantry Division on Hill 298 near Stockem, Germany. 1st and 2nd Platoons, Company "C" in anti-tank defense of 10th Tank Bn., positions southeast of Stockem and northeast of Halsdorf, respectively, while 3rd Platoon, Company "C" had anti-tank defense of CCR trains near Hommerdingen, Germany.

On 17 Sept., 1944, enemy small arms, mortar and artillery fire increased in intensity in all areas occupied by American troops. 2nd Platoon, Company "B" repulsed three enemy attacks against their position east of Wettingen, Germany, inflicting an estimated 150

casualties. 1st Bn, 112th Infantry Regt., 28th Division and 2nd Platoon also suffered heavy casualties from enemy mortar and artillery fire, all personnel and vehicles evacuated to safety. Lt. Rennebaum, Platoon Leader, was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross as a result of this action, the highest award received by any member of this Battalion during its entire period in combat.

For their outstanding work in this sector of action, T/4 Claycomb, Medical Detachment, was awarded the Silver Star in the Medical Detachment and T/5 Coschignano the first Bronze Star Medal. The work of the men in the Medical Detachment throughout the entire period of combat was exemplified by courage, daring and skill. The names of Barnes, Baker, Burden, Beam, Dewey, Davidson, Edlin, Estanish, Gura, Fittery, Kauffman, McCall, McCann, Mackey, Rhodes, and Youngs will long be remembered by the men of the firing companies. The fact that in this group of men a total of five Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, and nine Purple Heart Medals were awarded is ample demonstration of the superior record achieved by the Battalion Medical Detachment.

19 Sept. 1944 was the high point in the Battalions's combat history insofar as knocking out enemy tanks during any single twenty-four hour period is concerned. Starting at 0930 hours of this eventful day, CCR's CP area as well as the Battalion CP area came under intense artillery fire from the north, east and south, forcing the CP installations to be move from one protective terrain feature to another until it was finally decided to withdraw all units back into Luxembourg, a movement which was successfully completed by 0500 hours on 20 Sept. 1944. Prior to the withdrawal however, both Companies "B" and "C" had an artilleryman's field day. 1st Platoon, Company "B" with Lt. Jones commanding, while in position north of Frelingen, Germany, protecting the left flank of CCR knocked out six Mark VI tanks attempting to approach their position from the vicinity of Huttingen, Germany, by direct fire at ranges from 1500 to 3600 yards. Cpl. Rice, Tank Destroyer gunner, knocked out three enemy tanks in quick succession at 1800 yards while Cpl. Tomaszewski and Cpl. Kiwior knocked out tanks at 3600 and 3200 yards respectively. Two unidentified enemy tanks were also knocked out by the 2nd Platoon. In addition, this Platoon assisted the tanks attached to the 47th Armored Infantry Bn., in knocking out an additional five enemy tanks of undetermined designation, while Cpl. Giacomino knocked out two other enemy tanks but was unable to identify the tanks due to enemy fire. The 3rd Platoon, Company "C", with Lt. Feldman commanding, established OP and firing positions on the reverse slope of a hill 1500 yards north of Hommerdingen, Germany. Considerable enemy movement was observed in the vicinity of Huttingen and brought under fire at ranges from 1000 to 2000 yards which resulted in one enemy Mark V tank definitely knocked out and observed hits scored on six Mark VI's and one other Mark V, which the enemy either recovered or else completed the destruction. Thus, in one twenty-four hour period, the Battalion received credit for six Mark VI's, one Mark V, and four unidentified tanks destroyed; six Mark VI's and one Mark V probably destroyed, and assisted in the destruction of five unidentified tanks.

Thus did the Battalion acquit itself on this historic initial penetration of the Siegfried Line into Germany. The fact that a withdrawal

became necessary after the German Army moved a greatly superior force from other fronts to offset this threat, only further proved the success of the operation.

## **BATTLE OF THE HURTGEN FOREST, GERMANY**

After withdrawing from Germany back into Luxembourg on 19 Sept. 1944, the Battalion was committed to various road block and indirect artillery missions during October and November, 1944. The entire Battalion moved from Luxembourg to the vicinity of Faymonville, Belgium, on 5 October 1944.

Company "A" was attached to CCR on 11 October 1944 and moved to the are north of Elsenborn, Belgium, on anti-tank defense and indirect field artillery missions and on 13 October 1944, moved to an indirect fire position near Kalterherberg, Germany. Company "B" was attached to CCA on 13 Oct. 1944 and moved to the vicinity of Herleen, Holland. Company "C" was attached to CCB on 15 October 1944 and moved to the vicinity of Ober Forseba, Germany. CCA and Company "B" were in reserve with XIX Corps while CCB and Company "C" were in reserve with VII Corps in the attack on Aachen, Germany, but were not committed prior to the fall of that city. Thus it was that during this period the Battalion had elements in Belgium, Holland, and Germany at the same time.

On 23 October 1944, the Battalion moved to the vicinity of Kalterherberg, Germany where for the first time since entering combat civilian homes were used as billets, a policy which was continued from that date until the end of hostilities. On 1 November 1944 the new M-36 Tank Destroyers equipped with the 90 mm guns arrived to replace the M-10's with the three inch guns in the three firing companies.

By 18 November 1944, all companies were located in the vicinity of Rotgen, Germany, the gun companies having either road block or indirect artillery missions. On 25 November 1944, Co. "C" moved with CCR to vicinity of Hurtgen, Germany with mission of providing A.T. defense for CCR attached to 8th Inf. Div., V Corps, First U.S. Army, in the impending battle of Hurtgen Forest. On 29 November 1944, 5th Armored Divison with 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached, less CCR and Company "C" respectively, were relieved of attachment to V Corps and attached to VII Corps, First U.S. Army.

On 3 December CCA with Co. "A" attached was further attached to 4th Infantry Div. in their attack on Strauss, Germany, while Co. "B" was attached to CCB on indirect fire missions. The Battle of the Hurtgen Forest in Germany was by far the most intense period of combat experienced by any unit in this Battalion and full credit can be paid to CCR and Co. "C" for their outstanding combat record in this engagement. This was the area that the enemy had been able to strongly fortify and were determined to protect, as it controlled the

approaches to the vitally important network of dams which fed into the Roer River area. To the north British and American units were approaching the west bank of the Roer but could not cross until the network of dams in the hills above their positions were held by our forces. It was known that the German plan of defense was based on their ability to hold these dams to the last possible minute, and then release this vast supply of water to flood the entire Roer River area. It was for this reason that the American Army had to have those dams and it took the 28th Inf. Division, 8th Inf. Division and 78th Inf. Division supported by CCR and Co. "C" weeks of stubborn fighting thru mine fields and innumerable counter-attacks. The way was cleared thru Hurtgen, Kleinhau, Groshau, Brandenburg, Bergstein, Strauss, and Gey so that our forces were in a position where they could successfully launch an attack to capture these dams.

The enemy made extensive use of his air elements during this period, strafing and bombing both forward and rear elements of this organization. On 3 December 1944, near Rotgen, Germany, Co. "B" was attacked and strafed by ME-109's while in indirect fire positions and received credit for the first of four enemy planes destroyed by this Battalion. On the same day one mile East of Rotgen, Company "C"'s bivouac area was strafed by enemy planes and the second plane to the credit of this Battalion was destroyed.

Enemy artillery employment in the Hurtgen-Bergstein area was the heaviest encountered. The artillery fire was such as to confine tank crews to their tanks for hours at a time and air bursts and shrapnel caused many casualties to the men in the open M-36 turrets. One Co. "C" M-36 hit a mine in the vicinity of Bergstein, on 6 Dec. 1944 and the crew climbed into another M-36 for protection. Shortly afterwards, however, this other M-36 with both crews aboard received a direct hit in the open turret with a white phosphorous shell. As the result of this experience, plans were immediately started to build an armored turret top for all T.D. vehicles. This modification for all M-36 Tank Destroyer vehicles was finally completed in January, 1945, and proved invaluable in combat on a number of subsequent occasions.

At one time Company "C" had only one M-36 out of twelve operational, either due to being destroyed, knocked out by mines, or lacking crews. However, largely because of the untiring and aggressive efforts of the men in the Company, and the efforts of the Company and Battalion Motor Maintenance crew, recovery and repairs were completed so that seven M-36's were operational the next day.

While this was a difficult and hazardous period for our men, they in turn had been making the enemy pay heavily at all times. Innumerable casualties were inflicted on enemy troops as counter attack after counter attack was repulsed by our forces. Elements of the 272nd and the 246th Volks Grenadier Division, three Paratroop Divisions, the 116th Panzer Division and other units of the 5th Panzer Army were employed but once the American units took an objective they held it. On 6 December 1944, in Bergstein,

Germany, Company "C" destroyed five enemy tanks when Sgt. Woods knocked out one Mark VI and one Mark V tanks at a 1000 yard range, and Sgt. Leo destroyed one Mark IV at a 175 yard range. On 8 December 1944, CCR and Company "C" were relieved and pulled back to the vicinity of Rabotrath, Belgium, for a much needed rest. The Battle of Hurtgen Forest was not over, but the foothold on the commanding terrain controlling the approaches to the Roer River dams was secured with the capture of the towns of Kleinhau, Brandenburg, Bergstein, Strauss and Gey, Germany. Credit for the capture of these towns can be claimed by CCR and CCA, with Company "C" and Company "A" of this Battalion attached.

## **BATTLE OF THE ARDENNES**

Early in December 1944, intelligence reports showed that there was a considerable increase in enemy troop movement, and that the German 5th and 6th Panzer Armies were in reserve between the Roer and Rhine Rivers. Further, by looking at the friendly situation map, it could be seen that the American troops between Rotgen, Kalterherberg and Elsenborn, Belgium, were spread fairly thin. This entire sector from St. Vith, Belgium, south to Wiltz and Diekirch, Luxembourg, had been quiet since September, and it was generally felt by those who were located at these points that the area was fairly safe. It was thought the enemy could not afford to make the sacrifice in troops and material which a large counter attack would entail. The German Army could not afford such an expenditure as was later proven by the ease with which the Allied armies in the West crossed the Roer, Rhine, Weser and on to the banks of the Elbe River in March and April, 1945. Afford it or not, however, on 16 December 1944, the German Army did launch an offensive on a grand scale which was not stopped until spearhead elements of the German Army had nearly cut Belgium in two from the German to the French border, and until most of the U.S. First and Third Armies, together with the elements of the British Second Army had been shifted to meet this threat.

Around 8 December 1944, all companies in the Battalion with the exception of Company "B" and Company "C" moved north to the Hahn - Zweifall area located approximately six miles south of Aachen. Preparations were being made for the crossing of the Roer River as soon as the Roer River dams could be secured.

On 17 December 1944, first news of the German counter offensive in Belgium was received, enemy air activity increased and we learned that harassing enemy paratroopers had landed in the area between Hahn, Germany and Eupen, Belgium, which was the main supply route, anti-paratroop patrols were organized by the Battalion. On 19 December 1944, the Battalion was relieved of the attachment to VII Corps and 5th Armored Division, and attached to XIX Corps, 78th Infantry Division and the Battalion CP returned to Rotgen, Germany, to be in closer touch with Hq. 78th Infantry Division. On 23 December 1944, however, all companies reverted to Battalion control. The Battalion was relieved of the attachment to XIX Corps, 78th Infantry Division, and attached to VII Corps, 3rd

Armored Division and alerted for immediate movement to the vicinity of Barveau, Belgium. The battle of the Belgium Bulge was on.

Upon arrival of all units in the new area around 1400 hours on 24 December 1944, Company "A" took up a defensive position in Soy, Belgium, Company "B" was attached to the 83rd Reconnaissance Bn., 3rd Armored Division and took up defensive positions in the vicinity of Grandmenil, Belgium, Company "C" Reconnaissance Company and the Battalion Forward CP were established in Erezee, Belgium, and the Headquarters Company and the Battalion rear echelon elements moved into Bomal, Belgium. No one knew just how near the enemy had approached, but it did not take long to find out. Company "A's" position in Soy, Belgium, came under artillery fire shortly after their arrival and the enemy launched a small infantry counter attack which approached to within 200 yards of Company "A's" position before withdrawing. At 0130 hours, 25 December 1944, 2nd Platoon, Company "B" had a road block established in Grandmenil, Belgium, when an enemy armored column was heard approaching the concealed position. Sgt. Moser, Tank Destroyer Gun Commander, permitted the leading enemy vehicles to come up to 25 yards of his position before opening fire and then in quick succession knocked out the first two tanks at almost point blank range, both of which were later identified as Mark V's. This action caused the other vehicles in the enemy column to withdraw, and no further attempt was made by the enemy to utilize this Grandmenil-Erezee-Soy road net work which they needed to properly protect their northern flank. Later in the same day, members of Company "B" found two Mark V tanks abandoned by the German crews because they were out of gas, and these two enemy tanks were also destroyed. Thus did the Battalion celebrate Christmas Day in the Year 1944.

The Battalion remained on road blocks and protective anti-tank missions in this area until the 3rd Armored Division was relieved, and by 31 December 1944 all companies were in reserve with the 3d Armored Division. Battalion Hq. in Seny, Belgium, Headquarters and Reconnaissance Companies in Bomal, Company "A" in Les Avine, and companies "B" and "C" in Abee, Belgium.

On the first day of the year of final victory in Europe, the Battalion was relieved of the attachment to VII Corps, 3rd Armored Division and attached to XVIII Airborne Corps, 82nd Airborne Division. These were truly fighting men, a squad of the 82nd Airborne Division will take on a Company of the German Army, an 82nd Airborne Division Company will take on a German Battalion, and to assign any unit of the 82nd Airborne Division an objective was to know that the objective will be taken and held.

The mission of the 82nd Airborne during the time this Battalion was attached to it, was to clean up all enemy resistance in the Division area west of the Salm River. The mission was successfully completed in eleven days, but those eleven days were filled with excitement and pathos. During this period, Company "A" had two M-36 Tank Destroyers destroyed by anti-tank fire, and one M-36 Tank Destroyer and one M-8 Armored Car knocked out by enemy mines, while Company "C" had one M-36 Destroyer knocked out by enemy mines. The vehicles hit by anti-tank fire burned and were total losses, however, those vehicles damaged by mines were

recovered and repaired.

In addition to the vehicle losses, fourteen enlisted men in the Battalion were killed in this action, nine from Company "B", and five from Company "A" and eighteen were wounded. That the enemy paid dearly for these losses is without question. On 4 January 1945, the 1st Section, 2nd Platoon, Company "B" destroyed one Mark V tank in the vicinity of Abrefontaine, Belgium, and on the same day east of Odrimont, Belgium, Sgt. Moser and Sgt. Marrapese, both of Company "B", teamed up to knock out a Mark IV tank at 600 yard range. On 7 January 1945, southeast of Goronne, Belgium, Cpl. Kiwior, Company "B", knocked out another Mark VI Royal Tiger tank at 700 yards, the only two Royal Tigers to the credit of the Battalion. On 8 January 1945, Cpl. O'Brien and Cpl. Salamone, Company "A", teamed up to knock out two Mark IV tanks at 800 yards to make a total of six enemy tanks on this mission. In addition to these tanks, the Battalion also received credit for destroying one 88 mm towed gun, two armored vehicles, one half-track, one machine gun nest, one bazooka and an OP in a stonehouse; inflicted approximately 75 casualties of which 54 were known dead, and captured 41 prisoners of war. Upon conclusion of the operation, Company "B" received a citation from the Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division for the aggressive spirit displayed by the members of that company during this period.

On 11 January 1945, the Battalion was relieved of the attachment with the 82nd Airborne Division, and attached to the 75th Infantry Division. However, no actual contact with the enemy was made after this date while the Battalion was with the 75th Infantry Division.

On 16 January 1945, the Battalion was relieved of attachment to the 75th Infantry Division and moved to the vicinity of Francorchamps, Belgium, in the status of Corps Reserve. On 27 January 1945, the Battalion was relieved of attachment to XVIII Corps (Airborne), First U.S. Army, and attached once again to what all members of the Battalion have come to regard as the parent unit, the 5th Armored Division, which had recently been transferred from First U.S. Army to Ninth U.S. Army control. The Battalion less Company "A" move to Herbesthal, Belgium, for a rest period and needed maintenance. Company "A" was attached to CCA, 5th Armored Division, and moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of Rott, Belgium, with the mission of assisting CCA in their attack on Eichersheid, Germany. The mission was successfully completed with the loss of only one man, and Company "A" returned to Battalion control at Herbesthal, Belgium, on 1 February 1945. The Battalion moved to Voerendaal, Holland until the plans for the crossing of the Roer River on 25 February 1945, with the XIII Corps, Ninth U.S. Army, could be completed.

## **THE ROER TO THE RHINE RIVER**

Since early October 1944, the Roer River and the defensive positions of the German Army to its east, had been a formidable barrier. By the middle of February 1945, the U.S. First and Third Armies had not only regained all ground occupied the the German Army in

the battle of the Belgium Bulge, but had succeeded in pushing deep into German territory and seizing the Roer River dams. The Germans withdrew the remnants of their tattered 5th and 6th Panzer Armies east of the Roer River and around 15 February 1945, opened the gates of the dams and flooded the Roer River Valley in order to gain time to construct their defensive positions between the Roer and Rhine Rivers.

The build-up of Allied troops waiting for the Roer River crossing was now complete, and so all that was necessary was to wait for the flood waters to subside. This took about seven days, and on 23 February 1945, the XVI Corps launched its attack to cross. Company "A" under Division Artillery control was in indirect artillery position in the vicinity of Puffendorf, Germany, to support this attack. From 5 February 1945, Company "A" fired three registrations, 21 interdiction concentrations and 108 harassing concentrations, totaling 2122 rounds of which 1600 rounds were fired in the initial artillery barrage which lasted ten hours prior to the jumping off of the Infantry attack on 23 February 1945. This represents the greatest number of rounds fired by any Company in this battalion in any similar period of time.

Company "B" attached to CCB was the first unit of the Battalion to cross the Roer at Linnich, Germany on 25 February 1945, and the remainder of the Battalion followed the next day with Company "A" attached to CCA, Company "C" to CCR, and Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Reconnaissance Company Headquarters the Pioneer Platoon and Medical Detachment moving with Division Artillery Hq. The initial assembly area east of the Roer River was in the vicinity of Koffern-Hottorf, Germany. All elements of the 5th Armored Division then swung to the north capturing Rath, Erkelenz, Hardt, Rheindalen, Rheydt, by-passing Munchen-Gladbach and continuing through Vierson, Anrath, Huls, Tonsiberg, Vluynheide where the Battalion CP was established on 4 March 1945. Company "A" in the meantime had proceeded with CCA in the attack against Krefeld, while Company "C" continued with CCR in the attack on Repelen and Orsoy, on March 7, 1945. With the exception of a pocket of resistance around Wessel, the operation from the Roer River to the west bank of the Rhine River was completed by 10 March 1945. No losses in either vehicles or personnel were suffered by this Battalion in this operation although on 3 March 1945 a friendly plane dropped a bomb in Company "A's" area which killed two men, and injured several others.

The enemy troops opposing our troops in early March, constituted an inefficient group lacking sufficient personnel or equipment to even delay our advance. The principal obstacles confronting the Battalion's movement consisted of drainage ditches, supplemented by numerous anti-tank ditches and occasional mine fields. Enemy anti-tank guns were, for the most part, 88 mm guns dug in with excellent fields of fire covering anti-tank ditches, road blocks, mine fields, approaches and highways. Enemy air elements were scarce but reconnaissance planes were heard throughout the area with occasional strafing, but no damage was done to our units. In March 1945, during a movie program in the Battalion CP in the post office at Vluynheide, a lone enemy plane dove on the CP and dropped

what was estimated to be a 500 pound bomb but missed the building by 200 yards. Several men were cut however when the concussion of the bomb blew in all the windows of the building. The movie was continued after the black-out shades had been repaired. Enemy armor was limited and no enemy tanks were engaged by the Battalion.

On 12 March 1945, all companies reverted to Battalion Control and moved in the vicinity of Osterath, Germany. The Battalion CP was set up at Schweinheim, with three gun companies in indirect fire positions to the east. From 13 March 1945 to 29 March 1945, under Division Artillery control, Company "A" fired three registrations of 20 rounds, two TOT's totaling 77 rounds and 247 harrassing concentrations totaling 1528 rounds. All targets were located in the important industrial Ruhr district, east of the Rhine.

On 15 March 1945, 1st Platoon, Company "A" was subjected to very accurate counter-battery fire as the result of which two EM were killed and eight EM wounded. It was believed that some civilians in the area furnished the information as to the exact position of the Platoon. The concentration of enemy artillery is also believed to have damaged some of the ammunition in the company dump, because later in the afternoon while loading a 90 mm APC shell on a 2 1/2 ton truck a shell exploded in the hands of Cpl. Jacquinto, Company "A" and set off the entire load of ammunition in the truck, which was also destroyed. The premature explosion of the shell in his hands knocked Cpl. Jacquinto off the rear of the truck. He was revived by the company medical aid man, and after treatment for slight burns of his hands, remained on a duty status, unshaken, but richer by the award of an Oak Leaf Cluster to a previously earned Purple Heart Award.

On 30 March 1945, Co. "A", Co. "B" and Co. "C" were attached to CCA, CCB, and CCR respectively in preparation of tactical commitment east of the Rhine River, and on 31 March 1945 the entire Battalion crossed the River over an Engineer pontoon bridge at Wessel, Germany. The final phase of the war in Europe had started.

## **THE RHINE TO THE ELBE RIVER**

After being penned for so many months by terrain and prepared defensive positions which was only suitable for Infantry, the terrain east from the Rhine River was a tank man's dream. Flat country and with a good network of highways. Once the Infantry had seized a bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine and the Engineers had installed their pontoon bridges, the only limits on the armored forces was one of resupply of rations and gas. Reminiscent of the hard driving, fast moving, armored slashes following the breakthru at Avaraches, France, last August, once again the 5th Armored Division and the Tank Destroyers were on the loose, deep in enemy territory.

In general, the operation was broken into three phases; Phase No. 1 - 1 April to 8 April, the attack from the Rhine River east to the Wesser River. Phase 2 - 8 April to 16 April, Wesser River to Elbe River and phase No. 3 - 16 April to 25 April, the mopping of the rear areas and the Von Clauswitz Panzer Division.

After crossing the Rhine, the three gun companies during phase No. 1 moved usually along three separate routes of march with Co. "C" on the right, Co "A" in the center and Co. "B" on the left or northern flank, with Battalion Hq., Reconnaissance Co. and Medical Detachment moving with Division Artillery Headquarters, usually along the center route.

Munster, Germany, was by-passed to the south on 2 April and subsequently was captured by the 17th Airborne Division. The Dortmund Ems Canal was crossed by some elements on 1 April and the remainder on 2 April. Bielfeld was by-passed to the north on 3 April and the entire Division went into an assembly area in the vicinity of Hereford on that date and remained there until 8 April 1945.

On 3 April, east of Bonn Hof Lohne, the CCB column ran into some enemy resistance. Lt. Duchscherer and the 2nd Platoon, Company "B" went into action and after knocking out one unidentified tank, one German Scout car, six 76 mm artillery pieces, two mortar positions and capturing eight prisoners and inflicting an unknown number of casualties, the CCB column continued its march. Nine rounds of AP and twenty-four rounds of 90 mm HE were used by Lt. Duchscherer's Platoon in this action. On the same date, in the vicinity of Exeter, Germany, Cpl. Crawford, Company "C" knocked out one enemy artillery field piece at 1500 yards.

In phase No. 2, all elements of the Battalion crossed the Wesser River at Hamelin, Germany. The Pied Piper town, on 8 April 1945, proceeded generally NE, by-passing south of Hannover. On 9 April in the vicinity of Rosenthal, Cpl. Winget and Cpl. Appling, Company "C" each destroyed an 88 mm A-T gun at 1900 and 2200 yards respectively. On 10 April in Pattensen, Germany, enemy artillery fired a 200 round artillery concentration which fell in the 400 yard space between Division Artillery Headquarters and Battalion Headquarters without incurring any personnel loss, although two Division Artillery vehicles were hit. The reconnaissance Company CP building was hit and the roof damaged but no casualties sustained. Reconnaissance Company screened the town which CCR had by-passed and picked up 114 prisoners of war in the vicinity. CCR swung north and CCA continued the attack east thru CCR's old axis of march thru Peine and east to capture Tangermunde and Stendal, Germany. Battalion Headquarters continued with Division Artillery Headquarters thru Didease, Neuendorf and arrived in Demker, west of Tangermunde, on 11 April 1945. Enroute to Demker, Reconnaissance Company, while acting as rear guard to the Battalion, encountered an enemy patrol west of Deetz and engaged in fighting off and successfully routing the patrol after killing ten of their members.

At this point, CCA in Tangermunde was the closest U.S. Army unit to Berlin, however, this record was later lost in favor of the 2nd Armored Division who actually crossed the east bank of the Elbe River the next day against stiffening enemy opposition.

On 14 April 1945, the Battalion CP Headquarters, and Reconnaissance Company moved with Division Artillery Headquarters to Osterburg where these units remained until 16 April 1945.

The only loss on this movement from the Rhine to the Elbe Rivers was suffered by Co. "A" at Tangermunde, when SS troopers knocked out one M-36 vehicle, however, the gun sargeant was killed by small arms fire and the other four crew members were captured by SS troopers in Tangermunde. These four men with approximately 200 American Paratroop prisoners of war, were subsequently released the same day prior to the surrender of the town to CCA. Company "A" succeeded in destroying one locomotive and eight freight cars by direct fire and after taking Tangermunde, assisted CCA in the clearing of Stendal, capturing 59 prisoners on this mission.

CCB with Company "B" initially had the mission of following between CCR and CCA in a reserve status and to protect the bridge across the Wesser River at Hemelin. The Company subsequently moved east thru Osterburg to the Elbe River.

CCR with Company "C" had the misison of cutting the autobahn in the vicinity of Peine and then proceeding north and east toward the Elbe River and try to secure the briges over the river in the vicinity of Sandau, but the enemy destroyed the bridges and ferry before they could be secured.

After reaching the western banks of the Elbe River on 11 April 1945, and consolidating the position there in anticipation of making a crossing and marching directly on to Berlin, word came in that the Von Clausewitz Divsion had moved south to escape the British and were making an effort to cut our rear supply line and to eventually tie up with other German units holding out in the Hartz Mountains in the south. Phase No. 3, therefore, found the Battalion moving with the various combat commands to meet this threat. For the first time since the drive started with the crossing of the Roer River, the Battalion was moving west instead of east, even though still on the offensive.

Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters Company and Reconnaissance Company moved from Osterburg to Klotz on 16 April 1945, then on to Rohrberg on 18 April, then to Wopel and arrived at Salzwedel on 22 April 1945.

Battalion Motor Maintenance Platoon under Capt. Bayer had been left in the vicinity of Klotz, when Battalion Hq. and Headquarters

Company left for Rohrberg. On 20 April 1945, however, Capt. Bayer and his entire Platoon reported in unexpectedly at the Battalion CP at Wopel, that evening. It had been found that an estimated 400 enemy troops had infiltrated into the woods one mile from Capt. Bayer's area near Klotz. These enemy troops were subsequently captured and the estimate was found to be correct.

On 16 April 1945, Division Trains that utilized Battalion personnel trucks and drivers to haul supplies in a large convoy had proceeded about 15 miles west of Klotz when it was ambushed, and after the two lead vehicles had been destroyed, the remaining vehicles were abandoned and captured by the enemy. On 17 April, however, the truck belonging to this Battalion and one other truck was recaptured and returned to the division Rear Echelon. On the Battalion Personnel truck at the time of its capture by the enemy was the Battalion Standard and the silk parade flag, both of which were returned with the truck intact.

On 17 April 1945, CCA was relieved of the area in the vicinity of the Elbe River, and with Company "A" still attached moved west and then north on 18 April thru Knesbeck, Stiemke and Wittingen. On 21 April, Company "A" supported CCA on an attack north from Wittingen thru Kelnze and Hitzack. Opposition in general was light but Cpl. Rutkowski destroyed a 1/2 ton truck at 400 yard range in the vicinity of Harlingen on 22 April. In the vicinity of Kiefen, on 23 April, Cpl. Rutkowski, 2nd Platoon, Co. "A" had the honor of knocking out the last of the total of 56 tanks credited this Battalion when he destroyed a Mark V tank at 600 yard range. Cleaning up operations for Company "A" continued until 26 April when the Company reverted to Battalion Control.

Company "B" moved with CCB on 16 April to vicinity of Jubar, where it assisted in cleaning up a task force of the Von Clauswitz Panzer Division which had been harassing the supply lines in that area. On 18 April, 1st Platoon, Company "B" set up a defensive position against enemy armor reported moving from the direction of Ludelsen. The enemy was encountered in the woods north of Ludelsen and the 1st Platoon, Co. "B", destroyed on half track, two general purpose vehicles, one Jager Panther Tank and killed an unknown number of the enemy. Third Platoon, Co. "B" also destroyed one enemy half track and two general purpose vehicles the same day. On 25 April, Co. "B" reverted to Battalion Control.

On 16 April, Co. "C" with CCR moved in the vicinity of Salzwedel with a mission of cleaning up small pockets of resistance, then attacking north thru Luchow to the Elbe River. The entire company was attached to 10th Tank Bn. (Task Force Hamburg) on this mission, which moved thru Salzwedel, north to Luchow to Dannenburg. Cpl. Herman, 2nd Platoon, Co. "C" destroyed one 88-mm self propelled gun at 1500 yards on 22 April in the vicinity of Quicklen. Pvt. Helton took 6 prisoners in the vicinity of Dannenburg on 22 April. Co. "C" reverted to Battalion Control on 25 April. Thus ended the tactical commitment of all companies of this Battalion against the German Army in the European Theater after 266 days of combat.

## VICTORY IN EUROPE

On 26 April, the entire Battalion moved from the vicinity of Salzwedel south and west to take up military government duties controlling an area of approximately 230 sq. miles located south of the autobahn from Peine east to Wendezelle. Battalion CP, Headquarters Co. and Medical Detachment were located in Wendzelle, Reconnaissance Co. in Wendellburg, Company "A" in Woltorf, Company "B" in Zweidorf and Company "C" in Schmedenstadt, Germany. On 8 May 1945, when V-E Day was announced as effective 0001 hours, 9 May 1945, the combat history of the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion in the European Theater of Operations came to a close.

### SUMMARY OF ENEMY LOSSES CREDITED TO THE 628TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION, 2 AUGUST 1944 TO 8 MAY 1945

#### TANKS:

|                | Number | Total |               | Number | Total |
|----------------|--------|-------|---------------|--------|-------|
| Tiger Royals   | 2      |       | MACHINE GUNS: | 24     | 24    |
| Mark VI        | 14     |       | PILL BOXES:   | 58     | 58    |
| Mark V         | 14     |       | OP'S:         | 16     | 16    |
| Mark IV        | 13     |       |               |        |       |
| Unidentified   | 13     |       | MISCELLANEOUS |        |       |
|                | 56     | 56    | Buildings     | 52     |       |
|                |        |       | Bazooka Nests | 2      |       |
|                |        |       |               | 54     | 54    |
| S.P GUNS:      | 4      | 4     |               |        |       |
| TOWED GUNS:    |        |       |               |        |       |
| 88MM           | 8      |       | AIRPLANES:    | 4      | 4     |
| 75 MM OR 76 MM | 10     |       | TRAINS:       |        |       |
| 47 MM          | 1      |       | Locomotives   | 1      | 1     |
| 40 MM          | 2      |       | Freight Cars  | 8      | 8     |
| 75 MM Howitzer | 1      |       |               |        |       |
| Others         | 2      |       | PW'S CAPTURED |        |       |

|                 |    |    |                 |      |      |
|-----------------|----|----|-----------------|------|------|
|                 | 24 | 24 | EM              | 1487 |      |
| MORTARS:        | 7  | 7  | Officers        | 29   |      |
| HALF-TRACKS:    | 22 | 22 |                 | 1516 | 1516 |
| GENERAL PURPOSE |    |    | ESTIMATED ENEMY |      |      |
| VEHICLES        | 68 | 68 | CASUALTIES      | 1231 | 1231 |