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Authority *DN 0735017*By *R* NARA Date *9/26/09*

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HEADQUARTERS
645TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 45, U.S. ARMY

07 November 1944

SUBJECT: Battle Report

TO : Commanding General, Seventh Army, APO 758, U.S. Army (Thru Channels)

MAP REFERENCE: FRANCE 1/100,000, Sheet 15-G.

PERIOD COVERED: 01 October 1944 to 31 October 1944.

*L-1024***PART I**

1. The 1st October found the Battalion (minus "B" Company and 4th platoon. Reconnaissance Company) supporting the 45th Infantry Division advance to the East along the general line RAMBERVILLERS, AUTREY, to GRANDVILLERS. The terrain between AUTREY and GRANDVILLERS, mostly rolling, muddy, and heavily wooded in many places, proved a new experience in employment of our TDs. The close woods cut down fields of fire to narrow, short lanes, making movement extremely limited, often reducing the effectiveness of TDs to nothing but a morale factor for the infantry. The greater part of the German armor employed was the light MK IV tank, which already placed in the woods, could more easily and quickly be knocked out with bazooka fire at close ranges. The terrain east of RAMBERVILLERS ("A" Company's sector) was generally rolling and open with a few clumps of trees scattered enough on the rolling hills to make observation a problem. As most of the action in this sector was holding with active patrolling by the 157th Infantry, 2 platoons of "A" Company were deployed 2 km NE and SE of the town in Antitank positions overlooking the towns of BRU and JEANMENIL, where the majority of enemy forces were concentrated. The remaining platoon (which also constituted the reserve platoon) maintained an indirect fire battery W of RAMBERVILLERS which proved a great asset to Division Artillery due to shortages in 105mm ammunition. Reconnaissance Company OPs in that sector adjusted the battery on many enemy targets in the BRU - JEANMENIL area.

TD BN - 645 - 0.3

"C" Company, on the other hand, in support of the 179th and 180th Infantry Regiments vicinity of AUTREY, FREMONTAINE and GRANDVILLERS, was operating on a more aggressive front, providing assault fire and Antitank protection. The terrain, as previously mentioned, was heavily wooded and just as heavily defended by a stubborn enemy. One platoon worked with each Infantry Regiment and the reserve platoon was used in an artillery role supporting the fires of Division Artillery.

Reconnaissance Company faced the problem of getting observation into enemy territory full of woods and defiles from terrain with little dominating high ground. Sometimes it would take two or three OPs in different localities to completely cover one particular spot and even then there would be some "dead space."

2. On the 1st of October, platoon of "C" Company in the GRANDVILLERS sector,

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Battle Report for Period 1 October 1944 to 31 October 1944 (Continued).

fired a total of 118 rounds HE and 3 rounds APC, direct assault fire, at enemy infantry and vehicles on the edge of town, knocking out 1 self-propelled gun, 2 vehicles, and causing numerous casualties among the enemy infantry. On the 2nd October, 2 guns "A" Company at railroad station SE of RAMBERVILLERS, knocked out an enemy Mk IV tank vicinity of JEANMENIL with a total of 18 rounds APCBDF (Enemy tank burned). For the most part, up to the 5th of October, the Companies adhered to the above plan, effecting reliefs within themselves. The movement of the Battalion CP from AYDOILLES to STE HELENE on the 4th of October proved the only change. The Battalion CP, operating well forward and in the center of the sector, maintained good communications with the TD Companies using the SCR 608 radios and wire, providing a smooth running organization. Occasionally, due to terrain conditions, relays had to be established but this slowed down operations very little. However, the serious shortage of BA 39 and BA 40 batteries jeopardized communications within the companies.

L-1024

3. On the 5th October, "C" Company's indirect fire battery vicinity of NONZEVILLE, reverted to its primary mission of Antitank Defense and went into position in the FREMIFONTAINE sector, supporting the 180th Infantry. At 1600A one section of 3rd platoon fired 15 rounds HE at enemy infantry vicinity of railroad NE of FREMIFONTAINE.

4. During the night of 6th Oct the 636th TD Battalion (- Company "C" and one platoon of Reconnaissance Company) and "C" Company 601st TD Battalion arrived in the 45th Infantry Division sector per Headquarters VI Corps Order and were put under control of our Battalion Commander per VO CG 45th Infantry Division. Before daylight on the 7th October the following reliefs and changes were effected:

(a) "A" Company 645th TD Battalion relieved in RAMBERVILLERS sector by "A" Company 636th TD Battalion and established 6-gun Battery 2 km SE of PADOUX. Remainder of Company in reserve vicinity of PIERREPONT.

(b) 1st platoon "C" Company 645th TD Battalion in support of 179th Infantry Regiment relieved by "C" Company 601st TD Battalion and moved to FREMIFONTAINE sector to assist remainder of "C" Company 645th TD Battalion in support of 180th Infantry Regiment.

(c) 2 guns "C" Company vicinity of AUTREY relieved by 4 guns "B" Company 636th TD Battalion and moved to 180th Infantry sector.

(d) Reconnaissance Company 636th TD Battalion relieved 645th Reconnaissance Company OPs in AUTREY-RAMBERVILLERS sector, who in turn established new OPs and listening posts in GRANDVILLERS-AUTREY sector. Entire "C" Company in support of 180th Infantry due to increased enemy tank activity 2 km SE of FREMIFONTAINE, where "F" Company 180th Infantry had been box^{ed} off by enemy tanks.

5. At 0825A 8th October, 6 guns "C" Company vicinity of FREMIFONTAINE, fired 328 rounds HE, direct preparation fire in support of 180th Infantry attack, on a cross roads in the woods vicinity of 227638. After it was taken 2 TDs moved up to support Infantry road block in that vicinity. Under cover of darkness 1st platoon "A" Company relieved 2nd platoon "C" Company who then went into mobile reserve vicinity of PIERREPONT. Indirect fire Battery "A" Company continued to fire at enemy infantry, mortars and supply routes in support of 171st FA Battalion.

6. During the period from the 11th to 12 October the remainder of "A" Company relieved "C" Company in the FREMIFONTAINE sector. On the 12th October "C" Company established a 6-gun Battery 2 km SE of PADOUX and on the 13th October established a 3-gun battery vicinity of NONZEVILLE. Both batteries in support of 45th

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Battle Report for Period 01 October 1944 to 31 October 1944 (Continued).

Division Artillery.

7. On the 14th October, "A" Company supporting 180th Infantry Regiment, lost 1 M-10 of the 3rd platoon vicinity of 223684 by enemy shell fire. A heavy enemy mortar shell dropped in the open turret, exploding on the floor plate, causing five casualties. M-10 burned immediately. On the 14th October 18 Enlisted Men were sent to Headquarters 1st Armored Group, M-10 Drivers and Gunners School.

8. Before daylight 15th October the 1st and 2nd platoons "A" Company were relieved by "C" Company. Two TDs of 3rd platoon "A" Company remained in support of "C" Company vicinity of FREMIFONTAINE. With remaining 7 guns "A" Company took over battery positions vacated by "C" Company vicinity of PADOUX and NONZEVILLE. During the period Reconnaissance Company maintained CPs and swept roads for mines in advance of TDs.

9. The following day 2 guns 1st platoon "C" Company fired 15 rounds HE and 9 rounds APCBDF at enemy personnel in woods causing capture of 35 PWs by 180th Infantry. The indirect fire batteries continued to harass the enemy by firing at ammunition dumps, tanks, infantry and guns.

10. The period up to the 19th October found no changes in dispositions but on 19th October 6 guns "A" Company relieved "C" Company in 180th Infantry sector without incident. "C" Company then established a 4-gun indirect battery vicinity of NONZEVILLE in support of 160th FA Battalion and a 5-gun battery 2 km SE of PADOUX in support of 171st FA Battalion. On the 20th October, Reconnaissance Company CP vicinity of AUTREY adjusted PADOUX battery on enemy vehicles with good results and on the 21st adjusted battery on enemy gun battery, silencing the gun. At this point "A" and "C" Companies were down to a total of 16 M-10s operating. Four were in Ordnance and two were in Battalion Maintenance. The majority of m-10s had seen too much service and keeping them running kept the maintenance crews working day and night.

11. From the period 21st October to 26th October no change was found in unit dispositions. "A" Company continued in support of 180th Infantry advance in wooded sector SW of FREMIFONTAINE towards the MONTAGNE RIVER and "C" Company's indirect fire battery continued to pound enemy targets.

12. On the 26th October "C" Company 645th TD Bn relieved "C" Company 601st TD Bn in 179th Infantry sector. "C" Company 601st TD Bn detached from this headquarters and returned to control of parent unit in 3rd Infantry Division sector. Our "C" Company continued in support of 179th Infantry advance in the MONTAGNE sector. At 1300A same date, "A" Company relieved support of 180th Infantry Regiment and moved to assembly area vicinity of AUTREY. Battalion CP closed in STE HELENE location and moved to the recently taken town of HOUSSEAS at 1400A.

13. On the 27th October 636th TD Bn (- "B" Company) reverted to control of 36th Infantry Division. "B" Company attached to this headquarters supporting one Battalion 180th Infantry vicinity of HOUSSEAS and 157th Infantry attack to the NW of HOUSSEAS. At 0500A "A" Company moved 2 guns to vicinity of 226686 with the mission of protecting the exposed flank of the 45th Infantry Division.

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Reconnaissance Company provided security and OP for these guns. Two more guns

were moved on the NE edge of RAMBERVILLERS supporting 117th Reconnaissance Squadron and 2 guns moved to positions vacated by "A" Company 636th TD Bn vicinity of railroad station SE of RAMBERVILLERS. Also in support of 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, "C" Company continued in support of 179th Infantry Regiment. Under cover of darkness Reconnaissance Company swept and pulled mines on the HOUSSEAS-RAMBERVILLERS road and the following night 2 TDs of "C" Company were moved to positions vicinity of 234692 to cover JEANMENIL-BRU area. As the two guns were located 1000 yards beyond the last Infantry outpost one squad of Infantry accompanied the TDs to provide security.

14. The 28th October found 6 guns "A" Company supporting the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron with 4 guns in the recently liberated BRU and JEANMENIL areas and 2 guns in reserve vicinity of RAMBERVILLERS. At 1300 hours, 4th platoon Reconnaissance Company reported in from the NICE area where they had been attached to Provisional Air-borne Division.

15. On 20th October twenty Armored Force replacements were sent to Headquarters 1st Armored Group M-10 Drivers and Gunners School.

16. On 30th October "A" Company's guns in the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron sector were relieved by the entire "B" Company 636th TD Bn and moved 2 km N of HOUSSEAS to support 180th Infantry. 2 guns "C" Company continued in support of 180th Infantry and remainder of Company supported advance of the 179th Infantry in the advance on LA SALLE. The country in this sector was heavily wooded and mountainous and roads consisted mostly of muddy trails which constant rain did not improve. Even though TDs were stuck, tracks were thrown, and many detours had to be made through the woods, TDs managed to stay with forward infantry elements. During this period Reconnaissance Company swept and cleared roads in BRU area for employment of TDs.

17. October 31st found no change in the units.

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Battle Report for Period 01 October 1944 to 31 October 1944 (Continued).

PART II

A. Assault Firing for Month of October.

DATE	COMPANY	TARGET	NO. OF RDS		RESULTS
			HE	APCBDF	
2 Oct	"A"	Enemy MK IV tank		18	Destroyed
2 Oct	"C"	Enemy Personnel & vehs	118	3	1 SP & 2 vehs destroyed
5 Oct	"C"	Enemy Infantry	15		Dispersed
8 Oct	"C"	Enemy Personnel	18		Dispersed
9 Oct	"C"	Enemy dug-in positions in woods	328		Assault pre- paration Fire
15 Oct	"A"	Enemy Personnel	15		Dispersed
15 Oct	"C"	Enemy Infantry & MGs	117	14	Assault pre- paration Fire
16 Oct	"C"	Enemy Personnel in Woods	15	9	35 PWs taken
17 Oct	"A"	Enemy Personnel in Woods	35		Dispersed
		TOTAL	661	44	

B. Indirect Firing for Month of October

TOTAL NUMBER OF ROUNDS

TARGETS

HE
 SMOKE
 APCBDF

4,677

Enemy personnel, guns, vehicles, tanks, enemy-held town, interdiction and harassing fire on enemy supply routes, ammunition dumps and troop concentrations.

PART III

1. "B" Company 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, whose attachment to Provisional Air-borne Division in southern France dates from D-Day plus 5, continued in same attachment throughout the entire month of October. During this period indirect fire batteries were maintained and a total of 3722 rounds HE and 651 rounds Smoke were

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expended. Firing consisted largely of targets of opportunity though a number of unobserved missions (interdictory and harassing fire) were accomplished.

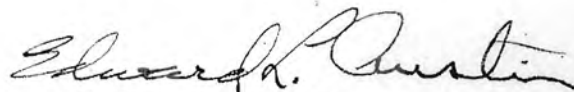
2. In addition to this indirect firing the company was called upon to furnish direct fire in 4 instances as shown in the table below.

3. No tank destroyers were lost or damaged and no casualties among personnel were suffered as a result of enemy action.

4. During the entire month "B" Company maintained its CP in LANTOSQUE, 30 kilometers N of NICE. 1st platoon maintained 4-gun indirect fire battery vicinity ROQUEBILLIÈRE and 3rd platoon maintained the same vicinity of ST MARTIN VESUBIE. Until October 21st 2nd platoon was in support of 550th Air-borne Infantry Battalion, operating a 4-gun indirect fire battery vicinity of BARCELONNETTE, but were relieved on that date and returned to NICE for Ordnance repairs on M-10s. On 24th October 2nd platoon was placed in indirect fire position in support of 601st FA Battalion.

A. "B" Company Assault Firing for Month of October

<u>DATE</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>TARGET</u>	<u>NO. OF RDS</u>		<u>RESULTS</u>
			<u>HE</u>	<u>SHOKE</u>	
1 Oct	1 TD 3rd plt	Enemy pill box	50		Direct hits
21 Oct	1 TD 3rd plt	Houses	62		Direct hits
21 Oct	1 TD 3rd plt	Infantry in area	27		Unknown
22 Oct	1 TD 3rd plt	Houses	26	13	Unknown
		TOTAL	165	13	



EDWARD L. AUSTIN

Lt Col FA.

Cmdg

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ANNEX "A"

BATTLE CASUALTY SUMMARY - OCTOBER 1944

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>RANK</u>	<u>ORG.</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
Thomas McHugh	32261377	S/Sgt	Rcn Co	2 Oct 44	Wounded
Edward Vaslet	31065135	Sgt	Co A	2 Oct 44	Killed
Robert E. Hayward	35050720	Pvt	Co A	4 Oct 44	Wounded
Charlie Watts	38217138	Pvt	Co C	8 Oct 44	Wounded
Joseph H. Dopstadt	33178091	Pvt	Co C	8 Oct 44	Wounded
Stanley L. Sweeney	12079190	Cpl	Co A	14 Oct 44	Wounded
Thurston W. Ayscue	34176691	T/5	Co A	14 Oct 44	Wounded
Peter J. Ascencio	32884575	Pvt	Co A	14 Oct 44	Wounded
Julian S. Sampson	38292198	T/4	Co A	14 Oct 44	Missing (Later restd KIA)
Howard D. Attebury	36728882	Pvt	Co A	14 Oct 44	Missing (" " ")
Joseph S. Alizzo	32263827	PFC	Co C	16 Oct 44	Wounded
Samuel E. Clarkson	38018004	T/4	Hq Co	19 Oct 44	Wounded
Donald L. Holl	01821587	1st Lt	Co C	29 Oct 44	Wounded
Ralph E. Smith	35292085	T/4	Co C	29 Oct 44	Wounded

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HEADQUARTERS
645TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 45, U.S. ARMY

30 October 1944

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned in Operations in Southern France (15 August to 15 October 1944)

TO.....: Commanding General Seventh Army (thru Commanding Officer 1st Armored Group.)

1. The following report is made more hastily than desired as a result of present combat conditions. The undersigned is also faced with the handicap of having been unable to make the landing with the Battalion, joining it at the commencement of more "stable" warfare. Thus it is necessary to depend a great deal upon the comments of the company commanders.

2. In the compilation of these comments it seems that the primary lesson is tolerance for the supported arm. All unit commanders are bitterly vindictive toward preemptory orders on the part of infantry officers. Many investigations on the part of the undersigned have revealed that infantry requests have been reasonable, but given to the wrong authority and with hazy, hasty explanations. Greater coordination has been effected recently by using the two staff majors (S-3, Bn Executive) as infantry, tank, T.D. coordinators with responsibilities in definite regimental areas. This leaves the company commander free to handle his platoons with more clarification as to the missions.

3. Operating with only two companies has been a tremendous problem in handling relief and maintenance. As a result this Battalion is at its lowest point.

4. For a period, the undersigned commanded a group of T.D. units, (comprising two T.D. Battalions each less one company) and a company of another T.D. Battalion. This combination proved surprisingly facile in control, showing the feasibility of reinforcing T.D. Battalions in critical areas.

5. More and more it is becoming apparent that the assignment of companies to regiments is not the best disposition. Terrain is the governing factor. At one point the regiment has had a company and a half in its area while another regiment had one platoon.

6. Woods assault is very difficult for the following reason:

- (a) A.P. ammunition must be fired as H.E. is a hazard to our own troops.
- (b) The enemy can hear T.D.s approach and can quickly bring mortar, artillery, bazooka fire - all of which are effective against our personnel with open turrets.
- (c) Enemy tanks operating in the woods are usually their light MK IV, more easily knocked out by 57mm AT guns, bazooks, and rifle grenades. As a matter of fact, T.D.s seldom are able to shoot at ranges greater than the effective ranges of the above weapons.

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Lessons Learned in Operations in Southern France (Cont'd)

7. The T.D. Battalion in offensive warfare should operate under the G-3 of Division and not under the artillery commander. The tank Battalion operates in this manner. It is felt that an armored representative and small staff be created in the G-3 section for both units.

8. Personnel from Headquarters and Reconnaissance Companies should be trained as T.D. drivers and gunners, thus supplying emergency replacements. This Battalion is now benefitting from the 1st Armored Group School.

9. An epidemic of missions for one gun has been cured after the loss of a T.D. through lack of support.

10. The undersigned has written reports similar to the above after the TUNISIAN and ITALIAN campaigns. Aside from certain fundamentals, each campaign has produced new solutions. It is not intended that future operations should proceed as if the answers are predetermined by experience. It will always exist that variances and exceptions to "rules" must be made on the spot.

11. Administratively this Battalion is now receiving orders from Army, Corps, and Division, sometimes creating misunderstandings, and in one case creating great injustice concerning rotation to members of this command.

/s/ EDWARD L. AUSTIN
/t/ EDWARD L. AUSTIN
Lt Col FA
Cmdg

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HEADQUARTERS
645TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 45, U.S. ARMY

30 October 1944

Statement of Executive Officer, 645th TD Battalion, on Lessons Learned in the Operation of TD Battalion in the Pursuit during Period 15 August to 15 October 1944.

1. During a rapid and prolonged pursuit of the enemy, close control of the units is impossible and the attachments of companies to combat teams in this type of operation is desirable. The Battalion Commander, or a representative from his staff, should constantly be at the CP of each of the leading infantry battalions to advise and direct the operation of the attached platoon or company. A platoon leader or even Company Commander does not have sufficient rank to impress upon an Infantry Commander the unsoundness of his plan for armor.
2. As Companies and Battalions of infantry, with attached armor, were dispatched to mop up resistance in towns along the main axis of advance, our lines of command and supply were heavily extended. Over these distances ninety percent of our communication was by personal contact. Fuel and ammunition dumps were established well forward, then all trucks of the transportation platoon were pooled to transport diesel oil and fuel, which was our largest bulk of expenditure. An average of 12,000 gallons of fuel was shuttled forward at each move. Unit supply vehicles serviced the platoons from the forward dumps very satisfactorily and only one instance was recorded of a platoon running out of fuel.
3. During this period supply of Class II property was non-existent. Vehicles which were sorely needed in the forward areas were dispatched on a 200 or 300 mile trip to the beach for clothing and equipment, and more often than not, returned empty handed as the dump had not yet been established or was moving.
4. Replacement of combat vehicles has not been satisfactory. Shortages of M-8 Scout Cars, which existed prior to D-Day, have not been filled to date. M-10 replacements have been slow and uncertain.
5. Too much praise cannot be given to the diesel motors for their ruggedness and dependability under constant use and a minimum of maintenance. Their low consumption of fuel, in comparison with gas engines, was the main factor in keeping us up with the Infantry.

/s/ JOHN C. NIEHAUS
/t/ JOHN C. NIEHAUS
Major, F. A.,
Bn Executive Officer.