



WEST GERMANY



RHINELAND

C. EUROPE



TD 6091 BN

In the foreward of this book Col. Finley has more or less given me the credit for all the work etc. that was necessary to bring to you the history of our Battalion. With out the help of P.F.C. Franck Pisok and Walter Von Neudegg on the cartoons, Cpl. Lester Shapp on the line drawings, Cpl. Nunzio Dinna on the illustrations and the men from each platoon and special sections in Headquarters Company writing up their own units history, it would have been an impossible task.

In thanking them here on this page for their work is the only way that I can repay them for a swell job well done.

DONALD M. CARNINE
1st. Lieut F.A. (TD)

FOREWARD

Here is a brief history of your Battalion. Originally planned as a reproduction of the weekly report to higher headquarters, Lt. Carnine enlarged it to its present size.

Into it has been incorporated some of your individual deed and actions.

It is hoped that in the years to come you will thumb through these pages and receive from them some measure of compensation for the sacrifices endured by you and the others.



GLENN S. FINLEY, Jr.,
Lt. Col., Cavalry
Commanding.

HISTORY OF THE 691st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

At a formal parade on the 18th day of May 1944, Col. J. J. Deery, Commanding the 12th Tank Destroyer Group, presented the Battalion Colors to Lt. Col. Frank S. Buchanan, Commanding Officer of the 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion. These Colors now carry five Battle Streamers that represent the five major Battles that were fought in World War Two in the European Theatre of Operations. Each Streamer represents one battle. The name of the battles in their order are : Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes and Central Europe.

The Coat of Arms appearing on the Battalion Colors was adopted by the battalion in 1942. The Shield represents a fractured target and is symbolic of the purpose and power of the organization in peircing and destroying enemy Tanks. The bulls eye bit is the ability to score effectively. The Star of Texas, used as the projectile, is emblematical of the place of the activation as well as being symbolic of the Cavalry, in that it is a form of a caltrap, an ancient Cavalry emblem, strewn on the battle fields to stem the advance of the horsed troops ; always landing with one point up, the mullet having five points and the end of the caltrap but four. The motto, "Coralled", is a canting allusion to the slaughtered bulls eye in the Texas venacular, and is a spirited goal for accomplishment. This Motto is reserved for exclusive use by the 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion, by the war Department of the United States Army.

On 15 December 1941 the 691st Tank Destroyer battalion was activated with troops from the Anti-tank Troop, 1st Cavalry Division, Anti-tank Troop, 2nd Cavalry Division and the F.A. The battalion was ordered activated by General Orders publised by the 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Bliss, Texas. The unit did not actually function as such until the Anti-tank Troop, 2nd Cav Div arrived at Fort Bliss, Texas from Fort Riley, Kansas on 24 December 1941. Lt. Col. Paul J. Matte, a cavalry officer, was appointed as Commanding Officer of the unit.

For a proper beginning the Staff held orientation classes to acquaint all members with their duties and problems in a Tank Destroyer Unit. Classes were scheduled by the Battalion Plans and Training Officer for the enlisted personnel and gradually the unit came into its own.

A brief history of the Battalion Commander and Staff members is appropriate at this point and Lt. Col. Paul J. Matte is a most fitting personality to take the lead. A man mature in years and principals but young in ideas. Lt. Col. Matte, in his early 50s, carried the command and respect requisite of a proficient commander.

The Command Post was humming with activities in preparation for a coming maneuver in Louisiana. The United States had entered the war on 7 December 1941 and this new type of fighting force was designed with the greatest expectations of revolutionary successes in battle. With a view toward such successes, the 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion prepared for a rigid and through training maneuver in Louisiana. Concise and well formed plans were laid for the movement of the unit to Louisiana by rail. From the start, it was evident that the able leadership, supervision and control maintained by the command post group would form a fighting unit with undaunted goals.

The battalion departed from Fort Bliss, Texas in July 1942, via rail, for Louisiana. The trip successfully completed, the battalion began a two month training maneuver. The experience in this tyde of training was, without doubt, the beginning of a field fighting unit well schooled in the problems and tactics of modern warfare. As can be seen by the operation of the command post during this maneuver, the efficiency of operation and perflection of combat realism increased until it became automatic. At the start of the maneuver, the operations section worked from a halve track entirely. The CO, the S-3 and the entire section lived and worked in the vehicle, making it impossible at times to perform efficiently. Later the CO and S-3 began to use Jeeps relieving the congestion and speeding up movement contacts. When the halve track broke down, as happened a few times, one of the Jeeps was always ready to continue with the "CP" and keep complete control.

The maneuver was made as towed unit and did a remarkable job "fighting" tanks and infantry. With the maneuver almost over the Battalion received orders to report to Camp Hood, Texas for a period of "tank destroyer training" at the home of the tank destroyer. The unit made a motor march to Camp Hood, arriving the latter part of September. The battalion had a bivouac area in north Camp Hood and used pyramidal tents for quarters. The CP set up in a farm house in the area and began the task of reequipping the unit for a rigid course in tank hunting tactics. In October the Battalion went out to the "commando course" for one week. The command post operated from a 3/4 ton truck and was "on the spot" with complete supervision and control during the course.

The training included excellent courses in close combat, infiltration night operations, grenades, rocket guns and a demonstration of the newest individual arms. Physical training was emphasized. After the "commando course" was finished the battalion spent the next few weeks on the range and for good measure had two night problems a week.

December 15th the battalion departed from Camp Hood and arrived at Camp Bowie, Texas the 16th. At Camp Bowie the battalion received about 200 recruits fresh out of civies. Here was a new job for the CP to handle: the training of new men who didn't know the difference between revielle and retreat. This was an interesting job for all concerned. The S-3 section was on the job from the early hours of the morning until the wee hours of the next. And too, the S-1 had a job getting the records of the men in shape. This was the best way to receive replacements; men who would have all their training with the outfit they would fight with. They "worked" into it.

On 19 January 1943 the battalion moved from Camp Bowie to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Here the basic training of the new men was finished and they became "battalion personnel".

The CPs enlisted men strength was increased during the month of March. Message Center got a couple of the new draftees, Pvs George Acklin and John Bellish. S-2 got a new crew: Sgt Bruce McRea and Pvt Clarence Coleman. S-3 got 2 men; Aggie and Pvt Richard Martsolf, and most of the time Sgt Jack K. Gould, the S-3 Sgt, had more help than he had work for them to do. Even Richard Lake, file and classification clerk got an assistant, Mike Lokuta. There was one more new face but he had been with the CP Group for over a month, in fact he was one of the first inductees to be re-drafted into the CP Group; the short hand artist, Robert Taylor.

The last of March we pulled out of Camp Claiborne to start on maneuvers. We moved from Camp Claiborne to an assembly area; while in this area we experimented with some of our new equipment to make sure we would be able to use it. Some of these items were the new black out tent and hammocks. The black-out tent at first glance looked like it would require hours to put up and take down, but with a little practice we found that it could be accomplished in a few minutes even under black-out conditions at night.

Maneuvers got started and we in the CP Group got used to setting up CP tents and then in the next hour taking them down getting ready to move out, digging fox holes. On the nights that we were sure of getting a good nights rest orders would come in that we had to make a night march of 25 or more miles. When the maneuver finally ended, part of the outfit was in Texas and the remainder in Louisiana.

During maneuvers there were several humorous incidents that occurred in the CP Group that still stand out after two years; one was the night T/5 Taylor was put in charge of a latrine detail shortly after he was given his stripes. The men on the detail decided to have a little fun out of the job so when the canvas screen was erected it was made continuous. A short while after the job was completed, the Col. tried to go into the latrine and after circling it twice, he decided there wasnt any opening and began calling Taylor. Everyone got a laugh when Taylor tried to show the Col. the opening. Another incident was the night the Personnel Section was posted as guides and were taken prisoner by a group of colored troops. This resulted in most of the battalion taking the wrong road and ending up driving all over Peason artillery range. It was on this trip that the S-3 half track half buried itself in a shell hole.

After the maneuver the unit returned to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and continued training on the ranges and plains of the camp. Then started a period of alerts for overseas shipment. The unit was alerted and hurried a program to get the battalion POM. However, when it was expected we would leave, orders came cancelling the move. This "sweating" continued until the boys began to say, "we'll never go over seas". But on 12 April 1944 the advance detail, Capt Joseph W. Long, the S-4, 1st Lt Ernest G. Vocke, the motor officer and M/Sgt Jack K. Gould, the Sergeant Major, departed from Camp Claiborne, enroute "somewhere" over there. Now the battalion was ready and were waiting to leave at any time. Due to crowded transportation facilities and other plans of the war department, the unit didn't ship until the 25th of July.

The trip over was routine and everything went smooth. *Liverpool, England was the port of debarkation on 3 August 1944. The battalion set up in a British Camp called "Llangattock". Here the biggest problem was equipping for combat on the continent. The men saw a little of England and worked hard to get the battalion ready for the move to France.

On 23 August the battalion moved from Langattock to a staging area near Glouster, England. On 25 August the battalion shipped on LSTs and LCI's arriving on the shores of France at Utah Beach on 27 August.

After we landed on the continent we began eating "K" and "C" rations, at first everyone was preparing their own meals. Later they began to form little select groups with someone who knew a little about cooking doing most of the cooking. After the CP had been in Arracourt, France for several weeks these separate groups combined or dissolved until there was only two groups left, one was the main group in a school house with T/4 Miller acting as chief cook and the other in the fire house down the street several doors. In the second group Coleman did the cooking and often the dish washing when T/5 Benner and Pfc Lokuta had both thought up good excuses. This set up in the cooking arrangement continued until the battalion moved to near Saar Union. While here a cook was sent down from Hq. Co. and we all finally "ate".

From the shores of France until the unit arrived near Brienne, France, it was a case of move, move, move to catch up with the 3rd Army's fast advance. Here the CP began operating tactically and controled the battalions first contact with the enemy. From now on it was little sleep for the members of the CP Group. Moves were made during darkness to avoid enemy observation and one move in particular will always be remembered by those of the CP. The battalion CP had assisted in taking the city of Nancy, France on 15 September 1944, and that night were ordered to move to the vicinity of Dieulouard. The convoy passed the road guide who was supposed to direct the battalion into an assembly area, and almost ended up with the whole unit in the German lines.

The CP Group had its worst situation at Luneville, France. The battalion was attached to the 2nd Cavalry Group and the CP moved into Luneville while it was still being heavily shelled. At darkness the CP moved into an orchard on the slope of a hill just on the edge of town. Here the crew set up the command post tent and then bedded down for the night. About 2300 hrs small arms fire began to close in near the CP and the boys thought it a little funny so close. In about 15 minutes the Jerries were in the CP bivouac and everyone was 10 miles down in a fox hole. The Jerries tried to draw our fire but no one fired from our area and they took off in 20 minutes. Having failed to do any harm then, they threw in about 50 rounds of artillery which fell just short of the CP. After this situation there was no more CP tent put up. We took buildings.

From Luneville, France it was a fast move with little trouble with the enemy until the battalion arrived at Arracourt, France. Here it was a holding situation and the CP set up in buildings for 6 weeks. While here the battalion commander, Lt Col. Frank S. Buchanan, was killed when his Jeep hit a road mine. The Staff was changed considerably and the executive officer, Major Glenn S. Finley, took over command of the battalion. Major Charles H. Love, then Capt, took the executive officers position.

A new idea in a CP was conceived by the CO and a 2-1/2 ton GMC truck was rigged to operate as a CP. The staff acquired 1 1/2 ton Jeeps for their transportation and now the CP was mobile plus.

When the CP left Arracourt it became a matter of routine moves and operation. There were no events of consequence, the CP history is a battalion history of dates and moves.

M/Sgt Jack K. Gould.

The first real action that the whole Battalion was committed on was helping take the city of Nancy, France. The Battalion joined Task Force Seabrea at 0600, 15th of September 1944, on the outskirts of Toul. The road leading to Nancy was heavily mined in many places and there were a few snipers. The First Battalion vehicles entered Nancy at 1145. The Battalion was released from Task Force Seabrea at 1700 and attached to the 80th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Dieulouard.

On the 18th of September the Battalion was released from attachment to the 80th Inf. Div. and assembled in the vicinity of Nancy. The Battalion less Company "C" moved from Nancy to the vicinity of Luneville, during the night of the 18th and arrived 5 miles west of Luneville at 0630, 19th September after an all night blackout road march. While in this location the Battalion was under heavy shellfire for the first time, and suffered its first casualties. The Battalion was supporting the 2nd Cavalry Group and 44th Armored Infantry Regiment. During the night of September 20th the battalion CP was harassed by small arms and machine gun fire near Luneville when a German patrol entered the bivouac. On the 22nd of September the Battalion was released from attachment to the 2nd Cav Group and placed under XII corps control. The Battalion moved to the vicinity of Maxie. While in this location indirect fire was placed on Bonville.

On the 27th of September, Company "A", Company "B", and the two Reconnaissance Platoons were put in direct support of the 4th Armored Division helping hold the high ground west of Reichcourt; in many cases with only an outpost between the gun crews and the Germans. Here the Battalion suffered its heaviest losses.

On the 22nd of October the 26th Infantry Division relieved the 4th Armored, but the 691st remained in their foxholes with no relief in sight. The Battalion continued to help the Infantry hold their lines, but got some relief from mortar fire by pulling one Company back at time for indirect fire. In this period the Battalion got its first tank, a Mark VI, knocked out by Company "C". The gun companies stayed in the same general area until the 8th of November when the big drive started. The Battalion supported the 26th Infantry Division in their advance and helped take many towns, among them Benestross and Sarre Union.

On December 6th the Battalion was released from the 26th Infantry Division and attached to the 6th Armored Division, which was at that time holding a line above Forbach.

On the 18th of December the Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 6th Armored Division and moved south into the 7th Army sector, and attached to the 87th Infantry Division. The Battalion supported the 87th Infantry Division. The 691st TD Battalion remained in their positions and was attached to the 44th. Late in the afternoon of the 24th of December the Battalion got orders to withdraw and prepare to move north to Reims, France. On the 27th of December the Battalion assembled in Bernie, France near Reims in support of the 17th Airborne Division. On the 29th of December the Battalion was attached to the 87th Infantry Division and moved to the vicinity of Bertrix, Belgium to help in the "Battle of the Bulge". Company "A" helped the Infantry take the town of St Hubert. In this area the Battalion got its first chance to fight with tanks in any numbers. Company "B" knocked out 3 tanks and "C" 2 tanks. On the 15th of January the Battalion moved to Contern, Luxembourg, and on the 17th to Mensdorf and vicinity to help the 87th Infantry Division maintain a defensive line west of the Sauer River. On the 25th of January the Battalion was released from attachment to the 87th Infantry Division but remained in position. On January 26th the Battalion was attached to the 76th Infantry Division which had relieved the 87th Division. When the 76th Division made its attack and crossed the Sauer River at Echternach, the 691st TD Battalion supported them with direct and indirect fire at enemy pill boxes and fortifications. Many hits were made and several pill boxes knocked out. Part of Company "B" crossed the river and moved into Germany with the Infantrymen. A few days after the crossing was made the 691st was relieved by the 808th TD Battalion which had new M-36's that were more maneuverable and mounted a more powerful gun. We said good-bye to the 76th and joined the 2nd Cav Group on the 24th of February. On the 3rd of March the Battalion was released from attachment to the 2nd Cav Group and ordered to move to Saarbourg, Germany and join the 94th Infantry Division. After arriving in Saarbourg, and positions for the gun Companies had been chosen, orders were received stating that the Battalion was released from attachment to the 94th Division and attached to the 65th Infantry Division in the vicinity of Boulay, France. On March the 8th, after joining the 65th Division, the gun Companies and Reconnaissance platoons moved into positions in the vicinity of Saarlautern. Here they supported the Infantry with direct and indirect fire.

On the 16th of March the Infantry began their attack and from then until the 21st, when the whole German front in the Saar Valley collapsed, it was a race to see who could catch up with the Germans first. On the 22nd of March Company "B" was attached to the 5th Infantry Division to protect the 5th Division ridge site on the Rhine River at Oppenheim, Germany.

On the 30th and 31st of March the Battalion crossed the Rhine River at Mainz and started on a rapid drive to catch up with the Germans or reach Berlin. On the 6th of April the Battalion, while in Sontra, was released from the 65th Division and attached to the 76th Infantry Division.

The 691st TD Battalion had most of the same men that had fought with the 76th at Echternach, but they were now armed with a superior weapon. New M-36s. These new Destroyers made the Infantrymen's job much easier in many instances, by knocking out machine gun nests and strong points, and destroying buildings that were being used by snipers. Company "A" was the first to knock out a tank with the new M-36 at Langensalza, Germany. From the 6th of April until V-E Day the Battalion moved forward with the 76th and helped them take many towns and hundreds of prisoners. On V-E Day the Battalion was in the same position it had been for sometime, in the vicinity of Chemnitz, waiting for the Russians to arrive.

Lt. Joe Bullock.

