

**RESTRICTED**

**OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "A", 701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION**

Period - 21 January to 16 February 1943

"A" Company was detached from the Battalion and attached to Combat Command "A" on January 4; the departure from the bivouac of the Combat Command en route to Sbaitla took place at 2300 hours. The Company arrived at the CC "A" bivouac area at dawn. Sbaitla was bombed and the column was strafed just as the troops entered. Fortunately, there were no casualties. The remainder of the day was spent digging in and arranging camouflage against enemy aircraft. Several air raids did occur, but once again no one was hurt.

On January 23, three enemy air raids took place, and the record of "no casualties" was kept intact. At 0230 hours, January 24, "A" Company, without the 3rd Platoon, moved from Sbaitla as part of a small combat team under the command of Lt. Colonel Egan to reinforce the French forces at Hadjeb El Aïoun. The team consisted of the 1st Battalion of the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, "B" Battery of the 91st Field Artillery, and a detachment of the 16th Engineers. "A" Company occupied forward positions 12 miles northeast of Hadjeb El Aïoun toward Fendouk Pass, at G-7575, by dawn. Enemy planes came over, but there were no raids. It was dangerous to move any vehicles on the road between Hadjeb El Aïoun and Fendouk during daylight. However, patrols were sent out night and day.

The following day there was no enemy ground activity. Enemy planes were overhead as usual, but the Company was well dug in and camouflaged in a castles patch. Contact and liaison were established with French forces under the command of Colonel Mascier. Excellent cooperation was seen forthcoming from Colonel Mascier's command. Patrols continued to go out.

**RESTRICTED**

25

**RESTRICTED**

For the next two days there was no enemy ground activity. A few shells landed near French Artillery positions, and the road became known as "Messerschmitt Highway". On January 28th, the Company moved across the wadi east of Djebel Trossa, through Pishan under the cover of darkness, and occupied positions at O-7424. Liaison was soon established with French forces under Colonel Goudroyer. There still was no enemy activity, and the following day "A" Company returned to former positions at O-7575 at 2000 hours.

On January 30th, French mortar shots were taken of "A" Company officers with Colonel Mascier's staff, and of Company vehicles in combat positions, illustrating cooperation between French and American forces. At 1500 hours "A" Company moved out to rejoin Combat Command "A" at Korn's crossroad near Lassoula, T-5266. T/4 Fivessé was seriously wounded by enemy aircraft at Sbeitla, and T/5 Lawrence was wounded by enemy planes at Lassoula when the 3rd Platoon was strafed. Two 75mm self-propelled guns were knocked out and several vehicles damaged. At 0300 hours of the following day "A" Company moved to Sidi Bou Zid and went into forward positions located at T-7253. The 3rd Platoon now rejoined the Company, and all were bombed and strafed at dawn while passing through Sidi Bou Zid. There were no casualties. T/4 Fivessé died in the meantime and was buried in the United States Cemetery at Sbeitla.

"A" Company was then attached to the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment under the command of Lt. Colonel Nightower. The 2nd Platoon was attached to a team of tanks and artillery under Major Parsons and occupied forward combat positions at T-7253. There was some sporadic shelling and a great deal of enemy air activity but not casualties. The next day, February 2nd, "A" Company, less the 2nd Platoon, occupied forward positions toward Raboul Pass and had the mission of protecting the left(north) flank in a tank attack at 11:00 hours. The Company moved out with the tanks and broke up an enemy tank attack which came south toward Raboul from Faid Pass. The enemy tanks were driven back by four of "A" Company's 75mm S/P's. The 37mm S/P's were completely out of effective range, but fired back for the "hell of it".

**RESTRICTED**

# RESTRICTED

fire was then centered on two 88mm guns dug in at Raboul Pass. These guns were out of range of the S/P's gun sights, but one was effectively silenced. At dusk the Company withdrew with the tanks to former positions. There had been no casualties.

From February 3 to February 7, "A" Company occupied forward positions at T-7556 before daylight and remained in position during the day, withdrawing to T-7203 during darkness. From February 8 to February 13, the Company was in position between Djebel Ksira and Djebel Garot Hadid furnishing anti-tank protection to the artillery and tanks. During the period the Company was under enemy "counter battery" artillery fire daily. As the men dug in "six feet under", no casualties were sustained.

The Germans broke through the pass between Djebel Kralif and Djebel El Akrouta with tanks and artillery at 0730 hours. They swept around Lascouda from the west to surround the mountain, oasis, and all troops in the vicinity. The 2nd Platoon was overrun by tanks and driven from their forward positions, but not before they had destroyed three or more enemy tanks. Only two 75mm S/P guns and a few peeps were able to extricate themselves. Lt. Asmbruster was wounded in action.

"A" Company, less the 2nd Platoon, moved out with the tanks to meet the enemy armor which was sweeping southwest from Lascouda toward Sidi Bou Zid. "A" Company was on the right flank of "I" Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment and took up positions in the high ground east of the Lascouda-Sidi Bou Zid road. Here, an attack of about 30 Mark IV tanks, which had debouched from Faid Pass and were going west on the Faid-Sadguda road, was met. "A" Company opened fire at 200 yards with all guns, including small arms, as they emerged from the cactus. The German column of tanks moved to their left flank (south) and overran the Company. Three of our 75mm S/P's and two 37mm S/P's were hit by tank fire and exploded and burned. The Company withdrew and was reassembled south of the Sidi-Bou Zid-Makassy road. A withdrawal south and west of Sidi Bou Zid toward Kern's crossroad was then begun, and the column

RESTRICTED 27

**RESTRICTED**

was bombed and strafed just west of Sidi Bou Zid. The last 75mm S/P and maintenance trucks were lost in this incident. "A" Company then turned southwest and crossed the wadi some two and a half miles off. Six enemy tanks were sighted creeping across to the front. All fire power gone, the Company halted, and the men dispersed and were made to lie down in the green field. The enemy tanks passed by and attacked the main column which had just been left.

The courage and leadership shown by Lt. Colonel Hightower during the fight was superior and outstanding. His bravery in placing his command tank between the main retreating column and the six enemy tanks mentioned above was a notable feat deserving of the highest praise. The enemy tanks were knocked out and the remainder of the column was saved.

The "A" Company column, which had meanwhile collected vehicles and personnel from several units, continued to work its way toward Kern's cross-road. The Company's losses for the day consisted of two officers captured and one officer both wounded and missing in action, five enlisted men killed, six captured, and 42 men missing in action. Vehicular losses were six 75mm S/P guns, two 37mm S/P guns, four M-2 half-tracks, three 3/4 ton AA, 11 1/4 ton trucks, and one 2 1/2 ton maintenance truck.

On February 15 and 16, "A" Company was ordered to occupy the pass at T-4562 and protect the south flank. This position was occupied prior to daylight after the Company had moved out at 0400 hours. There was no enemy ground activity and no enemy tanks were observed in the passes.

The rest of the 701st TD Battalion joined "A" Company in its positions on the afternoon of January 16th, and "A" Company reverted to Battalion control. At 2000 hours the same day, an order was received to withdraw to a position northeast of Sidi Bou Zid. The withdrawal was made while furious fighting was taking place on the Lasseuda-Sidi Bou Zid road.

\* \* \* \* \*

**RESTRICTED**