

CLASSIFIED HEADQUARTERS

81ST TANK DESTROYER BN
U.S. ARMY.

BY AUTHORITY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

DOWNGRADING COMMITTEE 17 June 45

From: 0601 hrs 1 March 1945

To: 2400 hrs 31 March 1945

W 48 (4)

SUBJECT: Action Against Enemy, Reports After After Action Reports.

TO : Adjutant General, Washington, D.C. (THRU CHANNELS).

Foreword: At the beginning of the period of this report, the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP) was still attached to the 79th Infantry Division (MVI Corps) and was located in HOUTHEM, HOLLAND. The Battalion was also under the Twelfth Tank Destroyer Group at the opening of this period, but was subsequently detached from its control.

1 Mar 45 to
2 Mar 45

On the first day of March, this battalion had received all but one of its thirty six M-36s. On the next day, the battalion received the thirty sixth M-36 and during the day some practice firing was done with excellent results being obtained. The Commanding General of the 79th Infantry Division observed the firing and expressed his satisfaction over the performance of our gunners on the 90mm gun.

3 Mar 45

At approximately 1430 hrs, on 3 March 1945, the battalion departed HOUTHEM, HOLLAND and traveled 45 miles, crossing the ROHR RIVER, closing in GOLKRATH, GERMANY, Coord F 962772, at about 1730 hrs the same day.

4 Mar 45

The companies performed routine duties during the day. During the afternoon, General WICKE, Commanding the 79th Inf Div visited the Battalion CP and conferred with Major Mc CORMACK and staff.

5 Mar 45 to
7 Mar 45

During the period that the Battalion remained in the Golkrath area, firing companies and personnel of other companies attended classes in aircraft identification. The firing companies also had classes in the use of the aiming circle and the azimuth indicator. M-36 crew practice was held daily and proved very beneficial for recently arrived reinforcements and also served as an effective refresher course for the veteran members of the battalion. On 6 March, the Battalion began its 32nd month overseas. On the 7th of March, there was training in indirect firing, a firing demonstration in the Panzerfaust, classes for radio operators. Combat loads on all destroyers were checked. Throughout the period, the personnel of the Battalion received dental treatment. The Articles of War were read to all personnel, with added instruction regarding the policy on non-fraternization being emphasized.

8 Mar 45

On the 8th of March, the Battalion moved from Golkrath (962772) to vicinity of Trebek (7561) Holland, route of march: Gerderath, Wassenberg, Heinsberg, Geilenkirchen, Heerlen, Trebek. The Battalion CP closed in new area in Trebek at approximately 2245 hrs, 8 March 45, distance traveled 35 miles.

9 Mar 45 to
17 Mar 45.

In the period between 9-17 March, the Battalion remained in the Trebek area and during that time entered into a period of training and reconditioning. On 10 March, an Ordnance welding team reported to the Battalion and commenced to construct tops for the M-36s and to weld other accessories onto the destroyers. Inspections were held throughout the various companies. On the 14th of March, elements of the Battalion engaged in river crossing practice near Linne, Coord 486475. A movie, Training Film, "Pickup" was also shown to the Battalion in connection with the efforts of the Battalion Surgeon towards eliminating venereal disease and

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After Action Reports (Cont'd)

and its occasions. Practice firing continued, with good results being obtained. A limited recreation program was instituted, taking effect after each day's training activities had been completed.

18 March 45
to
20 March 45

The Battalion was ordered to turn in twenty of its halftracks and the same was done, the battalion receiving an equal number of M-20s in return. On the 19th of March the Battalion prepared to move, and on the 20th, the various elements moved at slightly different times, during the day, to the vicinity of Neukirchen, Germany, distance traveled: approximately 72 miles. Co B established a CP two miles SSE of Rheinberg at Coord 229245. Two six gun platoons were formed with the first going into position at coord 2336 and the second at 2318. Co C closed in the town of Neukirchfeld coord 181176. Co A closed at 177212. Co B was attached to the 79th Inf Div Artillery and went into indirect fire positions, as shown above registering on coord 31062823.

21 March 45
to
23 March 45

There was little action during this period except for extensive patrol and reconnaissance work in preparation for the crossing of the Rhine River by the Battalion in support of the Division.

24 March 45
CROSSING OF THE
RHINE RIVER

On this day, at various times, the destroyer companies plus Ren Company crossed the Rhine River in direct support of the 79th Inf Div. Following is an account of what each company did the eve before crossing and on the day of the crossing itself: At approximately 0830 hrs, S/Sgt Stevenson commanding the 3rd platoon of Co A crossed the Rhine River on barges in vic of Drissen and coord 267287 and joined the 2nd Bn of the 315th Inf Regt at 1000 hrs, followed by the 1st pl which joined the 1st Bn of the 315th at 1200 hrs. The 2nd pl crossed and joined the 3rd Bn of the 315th at 1600 hrs. Activities of the platoons after the crossing: At 0900 hrs the 3rd platoon destroyed an enemy pill box vic of coord 280290 expending 1 rd of HE, 2 rds of APC, and 2 rds of T-105. At 1000 hrs, the 1st pl fired 5 rds of HE at enemy strongpoints in a brick yard vic of 283295 to relieve friendly infantry who had been pinned down. At 1100 hrs, the 1st pl destroyed an enemy 76mm A.T. gun vic of 296310, and fired 5 rds of HE at various MG nests during the advance. At 1430 hrs, the 2nd pl fired 13 rds of HE at enemy strong points in the vic of 395303 to 300309 and also machine-gunned other positions held by the enemy. At 2100 hrs, the 3rd pl machine-gunned and destroyed a large enemy truck, killing and wounding several enemy soldiers (vic of 312302).

At 0200 hrs, Co B joined the many other units (F.A.) who were lined up and in a tremendous artillery preparation. The destroyers of Co B fired at the rate of 20 rds per hour, and the company continued to fire until well into the morning. After the preparation fire was concluded, it was found that the company had expended approximately 2029 rds of 90mm ammunition. At 1100 hrs, on the 24th, the 2nd pl was alerted and crossed the Rhine at 1400 hrs, with the 1st pl crossing at 1700 hrs, and the 3rd pl at 1830. Ren Co crossed with the firing companies also.

Co C crossed the Rhine: 2nd pl at 1100 hrs; to the 2nd Bn of the 313th Inf Regt at 286276; the 3rd pl at 1230hrs, to the 3rd Bn of the 313th Inf Regt at 286286; the 1st pl at 1330 hrs, to the 1st Bn of the 313th Inf Regt. at 286266. All three platoons crossed under light enemy artillery fire. Elements of the 116th Pz Div were reportedly contacted but verification of that report could not be established until a later date.

The Bn CP and the Bn rear echelon remained on the west bank of the river alerted for hourly movement across to the east bank. All of the initial crossings made by the battalion and by the division infantry were by barges, and when the remainder of the battalion crossed on the 26th of March it also crossed by barges. There was sporadic artillery fire throughout the crossings with occasional airbursts in the vic of where the engineers were constructing a bridge.

After Action Reports (Cont'd)

25 March 45

Co A had set up its CP at coord 289292 one mile SW of Dinslaken. At 0700 hr, the 3rd pl jumped off in vic of 307304, the 2nd pl in vic of 302309, and the 1st pl in vic of 290320. At 1000 hrs, the 3rd pl knocked out 4 enemy horse drawn caissons in the vic of 322313. At 1200 hrs, the 2nd pl destroyed 2 enemy 88mm guns vic of 337318. During the fire fight, two of the pl's enlisted personnel were wounded. One was evacuated and the other, after treatment, returned to duty. At 1320 hrs, the 1st destroyer of the 3rd pl was hit by an enemy panzerfaust vic of 338314, killing the gunner (Brown, Pearlle) and wounding the platoon leader S/Sgt Stevenson and destroyer commander, Sgt Piver. The enemy then machinegunned the area preventing medical aid men from reaching the wounded men. S/Sgt Jones assumed command of the pl and shelled the enemy with HE until they withdrew. At 1500 hrs, during an enemy barrage, the gunner of one of the destroyers of the 3rd pl was hit by shrapnel and evacuated to the hospital. At 1600 hrs, the 3rd pl destroyed and knocked out both an 88mm gun and part of crew near 337316. During the day's operations an estimated 100 to 150 enemy were reported either killed or wounded by the 2nd and 3rd pls. Meanwhile, the 1st pl had advanced to 304321 without opposition. Total casualties for the day consisted of one enlisted man killed and seven enlisted men wounded for Co A.

Co B's platoon positions on this date were as follows: the 1st at coord 345300, the 2nd at 338283, the 3rd at 312292. During the day the 2nd pl fired 20 rds of HE, knocking down a church steeple with one round and sending the remainder of the HE into nous es suspecting of containing enemy troops.

Co C set up a CP in walsum 294274. During the day the 1st pl fired 8 rds of HE at enemy personnel in a factory at 293262. Ren Co 1st and 3rd pls continued to work with the pioneer pl on the east bank of the river.

Scattered artillery fire continued to fall in all gun position areas and occasional rds fell near company CPs.

26 March 45

On this day, at 1110 hrs, the Bn CP crossed the Rhine followed shortly after by the Rear Echelon all closing in or near Dinslakenorbruch 294316.

Co A's platoons made slight changes of position. Co B's pls were active with the 3rd pl knocking out an anti-tank gun as well as killing and wounding numbers of enemy troops. At the close of the day the pls were in position as follows: 1st, 369305; 2nd 353276; 3rd, 355290. The company CP was set up at 312292. Ren Co's CP also crossed the river on this day closing at Overbruch.

27 March 45

At 0500 hrs, the 1st and 2nd pls of Co A were alerted to support the 315th Inf in an attack. At 1000 hrs, the company CP moved to Averbruch 312283. At 1200 hrs, the 1st pl with 2 rds of HE silenced an enemy MG nest vic of 342266. At 1430 hrs, the 2nd pl fired 16 rds of HE, 400 rds of cal .30 and 200 rds of cal .50 ammo at enemy troops and strong points vic of 337255. At 1500 hrs, the 1st pl silenced a MG nest vic of 360255. At 1600 hrs, the 3rd pl moved to 344257, and the 1st pl to 359249, and the 2nd pl to 334244.

During the day Co B's 1st pl went into reserve while the 2nd pl moved 357266, and the 3rd to 361268. The 1st pl then moved out to 328298. Some light firing was done during the day mostly at enemy strong points.

After Action Reports (Continued)

28 March 45. On the 28th, the pls of Co A moved out in support of the 315th Inf having as their objective the town of Busch Hausen which objective was attained two and one half hours later, at 1500 hrs. The 1st pl fired 41 rds of HE and 2 rds of T-105 at enemy pillboxes, strong points and at enemy troops. At coord 364232 and vic the pls also fired 500 rds of carbine ammo, 300 rds of cal .50 MG ammo also at enemy troops. The 3rd pl fired 6 rds of HE at an enemy OP vic of coord 352194. At 1330 hrs, the company CP moved to the town of Wehofen 3229.

Co B's CP moved from Dinslaken 3129 to Schmachten 350272 at 1400 hrs. At the close of the day, the platoons were in the following positions: 1st, at 350272; 2nd, at 360259; 3rd, at 361269. During the day one enlisted man was severely wounded as a result of mortar fire. Lt. Hull commanding the company was promoted to Captain, as of 24 March 45.

Co C's CP remained in Hamborn 330219 while the platoons moved from their former positions supporting the infantry in a 4 mile march to the Rhine Canal encountering only slight resistance and then going into position at 1stpl: 306179; 2ndpl: 332189; 3rdpl: 342197.

Rcn Co's 2nd pl went on a mission to the 314th Inf sector to select a route and crossing for Co B over the canal north of Duisberg. Enemy small arms fire was heavy in this sector but the platoon completed its mission and returned to its bivouac area without casualty. The company CP remained in Overbruch 302286.

29 March 45 Co A's 1st pl was under heavy arty fire and also 120mm mortar fire during the morning of the 29th. The other two pls received sporadic arty and mortar fire also. The positions were as follows: 1st, at 373222, 2nd, at 359219, 3rd, at 349182. At 1000 hrs, the CP moved to Hamborn, 338243.

Co B moved from Schmachten to Sterkrade, 380254, where it was under heavy fire for approximately 30 minutes. The pl positions at the close of the day were: 1st, at 384228, 2nd at 388237, 3rd, at 398243. There was no change of importance in the location or situation as regards Co C. In Rcn Co, S/Sgt Kissler was commissioned a 2nd Lt.

30 March 45 There was no change as regards Co A and pls. One destroyer from the 1st pl fired 6 rds of HE at an enemy OP in a church steeple knocking out the OP. Co B had a quiet day and at the close of the period its pls were located: 1st, at 383231, 2nd, at 388237, 3rd, at 417232. Co C's 1st pl remained in its same position as on the day previous. The 2nd and 3rd pls moved into indirect fire positions at 3165126181. The company CP at 314262. The Bn CP moved from Dinslakenerbruch to Marxloh 325235.

31 March 45 Co A and pls moved to Bottrop and vicinity 453263. Co B moved to Sterkrade and vicinity 380249. Co C did not move and during the day fired 85 rds (indirect fire) HE on enemy personnel and trucks in the vicinity of waitteimerort 317124. Rcn Co moved to Hamborn 331228. At the close of the period the Battalion was, therefore, in the Ruhr, industrial heart of the German Reich, in support of the 79th Infantry Division.

A short summary of enemy materiel knocked out or destroyed by this battalion since its arrival in Normandy is presented below:

Mk IV Tanks	26
Mk V "	16
Mk VI "	2
Total	44

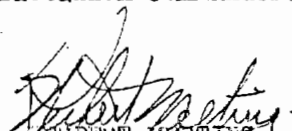
Plus 9 SP guns (75mm and 88mm)

In addition the Battalion has knocked out 41 gpd and combat vehicles 13 anti tank guns, and captured over 700 Germans

After Action Reports (Cont.)

- Summary and Battle experiences. Anchors or Grouzers
- Here are some suggestions, experiences, and opinions culled from the various companies in the Battalion during the winter fighting:
1. All recovery vehicles in a firing or destroyer company should be equipped with some type of anchor. The reason: a destroyer bogged down in mud or in snow usually has to be pulled by winch power, and if the recovery vehicle is not anchored it will slide forward toward the object which is being pulled by the winch. It is advisable to use a pulley and double the cable so that more or the maximum amount of winching power may be obtained.
 2. A well trained driver will eliminate 90 per cent of the maintenance problems in a tank destroyer company. All drivers should be trained to maintenance the vehicle in conjunction with company or battalion motor maintenance sections.
 3. Bogie wheels should never be replaced until they are actually blown or worn out because it has been found that the bogies that come with the destroyer originally give better service than replacements.
 4. A tank destroyer should be greased between every 200 to 300 miles of running. If this is done, there will be far less trouble encountered with grease seals.
 5. All tank destroyers should have an auxiliary small gasoline motor for the purpose of keeping the batteries charged.
 6. Much of the trouble re governors will be eliminated if a few drops of oil are put in the engine governor each month.
 7. All destroyers with open turrets should have covers -- made from at least a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thickness of steel plating. Reason: An air burst or tree burst will cause casualties which should be eliminated when the turret is closed. Any ordnance battalion can supply the material and do the work.
 8. Each tank or tank destroyer should have a tow clevis hook placed in the direct center of the front of the tank. In doing this, you will be able to winch a tank in a straight line, but by having the tow hook on both sides of the front, the tank has a tendency to pull to the right or to the left. By this statement is meant that three tow hooks should be placed on the front of a tank.
 9. Not enough crew members are familiar with all the duties of the entire crew. It is essential that every individual on a destroyer know and be able to apply himself to any or all duties on a destroyer.

For the Battalion Commander:


HERBERT HESTLING, JR.
Major, FA, 815th A.D. Bn
Executive.