

**823rd TANK
DESTROYER BATTALION**



Rec'd from E. V. Williams, Akaro. 6-28-'84

J. E. Niles

A History
of the
**823rd TANK
DESTROYER BATTALION**



**PUBLISHED FOR THE OFFICERS
AND MEN OF THE 823rd
TANK DESTROYER BATTALION**



1951

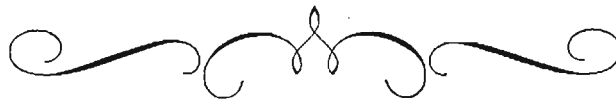
Dedication



This is a simple book. It wasn't written by literary genius. It was written by the hearts and hands and minds and courage of one group of Americans who helped fight a World War for those ideals which they deemed sacred.

Blood has been spilled on the pages of this book. It is the lifeblood of those young men—from city and farm—who came to this battalion to do a job. And, in the doing of that job they made the supreme sacrifice—for home and for country.

There is nothing else to say. These are the men. These are our comrades in battle. The humble thanks of a grateful nation are theirs. God rest them.

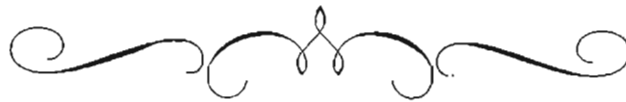


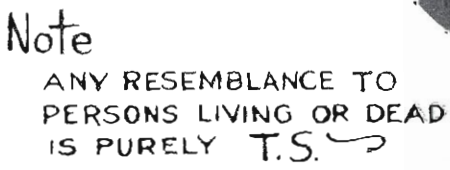
In Memory Of

THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES

Shauback, Sheldon M.	Corporal	27 June 1944
Jacobs, Ernie	Private	9 July 1944
Aspromonte, Mauro M.	Private	13 July 1944
Rasnic, Layman I.	Private	13 July 1944
Elmer, Richard G.	Private First Class	28 July 1944
Martinez, Miguel J.	Private First Class	29 July 1944
Yepez, Louis E.	Private First Class	29 July 1944
Jones, Harold H.	First Lieutenant	4 August 1944
Balcar, Edwin R.	Private	7 August 1944
Blanchard, Antoine C.	Private	7 August 1944
Dudek, Joseph S.	Private	7 August 1944
Hamilton, Wendell M.	Technician 5	7 August 1944
McEnturff, Lavon E.	Private First Class	7 August 1944
Wroten, Frederick	Corporal	7 August 1944
Schaefer, LeRoy A.	Private First Class	9 August 1944
Kranz, William I.	Private	14 August 1944
Ekel, Walter I.	Private	27 August 1944
Simpson, Binford D.	Private	28 August 1944
Warshal, Milton	Private First Class	28 August 1944
Diambola, William	Private	21 September 1944
Cripple, Theodore L.	Private First Class	21 September 1944
De Rochis, Gene V.	Private	22 September 1944
Smith, Charles D.	Corporal	26 September 1944
Edmond, Elton C.	Private First Class	11 October 1944
Costea, George	Private	11 October 1944
Morones, Pete D.	Private	16 October 1944
Gonzales, Roberto C.	Private First Class	23 October 1944
Voss, Burvel A.	Sergeant	24 October 1944
Rath, William T.	Private First Class	26 October 1944
Heitman, Erwin L.	Sergeant	13 November 1944
Galette, Ralph M.	Technician 5	17 November 1944
Pirtle, James H.	Private First Class	17 November 1944
Chasten, Louis B.	Second Lieutenant	22 November 1944
Hardee, Gaston P.	Private	22 November 1944
Irwin, John S.	Private First Class	30 November 1944
Boutte, Louis	Sergeant	7 December 1944
Juchtzer, Harvey H.	Private First Class	19 December 1944
Tkacz, Edward F.	Private	21 December 1944

Pioter, Roman J.	Technician 5	25 December 1944
Sandoval, Frank H.	Technician 4	25 December 1944
West, Loy D.	Technician 5	25 December 1944
Alverson, Robert E.	Private First Class	26 December 1944
Barton, Leon C.	Sergeant	15 January 1945
Malcomson, William H.	First Lieutenant	15 January 1945
Gentry, Clyde B.	Sergeant	18 January 1945
Compton, Paul D.	Sergeant	23 February 1945
Rogers, Howard H.	Sergeant	24 February 1945
Checketts, Robert D.	Sergeant	27 February 1945
Truett, James	Private	27 March 1945
Hoopes, Joseph H.	Private First Class	27 March 1945
Case, Floyd	Private First Class	4 April 1945
Henson, Arthur S.	Technician 5	12 April 1945
Hyden, Thomas J.	Technician 5	15 April 1945
Paiz, David.	Corporal	18 April 1945
Borel, Gilbert	Private First Class	18 April 1945
Clark, Walter S.	Sergeant	19 April 1945





MANEUVERS





LT. COL. STANLEY DETTMER

From the C. O.



This history, though giving an indication of the general action, cannot begin to portray the cardinal features that distinguished the service of our battalion.

This is not an apology for the history, but merely an acknowledgement of the futility of words when attempting to describe courage, sacrifice, and loyalty. Volumes could be written and still not tell adequately the whole story.

Let this history then serve as a means of refreshing the memory of the reader so that he will remember always that all men of our Battalion can say with humble but just pride — We fought a good fight!

Let it also remind us of our friends and comrades who are left behind in foreign lands, so that their courage and devotion will be forever with us. Let it remind us that these men spoke in deeds — not words.

STANLEY DETTMER

Lt. Col., Inf.

Commanding

Activation & Training

The 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated on July 25, 1942, at Camp Carson, Colorado, under the command of Major Charles B. McClelland. Captain Robert W. Rayburn was Executive Officer. The officer cadre was drawn from the 638th, 804th, and 846th Tank Destroyer Battalions; and the original "filler" came from the Cavalry Replacement Pool, and the Cavalry Officers' Candidate School, Class Number 6. The enlisted cadre of 77 men came from the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Life at Carson was easy and pleasant. This new camp, sprawling at the foot of picturesque Pikes Peak, was only a few minutes distance from Colorado Springs, a city well versed in the art of pleasing transients through its many years as one of the nation's leading scenic resorts.

Although the outfit played a great deal, it accomplished some serious work too. Because there was no equipment at first, basic military subjects were covered in classrooms and out-of-doors, under the direction of Captain Costomiris. Perhaps the hardest — and the most gratifying — part of the training schedules were the mountain climbs in which everyone in the Battalion engaged. Major McClelland, always leading his troops started off by climbing foothills; and finding that his command enjoyed hiking, he enlarged the program to include real mountains — Cheyenne Mountain, Mount Rosa, and finally Pike's Peak itself. The latter trip established the first of many records held by the Battalion. When the 823rd climbed "The Peak" in August 1942, it climbed higher than any other army outfit ever had — more than 14,500 feet above sea level.

Equipment — all of it automotive — started coming in. Driver's training and motorcycle riding were added to the training schedule, with everyone participating. Perhaps the most avid motorcycle enthusiasts were two newly-promoted officers — Lt. Colonel McClelland, and Major Rayburn.

But all good things end. Faces and hearts fell when it was learned that the organization had been ordered to Camp Livingston, Louisiana. This movement was accomplished during the second week of September, 1942.

Down in the deep South the training and the extra curricular activities continued. Colonel McClelland went to the Command and General Staff School, and during his absence Major Rayburn assumed command.

Able assisted by Lieutenant McInnis, the Major devised the most grueling of military tortures — a five mile obstacle course. Soon, with the aid of this outdoor torture chamber, the outfit was in top physical condition.

Then men and equipment began to arrive. On 1 October 1942, 200 men joined the Battalion from IRTC, Camp Robinson, Arkansas, followed a few days later by fifty more. The new vehicles were broken in on a road march to Natchez, Mississippi, a trip which a few husbands have not yet explained satisfactorily.

Lt. Col. McClelland took over command again in November. Captain Clint H. Smith was promoted to Major, and transferred to the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which he led into combat in the ETO.

Movement orders — and more men — came in December. The Battalion received 400 men from Camp Beauregard and Fort Sam Houston Reception Centers during the final weeks of 1942. The move, by motor, to Camp Bowie, Texas, was completed on 5 January 1943. Ten days later the Battalion received the balance of its men from Fort Douglas, Utah, and Fort McArthur, California.

Major Rayburn was transferred "back to branch" — the Cavalry, and he was succeeded by Captain Darrell J. Anderson, who attained his Majority, in March.

Basic training under the BUTC at Camp Bowie was a grueling process. Everyone put in long, hard hours, and they were rewarded by the enviable record which the Battalion made during its eight weeks of basic training.

Upon "graduation" from BUTC, the Battalion moved to Camp Hood, Texas, on 13 April 1943, to undergo advanced unit training.

AUTC gave the Battalion the technical skill and physical hardness necessary for a combat outfit. With the towed 3-inch gun, the unit established an almost unbelievable record for accuracy.

On 7 June 1943, Lt. Col. McClelland left the Battalion to assume command of the 101st Cavalry Regiment, later reorganized as the 101st Cav-





alry Group, and led into combat by our former commander, now a full colonel.

Lt. Col. Paul B. Bell assumed command of the organization on 12 June 1943, and set about the business of linking the well trained squads of the Battalion into a functioning tactical unit. Major Costomiris, who had been Lt. Col. McClelland's Executive Officer, continued in that capacity.

Preparatory to going on maneuvers, the Battalion was ordered to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, where it arrived on 2 August 1943. The following few weeks were spent in readying the men and equipment for the field, and passing unit tests given by the 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade.

On the exceedingly rainy morning of 15 September 1943, the Battalion departed Claiborne for the 1943 Third Army Maneuvers in Louisiana. During the next two months in the field the Battalion worked with the 84th, 99th, 102nd, and 103rd Infantry Divisions, as well as the 6th and 11th Tank Destroyer Groups.

Shortly after maneuvers, Lt. Col. Bell was transferred to the 2nd Tank Destroyer Group, which he still commands, and Major Costomiris assumed command of the Battalion.

The Battalion was now ready for combat. It had taken all of the preliminary steps — basic training, advanced unit training, maneuvers — and had begun the POM processing. On 11 February 1944, Major Stanley Dettmer assumed command of the Battalion, and the POM work got into high gear. The Battalion was ready.

The Battalion entrained on 9 March 1944, for the Boston Port of Embarkation, and arrived at Camp Myles Standish on 12 March. Less than a month later — on 6 April — the outfit trooped up the gang plank of the USS "Sea Porpoise" — Destination — England.

Crossing the Atlantic in April is not too rough. There were a couple of very weathery days, and some rumors about German submarines; but the trip on the whole was uneventful.

The "Sea Porpoise" dropped anchor in Newport Harbor. The Battalion boarded trains there and proceeded to Hertfordshire, England. On this trip the troops experienced their first taste of war—an air raid.

At the end of the line though was Hertford. Arriving early in the morning, most of the men were too tired to look around much. However, Hertford was one of those places that one instinctively likes. The Battalion was billeted in private residences leased by the army; and Battalion Headquarters was set up in the local Territorial Barracks.

It was here that the Battalion became acquainted with the 30th Infantry Division.

A few days after landing overseas, the Battalion was relieved from attachment to the Second Tank Destroyer Group, and became attached to "Old Hickory." Higher echelon attachments were XIX Corps, and the First United States Army.

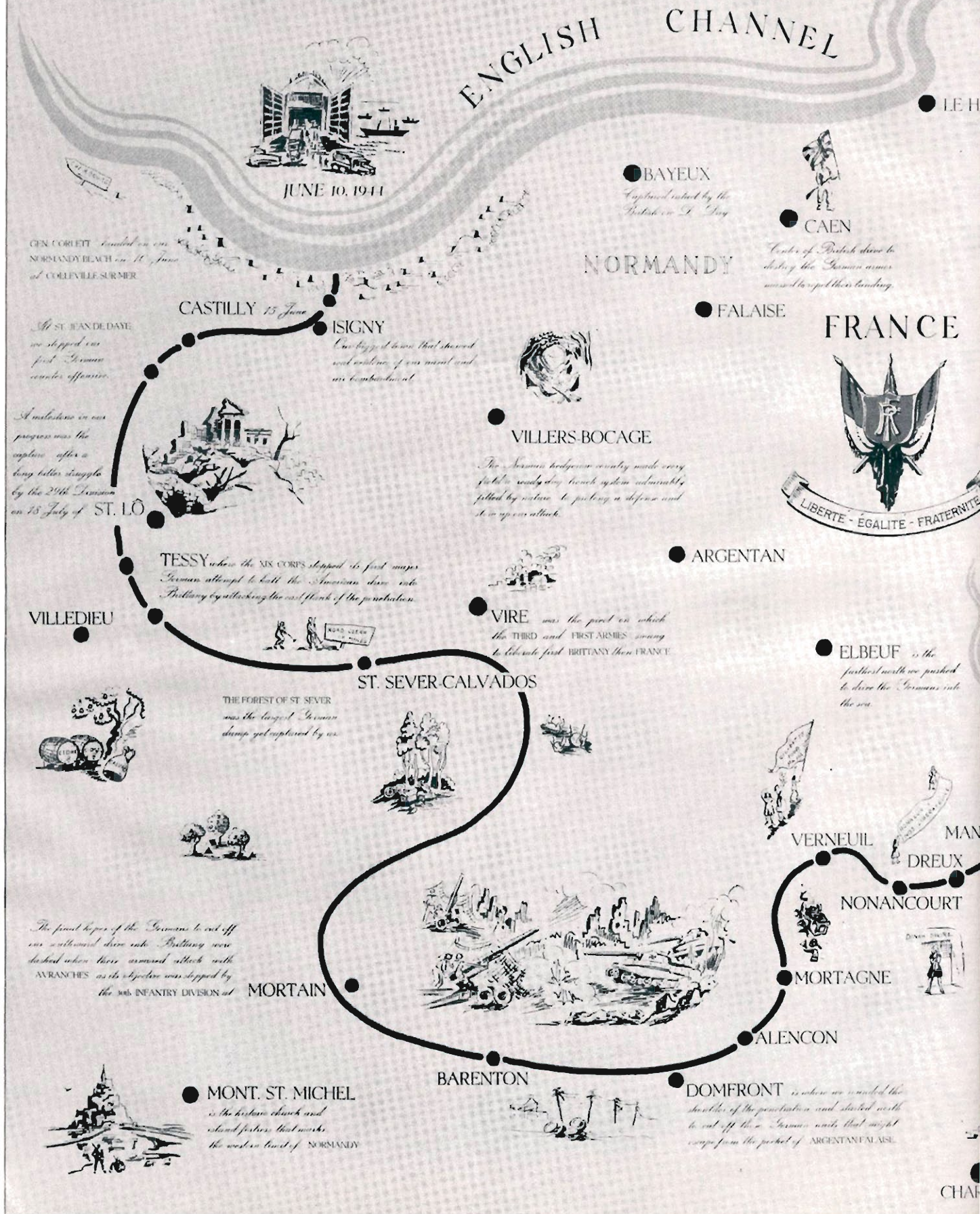
Everyone knew that the invasion of France was imminent, but no one knew just when it might occur. Consequently, the unit threw itself into a strenuous program. Once again new equipment streamed in. Under the supervision of the 30th Division Artillery, the Battalion became proficient in indirect firing, as proved by range tests on the barren Salisbury plains. Later, at Kimmeridge, gunners sharpened their eyes for direct fire through abbreviated firing tests.

It was not all work, however. The evenings were long, the lassies friendly, and the pubs numerous. Major General Hobbs, Commanding the 30th Division, spoke to the members of the Battalion. The staff met General Eisenhower, Lieutenant General Bradley, and Major General Corlett, XIX Corps Commander.

The invasion then loomed sharply ahead. The Battalion had water-proofed its vehicles, and during the last week of May, moved to Oakridge Camp, near Basingstoke. Major Dettmer was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. On 5 June 1944, General Hobbs made a very moving speech to the Battalion, wishing it luck. The next morning, the sky was black with planes. It was D-Day at last!



XIX CORPS IN ACTION



BELGIUM

HOLLAND

GERMANY

The FRENCH FORCES of the INTERIOR were of great assistance in liquidating and winning us of "Le Petit Boche."



BRUSSELS

WATERLOO

Even our Headquarters Commandant captured 150 German prisoners within 100 yards of our C. P.



TOURNAI

where the 2nd Armored Division entered BELGIUM the 3rd September

Up here we even intercepted German march songs along our first moving column - to their regret!



CAMBRAY

BRAY



ST. QUENTIN

Crossed the SOMME RIVER on the 2nd September

We went so fast past WORLD WAR I battlefields that all we really saw were the neat little cemeteries of our military predecessors here.

MERU

Crossed the SEINE RIVER on the 1st September



PARIS and VERSAILLES, so near and yet so far. While we saw the famous EIFFEL TOWER and liberated ST. GERMAIN the XIX CORPS had to plan to visit them both "up to the square"

HEERLEN

GULPEN



Crossed the MEUSE RIVER on the 24th September at MAASTRICHT

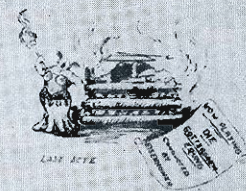
NIN CORPS attacked and penetrated thru the SIEGRIED LINE on the 2nd October

MAASTRICHT



LIEGE

Bridged the ALBERT CANAL the foremost anti-tank barrier in the world at FT. EREN ENIEL

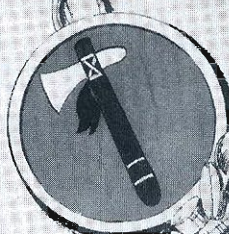


"DEUTSCHLAND UNTER ALLIES"

will be the 1944 edition of the German national anthem



We were helped in numerous ways by the Belgian resistance.



XIX CORPS

FROM D. DAY (6 JUNE 1944) TO GERMANY

MAJ. GEN. CHARLES H. CORLETT - COMMANDING
BRIG. GEN. GEORGE D. SHEA - ARTILLERY COMMANDER
BRIG. GEN. H. E. MAGUIRE - CHIEF OF STAFF

The Corps was organized 2 August 1942 at Camp Polk by Major General Critchberger as the III Armored Corps participated in the Louisiana maneuvers under the Third Army. In August 1943 the Corps commanded 12 Infantry Divisions, 2 Armored Divisions, 15 separate Tank Battalions and other Corps Troops. Louisiana maneuvers again in November 1943-16 December 1943 advance detachment to Ft. Hamilton for England. 29 January 1944 main body arrived Bristol, prepared for the invasion at Camp Knowle, Wiltshire, England. Just completed in the Normandy France Belgium and Holland Campaign longest continuous for this entire war and marked the German "West Wall" or "Siegfried Line" on 2 October 1944.



Combat & Normandie Campaign

Although the Battalion was scheduled to land in France on D + 6, circumstances plus an error in the records by a higher echelon, prevented movement to a marshalling area until 18 June. A wait — a not unpleasant trip across the English Channel — and the 823rd TD Battalion disembarked from three LST's (Numbers 14, 113, and 357) on Omaha Red Fox Beach, in Normandy, on 24 June 1944.

Less than 24 hours after the first jeep rolled down the gang plank, the Battalion went into action, with 36 guns in an indirect fire role. Company "B", commanded by Captain Francis E. Wilts, got off the first round, and suffered the first casualties that day. Registration was directed with excellent results by an L-5 artillery liaison plane named "The Junior" which gladdened the heart of the ground soldier whenever it flew.

On 26 June 1944, the Battalion was relieved from the 30th Infantry Division and attached to the 29th Infantry Division, where it took up its primary role. It was here that the outfit started learning things — that it pays to dig deep and construct a roof — that artillery can maim or disintegrate a man — that mortars can be silent death — that it does not pay to move around unnecessarily. These facts were learned — and well — at the cost of human lives.

On 3 July 1944, the Battalion reverted to the 30th Division, with which it remained until the end of the war in Europe. The mission was harassing and interdiction fire, primarily on St. Jean-de-Daye. Later inspection proved that the firing was effective.

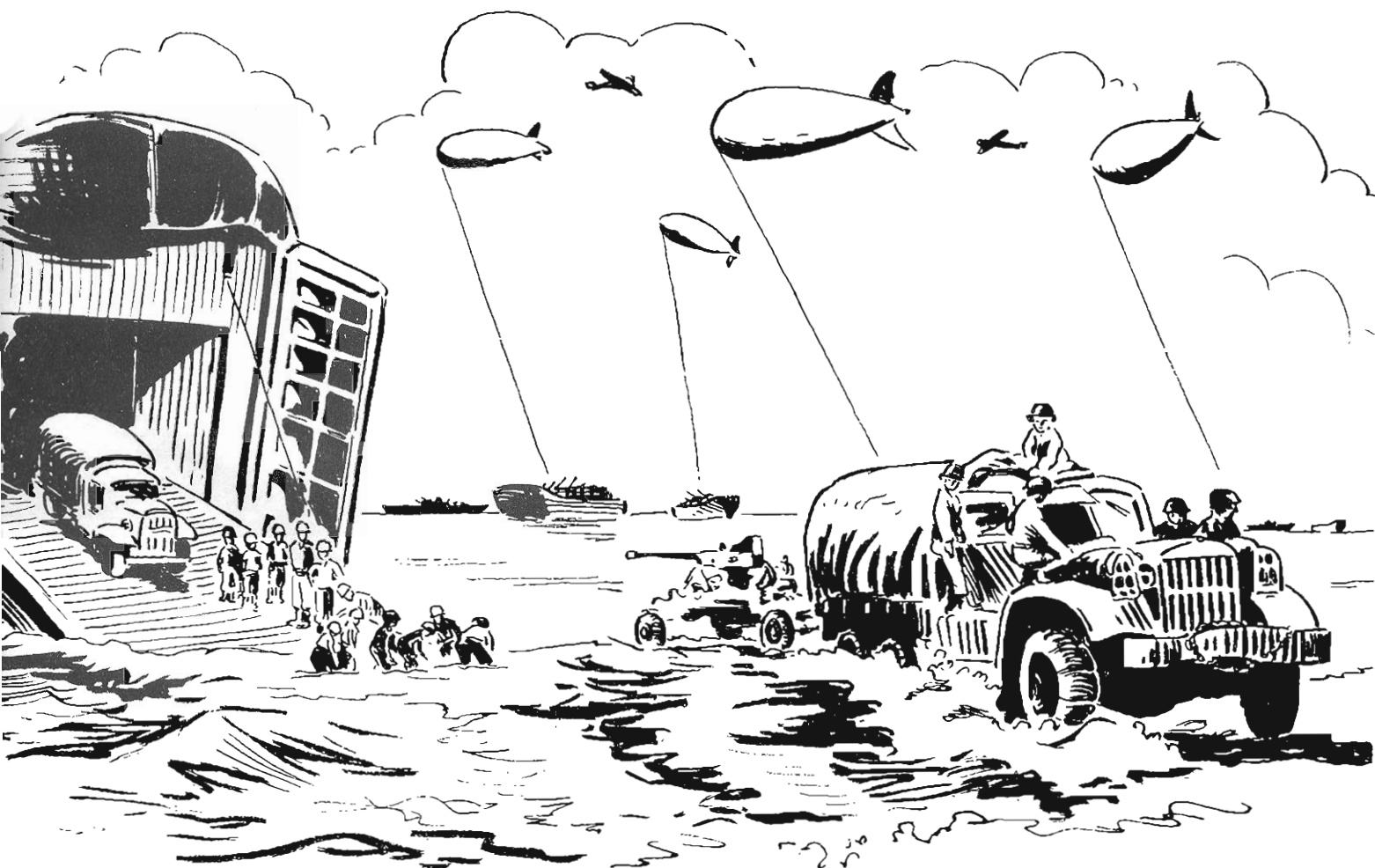
We had prepared ourselves. Now, it was time for attack. On 7 July 1944, the 30th Division, with the 823rd TD Battalion attached, shoved off on the most difficult of all offensives — a river crossing. The river: The Vire — not very large, but an important military objective. The first reconnaissance platoon, under 1st Lt. Thompson L. Raney, was the initial 823rd unit across, negotiating the stream via Bailey Bridge, at Airel, France, while under heavy artillery and mortar fire. When gun positions had been selected, the second and third platoons of Company "C," led by Capt. Samuel D. Swanson, crossed over the same bridge to support the 117th Regiment.

Guided by the second rcn. platoon, Company "A" made the crossing North of St. Jean-de-Daye, and went into position in support of the 120th Regiment.

That first night was a rough one for Company "C". After being

obliged to call upon the infantry to recover an overrun gun, they "sweated out" an enemy infantry counterattack all night.

Cpl. Warren E. Kuhn, at the time with the second rcn. platoon, recalls vividly that day of our first river crossing. He and Lormand and Hymel were riding the point jeep, and when they arrived at the bridge site, the engineers had not completed construction. However, as soon as the bridge was ready for use the men crossed the stream, and had advanced about 200 yards when they ran into an enemy barrage of artillery, mortar, and small arms fire. The only cover available was back across the river in a hedge-lined apple orchard. This particular field had contained a German aid station. Their mortars landed exactly in the middle of it. T/5 Paul E. Berkeley was being treated for a slight wound when a mortar shell struck injuring him seriously enough to be evacuated to England, and subsequently, to the States. Cpl. Kuhn also mentioned Lt. Pfaff's utter disregard for his own safety in looking after his men when the going was most rough. Reminiscent of this particular circumstance, Lt. Pfaff had been knocked to the ground by a mortar blast, but he arose immediately and ran from man to man in order to ascertain whether any of them had been hit.





S/Sgt. Eugene F. Savage tells about his first crossing of the Vire, while he was driving Lt. Col. Dettmer, Battalion C. O. He states, "I was too intent on getting on the other side to remember what was taking place in my thoughts. I was probably praying; one never knows. I do know that I felt as if the entire German Army was waiting, with hands on the lanyards of their 88's, for us to get onto that bridge." Savage recalled the feeling of safety that he found in the haven of a ditch alongside the road after "landing" on the Airel side of the river; and the wild dash to the comparative security of the front lines where he was "inside" artillery fire, and into mortar range.

Lt. Col. Stanley Dettmer, from the Company "C" Command Post, controlled the employment of his units, as they made their way over the Vire River, until a Battalion Command Post was established on the West bank.

Toward the end of the next day, 8 July 1944, the Battalion, less Headquarters Company, was across the river, but enemy artillery had knocked out many of the vehicles. The first prisoner taken by the Battalion was captured by Company "B" during the afternoon.

This action produced many acts of valor. Two of the courageous and heroic deeds performed by members of the 823rd TD Battalion in the Battle of the Vire River Bridgehead resulted in the award of Silver Stars for gallantry in action to Privates George R. Holliday, Jr., and Monroe J. Whitley. Their citation recorded that:

"Private First Class *Monroe J. Whitley*, 39855073, Field Artillery, United States Army, for gallantry in action on 08 July 1944, in France. Private *Whitley* was assigned to duty with a tank destroyer organization engaged in action supporting an infantry unit. During a fierce engagement with the enemy, Private *Whitley* and a companion witnessed an Infantryman wounded by enemy fire. With complete disregard for his own safety, he left the safety of his covered shelter and advanced over terrain covered by enemy fire in order to administer first-aid to his comrade. Finding him

seriously wounded and in need of immediate evacuation, he returned to his original position, secured a vehicle, and completely disregarding the dangers of the undertaking, evacuated the wounded man to safety. By this heroic deed, Private *Whitley* undoubtedly saved the life of a wounded comrade."

Sergeant George R. Holliday (then Private) is the companion of Private First Class Monroe J. Whitley, mentioned in the above citation.

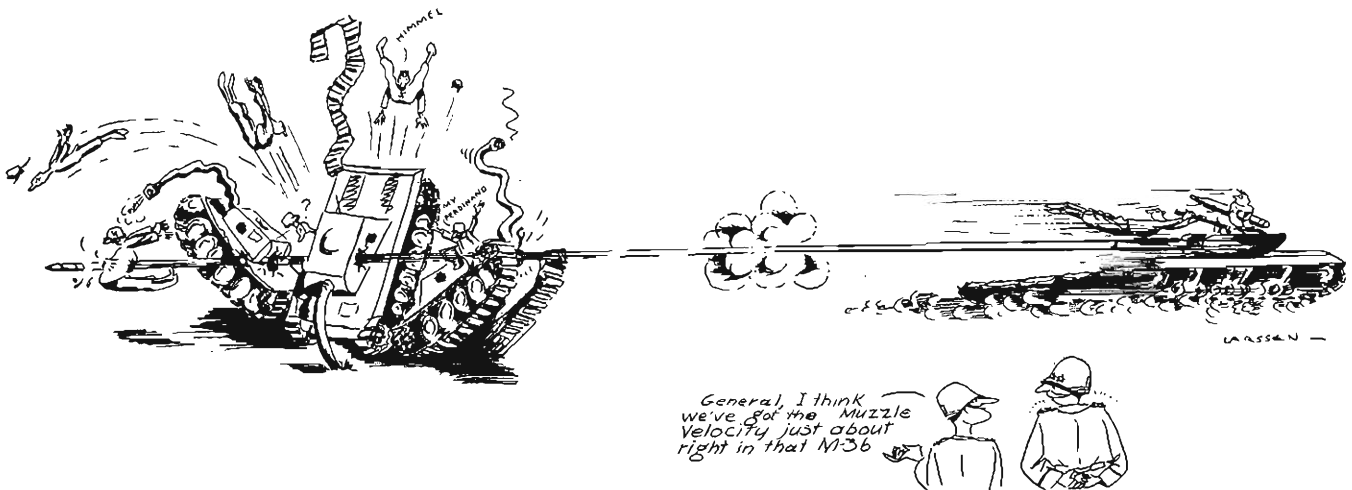
Lt. Col. Dettmer also was awarded a Silver Star for personally leading the various units under his command against a strong enemy counter-attack on the flank, which threatened to overrun his gun companies' positions, or force them to withdraw.

The establishment and enlargement of the Vire River Bridgehead placed the attacking components into position for the forthcoming assault upon the vital communications center of St. Lo.

During one of the many counterattacks that were sustained in the meantime, the 823rd TD Battalion got its first German tank, a Mark IV.

Just at daylight, on 11 July 1944, two Pz Kw IV tanks, of the Panzer Lehr Division, succeeded in reaching the Command Post of the 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry Regiment, which was located approximately 1½ miles North of Pont Hebert, and roughly ¾ of a mile West of the Vire River. Firing their 75's and machine guns, the two tanks did considerable damage, destroying several vehicles and causing some casualties before a 75mm crew got its gun into action. One of the tanks was knocked out and caught fire while the other withdrew to the South and East toward the Vire River.

At 0900, the same day, Sergeant Carl D. Hanna and 1st Lt. Thompson L. Raney, of the 1st Recon Platoon, went to the 2nd Battalion Command Post in order to obtain information on the day's operations. While they were there, the two men learned that the tank which had escaped was somewhere within the vicinity, and that it was firing its cannon at everything that moved. Not knowing the exact location of the marauding tank, Lt.





ST. LO

Raney and Sergeant Hanna dismounted and started down a road leading South and East in the direction of the Vire River. When they had reached a point approximately 500 yards from the river, where the road turned to the Left and dipped sharply down to the river-bottom, they heard the unmistakable sound of a German tank's starting motor. The tank itself was around the corner, about 50 yards away, in a defiladed position, and with its 75 pointing North it commanded the road. Lt. Raney immediately sought a likely position for a bazooka-man. However, because of the tank's excellent observation the only protected spot was about 60 yards in front of the tank, in a group of trees on the right shoulder of the sunken road.

Looking straight down the muzzle of the enemy 75, Lt. Raney fired the first shot. But it proved to be a dud. Another round was fired immediately. This one exploded harmlessly on a bar across the front of the tank—the bar that is utilized for carrying spare track links. A third rocket fired by Lt. Raney was also a dud. Sergeant Hanna fired the fourth time; and, his round exploded against the skirting which surrounds the turret.

When no movement was evidenced from the tank itself, the two men went forward to investigate. Three Germans arose from the grass and surrendered as they arrived. Questioning revealed that the enemy trio had left the tank when it was being fired upon by way of the escape hatch on the right side of the turret which was concealed from view by the road bank. For some unaccountable reason they had made no attempt to return the fire even though all of their guns were in working condition. The tank commander and another crew member had escaped into the thickly wooded area along the river bank. Further investigation disclosed that the Mark IV Tank had struck a German Tellermine as it backed down the road, and that its right track was blown off. The remaining members of the tank crew were in the act of repairing the track when they were discovered.

These two Mark IV's were the remainder of a group of five enemy tanks that had participated in a counterattack the previous night on the Belle Landes - St. Jean-de-Daye road. During the encounter, an M-10 of

#2

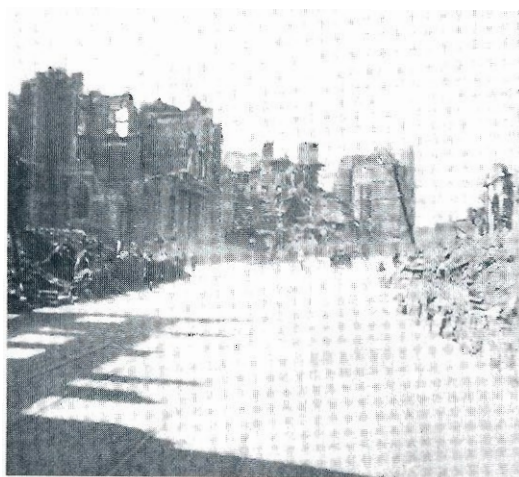
TANK CLAIM

TO: G-2 30th Division
FROM: S-2 823 T.D. Bn

Date 11 July 44

- A. Unit claiming credit for destruction. Reg #1 823 T.D. Bn
- B. Date and hour of destruction. 0900 11 July 44
- C. Exact Coordinates of destroyed tank. Map 151924, France 462706
- D. Type of tank destroyed and unit if determinable. Mk-IV
- E. Weapon used in stopping and destroying tank. Bazooka
- F. Number of rounds fired, range, point of impact, penetration and effect. 3 Rounds 2 Duds - 1 Penetrated
- G. (When applicable) Name of individual primarily responsible for stopping or destroying. LT. RANEY, Sgt. HANNA
- H. Names of organization of witness. C.O. 119 INF. REG.
- I. Short description of our enemy action leading to destruction. Part of force that was overrun C.P. 2nd Bn-119 Tank Hit And Crew Surrendered
- J. Tanks destroyed to date. 1

Henry W. Lutz, Jr.
Captain
S-2



the 703rd TD Battalion, and a light tank belonging to the 3rd Armored Division, were knocked out.

On 16 July 1944, a much needed Third Recon Platoon was formed by drawing upon KP's and the rear echelon for required personnel. This enabled the Battalion to have a Recon Platoon with each firing Company, which was deemed far more practicable than dividing two platoons between three companies. 1st Lt. Arthur D. Cunningham was commanding officer of the new adjunct; Staff Sergeant Irl R. Wolf, its Platoon Sergeant.

Lt. Cunningham having already served as Reconnaissance Officer was considered a natural for this position. His vehicle and its crew, driver Cpl. Walter Kaminski, radio operator T/4 Orville Haney, and machine gunner Cpl. Gerald Pardington, formed the nucleus for the new platoon. For some time Third Recon performed its duties handicapped by a bare minimum of vehicles and manpower.

Progress in the hedgerow country guarding the bastion of St. Lo was slow and torturous, enemy artillery fire devastating. Cpl. Henry F. Tompkins describes one of the many barrages. His platoon was situated on a side road lined with trees at the time. Each man had dug in well and the fox holes were covered. Cpl. Tompkins was returning from a nearby group when he heard the ominous approach of hostile shells. He jumped into the nearest fox hole which happened to be an open one. At the first let-up he made a dash for a covered hole just a few yards away. The Cpl. had barely entered the new shelter when another barrage commenced coming in. The second shell made a direct hit on the hole that he had just evacuated. His only loss was one heel, which he had used as a spade in attempting to dig deeper.

St. Lo was an important fortress in the German defense system, which the air force helped to neutralize. The 30th Division pushed on to within striking distance of the town. Then, the situation became somewhat more static. A great deal of much needed personal and mechanical maintenance was conducted. Companies "A" and "C" pulled back to indirect firing

positions while "B" Company held down the anti-tank posts in support of the 30th Division line.

These positions were maintained until after the "Break-through Bombing" of 25 July 1944. Waiting for and depending upon the weather, plans for the air strike were changed repeatedly. It was to be a mid-day attack, and could be called off up to the very last moment. When the raid finally did materialize it proved to be a spectacle which members of the Battalion never expect to see equalled. 3,000 planes darkened the skys in the highly concentrated effort. They flew almost directly overhead—wave after wave—continuously—in a seemingly never ending flow. First the fighters dive-bombed and strafed pin-point targets; then came high altitude precision heavy bombers; then the mediums; and then again, the dive-bombers. The latter were apparently mopping-up targets of opportunity.

In the early phases of the air strike, enemy ack-ack was heavily concentrated, but within an hour or so there was none in evidence at all. The crews must have been driven into the ground.

The accomplishment of the air arm was tremendous. Despite the unintentional bombing of friendly troops it paved the way for the major drive of the ground forces. The First Army elements pushed on rapidly to the South. To the West, armored units of Lt. General Patton's still secret Third U. S. Army were exploiting the breakthrough and racing for Brest.

Its current mission achieved the Battalion, having pushed to St. Romphaire, took a two day break for rest and maintenance. During that period however, the Luftwaffe became increasingly active. It made a regular "milk run" out of the 30th Division bivouac area. Every night at 2200 hours, "Bed-check Charley" appeared out of the dusk, to be followed within a few minutes by his bomb-laden companions. In one night's bombing by these sneak raiders the Battalion suffered thirteen casualties, including two enlisted men killed.

All was not so gory though. American girls were seen for the first time in months when a Red Cross Clubmobile visited the area, movies were shown, and general maintenance conducted.



Battle of Mortain

Despite this respite, all of us realized that there was still a war to be fought. The village of Mortain, France, lay some seventy miles away. It was to be our next port of call, the first of the "Victory Marches" through the continent of Europe. Civilians lined the roads ecstatically greeting "Les Americans", and showering the troops with flowers, cider, and cognac. In return, the soldiers scattered cigarettes, chocolate, and chewing gum among the populace. Happy throngs waved jubilantly at the passing columns. It was a never to be forgotten scene of a liberated people expressing their joy after more than four years of enslavement.

The terrain changed materially too. The small compact fields encircled with hedgerows became progressively larger, the country itself assumed a more undulating character. There was now more room for open warfare. In Normandy, each field was a strongpoint that had to be slowly and painfully reduced. Now, a more vigorous offensive was possible.

The enemy was well acquainted with the possibilities that presented themselves. He had been over the ground before. Four of his best Panzer Divisions were massed to thwart the developing threat to his line of defense. And, on 8 August 1944, he struck with all the power that he could muster on the main road between Mortain and St. Barthelmy ridge in the misty dawn of early-morning. The German plan called for driving a wedge through the Allies at this point, separating the American from the British forces, and driving them back some twenty miles, through Avranches and to the sea. The Third U. S. Army cut off from its supply bases would also be placed in a precarious position.

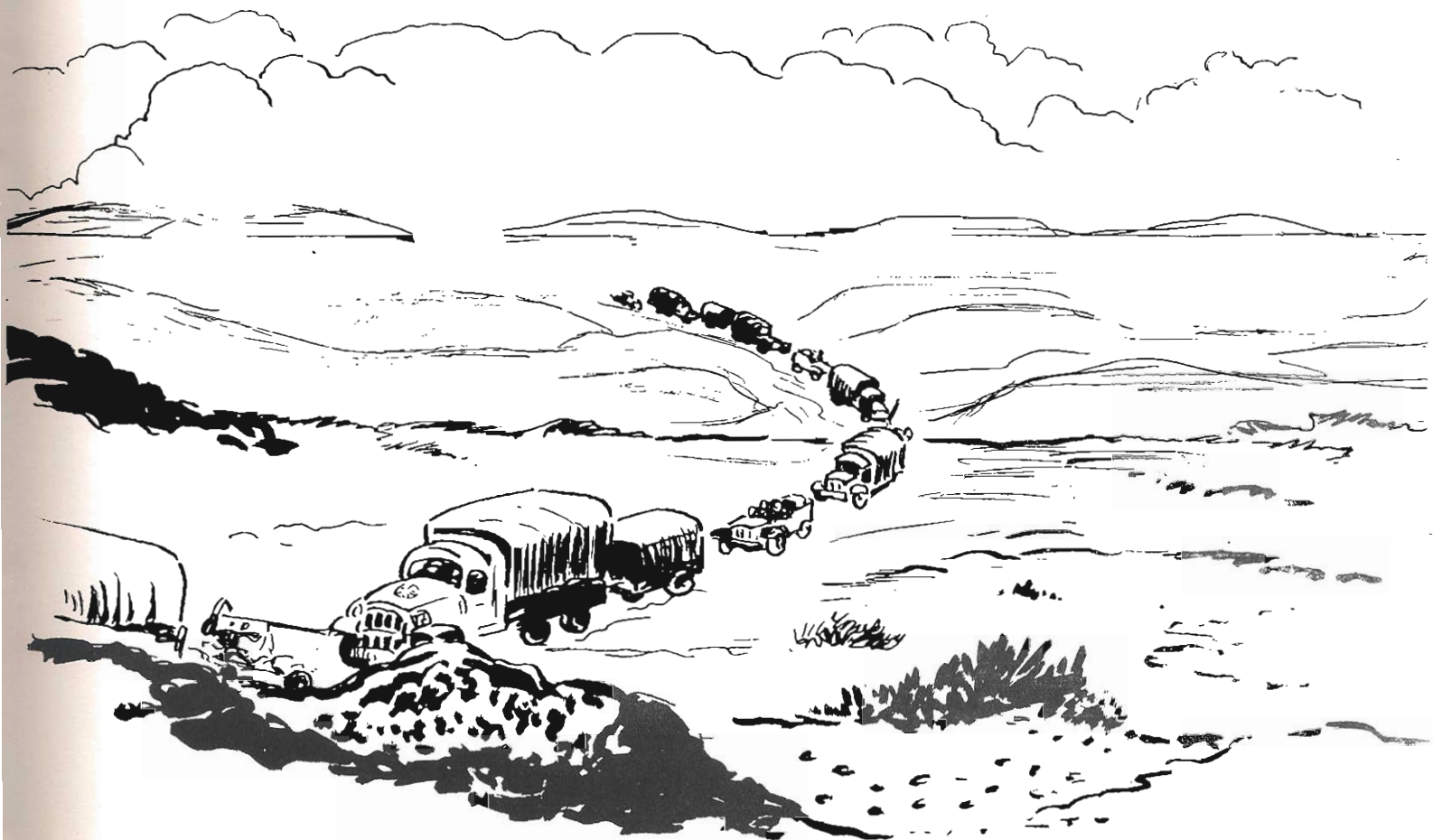
The savage attack succeeded in piercing the American lines. Ground had to be given up. Both sides suffered heavy casualties in the do-or-die encounter. Then the 30th Infantry, with the aid of the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, stiffened and held. Enemy artillery took a terrific toll. One Division with its supporting components had absorbed the impact of the most determined German drive of the war. But they too had suffered heavily. What a welcome sight it was to see the British typhoons come into action! With their rocket firing weapons they piled up the enemy armor and helped slacken the momentum of the hostile offensive. Two days later, ground support arrived—RCT 12 of the 4th Armored Division, and a combat command from the 3rd Armored Division.

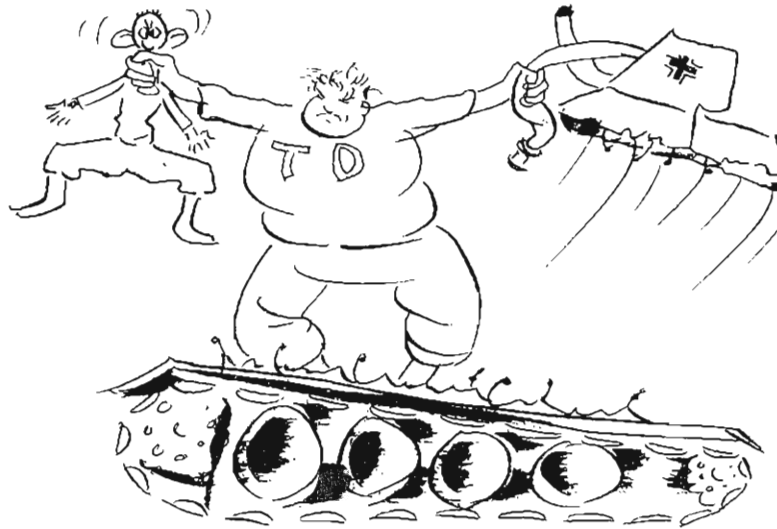
This battle will never be forgotten by the Battalion! It stayed right with the doughboys and did not yield a foot of ground. The enemy used

his most elite troops in the effort; the Second SS Panzer Division, the SS Panzer Division "Das Reich", the SS Panzer Division "Adolph Hitler", and the 116th Panzer Grenadiers. But they were fought to a standstill. The savage attack which had penetrated to within a few feet of the Battalion's destroyers was fought off with machine guns, hand grenades, rifle fire. 823rd Tank Destroyers blocked the two main roads leading to Avranches and allowed no hostile armor or infantry to get through.

The action in and near Mortain and St. Barthelmy was so fast and furious that any attempt to describe it must leave the story only half told. Company "A's" role consisted primarily of repulsing numerous counter-attacks, knocking out tanks as well as general purpose vehicles, and killing Germans.

On 8 August 1944, at 0130 hours, hostile forces infiltrated friendly infantry lines, cut off Company "A's" third platoon security outpost and attempted to enter Mortain from the Southwest. They were driven back, chiefly by fire from .50 calibre machine guns mounted on the TD half-tracks. A second enemy penetration proved to be more successful. A large number of troops, presumably from the 116th Panzer Grenadiers, made their way





through our lines and occupied the town of Mortain. 1st Lt. Elmer L. Miller, the platoon leader could have withdrawn honorably since no tanks were involved in the action; but, knowing how thinly spread were the friendly troops, and that no reserves were available, he chose to fight it out until he was captured.

Concentrated small arms fire at close range made it impossible to use the three inch guns, and so the men of the Battalion were broken up into small isolated groups. Sixteen men of the third platoon fought North through the town for five days and eventually joined the first platoon. Nine others were cut off. They withdrew with the infantry and battled along side the doughs of the surrounded Second Battalion of the 120th Infantry Regiment for five days. One person, Nageeb A. David, was so completely separated that he had to remain concealed in a ditch, for a similar period, without food or water, in order to escape detection by the enemy. He was rescued when the counter thrust was finally driven back.

The story is told of five men who hid themselves in hay stacks, attics, and hay lofts until they were able to work themselves far enough to the rear to come under the protection of friendly infantry. They thought that their number was up once when a flare began to descend upon the barn in which they were hiding. Just as they felt certain their haven was about to catch fire, the flare rolled to the ground, and the French owner of the premises ran out to smother it with water. The Frenchman also brought water to the men but evidently had no food to offer them.

The first and second platoons of Company "A" underwent incessant mortar and artillery fire. They repulsed counterattack after counterattack for five long days and nights. Then the attack petered out and the German forces began their trek back to the Siegfried Line. In containing the enemy attack, the second platoon knocked out two Mark IV tanks, two self-propelled guns, and one armored car, with three inch fire. One Mark IV was put out of commission by a bazooka team. The platoon also killed about fifty of the enemy.

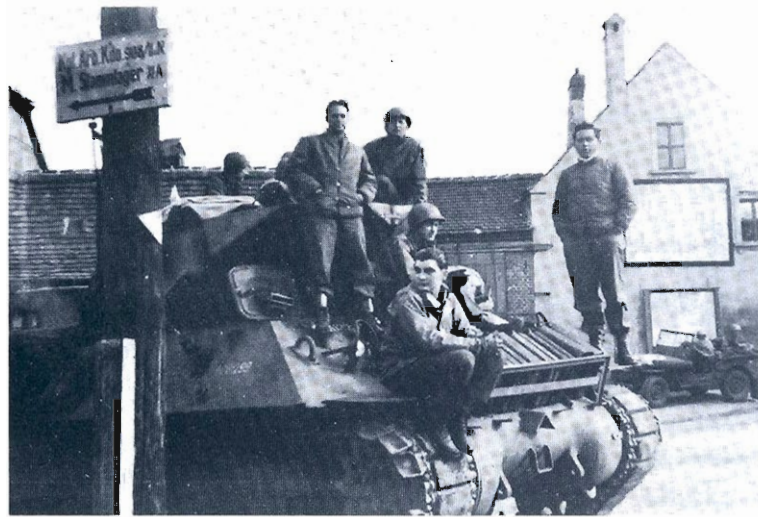
The first platoon, under 1st Lt. Thomas Springfield, was maintaining a road block through the entire fracas; and although it was cut off at one time, it remained in position and accounted for a goodly share of the Panzers, including an estimated 200 Panzer Grenadiers killed. For five days and nights the foe threw its strongest weight against the 30th Division line in a fierce attempt to break through. But it could never quite make it. Despite voluminous artillery, mortar, SP gun, and direct tank fire, infantry, tanks, and armored vehicles, the fighting spirit of the first platoon never wavered.

Company "B" was caught in the prong of the German offensive that was bent upon encircling St. Barthelmy, France. The third platoon in the village was overrun, while the first platoon had a field day knocking out Panther Tanks and destroying many of the invaders.

At 0200 hours, 7 August 1944, the third platoon moved into St. Barthelmy along with one gun of the second platoon. One section covered the approaches to the town from the Southeast; the other protected the Northwest approaches. About 0300 hours hostile troop and tank movement could be heard. However, visibility was practically zero because of the thick fog that enveloped the area. At approximately 1615 hours, following a terrific artillery concentration for one and one-quarter hours, a coordinated tank and panzer grenadier attack was launched by the foe from the North, East, and South. The friendly infantry lines were overwhelmed and had to withdraw West of the town. A few small components managed to establish strong points within the village, however, and held their ground. The onrushing foe used every weapon at its command to the fullest extent. Behind extremely heavy small arms, rifle grenade, machine gun, mortar, and tank fire, they drove to within sight of the Battalion's three inch gun positions. The guns themselves were being manned by abbreviated crews, all excess personnel being utilized as infantry.

Despite the extreme valor of its men the third platoon was overrun by this highly superior force, and only a handful managed to escape. Lt.





Green, leader of the group, was last seen by one of the security men who got away, backing into a doorway firing a .30 calibre machine gun from the hip, as it might have been done in the movies.

With the disintegration of the third platoon, Lt. Leon L. Neel, in charge of the first platoon, spread out his gun positions in order to take up as much of the slack as was possible. One gun, placed West of the town immediately accounted for a Panther tank. Pvt. Cecil O. Derr killed the tank commander with his carbine at 300 yards. A few rounds of HE got rid of the supporting grenadiers, and AP demolished the tank itself. Not long afterwards the three inch gun became a victim of a German 88, and part of the crew was injured by rifle grenades. Lt. Neel lost no time in bringing up a replacement which he set up in a field with a 57mm AT gun, and he coordinated their respective fields of fire. However, the 57mm gun departed just as additional enemy tanks arrived, and part of the sector was left uncovered.

Visibility was so poor during the early hours that firing had to be aimed at opposing gun flashes. Later investigation proved the system to have been highly effective. As the fog began clearing a Panther Tank was seen bearing down the main road. It was quickly put out of action with AP, and all of its crew killed with HE as they attempted to flee the vehicle. Two more tanks were observed on the highway, but they stopped just short of the 3 inch gun range. One of them circled through the fields and assumed a position from which it could dominate the immediate area. The tank destroyer weapon was in a hastily occupied position. Its crew could observe the marauding tanks, but was unable to fire upon them. For forty-five minutes, the tank on the road conducted a vigilant search for the 3 inch piece. It knocked out two friendly vehicles that were travelling down the main highway, during the interval, but failed to find the concealed gun. Finally it maneuvered into range. The crew fired one round realizing only too well that by doing so they would reveal their own position to the second hostile tank. The shot found its mark and another enemy tank was

destroyed. The remaining marauder went into action at once. It succeeded in knocking out the three inch and the crew was forcibly ejected by the impact.

The personnel sought refuge behind a hedgerow, and then moved to the rear where they joined other men from knocked-out guns in manning outposts, serving on bazooka teams, and making reconnaissance into enemy territory. Without specific orders they succeeded in recovering a half-track and a gun that had been abandoned in "no man's land." The balance of the Company continued to man its weapons, guarding against any further penetration. The town of St. Barthelmy was taken, but the foe was unable to make any appreciable gain to the West of the village because of Company "B's" stout anti-tank defense.

The powerful enemy thrust had failed far short of its objective. Innumerable were the acts of gallantry performed during those hectic days. With utter disregard for personal safety, and in the face of a superior and fanatic foe, the members of the Battalion fought on. Opportunities for honorable withdrawal presented themselves time after time, but the men refused to quit the struggle for possession of this vitally important area.

In this memorable encounter the Battalion set a new Army record for tanks destroyed in one day's action, and also for the number of enemy vehicles knocked out. When the Germans withdrew, the battlefield was practically devoid of vegetation. Hardly a house or building remained standing. But German equipment, including tanks, self-propelled guns, trucks, half-tracks, motorcycles, bicycles, anti-tank guns—and enemy dead—cluttered the ground.

The Presidential Citation was awarded Companies "A" and "B" for their valiant defense of the sector. As integral components of the honored companies, members of the Second and Third Reconnaissance Platoons also received the coveted award. Silver and Bronze Stars presented to many members of the Battalion signified the numerous acts of heroic achievement that were performed by the men.

