

History of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion

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The unit was constituted 1 June 1940 in the Regular Army from the 10th Field Artillery, 3rd Infantry Division, as the 10th Antitank Battalion and then activated on 1 July 1940 as the 99th Infantry Battalion (Anti-tank). It was redesignated as the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion December 15, 1941 at Fort Lewis, Washington, where training began, and continued at Camp Hood, Texas until overseas departure on 14 January 1943.

The 899th landed in North Africa on January 26, 1943. The Battalion's baptism of fire was at El Guettar, Tunisia, on March 23, 1943, equipped with the brand new, full tracked M10 GMC's, armed with high velocity, flat trajectory 3 inch gun. As depicted in PATTON: A STUDY IN COMMAND, by H. Essame:

Meanwhile Patton had pushed the 1st Infantry Division on the Gabes road to El Guettar as General Alexander had expected on 23 March 1943 the 10th Panzer Division, eager to repeat it's triumph at Kasserine descended at full force upon them. It was a Homeric battle. In the early morning the huge hollow square of tanks and self-propelled guns, interdispersed with carrier born Infantry carried all before it. Two Field Artillery battalions and some of the Infantry were overrun. Then the tide of the battle turned. The rest of the American Field Artillery and the Tank Destroyers of the 601st and 899th TD Battalions stood fast and fought back. Soon the 10th Panzer Division faltered and reeled back leaving thirty burning tanks upon the battlefield. Later in the afternoon they returned to the attack, only to be once more blasted off the field.

A period of training in the Algerian desert followed the Tunisian campaign and on 1 November 1943 the 899th departed North Africa and landed in Italy on 10 November 1943. A short time later, the Battalion was withdrawn and embarked for England to train in preparation for D-Day invasion at Normandy.

Company "A" and Company "C" landed on Utah Beach on D-Day, with the remainder of the 899th arriving D plus 4 and 5. The 899th, the first TD Bn to land in France, teamed with four infantry divisions, including the Fourth Infantry Division, until D plus 11, when it was attached to the Ninth Infantry Division...its objective, Cherbourg.

After cutting the peninsula and pushing on to capture Cherbourg with the Ninth, the 899th also assisted in cleaning up the remaining resistance on Cap de La Hague. During the drive to Cherbourg the 2nd Platoon, Company "C", 899th

Tank Destroyer Battalion received the Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary gallantry in action comprising a series of occasions on which they destroyed enemy guns blocking the advance of the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, to Cherbourg and Greville. In all these engagements the crews of the 2nd Platoon, by their unhesitating subordination of personal safety to swift accomplishment of successive dangerous missions, won the admiration of all those to whom they set their inspiring example of gallantry.

After a short rest period of seven days the drive to the south began. It was at the very start of this drive that the 899th again showed its fighting ability. On July 11, 1944, near St. Jean de Daye , France, Company "A" and Company "C" 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion were cited for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty, supporting the 39th Infantry and the 47th Infantry in a defense role. At 0200 on the morning of 11 July 1944, the enemy launched a combined armored and infantry attack, that was destined to split the Allied beachhead. When the smoke cleared on the battlefield that day the 899th had accounted for fourteen German tanks and one SP Gun. Company "A" and Company "C" received the Presidential Unit Citation.

Breaking out of the bitter hedgerow fighting the 899th with the Ninth Division cut the St. Lo-Perriers road, and spearheaded the breakthrough on 25 July 1944, and then swung south, across the Seine River through Chateau Thierry, and became one of the first Allied units to begin the liberation of Belgium, on 2 Sept 1944.

The 899th continued in holding positions during most of the month of October in the battle for the Hurtgen Forest. It was during the Hurtgen fighting that Staff Sergeant Hershel F. Briles won the Medal of Honor for putting his life on the line twice to remove wounded men from their burning tank destroyers. In December the 899th with the Ninth anchored the northern flank of the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge, and held the ground through late January. Attack plans to push to the Roer River were received. At this time the unit exchanged their M10 TD's for the M36 TD's On 28 February 1945 the 899th was across the Roer with the Ninth, to begin the battle of the Rhine Valley. The 899th with the Ninth reached the Rhine on 7 March 1944, the day the 9th Armored Division captured a bridge across the Rhine at Remagen. On March 8th, "C" Company crossed at Remagen with the 47th Inf. "A" and "B" Companies followed across the river on 10 March. The fighting for the Remagen Bridgehead reached its highest peak. The 47th Infantry Regiment with attached units, including "C" Company, 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion received The Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism and outstanding performance of duty in gallantly holding and extending the important Remagen bridgehead over the Rhine River from 8 to 19 March 1945. Over the Rhine the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion helped clean out the Ruhr pocket and then beat down the resistance in the Harz Mountains. By 1 May

1945 the 899th moved to the Mulde River with the Ninth Division to meet the Russians. Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on 8 May 1945.

With high hopes of returning to the States the men of the 899th TD Bn moved down the autobahn into Bavaria, just forty miles south of Munich. "Tent City" in the forest near Ingolstadt became our home. A VE-Day parade was scheduled with General Patton trooping the line. Quotas came through and the first group of men left the Battalion for the States. On June 20th the 899th was placed in Category Two, which meant the Pacific. However the Battalion remained in Bavaria until disbanded. In November the men were transferred to the Ninth Infantry. On December 21, 1945, 350 Tank Destroyer men departed Dachau in boxcars, and traveled four days to Holland for an assignment to a Quartermaster Graves Registration Group. The 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion was inactivated 27 December 1945 at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

Finally, the 899th's courage and unerring aim in battle left in the Battalion's wake over the battlefields of North Africa and Europe, the shattered wrecks of 71 Enemy Tanks, 7 Jagdpanthers, 15 SP Guns, 24 Artillery Pieces, 67 Anti-tank Guns, 10 Half -tracks, 45 GP Vehicles, 93 Machine Gun Nests, 62 Pillboxes and 12 Fortifications. The Battalion damaged a great many more, inflicted untold casualties on the vaunted Wehrmacht, Paratroop and SS formations and captured 2,618 Prisoners.

This brief history of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion of World War Two has been compiled for presentation at the dedication of the Battalion's Monument, at Fort Knox, KY, on 8 September 1995. The Monument is located in the Armor Memorial Park, at the Patton Museum of Cavalry and Armor.