

Tank Busters



607

TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
'BATTLE WITH THE JERRIES'



TANK BUSTERS

THE HISTORY

of the

607th TANK DESTROYER

BATTALION

IN COMBAT

ON THE WESTERN FRONT

DEDICATED

TO THE SOLDIERS WHO DIED SO
THAT OTHERS MIGHT BE FREE
TO LIVE AS THEY DESIRE.

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BATTALION HISTORY STAFF

1st Lt. HAROLD H. EBY,	Historian
T/Sgt. ORNO D. STRONG JR.,	Layout
T/5 FRANK W. DAVIS,	Artist
T/5 ROY M. KEMP,	Typist

Acknowledgment is made to the officers of all Companies who aided by submitting stories from their units and to all the men who submitted the pictures found in this book.



LT. COL. HARALD S. SUNDT

FOREWORD

SOLDIERS of the 607th Tank Destroyer Battalion:

This memento of our labor and sacrifice, of our teamwork and cooperation with the combined arms of our Army will take on increasing importance in our lives as the stress of battle grows dim and the struggle for a better world, socially, economically, politically, and religiously goes on. In the carrying out of your assigned missions there will be trials, there will be triumphs, there may be disasters, for you individually or as a member of the group with whom you may be associated. You may be faced with great personal decisions. This eternal struggle is life, men, and the pursuit of happiness, of liberty and of truth. I know that the strength of soul and of character which you have found as part and parcel of the 607th, that which you created by your everyday acceptance of risk and responsibility plus your loyalty and devotion to duty, will help to light your way. And then in the hush of the evening of life, as individuals we can proudly proclaim: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the Faith. I have achieved 'TOTAL VICTORY'."

Harald S. Sundt

Lt. Col. (FA) 607th T.D. Bn.
Commanding

INTRODUCTION

THE 607th Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated on the 15th day of December 1941 at Fort Ord California.

Personnel for the new unit was obtained from the 7th Infantry Division Provisional Anti-Tank Battalion which, in turn, had received its personnel of sixteen officers and two hundred nineteen enlisted men from the following units: Battery "D", 31st FA Battalion, Hq and Hq Battery, 31st FA Battalion, 74th, 75th, and 76th FA Battalions, and the 17th, 32nd, and 53rd Infantry Regiments. Later, personnel were received from the 47th, 48th, and 57th FA Battalions.

Approximately six hundred selectees from the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana were assigned in March 1942, bringing the battalion above its authorized strength. In December 1942 and January 1943, three hundred and sixty selectees from Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia replaced the loses of the preceeding nine months.

On the 15th day of December 1943 the battalion was reorganized, changing it from a self-propelled battalion, to a towed battalion, Reconnaissance Company being inactivated. The battalion continued as a towed unit until November 1944, when, shortly before the battle for Metz, France, it was converted, in combat, to a self-propelled battalion equipped with M-36 destroyers. The Reconnaissance Company was again activated.

With the exception of four and one half months training at the Tank Destroyer Center, at Camp Hood Texas, the Battalion received all of its precombat training in California at Sunnyvale. Hunter Liggett Military Reservation, Camp San Luis Obispo, Lost Hills, Desert Training Center, and Camp Cooke.

On the 2nd of April 1944 the Battalion departed from Camp Cooke, California for Camp Miles Standish, Taunton, Massachusetts and on

the 13th of April 1944 embarked on the USS Wakefield, a United States Troop Transport, for overseas duty.

Arriving in England on the 21st of April, the unit was stationed in Macclesfield, Cheshire for one month and then proceeded to Camp Barton Stacey in southern England where it made its final preparations for the invasion, arriving on the beaches of Normandy, France on 16th June 1944.

This is the background to eleven months of combat in France, Belgium and Germany for which the Battalion won battle participation credit for the following Campaigns more fully described in the text:

- * 17 June 1944 to 24 July 1944 Normandy
- * 25 July 1944 to 14 September 1944 . . . Northern France
- * 15 September 1944 to 21 March 1945 . . Rhineland
- * 16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945 . . Ardennes
- * 22 March 1945 to 11 May 1945 Central Europe

PART ONE

NORMANDY AND FALAISE BATTLES

The Build Up.

AT 0130 17 June 1944 (D plus 11) the Headquarters Company forward and Company A, 607th Tank Destroyer Battalion, landed on Utah Beach - the beach on the east coast of the Cherbourg Peninsula of France. - Companies B and C were unable to land until June 23rd due to the roughness of the water. After dewaterproofing the vehicles and equipment at St. Germain de Verraville, the Battalion, less Companies B and C, moved up to support the 9th Infantry Division's anti-tank defenses. On joining the 9th Infantry Division, Co. A, with the 2nd reconnaissance platoon attached, employed in the vicinity of Canville, was given the mission of protecting the division, as it advanced toward Cherbourg, from an attack from the south and southwest. While on this mission Co. A captured its and the Battalion's first prisoner. The Battalion CP had moved successively to Ste. Mere Eglise, Pigard, Ste. Sauveur Le Vicomte, and Blandamour during the period. Orders were received on June 19th relieving the Battalion from attachment to the VII Corps and the 9th Infantry Division and attaching it to the VIII Corps which faced to the south. Co. A was attached to the 82nd A/B Division and the Battalion, less Co. A, to the 90th Infantry Division.

Co. A joined the 325th Glider Infantry, 82nd A/B Division, two and one-half miles south of Pont l'Abbe and was immediately emplaced to reinforce the divisional antitank defense. The Battalion CP moved to Ste. Colombe and on the next day to Cretteville via Vents and Picauville.

On June 23rd Companies B and C landed in three feet of water and dewaterproofed in the vicinity of St. Germain de Verraville. Co. B was attached to the 357th Infantry Regiment, 90th Division, joined them in the vicinity of Besneville and went into position at St. Lo d'Ourville. Co. C moved to the TD's secondary mission — that of indirect fire — in the vicinity of Cretteville and fired the first rounds from a three inch gun of this Battalion on French soil. During the period of June 24 -

July 5, they fired 5994 rounds interdicting roads in the enemy's rear areas. The enemy counterbattered several times; the first on June 24th causing no casualties but some damage to materiel.

Co. B went into indirect fire positions two miles east of Cretteville in support of the 357th Combat Team on June 30th. Three days later, July 3rd, Co. B and Co. C each placed one platoon in direct AT support of the 358th Infantry and the 357th Infantry, respectively, while the remainder stayed in general support of the Division Artillery.

The next day all of Co. C was placed in direct AT support of the 359th Infantry in the vicinity of Ste. Suzanne. Co. A and Co. B returned to Battalion control and were placed in general support of the Division Artillery, Co. A having been relieved from attachment to the 82nd A/B Division.

The Battalion CP moved from Cretteville to a field one mile south of Pretot on July 5th.

The next day, July 6th, Co. B joined the 357th Infantry Regiment at St. Jores and was placed in direct AT support of them. Co. A, remaining in general support of the Division Artillery, from Vindefontaine, fired over 3000 rounds during the week into the enemy's rear areas.

During the period of July 7 to 27 the Division advanced very slowly, especially in the areas around Foret De Monte Castro on hill 122 (where Co. C received heavy mortar fire), on the approaches to the island at Seves, and at Beau Coudray.

On July 12th 1st Lt. Raymond P. Nash, 1st Lt. Edmond P. Harrison, S/Sgt. Noriega and Pfc. Spears were ambushed and captured by the Germans while on reconnaissance for gun positions.

Co. C's second platoon being in position north of the Seves River southeast of Gonfreville, on the night of July 20th moved the first and second gun sections into positions to support an infantry attack across the Seves river to the island. The guns were unlimbered from the half-tracks and moved by hand to positions well in front of the infantry's front lines. Under the cover of darkness the positions were dug in and camouflaged. At daylight there was to be an infantry attack preceded by a ten minute artillery barrage. Under cover of the artillery fire the three inch guns were to fire direct at the enemy installations in six houses and the surrounding woods located five hundred yards to the front. The attack was postponed 24 hours, leaving the guns under

direct enemy observation until 0620 July 22nd when the attack was launched as scheduled. The guns expended ammunition as fast as four men crews could put out for ten minutes. Though the infantry attack was temporarily successful, the three inch guns received heavy shelling by enemy mortars and artillery from very short range. For eight hours artillery pounded the guns, the crew members being saved only by their deep fox holes. Heavy casualties were reported to have been inflicted on the enemy by the direct fire. The Germans counter-attacked and it was several days before the guns could be withdrawn.

The Break Through.

Due to the bombing from St. Lo to the southwest toward Periers and the exploitation of the breakthrough that was subsequently forced, the enemy withdrew from the Division front on the night of July 27th. Light rear guard action, only, was encountered in the next several days. The 4th Armored Division moved southwest across the Division front to Periers and then south to and beyond St. Sauveur Lendelin on July 28th.

The Battalion moved south to the vicinity of St. Sauveur Lendelin on the 28th July and assembled one mile east of the town.

During the month of July 15,424 rounds were fired indirect. The Battalion kept units in direct support of the AT defenses of the regiments and also in support of the Division Artillery. Platoons were rotated and the Companies displaced forward with the units they were supporting. All units received heavy enemy fire and suffered casualties.

On August 2nd the Battalion, minus Co. A, marched south to the vicinity of St. Hillaire de Haurcouet via Coutances and Avranches. Co. A was attached to the 357th Regimental Combat Team and moved to La Mancilliere (six miles northwest of St. Hillaire). The Battalion CP occupied Insigny (three miles northwest of St. Hillaire); Co. B moved six miles south of St. Hillaire and Co. C went into St. Hillaire.

On To Le Mans.

A breakthrough to the enemy's rear had been made. The rapid exploitation of it would trap thousands of Germans or make them withdraw across the entire front to their next defense line deep inside of

France. Task Force Weaver, consisting of the 357th Infantry Regiment, 712th Tank Battalion, 344th FA, 345th FA and Co. A, 607th TD Battalion was organized and given the mission of securing the crossing of the Mayenne River at Mayenne and then to proceed to Le Mans. Co. A, reinforced by the second section of the 2nd Rcn platoon, was the Battalion's contribution to the Task Force.

On August 5th the Task Force left La Condonniere. The 2nd platoon of Co. A marched with the flank guard through Buais, Fougevalle, Desartines, Gorrion and Mayenne. Light opposition was encountered at Gorrion, but no armor was engaged. Co. A, less the 2nd platoon, marched with the main body and moved through St. Hillaire du Haurcouet, Landivy, Ernee and Mayenne, a distance of about fifty miles. One enemy vehicle was destroyed by the 3rd platoon at Mayenne. The next day, August 6th, the Task Force was ordered to march on Le Mans. Co. A, less the 3rd platoon, marched with one column, the route being Mayenne, Mouey, Commes, Montsur, St. Suzanne, Viviers, St. Symphorien, Bernay, La Quinte and Le Mans. The 3rd platoon, marching with the other column proceeded via Avon, Jublains, Evron, St. Suzanne, St. Dennis, Coulons, Charvaun, and Le Mans. No armor was engaged by Co. A on this march.

The Battalion, less Co. A reinforced, remained with the main body of the Division. However, Co. B was attached to the 358th Infantry and Co. C to the 359th Infantry throughout the drive. The TD companies supplemented the blocking of side roads leading to the main axis of the advance. A reconnaissance platoon was attached to Co. B and a reconnaissance section to Co. C. The reconnaissance platoon with Co. B, cooperating with the Regimental I and R platoon, made continuous forward and flank reconnaissance. Co. C destroyed two enemy half tracks, the first armored vehicles hit by the Battalion, and killed or wounded four enemy troops at Montsurs. The Battalion CP moved from Isigny to Landivy to La Bigottiere to La Chappelle Rain-souin to La Quinte to the east edge of Le Mans, arriving there on August 8th amid cheering crowds.

Twenty eight prisoners had been taken and several Germans had been killed or wounded by the Battalion. The companies remained in direct anti-tank support of the infantry regiments generally to the north and east of the town.

Closing The Trap.

Pressure by the British had prevented the enemy from standing fast near Falaise. Furthermore, the strong German attack at Mortain was beaten off. Because of these events on August 9th the XV Corps was given the mission of securing Alencon and eventually of joining the forces to the north.

On August 11th Co. B was attached to the 358th Infantry and proceeded to secure the Division's left flank from Le Mans to Alencon. The 359th Infantry with Co. C attached moved through Alencon, which had been taken by the 2nd French Armored Division, to the high ground north and east of the town.

The Battalion less companies B and C moved north to Bellon and to Danguel, a distance of 21 miles. On August 13th the 357th Infantry plus attached troops and Co. A marched through Alencon and secured three hills in Foret D'ecoures about six miles northwest of the town. Devastating fire was placed on the enemy in Longuence. Following the companies, the Battalion CP moved to two miles northwest of Alencon. On August 15th Co. B was relieved from attachment to the 358th Infantry and moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of the Battalion CP. On the same day the Battalion, less Co. A, moved from the vicinity of Alencon with the 90th Infantry Division, less the 357th Combat Team, to relieve the 5th Armored Division in the general area of Le Bourg St. Leonard-Exmes-Nonant le Pin-Chaillou. Co. A and the 357th Combat Team arrived on August 17th.

The final effort to close the last gap in the Falaise Pocket began. Initially, the 359th Infantry, manning the point of the threat where the enemy would try to escape, was reinforced by Co. C plus one platoon of Co. B. One platoon was placed in the vicinity of Le Bourg St. Leonard, one in the vicinity of Exmes, one at Nonat le Pin, and one in the vicinity of Croiselles. Co. B, less one platoon, and the Battalion CP were in Chaillou.

Co. C made first contact with the enemy near Croiselles at 0500 August 16th, destroying one half-track and setting fire to the second. At 0800 a German Infantry attack on Le Bourg St. Leonard was partially successful but all the ground and equipment was regained by noon. A subsequent tank supported infantry attack was even more

successful, but a determined counter-attack nearly completely restored the American position in St. Leonard. During this attack, Lt. Colonel Harald S. Sundt, without regard for his personal safety, showed exceptional diligence in reconnoitering gun positions to best destroy the enemy tanks. At one critical action he personally manned a tank destroyer gun which was directly in the path of an enemy attack, assisting Sgt. Harold W. Scott and Cpl. Orlin L. Shirley, both of Co. C. This action greatly assisted in the stopping of the enemy attack and the recapture of the town. This gallant act under enemy fire was an inspiration to both the infantry and tank destroyer personnel and facilitated in closing the gap at Chambois. For their gallantry in action Lt. Colonel Sundt, Sgt. Scott and Cpl. Shirley were awarded the Silver Star Medal. On the same day an enemy tank appeared from the woods near St. Leonard and approached the town. Cpl. Bertram S. Washabaugh and Pfc. Francis L. Hunsicker, both of Co. C, upon their own initiative exchanged direct fire with the tank and succeeded in knocking it out of action. This was done in spite of continuous withering fire which had caused the gun crew and the other troops in the vicinity to seek shelter. The Silver Star was their award.

On August 17th intense small arms, mortar, artillery and nebelwerfer fire was received throughout the Le Bourg St. Leonard area, extending fifteen hundred yards eastward. Tank fighting also raged in this area, climaxed at about 1600 by an attack of six tanks launched eastward along the main road running through Le Bourg St. Leonard and supported by artillery fire. The attack was stopped by M-10 fire of the 773rd TD Bn before it had reached the field of fire of Co. C's guns which were covering that road. Co. B relieved Co. C platoons at Exmes and Croiselles, permitting Co. C to concentrate on the Le Bourg St. Leonard fight. Co. B in turn was relieved by Co. A when the 358th Infantry was shifted to the south and west of Le Bourg St. Leonard.

Later in the evening of August 19th Lt. George W. King's platoon of Co. C entered Chambois. Feeling very much put out because the other platoons had all the tank shooting to date, he personally requested his platoon, instead of the previously designated platoon, be given this mission. He certainly got all the excitement he had asked for and got two tanks and a very large self propelled gun.

Lt. Richard A. Reynolds placed his 3rd platoon of Co. B in positions



JUST A PORTION OF THE DESTRUCTION AT CHAMBOIS

from which his three inch guns, by accurate and effective fire, destroyed six tanks in the vicinity of the Ste. Eugenie. During the course of action, one gun received direct hostile small arms and artillery fire which could not be effectively returned from its concealed location, but Lt. Reynolds, with his crew members Sgt. James W. Bowman, Cpl. Russell L. Kunz, T/5 Homer E. Griner, T/5 Orville C. Zinc, Pfc. Harry W. Mowery, Pfc. Paul F. Bonito, Pfc. Robert L. Davis, Pvt. Theodore Sekulski and Pvt. Charles W. Sowders, in the face of enemy fire, seized the trails of the gun and pushed it forward by hand to an exposed position one hundred yards from the enemy's line. From this position the gun destroyed an enemy tank, four other vehicles, and an enemy self-propelled gun which had prevented the advance of our troops. For their heroic action Lt. Reynolds and all members of the crew received the Silver Star Medal.

On August 20th the enemy furiously endeavored to break out of the trap which had been closed when the Poles reached Chambois. The enemy was stopped dead at the northwest entrance to Chambois. In the 358th Infantry area Co. B, in position at Bon Menil and Ste. Eugenie, continued to give excellent results with flanking fire.

On August 21st the operations consisted in mainly rounding up stray Germans who wanted desperately to give up. The trap had succeeded in destroying or capturing most of the German Seventh Army. The remarkable record of the Jerry equipment destroyed during the battles of Le Bourg St. Leonard-Chambois by this Battalion can best be shown by figures.

	Co. A	Co. B	Co. C	Total
Tanks, Mark IV and V	0	27	7	34
Self propelled guns	0	20	3	23
Armored half tracks	0	8	1	9
General Purpose Vehicles	6	54	4	64
Horse-drawn Artillery Pieces	0	16	0	16
Total of all types	6	125	15	146
Prisoners captured	519.			

The Battalion CP had moved to Nonant Le Pin, to one mile south-east of Le Bourg St. Leonard and back to a Battalion assembly area at Nonant Le Pin by August 21st. Here the Battalion remained in assembly until August 26th.

MOSELLE RIVER AND METZ BATTLES

Racing Through France.

While the 90th Division had been fighting in the Falaise Pocket, other units had pushed far to the east and southeast. Our turn came now. The Battalion marched as a unit in the 90th Division column from Nonant Le Pin to Fontainebleau, a distance of 171 miles, on August 26th. The route of march led through Sees, Mamers, La Ferte Bernard, Chateaudun, Janville, Pithiviers and to a woods three miles south of Fontainebleau.

The next day Companies A and C went into direct support of the 357th Infantry and the 359th Infantry respectively in their drives to the northeast. During the period August 27-30 Co. A moved to Cormicy (ten miles northwest of Reims) via Jouy le Chatel, Viels Maisons, and Chatteau Thierry, where they crossed the Marne. Co. C advanced to Le Croix en Brie, St. Agnau, Gueux and to St. Etienne Sur Suipee (ten miles north of Reims). Behind these units the Battalion CP, plus Co. B moved across the Seine at Fontainebleau through Machault and Nangis to Le Croix en Brie, to Montmiral, across the Marne and to Savigny Sur Ardres and on to Ft. de Brimont (five miles north of Reims). The total distance traveled from Fontainebleau was 135 miles. Very little opposition was met on the drive.

Co. A was relieved of the support mission with the 357th Infantry Regiment and assembled in the vicinity of the Battalion CP on September 1st. The 2nd platoon of Co. B was attached to Co. C to help support the 359th Infantry Regiment's covering to the northwest of Rettel.

On September 4th Co. A, with the 2nd Rcn platoon attached, and Co. C were attached to the 357th and the 359th Combat Teams respectively. The following day Co. A, with Co. B supporting, moved with the 357th CT to Rouvres (4000 yards east of Etain), and Co. C with the 359th CT to 2000 yards north of Etain. The Battalion CP, plus one reconnaissance platoon, moved to 2000 yards northwest of Rouvres, passing through Reims, St. Menehould, Verdun and Etain, a distance, of 95 miles. Co. B. was placed in support of the 358th In-

fantry Regiment and moved to 1000 yards northeast of Eton. Platoons of all companies continued to give AT support to the battalions with which they had worked during the advance.

Fighting For The Moselle.

On September 7th Co. A and Co. B. were relieved of attachment and placed in support of their regiments. Co. C, minus one platoon, which remained with the Battalion, was attached to the 359th Infantry. Each company was given a reconnaissance section. The Battalion CP, plus one TD platoon from Co. C and one reconnaissance section, moved to the vicinity of Norroy le Sec. Co. A moved their CP to Mancieulles with the platoons in the vicinity of Avril and Briey. During the day they knocked out one half-track, one machine gun and killed several Germans. Co. B moved their CP to 1000 yards north of Piennes with one platoon at Spincourt. Later this platoon moved to Mairy while another platoon went to Trieux. By the end of the day Co. C moved its CP to a point 2000 yards north of Landres with platoons at Constantine, Mercy Le Bas, and Circourt, blocking roads to the north.

One TD company and one reconnaissance platoon of the 774th TD Battalion was attached to the 607th TD Battalion and moved to an assembly near the Battalion CP.

At 0200 September 8th an enemy column penetrated the Division Area. At 0400 it hit the Division Artillery CP, but was repulsed with slight losses to both sides. One tank approaching the Battalion CP and rear echelon was fired upon by a three inch gun. The tank changed its course out of the field of fire of the gun. Lt. Elliott Schechter, with a squad, took after it on foot. Crawling to within a hundred yards of the tank they fired a rifle grenade and several rounds of carbine ammunition at it and immediately the crew abandoned it and fled. In the ensuing skirmish one German was wounded and seven prisoners were taken, including one officer. Co. B was forced to move its CP to Norroy. The 2nd platoon, at 0530, destroyed several enemy half tracks near Bonvilles as they approached from the south. Four enemy tanks fired upon Mairy from the west at 0700, but three were destroyed by two guns of the 2nd platoon located in that town. At

0800 a column of eleven half tracks entered the town from the south and turned east. Two were destroyed by the Infantry, two by TD bazooka fire, and four by the 2nd platoon as they swung north out of the town. Co. C moved their CP 5000 yards northeast and their 1st platoon, which had been in Battalion reserve, was relieved and sent to Murville. Co. C, 774th TD Bn, sent guns to the vicinity of Bonvillers, Piennes, Landres, Mercy Le Haut, Xivry, Higny and Mairy. On the 8th they destroyed four tanks.

Co. A, 774th TD Bn, was placed in support of the 607th TD Bn and sent two platoons to cover the south flank of woods 1000 yards north of the Battalion CP. That night all elements of the 774th TD Bn were ordered to revert to their Battalion, but to remain on the same mission.

Co. A moved their CP to Avril and immediately thereafter the enemy launched a tank-infantry attack from Trieux toward Briey to relieve their forces surrounded there. The 1st platoon of Co. A, commanded by Lt. Bruce Gildersleeve, was moving their guns to a ridge outside of Avril when small arms fire broke out to their front. Under artillery fire the man-handled the guns with the help of the infantry to the top of the hill. From there they destroyed two enemy tank destroyers, two half-tracks, and killed about twenty foot soldiers thus breaking up the attack.

On the 9th and 10th of September the companies continued to advance with their regiments. By the 11th the Battalion CP had moved to St. Piermont, 2000 yards south of Trieux. Co. A moved its CP to Neufchef, the platoons moving to Florrange and Uckange via Morlange and Rangevaux. One platoon had moved to Hayange, but was moved back to Neufchef. Co. B's CP moved from Norroy to a point 2000 yards west of Fontoy and its platoons moved on the 10th of September to Fontoy, Angeviller and Algrange. On the 11th the second platoon advanced to Elange. On the 10th Co. C had moved its CP to Aumetz, following its platoons which had advanced to Aumetz, Frouville and Ludelange. The following day the Company moved to Angevillers with all its platoons.

On the 12th and 13th the companies, supporting the regiments, continued their advance, closing up to the Moselle River. Co. B moved two platoons to positions overlooking Thionville from the west side