

## An Outline of History

On December 15th 1941 the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was born. Springing up from the remains of the 3rd Infantry Division's Anti-Tank Company, the historical heritage of the 603rd dates back to the days of Captain Miles Standish. The new Battalion remained part of the Third Division and while stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington took part in the making of a Hollywood production. The theatrical, with Wallace Berry as Star, pertained to the mechanizing of cavalry units.

Leaving Fort Lewis the 603rd moved down to the coast of California where the entire Division took part in amphibious maneuvers. A short period of desert maneuvers were included in the training schedule before they entrained for the East Coast.

In August of 1942 the 3rd Division arrived at Camp Pickett, Virginia to prepare for overseas movement. Training included tough physical conditioning courses, long hikes, night marching and extensive firing practice. New clothing and equipment were issued and the impending invasion of North Africa became more apparent. The Third Infantry Division moved overseas but by some queer quirk in War Department plans, the 603rd was left waiting at the dock.

After determining that the battle of North Africa was going as well could be expected, the 603rd moved on to the newly opened Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood, Texas. After establishing all kinds of records for the other Battalions to shoot at, hopes for overseas service were once again raised.

But somewhere along the line the Battalion had missed the maneuvers in Louisiana. Again they were off, this time for three months of eating with the mosquitoes and chiggers.

The culmination of maneuvers placed the 603rd in Camp Shelby, Mississippi for a rest, prior to shipping out. However, it seems they were wanted at the Tank Destroyer Center as School Troops. In Camp Hood the Battalion spent their time testing the new T-70 Tank Destroyer (now known as the M-18, "Hellecat"). The experiment included driving down to the Gulf of Mexico and ducking the TD's into the salty brine. After that, one wasn't sure whether the primary mission of TD's would be destroying tanks or submarines.

With the fifth and final phase of its training completed the Battalion moved to another staging area---Camp Maxey, Texas. Physicals, lectures, new clothing and they were off to the POE.

Nine days at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey to get the final taste of American soil and the 603rd was on its way to the ETO.

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(Continued from Last Week)

On the tenth day of April 1944 the HMS Queen Mary put to sea with all members of the 603rd present and accounted for. In keeping with previous good fortune the Battalion drew the job of Kitchen Police and Table Waiters for the entire complement of the ship. A mere 12,500 hungry soldiers, sailors and Wacs. After six uneventful days on the high seas the Queen dropped anchor off the green hills of Scotland. A short train ride took the battalion to Cannock, where it was to live for the next two weeks. A motorcade through the ancient English countryside brought the 603rd to Sherbourne Castle, Gloucester. Here the Battalion received their new equipment and when D Day rolled around the members of the 603rd were engaged in preparing the new M-18's for combat.

On the 21st of July the Battalion landed at Utah Beach on the Normandy peninsula. On the 28th the 603rd attached to the 6th Armored Division was committed to action. The mission being to take Granville on the west coast of the Cherbourg peninsula. By the 31st of July the mission was accomplished and the 6th Armored struck out for Avaranches at the base of the Peninsula.

Orders on the first of August were for the Sixth to proceed to the Port of Brest at the tip of the Brittany Peninsula. Brushing aside all light resistance and by passing heavy resistance the division liberated the Brest peninsula by the 9th of August destroying, disorganizing or bottling up 60,000 enemy troops. Due to the fact that the Gun Companies were split up among the Combat Commands in the Division and then were further broken down into Task forces it is impossible to trace the myriad of routes taken by the Battalion. However the following is the general axis of advance taken by Reserve Command to which Battalion Headquarters was attached. Avaranches, Autrain, Quedillac, La Bousaine, Poullaouen, Serignac, Gousenou, Bourg Blanc.

On the 12th of August CCB with C Company moved to Vannes and Reserve Command with B Company moved to Lorient, both moves for the purpose of relieving the 4th Armored Division. Company A remained with CCA to take part in the final assault on the city of Brest.

Casualties for the month of August were extremely severe. Lt. Col. John G. Minniece, the Battalion Commander, was severely wounded in action and died a few days later. 3 officers were wounded in action. Among the enlisted personnel 6 were killed, 23 wounded, and 12 missing in action.

During the initial weeks of September we find A Company still taking part in the assault on Brest, B Company was holding ground near Hennebont, C Company patrolled the north Bank of the Loire river. The first two weeks in September found all companies looking for parts to replace those worn out on the run to Brest. The M-18 tracks were a critical item and at the time none were to be had in all of France. The Third Army was on the move again and all vehicles were ordered to go as far as they could and then were to be abandoned.



The end of September placed the 6th Armored north of Nancy holding the high ground south of Nomeny. Reconnaissance Company after their excellent job on the Brest fiasco were used as patrolling forces and in support of the TD Companies. Casualties for September included one Officer and 13 enlisted men wounded.

At the beginning of the month of October the Division was deployed in the general area around Nancy with the various units holding a line between Leyr and Gremecy Forest. On the 8th and 9th CCA and CCB with Reconnaissance, A and C Companies made an attack north of Leyr seizing a number of towns and the high ground to Letricourt. The 35th and 80th Divisions pushed off simultaneously consolidating all gains.

The latter part of the month was spent in Billels around Nancy. Casualties for October were 1 Officer and 5 EM killed in action, 12 enlisted men wounded and 1 EM missing in action.

## Home is the Wanderer

### Home From the Sea

At the culmination of the war in Europe the 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion moved to the Infantry Barracks in Zeitz, Germany. A short two weeks later the Battalion left for Klosterlausnitz which fell into the occupation zone of the 6th Armored Division. During the next five weeks the 6th was placed in Category IV, to be discharged, the Russians were to occupy Thuringia and the 603rd was generally in the way. On the day before Russian occupation of the zone the 603rd was transferred to the 7th Tank Destroyer Group which made their home in Bavaria, two hundred miles to the south.

An all night drive placed the Battalion in their latest bivouac, a lovely green field, somewhere in the zone occupied by the Fourth Armored Division. When dawn came the men were able to see the town of Abensberg a short five minutes away. In order to locate this quaint old Bavarian town you will first have to find a map of Bavaria. Then draw a straight line between Munich and Nuremberg and locate Ingolstadt. About fifteen miles east of Ingolstadt you might be able to find Abensberg . . . If your map is large enough.

Ancient buildings with modern improvements, electricity and gas, the town safely houses about three thousand. The inhabitants adhere to the quaint Bavarian costumes of short leather pants with suspenders for the men and multi-colored dirndls covered with white aprons for the women. The town is devoid of any manufacturing industry and has very little farming land. Two Rathouses (Beer Parlors) serve a light flat-tasting beer that few like. In general, Abensberg is the kind of a town that American Soldiers like to get away from.