

BATTLE OF AACHEN

634th Tank Destroyer Bn, Company B, 3d platoon

Attached to 2d Bn, 18th Inf Regt. 8-16 Oct 44.

Interview with: Lt Emmett R. Duffy, leader 3d platoon ✓

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8 Oct 44 - Ordered to support the 2d Bn, 18th Inf Regt, in its pre-dawn attack northward to VERLAUTENHEIDE, the 4 destroyers of the 3d TD platoon left the RR tracks north of EILENDORF at daylight, going through the RR underpass at (88754420), and followed by friendly tanks. The doughboys of E and F Co's had pushed off at 0400 and were already in VERLAUTENHEIDE by this time. Near the CR (888450) just south of the town the TD's "shot up" two enemy pillboxes and one machine gun nest, firing 14 rounds. Friendly infantry got some prisoners out of the pillboxes.

The Sherman nearest the TD's hit a mine at the indicated crossroads, and another was put out of action in the same vicinity. Lt. Buffy saw other medium tanks in difficulty. The four TD's held up, as did other armor, and remained near a house at approximately(89204485) from about 0700 to nearly 0900 when the area ahead had been swept for mines.

Arriving in VERLAUTENHEIDE around 0900 without much difficulty, there was not much small arms fire at the time, but increasingly heavy artillery fire. Two of the destroyers were placed in the vicinity of the E Co CP, the square-shaped group of buildings at (88454565), guarding the northern approaches to the town, and the other two to the south near the F Co CP, covering the QUINX road center, vicinity (88754430). It was a "quiet" night except for enemy artillery, which hit one of the destroyers in the south of the town, killing one crew member and wounding another, but not putting the vehicle out of action.

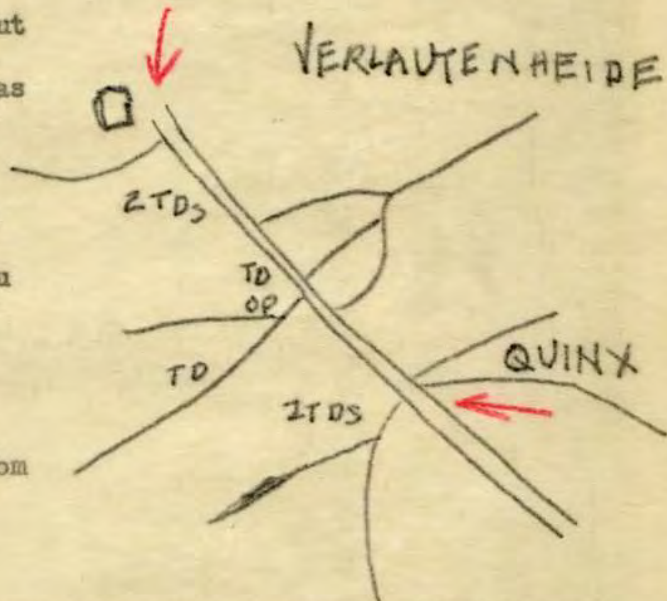
9 Oct 44 - At 0630 Lt. Duffy was notified that the enemy had attacked to the south, QUINX crossroads vicinity (887453), and penetrated between F and G Co's, threatening the Bn CP just west of the crossroads. He took one destroyer near the CP building; found that the enemy had penetrated up to the main northwest-southeast street in front of the CP; and were across the street to the south. Battalion told him "to shoot everything across the street." If any F Co doughboys were left on the east side of the street they were in cellars and pinned down. Enemy small arms and heavier fire was coming across the street. The destroyer "sprayed" the buildings on the other side (east) of the street, and blasted some with 76 mm fire. Meanwhile, friendly tanks on either side were also firing across the street. (See account of Sgt. Hajek and Cpl. Jacobs, 2d platoon, B Co, 745th TK Bn), and by 0830 the attack was broken. During the engagement an enemy shell fragment ripped the radiator of the destroyer engaged, and shortly afterward another was hit, leaving Lt. Duffy with 3 damaged TD's and one undamaged vehicle. All remained in action, however.

10 - 15 Oct 44 - For the next 5 days Lt. Duffy said his and other armor remained in VERLAUTENHEIDE undergoing continual artillery fire, so heavy that the men could scarcely leave their vehicles. The job of the TD's, the lieutenant said, was to keep the infantry positions in the town from being overrun in the repeated enemy thrusts. The enemy wanted the Americans to come out of the town, particularly the protective armor, where the enemy armor and artillery could destroy them; but the destroyers' job was to hold and safeguard; and that is what they did. Actually, Lt. Duffy said, the TD's could not have gotten out of the town if they had wanted to, friendly mines being laid so heavily and closely about.

On Monday and Tuesday (9-10 Oct) after the destroyers got settled, the lieutenant said he went over "every foot of the town." He set up his OP near the church (88654540) affording good observation; made a sketch of the terrain; and gave a copy to each TD commander, indicating the spots to be watched. Since it was "a bastard job" keeping radio communications in the heavy artillery fire

he organized telephone communications, destroyer-to-destroyer. These were often shot out.

On 11 Oct 44 two destroyers of the 2d TD platoon were moved to the HAASEN vicinity, and Lt. Duffy had charge of the other two 2d platoon vehicles remaining in VERLAUTENHEIDE, as well as the four of his own platoon. He positioned the destroyers in the town, as shown on the sketch, to give all around protection, but particularly to the north and east. From these positions the vehicles were moved as needed to meet enemy threats, or to blast pillboxes, such as the one knocked out at (893460) on about 11 Oct 44. It was believed that enemy infantry in the box, well beyond American lines, had a mortar. A destroyer put a shot thru the embrasure of the pillbox, and other shots blasted the roof off. There was no more observable fire from the emplacement.



15 Oct 44 - Early in the morning enemy tanks were reported moving toward American positions in strength, from the north and east. The TD men knew that several enemy vehicles had infiltrated from the direction of WEIDEN (8948) to the RJ just north of VERLAUTENHEIDE, but had been unable to spot them because they were hidden behind the houses from (883461) to (88454585). In the morning of 15 Oct, however, the main enemy tank threat was from the east.

Around 0800 tanks were glimpsed over the folding ground 1,000 or more yards northeast toward WAMBACH (901468). A little later Lt. Duffy saw two tanks leave WAMBACH and head for the woods several hundred yards southeast, vicinity (906464). They made it to the woods before the TD nearest the OP could

get on them. Then two more, Mark VI's, tried it. But just as they showed their tails, turning to their right into the woods, the TD's shots went home; and both enemy tanks were knocked out, still in observation. Lt. Duffy said the destroyer's 76 mm fire would not have gotten the Mark VI's but for the fortunate hits on their rears. The TD also damaged an enemy SP gun in the indicated wooded area. None of the Jerry armor returned fire while making the dash for the woods, or when hit. "They were damn poor shots when they did fire back" that week, the lieutenant said.

On the same day, a Mark IV was also knocked out by 3d platoon destroyers just outside the woods to the east at (901455). The Jerry crew made off; but later (while communications between the destroyers' OP and the vehicles were shot out, and effective fire interrupted) another German tank pulled out of the woods and towed the crippled vehicle to cover.

Note: The following paragraph is supplemented by information supplied separately by Sgt. F. G. Yantis, driver of a 2d TD platoon destroyer involved in the action.

At about 1800, an enemy force of one company and two Mark V's attacked from the direction of QUINX, the enemy foot soldiers getting hold of F Co forward foxholes and the houses along the eastern edge of VERLAUTENHEIDE. (Sgt. Yantis said it was raining and the enemy pushed in because the doughboys had left the forward holes to get back to the houses out of the downpour.) Lt. Duffy moved two destroyers to stop the attack. One was a TD already in the southern part of the town, under Sgt. Nessa (not interviewed), who shot out one of the Mark V's, helping to stop the attack. The other destroyer, which had been out for repairs, had just been brought back to VERLAUTENHEIDE that afternoon, to RJ (886455), to help guard the northern approaches. It was the only 2d platoon TD in the town at the time, Sgt. Yantis driving. The vehicle was <sup>brought</sup> near the church and OP to meet the attack; but the commander of the vehicle was killed by artillery fire while he stood outside trying to get his gun on the other Mark

V, which otherwise, Lt. Duffy said, would not have gotten away. Sgt. Yantis, the driver of this vehicle, said a friendly Sherman just behind (north of) him was knocked out by the enemy tank. He also said friendly artillery was very effective in breaking up the enemy attack, and chasing the enemy tank in his vicinity.

16 Oct 44 -- In the morning a destroyer in the orchard near RJ (885456) spotted a Tiger tank about 300 to 400 yards north of the town, by the houses vicinity (884460), where enemy vehicles were known to be located. The TD fired 8 rounds at the Mark VI but the shots "bounced off" the enemy's thick front armor. A little later another destroyer in the same vicinity got within 100 yards of the Tiger and fired 5 rounds point blank, apparently without effect, for the Mark VI immediately returned fire, penetrating and knocking out the TD, and killing the gun sergeant and seriously wounding two others. The driver and assistant driver escaped.

However, one enemy Mark V was knocked out in this engagement; and during the same day a destroyer got another Mark V deployed on the edge of the woods 1200 yards to the east.

Thus, in two days of fighting, Lt. Duffy said, the tank destroyers in VERLAUTENHEIDE destroyed 6 enemy tanks: 2 Mark VI's; 3 Mark V's; and one Mark IV -- not counting two "probables".

Sgt. Orville Nessa (not interviewed) was credited with knocking out 4 of the 6 enemy tanks destroyed.