

HEADQUARTERS
645TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 45, U. S. ARMY

6 January 1944

SUBJECT: Battle Report

TO.....:

MAP REFERENCES: Italy, 1/100,000 Sheet 161

PERIOD COVERED: 1 December 1943 to 31 December 1943

1. The beginning of this phase now all units in the same position as of November 30, 1943.

2. On the night of 1 December, Company A fired four hundred and fifty rounds in vicinity of two thousand to three thousand yards north of SAN VITTORE. Company B fired 397 rounds of interdictory fire at supply route near VITICUSO. 2nd platoon, Company C, fired 57 rounds HE, range 6500 yards, direct assault fire at enemy infantry on MT. CARNO, which is 2000 yards northwest of VITICUSO. 130th Infantry Regiment observers reported that the ricochet effect was terrific. They reported that some of the Germans tripped on their own mines in a hurried attempt to scatter and evade the shelling. The Commanding General of the 45th Infantry Division ordered the Battalion to send out patrols to gain more information, since the infantry patrolling was not adequate. The Commanding Officer, 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, elected to send two patrols from Company B out on the night of 1 December near VITICUSO. These patrols consisted of four men each. The previous night they went up to the front lines so as to study the terrain the following day, then push off the night of 1 December. The S-2 selected their route and gave them the mission of reaching high ground northeast of VITICUSO during the night, staying at that place throughout the day and observing enemy activity. Neither patrol reached their objective due to enemy machine gun and mortar fire. Reconnaissance Company platoons still maintained OP's with the exception of the 3rd platoon, which had to withdraw because of shelling. Some of their equipment had to be left behind, which was later recovered.

3. Our patrol activity continued on 2 December. Company sent out a three man patrol with the same objective as of the previous night. Company A sent two four-man patrols out with the same mission as Company B, except they were to reach the high ground east of VITICUSO. Company A fired 408 rounds harassing fire north of SAN VITTORE.

4. On 3 December, Company A turned loose 288 rounds interdictory fire 3000 yards north of SA. VITTORE. Company B followed up with 150 rounds on highway south of ACQUAFONDATA. 2nd platoon, Company C, fired 41 rounds direct fire at enemy OP with excellent results. The patrols sent out 2 December again were unable to reach their objectives. One patrol of Company A was stopped by our infantry because the route took it through an enemy outpost which the said infantry was attempting to take that night. The other Company A patrol reached a point 1000 yards northeast, of CONCACASALE, where they heard talking, believed to be a German outpost. Company B's patrol barely reached enemy territory when it was met by enemy mortar and machine gun fire.

BATTLE REPORT (CONT'D) 1 December 1943 to 31 December 1943

5. During the period 4 December through 6 December, Company A fired 120 rounds interdictory fire on road junction 5000 yards north of SAN PIETRO; 360 rounds on VITICUSO; 76 rounds with good effect on enemy vehicles and personnel; 32 rounds HE on registration; 86 rounds at personnel in buildings 4000 yards west of SAN PIETRO with excellent results; 712 rounds interdictory fire at supply route northeast of SAN VITTORE; 400 rounds same type of fire on road north of SAN PIETRO; 1600 rounds at three concentrations vicinity ST. MARIA. Company A moved the platoon which had been north of POZZILLI back to the company area so as to form three four-gun batteries. Company B fired 150 rounds harassing fire on VITICUSO. This was repeated the following two nights. Company C fired 440 rounds interdictory fire on road east of FILIGNANO; 42 rounds assault fire on OP and personnel northwest of VENAFARO, inflicting heavy casualties. Companies A and B continued their patrolling. Company A sent one patrol northeast of VITICUSO to remain out thirty-six hours. They reached the southeastern slope of hill 770 where one gun was heard firing from the adjacent hill. Company B's patrol could not reach it's objective due to friendly artillery fire falling on that point.

6. 7 December found Company A firing 120 rounds at enemy personnel on MT. SANMUCRO and 2100 rounds interdictory fire in vicinity of SAN VITTORE. Company B expended 197 rounds at VITICUSO and CASALE with devastating effect. Two three-man patrols from Reconnaissance Company were sent through the lines near CERRETO with the mission of gaining information as to dispositions and strong points on MT. LA BONDITA. They travelled only 600 yards through the front lines when machine guns began to sweep the draw they were approaching. The northern patrol also met the same situation in their sector. Both patrols were able to give location of enemy machine guns.

7. All companies shared the indirect firing on 3 December. Company A dropped 224 rounds in ST. MARIA during the night. Company B cracked VITICUSO again during the night with 102 rounds and Company C kept pace by registering with 20 rounds on a supply route 1000 yards southeast of VITICUSO, then followed this up during the night with 200 rounds on the same spot.

8. On December 9 and 10, only A and B Companies fired. Company A blasted ST. MARIA with 200 rounds interdictory as well as some buildings north of the same town. Company B registered in with 20 rounds. Due to shortage of 3-inch ammunition, an allotment of seven (7) rounds per gun per day was given. A prisoner-of-war reported that four Germans, dressed as monks, were coming through the lines to lay mines. A priest was arrested during the night and brought in for interrogation by the Battalion S-2. He was not German.

9. On 11 December, Reconnaissance Company sighted enemy gun positions in a draw north of SAN VITTORE, which was taken under fire by Company A. The bursts could not be picked up, so 178th Field Artillery Battalion finished the mission. The observer distinguished himself by giving excellent fire data, so that the target was hit in a few rounds. Several trucks were seen burning. Early in the morning, Company B fired 126 rounds on road junctions around CASALE. Later in the day, Company B Executive Officer adjusted fire on enemy personnel near ACQUAFONDATA. The 275 rounds expended terrorized the Boche. The 2nd platoon, Company C, again blasted enemy personnel on the reverse slope of MT. CARNO with 73 rounds. Firing Company personnel relieved all of Reconnaissance Company from OP's so as to release the latter for patrol work.

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BATTLE REPORT (CONT'D) From 1 December 1943 to 31 December 1943

10. Very little firing was done between 12 to 14 December inclusive. On 13 December, Company B OP adjusted fire of own unit on enemy personnel around CASALE and ACQUAFONDATA. A total of 373 rounds were expended. Company C OP on top of hill 970 was shelled by mortar fire.

11. Company A fired 92 rounds on enemy gun positions on MT LUNGO (952140). Activity was not seen in that vicinity after that concentration. Company B laid 202 rounds interdiction fire on road at 01062795. Reconnaissance Company sent intelligence and reconnaissance patrol out on the night of 15 December. Their mission was to advance down POZZILLI-CASALE road as far as possible. They were stopped by machine gun fire at 024253. Reported that northwest slope of hill 470 and southwest slope of hill 640 occupied by the enemy. On 16 December, Company B fired 200 rounds interdiction on 009232 and 01062794. Reconnaissance Company sent out a four-man patrol to investigate trail in vicinity of 022252. Mission was not accomplished due to small arms fire.

12. Reconnaissance Company sent a patrol to CASALE the night of 17 December. They found that the road at 064270 was impassable for our M-10's and furthermore that the road was being continuously shelled. In order to reach further out by indirect firing and to have adequate anti-tank protection in the LAGONE area, the Commanding Officer, 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, ordered one platoon from Company C put in the vicinity of LAGONE (004276) on the morning of 18 December. Company A moved one section on the POZZILLI-CASALE road (024253) into an anti-tank position. No firing during the day. On the night of 18 December, Reconnaissance Company sent another patrol into CASALE. They found the road littered with enemy equipment, which led them to believe that the enemy had made a hasty withdrawal. The patrol further reported that culverts were blown in the vicinity of 997273 and 995274; also the bridge several hundred yards east of CASALE WAS BLOWN.

13. On 19 December, the 2nd platoon, Company C, moved from LAGONE, to indirect fire positions in CALLEMACHIS (045277). During the night of 19 December, Reconnaissance Company patrol captured two Germans near CASALE. They were able to observe rifle and machine gun fire coming from MT MOLINO. Company B dropped 200 rounds on the road south of ACQUAFONDATA. The following night, 20 December, Company B duplicated this firing. The Battalion S-2 directed Company C OP (Jolly 5) to move to 986269 in order to observe the CASALE-ACQUAFONDATA road. Also moved Company B OP to 933256 for better observation on VITICUSO. Another patrol was sent out by Reconnaissance Company on 21 December to reconnoiter the CASALE-ACQUAFONDATA. On the same day, the Commanding General of the 45th Infantry Division ordered Reconnaissance Company in Division reserve. They moved into assembly area in vicinity of 015192 to act as reserve company for Provisional Company 751st Tank Battalion, who were manning out post in the CONCACASALE area. Company B registered on VITICUSO on 26 December.

14. 2nd Platoon, Company C, turned loose 410 rounds interdiction fire near 958268 and 962268 on 30 December. These were their first missions from the new position. After about a month without any enemy shellfire, the Battalion Command Post in VENAFRO was very much surprised on 30 December to hear about 20 rounds whistle in. Five more rounds were added on 31 December.

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BATTLE REPORT (CONT'D) From 1 December to 31 December 1944

15. The 3-inch gun has proven very effective for indirect firing, especially for interdiction. However, the dispersion is great at the ranges we have had to fire. (From 10,000 to 14,000 yards) Also, the burst is very difficult to pick up. Believe the smoke shell will remedy that.

16. The OP's of the Battalion have picked up numerous targets and have adjusted fire upon them not only for this unit but for artillery units.

17. The vigorous patrolling carried on by all companies with the exception of Company C, was very beneficial. Believe they would have been more successful had they the opportunity to get better acquainted with the terrain as the Infantry does. Complete coordination with the infantry was difficult at first due to last minute changes in situation, which did not reach us in time. This flaw was ironed out and coordination was excellent.

18. The ammunition expenditure continued to be enormous at the early part of the month. Since all the Tank Destroyer Battalions in this theatre were expending about the same, each gun was cut to seven (7) rounds per day. Later in the month, the allotment was raised to eleven (11) rounds, then at the end of the month, all limitations were removed. During the month, the Battalion expended 13,981 rounds HE, and 116 rounds APC, making a total expenditure of 14, 097 rounds.

19. Supplies during this period offered no problems. Overshoes were drawn for all men. Replacements were made at once on the majority of items requisitioned. Rations were adequate. Men voiced their opinion as preferring "5 in 1" to other rations. When a unit kitchen is possible, "B" Rations are preferred. "10 in 1" rations run third in the men's choice. Three hundred Carbines were drawn to replace Thompson Sub Machine Gun, Cal. .45. All men armed with the Carbine fired thirty (30) rounds each on the Battalion range located 500 yards northeast of POZZILLI. Firing took place between 26th and 30th of December 1943.

20. A Command Inspection was held by the Battalion Commanding Officer during the period 20th to 24th of December 1943. All Companies were inspected. Ordnance equipment was found to be in good condition. The men's personal equipment and clothing was clean and serviceable in spite of the adverse weather conditions.

21. During the month of December, the Battalion furnished an average of fifty (50) men to the Division Pack Train as "Mule Skinners". The Battalion also had an average of thirty (30) men at the Fifth Army Rest Camp in NAPLES.

EDWARD L. AUSTIN
Major, Field Artillery
Commanding

Annex "A" Battle Report Overlay
Annex "B" Battle Casualty Summary

BATTLE REPORT (CONT'D)

2 incs.

Intelligence Summary

Journals and Operational Notes.

(1) Messages.

BATTLE CASUALTY SUMMARY FOR PERIOD 1 DECEMBER 1943 TO
31 DECEMBER 1943

NAME	ASN	RANK	CO	DATE	STATUS
☛ Cox, Edward D	38018096	Pvt.	B	26 Dec.	Wounded
:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:
☛ **Back to duty:	:	:	:	:	:
:	:	:	:	:	:

ANNEX "B"