MARCH:

Men came from California, men came from Massachusettes; they came from both these margins of America and almost every state in between, to form a battalion of Tank Destroyers for the Allied cause.

They disembarked from a troop train that loaded them at Fort Douglas Reception Center and some didn't even know they were in Texas. They arrived late on the night of March 12, 1943, and the trucks that met them at the station drove them through a gate that said Camp Bowie.

They arrived also from Reception Centers at Fort Devan, Mass., and from Fort Sill, Okla. These, together with the cadre from the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion, whose members hailed mainly from the southern states, were present the windy day of March 13, when a simple and impressive ceremony was held on the area parade ground.

The enlisted men faced the west and the officers, behind Major Arthur Park, battalion commander,--more than half were newly uniformed and fresh from OCS--faced the north. The tiny Adjutant, Lt Hogue, yelled into the wind in as loud a voice as he could muster the order of activation. The 650th Tank Destroyer Battalion was an organized fact.

Later that day, the group of men inducted in California, who hadn't been sent to Fort Douglas, arrived from Arlington Reception Center.

Although the other companies were able to go into immediate training, Reconnaissance company had to wait two or three days after activation before its roster of men arrived, mainly from the north-west. In all, there were few states, by this time, shy some representative, the greatest numbers having come from California, Washington and Oklahoma.

Simultaneous with activation, the 650th became part of Basic Unit Training Center and was assigned to the 14th TD Gp, commanded by Lt Col Willis A. Hedden.

MAY:

Having completed training under BU TC, the 650th left for Camp Hood, Tank Destroyer Center, May 13, 1943.

Not far out of Camp Bowie, the battalion went into bivouac and passed inspection by the 14th Group of personal and battalion equipment.

After two nights in the field, the organization struck shelter tents, packed equipment and headed for Camp Hood the morning of the 15th. The battalion arrived intact at its destination later that day and immediately took over the area assigned it.

AUGUST:

August 11, 1943, the 650th TD Bn passed out of the 14th TD Gp. Shortly thereafter the Bn was assigned to the 16th and later the 18th TD Gp.

As part of training under Advanced Unit Training Center, the battalion spent one week on the Camp Hood Battle Conditioning Course (June 27-July 4). Numerous men fell, overcome by the heat of the blazing Texas sun. The medical detachment proved itself here in worth and in capability.

SEPTEMBER:

Following various phases of unit training, 650 rolled out of Camp Hood the morning of September 11 en route to Camp Bowie.

Bivouac was arranged at Panther Park, Lampasas, and the officers and men took advantage of the one-day "morale trip" to swim, roller skate and dance.

Next day, September 12, the Bn was back at Camp Bowie and hard at work making its newly assigned area fit for scrutiny of Post Sanitation Inspectors.

OCTOBER:

Death moved for the first time through the ranks of the 650th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Four men of Headquarters company were killed.

Quoting from COUGAR COMMENT, the battalion's weekly newspaper which bore most of its history:

"Four men of Headquarters Company, 650th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were burned to death when the car carrying them home on furlough turned into a blazing torch, following a head-on collision with a truck near Stephenville, last October 13.

"They were:

"Sgt Henry L. Rickert of Oakland, Calif.; Pfc Henry F. Maher of Hartford, Conn.; Pvt James F. Goggin of Charleston, Mass. and Pvt Homer D. Peck of Jefferson, Ga.

"Following the crash, the car, which Rickert was driving, caught fire."

Three of the men, it was indicated by subsequent photographs of the car and its occupants, apparently were killed almost instantly. Pfc Maher died the following day after inquiring after his "buddies" and being told they were "comfortable".

NOVEMBER:

Leaving behind it only its "B" bags and a handful of men to guard them, the 650th moved out on the 13th of this month for long awaited maneuvers in Louisiana.

The first night was spent in the field just outside Camp Bowie, the next at Bryant, Texas, and by the 15th the Bn was securely bivouaced for a two-week maintenance period in Louisiana, approximately twenty miles north-east of Leesville.

For most of the men it was the first time to see and learn something of swamp, of Spanish moss, of the pitcher plant, of the Praying Mantis, of mud. Although forearmed, the weather never grew warm enough for use of the mosquito bars issued in garrison.

A silver web of frost covered the earth when 650 crawled from its pup tent Thanksgiving morn. Turkey dinner and a solid day's work to be thankful for...

DECEMBER:

By this last month of the year, 650 was well into the core of "Winter maneuvers in Louisiana" and all that implies. Whenever the rain stopped for a few days the frost turned it to ice. Tanks and M-10's churned up the loose red mud roads and turned them into hog sloughs so that by Christmas all track-laying vehicles were grounded.

An eighty-five mile march started at dawn of the 24th culminated by noon of Christmas Day with a handful of the Bn's vehicles having arrived at the new area above Seiper. These included by six of the Bn's thirty-six M-10's.

After several days the sun dried the roads sufficiently to allow movement and the Bn moved to another area in preparation for the following problem. This was December 31, and it was only a few minutes after the first of the long column had arrived that news came of the tragedy at Seiper.

While some of the Bn had been shifting to the new location, others were occupied with the laborious task of removing the giant tank destroyers from the muck that held them fast for almost five days.

Accidentally killed, crushed under his own destroyer, was Cpl Harold K. Christofersen, "C" Co driver. He had been attempting to extricate his M-10 from its trap of mud near Seiper.

That was December 31, New Years Eve...

1944

JANUARY:

While the "men were being sifted from the boys", as they say, on continued problems during which "C" ration was often delicacy, two more men of 650 met with sudden oblivion.

Pvt Justo F. Chavez, Hq Co and Pvt Alfred W. Enriquez of "A" Co met death in Los Angeles as the result of stab wounds suffered in a brawl in that city while on furlough, it was learned later.

Although maintenance on vehicles and other equipment had been excellent, because of their extremely hard usage, these important items of a TD unit began noticably to groan, and it was with a concerted sigh of welcome relief the Bn left the Sabine River area on the 29th and faced home.

An overnight halt near Waco, Texas, that night, then Camp Bowie next morning. Bowie no longer held for the men the lusterless boredom of early training days. Suddenly this Texas camp, as though by magic, held a million wonderous diversions and comforts. Bowie of the white sheets and warm hutments; Bowie of the hot showers and three square meals eaten in glass plates at Tables; Bowie of the theatres and libraries and Brownwood and golf and the USO's!

FEBRUARY:

The sixth day of this month, after but a single week of garrison life following close to three months in the field, 650 roared out of its Camp Bowie motor pool once more. This time for twenty-two days of flag exercises as opponnents to the 13th Armd Div and not too far from Bowie and civilization.

Upon return to Camp Bowie, February 28th, the men of the Bn , despite the frequent rain encountered, referred to their three-week adventure as "A Boy Scout picnic !"

MARCH:

The 13th of this month marked one year of activation and each Co held its own celebration. A week later the Bn packed its belongings and moved from its west side habitation area in Camp Bowie to buildings in the "New Area" of the camp.

The night of the 21st an all-Bn dance was held in recognition of the anniversary at the Memorial Hall in Brownwood.

At midnight, 24 March, the 650th Tank Destroyer Bn became the 425th Armored Field Artillery Bn, according to special order.

Several days later, after the men had learned they would have to exchange their destroyers for M-7's, their three-inch guns for 105 mm Howitzers, their concept of "Company" to another of "Battery", and their orange and black braid for the historied red, the greatest sorrow in all this for most of the men, it was revealed, was that they'd also have to remove the Cougar patch which they had met as rookies in its infancy and had helped to develop as a decisive arm of the service.

With the conversion to an Armored Field Artillery unit the organization became part of the 414th Field Artllery Gp.