

O P E R A T I O N S

of the

701st TANK DESTROYER BATTALION



The
ITALIAN CAMPAIGN,

-Anzio Beachhead-
Offensive

1 May 1944 - 31 May 1944

HEADQUARTERS
701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 464, c/o Postmaster, N.Y.C., N.Y.

23 June 1944



SUBJECT: Operations Report
TO : Adjutant General, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C. (through channels).

1. In compliance with the requirements of paragraph 10, AR 345-105, dated March 10, 1943, the following Operations Report of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, covering the period 1 May 1944 to 31 May 1944 is herewith submitted.

2. The operations covered in this report are statements from the Unit and Staff Journal, the Battalion Diary, and of officers concerned; and supporting evidence for said statements is on file in the records of this Battalion.

3. This report was prepared by the Intelligence Section of the Battalion.

William H. Bateman

WILLIAM H. BATEMAN,
Captain, 701st Tank Destroyer Bn.,
S-2

HEADQUARTERS
701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 464, c/o Postmaster, New York, N.Y.

1 June 1944

HISTORY OF 701ST TANK DESTROYER BATTALION COVERING
PERIOD OF 1 MAY - 31 MAY 1944



The start of the month of May proved exceptionally quiet for the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, accustomed as its members were to the heavy artillery thrown at the Beachhead by the Germans and the frequent nightly air raids. "B" and "C" companies were acting as supporting artillery and "A" company was dug in for an anti-tank role in the 34th Division sector. Reconnaissance company operated three OP's for the Battalion's artillery function at the time.

On May 3rd the Germans raided the port of Anzio during the hours of darkness. The 701st had several truck drivers on special duty with the 6723rd Trucking Battalion and the trucks had just been concentrated in an assembly area near the port after having returned from Naples loaded with supplies. The drivers remained with their trucks prior to returning to their outfit the following morning. When the German air raid occurred, it caught a number of the truckers asleep on the ground without the sanctuary of a slit trench. A personnel bomb tore into the skull of Pvt. Charles H. Dunahay, "C" company, and killed him as he lay sleeping beneath his truck. Pvt. Charles H. Brown, "B" company, who had been sleeping at Dunahay's side, was severely wounded by a fragment which penetrated his chest and he died in the hospital the following day.

Having done a tremendous amount of firing, the 3" gun tubes on the Battalion's M-10 tank destroyers were being changed by ordnance. "B" company received priority, and, with all its guns in excellent shape, relieved "A" company without incident in the anti-tank positions on the 34th Division sector.

Relieved, platoon at a time, "A" company came back under Battalion control and went into the artillery positions vacated by "B". Once secure in its direct fire position, "B" company was attached to the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The Bronze Star Medals were awarded to Lieutenant James Williams and Sergeant Isadore Patrick, both of "B" company, for their courageous actions on 15th April 1944, in the vicinity of Carreto Alto during a raid with the SSF on the southern flank of the Anzio Beachhead. Immediately following the start of the raid into enemy territory, the leading tank ran over a mine and burst into flames, blocking the advance of the succeeding elements. Lieutenant Williams and Sergeant Patrick unhesitatingly dismounted from their M-10 and, disregarding the danger of the blazing tank and its exploding ammunition, cleared a path through the minefield; guided their vehicle to the flaming tank, assisted in attaching a tow cable to it and directed the towing of it to a nearby side road. Their prompt and efficient action in removing this obstacle to the advance of the raiding party was important factor in enabling it to complete successfully it's mission.

At this time, the award of the Legion of Merit came through for Lt. Colonel Harrison King, former Battalion Commander of the 701st., who had been evacuated as a result of serious wounds received some time previously. The medal was given to Lt. Colonel King "for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as Battalion Commander, 701st T.D. Battalion. From 10 August to 20 October 1943, immediately after the Battalion had been reorganized with the new M-10 Tank Destroyer, he planned and supervised with marked ability and conspicuous success the training of his personnel with new equipment. Long an advocate of the employment of Tank Destroyers, as supporting artillery, his foresight in anticipating the need for and providing artillery training for his officers and men was responsible for the Battalion successes in Italy. His professional knowledge, sound judgment and att-



ention to detail, carried over a long period of time, was the greatest single factor in molding the Battalion into a fine working and highly proficient team. His outstanding contributions to the attainments realized by the Battalion reflect great credit upon himself and the military service and are worthy of the highest praise."

Major Doran started a school in forward observation for platoon commanders on May 5th. The curriculum was unique in that actual firing was used in connection with the teaching of the finer points of forward observation, and this doubtless proved a source of misery to the Tedeschi.

For some five days the gun companies worked with the First Armored Division on Tank-Infantry-Tank Destroyer problems in preparation for planned future operations. In connection with these preparations, Rcn. company reconnoitered routes to assembly areas in the La Ferrier area and Pioneer Platoon worked with the First Armored Division in sweeping areas for mines. "B" company was relieved from its anti-tank work in the 34th Division sector and returned to the Battalion in the Padiglione area. Several days previously, the Nazis had mortared the "B" company positions in the Isola Bella area with phosphorus. Sergeant Patrick and Lieutenant Williams hopped out of their M-10 to help extinguish some ensuing fires and both received burns in the process. Patrick was sent to a hospital but rejoined his company three days later.

Despite poor visibility, due to natural and artificial causes, the 701st gun companies continued their successful house, CP, and vehicular destruction. The Krauts used their heavier caliber guns to harass our rear areas and the line companies were many times subjected to bombardment by 150mm, 170mm, and even 210mm guns.

"B" company carried out a reconnaissance for indirect fire positions as did the Transportation Section for routes of supply for the coming operations. Transportation soon afterward started hauling ammunition to the "B" company



positions, newly reconnoitered in the La Ferrier vicinity. "C" company used the terrain plot at First Armored Division Headquarters to study the terrain over which the fighting would take place, and the forward positions, in conjunction with the planned operations, were prepared by the "C" company personnel. Two additional M-10's were obtained by Battalion S-4 for use as command vehicles in the coming operations, and a close maintenance check was made of all M-10's and vehicles. Plans "Buffalo" and Grasshopper" were closely studied by the Battalion and preparations were made to carry out either one chosen. Plan "Buffalo", however, was eventually picked and preparations were made accordingly. Lt. Edson of "C" company made a bridge reconnaissance with the 16th Engineers, and a Tank-Infantry-Tank Destroyer exercise was held in the First Armored Division training area with a platoon of "B" company participating. "B" company was alerted for movement on May 20th by order of First Armored Division and moved to indirect fire positions on the night of May 21-22 while Battalion Headquarters moved to a new CP across the Mussolini Canal. Reconnaissance Company of the 701st and "B" company of the 636th Tank Destroyers, attached to the 701st Tank Busters for the "Buffalo" operation, both moved into the vicinity of the Battalion CP. Meanwhile, "A" and "C" companies had slipped into prepared positions in the La Ferrier area during hours of darkness and struck according to plan the following morning. "A" company, attacking in support of Combat Command "A", headed down Red Road and took the first objective, crossing the railroad running northwest before Cisterna, within 15 minutes. Cpl. Patrick Michael Roach drove a three inch shell through a German tank, size unknown, which had taken refuge behind a half shattered building. Cpl. John K. Conlin encountered two Nazi Mark VI panzers rolling along a slope and got a "lighting draw" on them to neatly drop armored piercing shells alongside the barrels of the "Tigers" dreaded 88mm guns. The German return shots were wild and were the last ever fired by their crews for the glory of Greater Germany. Their turrets were locked by in the impact of Conlin's AP shells, and direct strikes with high explosive shells put the finishing touches on the agonized "Tigers" which went up in flame without



a member of the trapped crews managing to emerge. That afternoon, the alarm that 25 Mark VI's were forming for a counter-attack sounded over the radio net. "Correction, please," declared Captain John M. Wright, commander of "A" company, "Make that 23. I've just knocked out two." The counter attack never materialized. Just prior to reaching the railway, one destroyer ran over an anti-tank mine. Cpl. Paul B. Frasher, the gunner, had his 3" gun loaded, and it went off as a result of the percussion to catch Frasher on the recoil. Lightly wounded, Frasher was evacuated to the hospital. Sergeant Blossmoe's destroyer was also put out of action by a mine and the crew was ordered to return to the rear for a new M-10. All the members scrambled out but had noticed some frightened Krauts disappearing into a cave. Tommy guns, rifles and carbines were fired into the place with no noticeable results. Finally, fragmentation grenades were tossed into the opening but the Nazi held firm. Finally, Blossmoe remembered how bees are ejected from their hives in his native Wisconsin and came through with a smoke grenade tossed deep into the inner recesses of the cave. Out rushed 14 cowed Jerries, tears streaming from their eyes, gasps of "Kamerad" coming from their mouths. Tragedy struck the destroyer of Lt. Walter E. Loveless as it received hits from both 88 and 77mm German anti-tank guns. Lt. Loveless was severely wounded and Corporal Chester A Poplawsky, the driver, was killed as the German shots headed through the front of the tank. Sergeant John P. Sears was severely wounded and finally expired in the hospital a week later. T/5 Evans E. Jessie also was badly wounded and Private First Class Merejildo Gurule was slightly injured by fragments and burns. Lt. Louis A. Romani was caught in the back of the neck by a shell fragment, soon after taking over Lt. Loveless' platoon, and, seriously wounded, was evacuated.

"C" Company roared into the attack with a platoon driving along either side of Purple Path, supposedly through gaps cleared in the minefields protecting the left flank of the German positions around Cisterna. Eight "C" company M-10's were made hors de combat by anti-tank mines after hopping off from their

offensive fire positions on forward slopes. Billowing clouds of dust resulting from the intense artillery barrage and the supporting low level air assault and bombardment made visibility extremely difficult, but Combat Command "B", with which "C" company was working, achieved all its objectives by nightfall. Sergeant Stank's destroyer was stopped by a mine during the "C" company action and the crew was ordered to return to the rear for a replacement. However, Sergeant Stank persisted in remaining with his gun, and loaded and fired 100 rounds of 3" ammunition by himself to support American infantrymen attacking across Highway 7. Sergeant Bezpiaty, too, found it hard to leave his gun after the destroyer had been halted by a mine and scored a clean hit to smash up a Kraut tank before he would return to get another M-10. Pvt. Boyd L. Rhodes was removing a radio from a knocked out destroyer to be shifted to another platoon command destroyer when he was machine gunned by some Germans and lightly wounded. A platoon of "B" company destroyers was attached to "C" company after the initial "C" losses, and plastered a German flame thrower with devastating hits.

"B" company fired artillery preparation and supporting fire during this phase of the operations and did fine work. "A" company ran amuck to hang up a tally of 11 Tedeschi panzers and one 88mm gun. "C" company definitely accounted for two enemy tanks, and crews of damaged destroyers reported back to Battalion Trains, quickly received new M-10's and roared straight back to combat. At the end of the first day, despite fierce German resistance, everything was going according to plan.

The attack continued at dawn, May 23rd with all the gun companies now detached. Reconnaissance Company reported from an OP that the enemy counter-attack with machine-gunners, infantry, and self-propelled guns had been hurled back on the 45th Division at 2140 hours. While going forward on a reconnaissance mission, Lt. Samuel Mendlow, Staff Sergeant Edwin B. Wessner, and Sergeant Clyde T. Cephart ran over a mine which blew up their "peep". All were reported seriously wounded.

By the morning of May 24th, "C" company's M-10's were almost all retrieved or replaced. With Nazi resistance dwindling, the Anzio offensive rose to a new pitch. Sergeant Fussell, of "C" company, had his arm broken by the recoil of his 3" gun but gritted his teeth and carried on for two more days during which his destroyer accounted for a battery of four 88mm guns. Lt. Jackson noticed 12 Boches trot into a cave and, after waiting patiently a few moments, had a 3" HE shell pumped into the cavern. In the ensuing explosion, the entrance crumbled and blocked the opening, no signs of life were seen and certainly not a Kraut was ever noticed to emerge. However, the following day Lt. Jackson could definitely carve notches on the stock of his carbine as observers watched him calmly pick off two Germans from the vantage point of his destroyer turret. A few prisoners were also taken by "C" company, and, on one occasion, a round fired into a dugout eliminated 10 Krauts from their earthly cares. No tanks were claimed by the tank busters during the day, and the Battalion total stood at 12 panzers, 1 towed 88mm gun, two self-propelled guns, two 47mm guns, and a damaged "Personnel." During the night of May 24th-25th, a counter-attack on our left flank was smashed by the 180th Infantry Regiment with no German penetrations made.

The Anzio Beachhead passed into the annals of American military history as the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron slashed north from Terracina to meet the 36th Engineers along the coast west of Littoria. Comparatively no opposition had been encountered in the junction of VI Corps and the rest of the Fifth Army to solidify the battle front in Italy. "C" company reported a "probable" Mark VI KO'd during the day. Private John William Ryan of "C" company was lightly wounded by shrapnel as he sat blithely on the top of an M-10 on the far side of Highway 7 in the flat ground below Cori.

The attack toward Velletri continued to progress against feeble German resistance and Colonel Howse with his task force on the right flank of CG "B" was reported to have broken into Artena. A Nazi battery of dual purpose 88mm

guns was being worked on by the crews when they were suddenly surprised by "C" company tank destroyers and polished off. "C" also accounted for two more tanks and two vehicles. Lt. Albert L. Shillington's M-10 had dropped into a ditch near Velletri. As communications were out, Lt. Shillington, Private First Class James J. Dasella and Private Lloyd Parks started off to get a T-2 to tow them out of their predicament. An enemy shell landed near them to lightly wound Shillington and injured Parks and Casella. The Battalion was then withdrawn for maintenance and cleanup. During the period of action from May 22nd to May 26th, the following German material was destroyed by our tank busters:

"A" Company - 12 tanks, 3 self-propelled guns, 3 anti-tank guns.

"B" Company - 2 Mark VI's, 4 Mark IV's, 1 tank towing a gun, 1 AT gun.

"C" Company - 1 Mark VI, 1 Mark IV, 8 anti-tank guns, 5 artillery pieces (220mm Howitzers), 2 vehicles, 1 machine gun.

Maintenance work continued and the Battalion Commander reported to General Harmon to discuss the reconnaissance made during the morning. It was learned that an attack was planned for the morning of the 29th and word had it that the 45th Division would follow up the First Armored Division breakthrough and be transported in trucks. 39 M-10's were ready for service that afternoon and "A" company went into an assembly area.

Without companies "A" and "C", the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion was detached from Division Reserve and was attached to Combat Command "A" to maintain contact with the 34th and 45th Divisions. The 701st would also furnish anti-tank protection to CC "A's" right flank. American armor crossed Line "Wolf" and met little resistance. However, one of "A" company's M-10's was hit by Nazi shell fire near Velletri. Sergeant Donald Blank and T/5 Allen K. Smith were lightly wounded. Sergeant Hubert Woosley received a serious head wound from a German air burst. Private Vincent M. DeFabio was seriously wounded in the legs and abdomen by nearby Kraut small arms fire.

The attack continued to go along favorably the following day, but Cpl. Nolan Edward Buhmann was shot through the head by a Nazi sniper as he was perched on the turret of an M-10. Major Frank J. Redding, Battalion Commander, was injured in an automobile accident and was evacuated. Major Doran, thereupon, assumed command of the 701st Tank Destroyers.

As the month ended, First Armored Division was to reshuffle its units in order to place them in their proper positions. The tanks were to start the attack with the infantry following behind. Once the infantry digs in, the tanks would drop back although a number would remain far forward to directly support the doughboys. Colonel Daniels, commander of CC "A", asked whether the 701st could stay in position without additional help as well as submitting requests for defensive fire and giving accurate locations of our elements. The Battalion complied and the end of May saw the companies detached and in position for coming operations.

In addition to the recognition of the fighting performance of the 701st line companies, praise must be given to the splendid work done by S-4 in procuring needed supplies and equipment rapidly and efficiently. Seven M-10's had been requisitioned by S-4 and another was obtained by Maintenance after Captain Laird, Battalion S-4, discovered it marooned on the battlefield. Battalion Maintenance did a very fine job in fixing up and retrieving the necessary destroyers. And finally, the Battalion Transportation Section may well slap itself on the back for the fine work done by the truck drivers in bringing up supplies and ammo through the thick haze of dust which hung over the forward areas. Driving blackout all during the hours of darkness, they brought up the required supplies to the crews of the destroyers in the most advanced positions. Moreover, the Communications Section functioned smoothly with Staff Sergeant Joseph Offner's wire crew working at any hours through the day and night to lay wire and repair breaks, often during periods of intense shelling. In the operations toward the end of the month, Sergeant Sterling K. Smith of "C" Company and T/4 Lonnie Phillips of



"B" company performed commendably their tasks of repair and maintenance of their respective company's radio communications.

From the beginning of the offensive to the end of May, the 701st TD's were officially credited with 22 tanks, 4 self-propelled guns, 1 "Ferdinand", 12 anti-tank guns and a number of other targets. The situation found Allied troops steadily advancing in their offensive to take Rome and "destroy" the German armies in Italy. The Anzio Beachhead was now joined to the rest of the front and it seemed certain that Kesselring's depleted forces could no longer hold the momentum of the Allied drive to Rome for any length of time. Of this, the numerous German prisoners of war seemed aware. They no longer believed in a sweeping victory of the German Reich and its Fuehrer, but they had only been fighting to stave off national disaster and to save their skins - a theory hammered into their skulls time and time again by everyone in the Nazi political and military hierarchy from Adolf and Goebbels down to the lowest field officer in the Wehrmacht. Of the approximate 75 prisoners taken by the line companies of the 701st during this period, many were frightened youngsters of 15 or 16 years of age; many were second line troops from rear echelon outfits who were thrown into the fighting in a last desperate effort to halt the Allied offensive; and all the prisoners of war were hungry and exhausted troops who were quite happy to have it over with.

BATTALION CASUALTIES

1 MAY 1944 - 31 MAY 1944

Killed in Action	-	3
*Severely wounded IA	-	10
Lightly wounded IA	-	6
Lightly injured IA	-	5
TOTAL	-	<u>24</u>

* Two of this number died several days later.

////////////////////

