

THE 728 AMPHIBIAN TRACTOR BATTALION

In order to write a history of a military unit one must go back to the beginning of the ancestor units, particularly if the unit has ancestors. The lineage of the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion goes directly back to the 181st Field Artillery Regiment, the 191st Field Artillery Regiment and the 168th Field Artillery Regiment. The first two were units of the Tennessee National Guard (Army) the third from the Colorado Army National Guard.

The above units were assigned to the 75th Field Artillery Brigade, Camp Forrest Tennessee in February/March 1941. The 75th Brigade trained as a unit until the summer of 1941 (July/Aug). At this time the 75th Provisional Antitank Battalion was formed from the antitank batteries of the 181st and 191st Artillery Regiments with the Headquarters Battery coming from both the above regiments and the 168th Field Artillery Regiment.

The 75th Antitank Battalion was activated August 1, 1941 with Lt. Col. William Q. Howell as Commander.

On July 28, 1941 Special Orders 46 Headquarters, 75th Field Artillery Brigade dated 28 July 1941 assigned the following officers to the 75th Field Artillery Brigade Provisional (GHQ) Antitank Battalion:

Capt. Fred L. Plahte, 168th FA	1st Lt. George T. Walker, 168th FA
Capt. Clarence D. McCurry 191st FA	2d Lt. Walter K. Freeland, 181st FA
1st Lt. Kenneth M. Burke, 168th FA	2d Lt. Robert S. Long, HQ, 75th FA Bde

The 75th AT Battalion participated in maneuvers in Louisiana as part of the Third Provisional GHQ Antitank Group at Camp Claibourne, Louisiana. At the cessation of maneuvers in this area the Battalion marched overland to participate in 1st Army maneuvers in North Carolina. At the conclusion of these maneuvers the Battalion marched back to Camp Forest, Tennessee for rest, recuperation and more training.

The 775th Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated 15 December 1941 at Camp Forest, Tennessee from the 75th Antitank Battalion and attached to the 33rd Division (Infantry). Headquarters Company was composed of selected personnel from the 181st, 191st, and 168th FA Regiments. Reconnaissance Company and part of Company B came from Btrys B & H, 191st FA; Company A came from Battery D, 181st FA and Company C from Battery H, 181st FA.

On 6 Feb 1942 Lt. Col. Howell was relieved of Command by the Second Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Ben Lear and was replaced by Lt. Col. Frederic B. Mann of Mamouth, Illinois. Colonel Mann was assigned from the 33rd Division Artillery.

The first selectees were received by the Battalion on 25 March 1942. All were from Fort Hayes, Ohio.

Cadre was furnished for the activation of the 810 Tank Destroyer Battalion in March 1942, 5 officers and 76 enlisted men. Again in April, 1942, 2 officers and 20 enlisted men furnished for cadre for 706 Tank Destroyer Battalion, Battalion was attached to 14th FA Bde April, 1942. In July, 1942, Battalion attached to 11th Detachment Special Troops, Second U.S. Army.

The Battalion moved from Camp Forest, Tennessee to Camp Hood, Texas 30 August 1942 and was attached to 1st Tank Destroyer Group.

In September, 1942 one officer/18 enlisted furnished as cadre to Headquarters, Headquarters Company, 8th Tank Destroyer Group. Several attachments followed: Sept. 1942 Attached to 2d TD Group
Sept. 1942 Attached to 4th TD Group
November 1942 Attached to 7th TD Group

In November, 1942 the Battalion moved from Camp Hood, Texas to Camp Bowie, Texas, Brownwood, Texas. After a brief stay here, the Battalion on, November 26, 1942 received 200 selectees from Camp Shelby, MS. Then on December 7, 1942 moved to Camp Young, California and was attached to Fourth Armored Corps. (Indio CA) It was here one man was tried by a General Court Martial for the murder of another man. January, 1943 attached to 6th TD Group. Feb 13/Mar 5, 1943 participated desert maneuvers, moving northward across the desert. Feb. 1943 received 105 selectees from Fort Sill, OK. 6 March 1943 moved to Ibis, CA, 17 miles west of Needles where a tent camp was built. And in April, 1943 the Battalion was attached to 4th Armored Division.

May 12, 1943 Battalion moved to Camp Cooke, Lompoc, CA and attached to 2d Headquarters Special Troops, 2d Armored Corps. During this time from Camp Forest, Tennessee to Camp Cooke, CA 125 enlisted personnel were sent to officer candidate schools.

A May, 1943 roster lists the following officers:

Battalion Commander	Lt.Col. Frederic B. Mann
Executive Officer	Major William B. Hardin
Adjutant	Captain Walter K. Fineland
Asst. Adjutant/Per O	2d Lt. Douglas
S2	2d Lt. Lane
S3	Captain Robert B. Trivett
S4	1st Lt. Steve Wheeler
Communications Officer	Lt. Shapiro
Motor Officer	Lt. Garrett
Special Service Officer	Lt. Fox
P&D Officer	Lt. Stineman
Reconnaissance Co Cdr	Capt. Thomas Murrell
Executive O	1st Lt. Gordon Totten
1st Reconnaissance	1st Lt. Miller
2d Reconnaissance	1st Lt. Spaulding
3d Reconnaissance	1st Lt. Eiselstein
Medical Detach. Cdr	Capt. John Garner
Asst. Surgeon/Dental O	1st Lt. Miller

In trying to put a document such as this together one must use any and all material that is available. The following is a letter or diary written by Roderich Moreheart, a T5 tractor driver in Company A to an unknown recipient. However, it is an interesting first hand account of events in his life and throws some light on what the Battalion was doing from the period 10 May 1943 to 4 December 1945. The following is in Moreheart's own words:

"Leave Camp Ibis, CA May 10, 1943. Bivouacked there three days in tents. Entrained May 12 for Camp Cooke, CA Drew new equipment, including T70 Destroyers. Intensive training took place here. Sent out one Provisional Company here. These men mostly went to Europe. A few went to Camp White (Oregon). Some to armored infantry, 6th Armored Division. Gave two furloughs here. The last furlough was from Cooke. Battalion turned in equipment in March, 1944 and entrained for East Garrison, Fort Ord, CA. The Battalion was deactivated here and worked down to about 65 men per company, headquarters, A and B. The surplus going to start new amphibian battalions, and some went to existing battalions. This was the beginning of the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion. After a month or so at East Garrison, we moved to Fort Ord and went into Amphibian training. At the end of the training, we helped stage the first water parade of Amphibians. We also took part in the first group inspection and parade of Amphibians. Here the Amphibian song had its preview, and I've never heard it since. Near the end of September we entrained for Fort Lawton, Washington. Here we spent a few days eating good food and waiting for our ship, The Cape Perpetua. We loaded and set sail August 6, 1944. A blimp escorted us one hundred miles to sea. After an uneventful trip at sea, we arrived August 14 in Hawaii. Here we saw Pearl Harbor and into camp at Koko Head. We were here 27 days, getting our new tractors ready for action.

This included a dry run on Maui. Passes were given when our work was under control. On to Honolulu.

On September 10, 1944, we again put to sea, this time in LST's. Ours was 1013, and in convoy, bound for a target that didn't materialize. We put in at Enewietok Island. Very few went ashore, but we did have a visitor aboard, a former Captain in the 775. But I do not recall his name. Crossed the Equator on October 1, 1944. I was 39 years old. All hands were initiated into the Solemn Mysteries of the Ancient Order of the Deep. We must have arrived at Manus Island on the 8th of October for we were here two days and everyone went ashore. Not much here to see but sand and G.I.s.

We left here October 10th in full battle array. The largest convoy to sail those seas till that time. On the morning of October 20th, we hit the target at 8:30 a.m. Leyte PI. We hauled the Combat Teams of the 96th Division to their first battle on shore. It was ours too. Here we gained our first battle star. Also the assault arrowhead. We also received the Philippine Ribbon with two stars from the President of the Island. We were 8th Army veterans when we finished the campaign (Editor's note: it was 6th U.S. Army). March 13-19, 1945 we again had dry runs. This time we hit Leyte twice again. March 21 we again put to sea, Task Force 38. This time we were 10th Army and again hauling the 96th Division. On Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, the sea was like a mill pond, but the Peace of Easter was broken as Task Force 38 gave us the greatest cover of fire power ever given an assault force. The Navy and Marines had their planes over the Island too. About a month later we crossed the island and went to the front with the 7th Division. We stayed on the east shore until the island was secure.

The battalion made several more landings on islands around Okinawa. We scrapped our weary tractors here and loaded aboard LST's again. This time the entire Company A was together again. Again I was aboard the 1013. Old friendships were renewed. This was July 18th. On this trip we were under submarine attack. They hit our Destroyer escort. But fortunately, it didn't sink, although several aboard were casualties. The attackers were eliminated. On July 31, we arrived at Mindora, PI. Here we were to draw new tractors and winter clothing and gear, for we were to land on the Plains of Tokio in January, 1946, but V.J. Day came first. After a month we took over the duties of Military Police, Island Command.

Here I left the 728 in company of Herb Adams of London, Ohio, State Side Bound. We left Mindora September 26 on a liberty ship, The Binger Hermann. We arrived at Leyte, PI at the 28th Replacement Depot, September 29. Left Leyte after 43 days of sleeping and loafing, on November 26. We boarded the Navy ship Afoundria, arriving at San Pedro, CA. Did the USA ever look good! Arrived at Camp Anza, CA on November 27. Left by Sante Fe pullmans November 29. Arrived at Camp Atterbury, IN December 2, 1945. Discharged December 4, 1945. The battalion all arrived home in December or early January, most of them coming with the 7th Division."

Roderick F. Morehart, 35291308
March 25, 1942-December 4, 1945
T5-Tractor 46 Company A

The above letter, though inaccurate in some spots, is a pretty good account of the activities of the 775th TD Battalion and the 728th Am Trac Battalion from a man who was in a unit where "the rubber hits the road." I am grateful to Morehart for this record.

At this point I am including Captain Denny K. Farnsworth's daily calendar. This chronicle covers the period 1 January 1945 thru 31 December 1945. This is a day by day account of activities from Leyte thru Okinawa into demobilization of his actions as a company commander and parallels the actions of the battalion and dispels any doubts on dates and events.

1945

Monday, January 1 - on Leyte Island

Wednesday, March 21--Loaded on LST #70 for new invasion. Have spent from 1 Oct 1944 to this date in Philippines. Got wounded 27 Nov 1945.

Thursday, March 22 thru Saturday, March 24
Aboard LST 70--still in harbor.

Sunday, March 25--Left Philippine Islands today for Okinawa Islands--350 miles from Japan.

March 26 thru Saturday, March 31

We hit the beach at 0830 in the a.m. Nice Easter for the Japs.

Sunday, April 1

Landed safely at 1050. Reported to White 3 Beach as liaison officer to the Beach Master.

Monday, April 2

Beach, air raids.

Tuesday, April 3

Beach White 3, air raid

Wednesday, April 4

Beach White 3, air raid

Thursday, April 5

Reported back to battalion.

Air raid--two men wounded by shrapnel.

Friday, April 6

Aboard LST 918 for another landing. Same LST I came from Hawaii to Leyte on.

Air raid.

Saturday, April 7 thru April 10

Enroute to Tsugen Jima

Wednesday, April 11

Landed on Tsugen Jima--carried in the 77th Division (1 Bn)

Very rough going. Received a lot of fire from the beach and on inland. No casualties in this battalion but the

780 Amphibian Tank Battalion got hell shot out of them--hit by 5 wide shells.

Lt. Ferrero wounded in left arm. Severed a nerve so he won't be able to use his arm for a year or more.

Thursday, April 12

Back aboard--enroute back to Okinawa. Air raid.

Friday, April 13

Unloaded, started to set up camp.

Air raids--one plane shot down after dark.

Saturday, April 14

Still trying to fix up the camp.

Air raid.

Shortage of lumber makes it hard to build a kitchen. Shortage of water.

Sunday, April 15

This morning at 0406 the Japs hit us with an air raid-- Anderson, Rider, Elskee killed instantly. 10 EM, 2 officers wounded--5 in "A" Company. Melonowski died later. Parker lost his right leg. Wendalls lost a foot and arm. Lewandowski lost all his buttocks but they will be able to graft on more flesh.

Monday, April 16

All men evacuated today, but Lt. Russell--most of the men were very seriously wounded so we will probably lose some more.

Tuesday, April 17

Air raid--nothing new. Patrols to the east--found big hill fixed up with fortification we will use that as MLR in case of a serious counter attack.

Wednesday, April 18

Air raids day and night--we seem to be on the milk run.

Thursday, April 19

Still getting air raids--red alert last until 10:30 p.m.

Friday, April 20

Wow! The airport sure caught it last night. We didn't get to bed until after 0200. What a night and cold too. Lt. Russell returned for duty.

Saturday, April 21

Only one plane got thru and dropped three bombs on the north airfield--lots of planes around the island and we were up until 0230. 90 mm AA kept them from coming in. I think maybe it was just for nuisance value. Points for rotation came out today.

Sunday, April 22

Dug a foxhole today. The battalion had to go out and take back the small island we took the other day (Tsugen Jima). Someone overlooked an artillery piece and it was shelling this island (Okinawa). "B" Company got the assignment with one company of Amphibian Tanks attached.

Monday, April 23

Not many men left in the company today--all of them had guard last night so most of them are either sleeping or improving their fox holes--that includes yours truly.

Tuesday, April 24

Rained most of the day. No air raids at all.

Wednesday, April 25

No air raid last night. Went back to Tsugen Jima and finished blowing it up--1 PW killed and 59 civilians brought back. 300 pounds of explosive used--only a few of the caves were sealed.

Thursday, April 26

Short air raid last night. They shelled the airfield north of us. The Jap shells went right over us--result, fox holes for everyone as we didn't know when they might get a short round.

April 27

Still getting air raids as well as artillery from the Japs.
Fire on the airfield last night.

Saturday, April 28

Still more air raids--getting so I can get in my foxhole from the bed without ever waking up.

Sunday, April 29

We were on the alert all day. Did get a haircut but a shell landed about 200 yards from here and Williams very near whacked off an ear.

Monday, April 30

Rain in the air--went on patrol.

Tuesday, May 1

Rain all day, very muddy.

Wednesday, May 2

Wow! Slept all night in bed for a change. The low ceiling and rain kept the Nips at home. A Jap infiltrated in and threw something at our tent. The guards ran him off--couldn't shoot for fear of our own troops getting hit.

Thursday, May 3

Another dreary day in the A.M. The usual air raid with shelling the airport to the north.

Friday, May 4

Nothing new--still spending the night in the foxhole.

Saturday, May 5

Much air activity last night. 206 Jap planes shot down by the Marines since April 7.

Sunday, May 6--Mothers' Day

Monday, May 7

Rain, no air raid.

Tuesday, May 8

Rained last night, no air raid. First show on this island tonight "Three Men in White."

Wednesday, May 9

Another night with no air raid, a good night's sleep.

Thursday, May 10

Caught hell last night--planes and so much artillery I didn't get to sleep until 0530 and up at 0700--what a business. Tried to have a show tonight but the air raid stopped it first and then a condensor burned out on the projector so we only saw part of "Doughgirls." Enemy planes came over very high this A.M. about 0300--looked like a transport--a fighter came over about 0500--no damage.

Friday, May 11

This day starts fine. Red alert at 0830--Sky is overcast so maybe we will get some peace today and a good nights sleep.

Saturday, May 12

No change--no air raid last night.

Sunday, May 13

Planes came over all day today.

Monday, May 14

Rain today. Hope it rains all night.

Tuesday, May 15

Rain last night. Didn't do much today but found out I could get films developed and enlarged here. Helge (Pearson?) has made his own enlarger.

Wednesday, May 16

Wow! Last night was bad. They really plastered us last night.

Thursday, May 17

More raids last night. Was up most of the night. Today, we start a 30-day rehabilitation period for another operation, supposed to get all new equipment but we are fixing up the old wrecks instead. We may have to use them on two more operations.

Friday, May 18

One raid or rather alert all night long--last one at 0530--will take Major Hardin (EXO) to TATC this afternoon.

Saturday, May 19

More than 45 planes tried to come in last night--4 made it. Just saw part of the show as the alert lasted until 1130 p.m. (2330) Lots of details today--tentage is in but we have to locate it. Break camp and move at 0545. Rain.

Sunday, May 20

Check atabrine roster and comply with order on taking. Big bombing last night. Rain. Moved out at 0545 for Owkinawa--2500 yards in rear of line, prepare for beach defense. Very noisy spot--lots of mosquitos and artillery fire from both sides going over our head. M/G fire heard very plainly.

Monday, May 21

At 0550 several Jap shells landed in area. No damage, men are well. Finished a goal kitchen today. The flies are terrific in this area. Sugar cane and dead bodies of animals are breeding them by the millions. We are burying everything we find but have to be careful moving around as there are mines, booby traps and snipers all over the area.

Tuesday, May 22

Still more rain. Killed two Japs right next to the orderly room, they were in a cane patch.

Wednesday, May 23

Still raining and the artillery keeps hovering away until it seems my head will drop off. Still killing Japs around here in the cane patches.

Thursday, May 24

Allen Stineman (LT) and Ridgley were wounded by hand grenades thrown by Jap infiltrators this A.M. about 0530--not serious--lots of Jap artillery fell in the area all night. Went to the 71st hospital to have a tooth pulled.

Friday, May 25

Another bad night. Air raids on both sides of the island. Artillery fire all night. Jap artillery and motor fire on the beach. 5 men are casualties from "B" Co and a boy from "A" went crazy--hope the old man is satisfied now. He volunteered for this job. This morning at 0830 two Jap planes attacked the ships in the east harbor and again at 0920. The last one dropped 6 bombs but missed with all of them. These grand seats are O.K. some time. Putnam killed, Gosnell, Sliger, Jessee King and Kown? were wounded by a mine today. Putnam was trying to remove it so they could bring in a tractor. Very heavy artillery fire.

Saturday, May 26

Still raining to beat hell--very muddy and all the foxholes are full--what a mess!

Artillery fired all night and have been at it all day, started a heavy barrage at 1630. I don't see how the Japs can take much more. It has rained all day and the mud is so bad that we have to bring rations and water in by hand.

Sunday, May 27

Last night we had artillery fire in the area at 2330. About 12 rounds, some air bursts and several duds. Today is gloomy and rainy. Think we will be pulling out in about a week. Hope so, I was never cut out to be an infantryman. Rained all day.

Monday, May 28

Rained hard all night as well--some infiltration--if we don't get some dry weather soon, we won't be able to even walk.

Tuesday, May 29

Still lots of rain. We keep moving up with the infantry and sometimes even ahead of it.

Wednesday, May 30

Still raining, things are moving very slowly now due to the deep mud,

Thursday, May 31

Still it rains, this place is a quadmire, Nothing doing much but artillery.

Friday, June 1

The weather broke and it has started to dry out. We are without water or rations as the roads are impossible. Will hope for a dry day tomorrow. The infantry went ahead today and made good progress.

Saturday, June 2

Still more rain and no sign of a let up. No air raids are some compensation for all this bad weather.

Sunday, June 3

Heavy rain all day--the roads are impossible now.

Monday, June 4

The roads are impassable but Kirk walked about 12 miles to get the mail in to us. Supposed to be a big wind and rain tonight. We have had plenty of rain all day long.

Tuesday, June 5

Another rainy day. The island is about secure--the 7th Division is to the southern end of the island and we have stretched our left flank position all that safety will allow--hear that and our tank company may move in with us--Curly will be unhappy about that. (COL Mann)

Wednesday, June 6

Last night there were Japs across the road so as a result no sleep until after 0300, flares and firing until that time. The sun came out today and dried things off some.

Thursday, June 7

Last night was very quiet--the sun out again today--may move tomorrow.

Friday, June 8

Very quiet last night. Two air raids but on southend of island. We are spread out so bad we might as well not have guards.

Saturday, June 9

Quiet last night. Sun shined all day and things are drying out fairly well. Heavy air attacks off the island tonight.

Sunday, June 10

Up at 0500 as they (Japs) tried to come in over the reef at that time several more good Japs have gone to join their ancestors--.50 cal. slugs sure tear them up, they seem to explode wherever one gets it.

Monday, June 11

No air raid last night. Shot a Jap this morning in the field just south of Ney C.P. about 150 yards.

Tuesday, June 12

Had driver with brass.

Wednesday, June 13

Very quiet night--very good sleep but woke up with hangover. Speedy (Waddel) picked me up at 0900 and we flew up to Ie Shima and then around the area and island.

Thursday, June 14

Killed another Jap this morning out ride the tank ditch--they are sneaking in for food--this one had two hand grenades but no other arms. Seems like every morning at 0500 the shooting starts.

Friday, June 15

Up at 0500--infiltration again--this time two got away in the poor light. Made a cabinet for my radio--my trunk came and my blouse is ruined. The radio cabinet was smashed and all the clothing soaked and moldy as hell.

Saturday, June 16

Inspection of records by XXIV Corps. Inspector arrived at 1130. Air raid last night.

Sunday, June 17

Sat on my can all day and took a sun bath.

Monday, June 18

Planes came over last night and infiltrators bothered all night--killed two this A.M. in the tank ditch.

Tuesday, June 19

Fairly quiet last night. Some firing at infiltrators in our area--lots of mail today. Tomorrow the Japs are supposed to hit us with two divisions I wonder?

Wednesday, June 20

Well, the big attack didn't come off as the Japs promised. They are about licked.

Thursday, June 21

The island declared secure today. Sgt, Durkop, Sgt. Breeding, Sgt. Hutson captured 2 Japs and killed one.

Friday, June 22

They bombed the hell out of Yontan (airfield) last night. Lots of planes came in this morning--28 were shot down.

Saturday, June 23

Some infiltrators but nothing otherwise.

Sunday, June 24

Same as Saturday.

Monday, June 25

Packing up to move again.

Tuesday, June 26

Still packing and waiting. Some infiltration of Japs last night.

Wednesday, June 27

Moved today to an area near the sawmill at Yonabaru--the CB's are sure nervous--they fired all night. Very hot today.

Thursday, June 28

Another hot day--not much sleep last night. I guess the infantry has rounded most of them up. The colonel came in and changed his mind again on what he wants to live in--sure makes it tough on the EM.

Saturday, June 30

Camp duties--first show in the new area.

Sunday, July 1--Tuesday, July 3

Camp duties--nothing new.

Wednesday, July 4

Ordnance inspection--turned in all tractors.

Thursday, 5 July

Looks like we ship out on the 10th. Burned my leg--very painful.

Friday, July 6

Air raid last night. Spent the day banding boxes getting ready to ship out. My leg has 2d degree burn, impossible to walk without a lot of pain. "Winged Victory" for the show tonight--very good I hear.

Saturday, July 7

Very quiet last night. Some flares and a little firing of small arms nothing close. Start hauling boxes to the ships for loading--soon we move. Bill (Maj Hardin) is going to see about our locker fund.

Sunday, July 8

Visited a friend. Got a picture of General Stillwell. Leg still sore and badly blistered.

Monday, July 9

Had red alert at 2000 for about 20 minutes tonight. Still some firing at night and a few Nips are killed every day.

Tuesday, July 10

We were supposed to leave today but looks like we will be here for another week at least.

Wednesday, July 11--Saturday, July 14

Usual duties, waiting for ship.

Sunday, July 15

We were alerted this A.M. at 0800. But no ship yet.

Tuesday, July 17

Mosquitos were bad last night. We had breakfast in our own kitchen, lunch with "A" Company--very lousy too. Loaded aboard LST 739 at 1600--a hell ship from the looks of things.

Wednesday, July 18

Still in the harbor, will pull out at 1600 to hit the open sea as a typhoon is coming. Very little water aboard and the ship is calling for all kinds of details.

Thursday, July 19

Today has been very rough--last night the seas started running and we thought this thing would fall apart--most of the men are seasick but I have been lucky so far.

We are in dangerous waters without an escort. 90 miles east of Okinawa--poor navigation resulted in us hitting the northend of the island coming in so we had an extra 60 miles south to travel to Yonabaru.

Friday, July 20

Good nights sleep. Took some sun today and have a good tan started. The ship just lays in port.

Saturday, July 21

Today I saw George Grange--the Paymaster on LST 918. We took on 400 tons of oil and 400 tons of water. Guess we are really going after all. Saw picture tonight on the tank deck.

Sunday, July 22

This date seems to be the date I leave places. A year ago I left Mona (Mrs. Farnsworth) at Fort Ord, California. Good weather so far and the food is good. We had a fresh water shower today.

Monday, July 23

Sleeping on deck is sure fine. The weather holds good and the sea is calm. Makes a nice trip. Built a dock chair so now I can take the sun in comfort.

Today was very quiet until we ran into a pack of subs. They sank the DE (USS Humbolt) and now we have no air radar. 113 killed. The wounded are to be transferred to this ship. One torpedo went 10 feet astern of this ship and a small sub tried to ram us but thanks to the shallow draft and round bottom it slid right under just scraping the bottom of the LST.

Wednesday, July 25

The wounded came aboard this A.M. What a pitiful sight. Legs off, toes off, hands blown off. I hope I never see anything like this again. Two of the boys died and they buried them at sea at 1400 today. We should be in Leyte Friday and put the rest of them in a hospital,

Thursday, July 26

Quiet night last night. Had another burial at sea 1115 today. Tomorrow we should be in Leyte and transfer the wounded.

Friday, July 27

Pulled into Leyte harbor and transferred the wounded. The commander has gone in for orders. We may stay here two days. If we do will hit to F.O.C. (Fleet Officers Club).

Saturday, July-28

Saw two pictures last night. We were supposed to leave here today but late this afternoon were ordered to leave at 0800. That makes another Sunday move for us. Word came too late to get in the club so no cold drinks for us.

Sunday, July 29

Left Leyte harbor at 0800 for Mindora. Will arrive there Tuesday at 1400 if we are on schedule. Very pretty trip in store for us I hear. Lots of islands enroute and we sail close to them. Lots of fish, saw a whale on either side of the ship.

Monday, July 30

Very calm weather. Rained some in the A.M. but the rest of the day was nice. Tomorrow we will arrive at our new station.

Tuesday, July 31

Should arrive Mindora at 1400. Arrived at 0930 didn't start unloading until evening so we had to work all night. The new area is on the beach and will be O.K. when we fix it up.

Wednesday, August 1

Moved to new area and started setting up camp. This place has no shade but I believe we can make it livable.

Thursday, August 2

Start drawing majors pay--should have in June but couldn't count service before I was 18.

Friday, August 3--Saturday, August 14

Setting up new camp site.

Sunday, August 5--Monday, August 6
Went to Manila and back.

Tuesday, August 7
Still setting up camp.

Wednesday, August 18
COL Mann (Bn Cdr) flew to China with the Navy today. One of the planes in his flight had a motor shot out so his plane escorted it to a base south of Borneo. He won't be back for a day or so.

Thursday, August 9
Russia declared war on Japan according to the news this morning. That's even better news than when Germany surrendered.

Friday, August 10
Tonight Japan offered to surrender if they could keep the Emperor in office. Quite a celebration here. Rockets by the Navy were very pretty.

Saturday, August 11--August 14
Waiting for word of Japan surrender.

Wednesday, August 15
REDLETTER DAY!!! 0800--News came that Japan had surrendered unconditionally. The regular newscast was interrupted for this announcement. Now we can really start wondering and worrying as to whether we are going to be troop of occupation or will we get to go home. O.D. today.

Thursday, August 16--Saturday, August 18.
Nothing.

Sunday, August 19
Prepare for showdown inspection. Warn supply sergeant about property accountability.

Monday, August 20--Wednesday, August 22
Nothing.

Thursday, August 23
May get to go home on TD & RR for 45 days. The orders are at Division now.

Friday, August 24--Monday, August 27
Nothing.

Tuesday, August 28
One company is out on MP duty--Captain Mosely is assistant Provost Marshal. One platoon of "B" is guarding QM dumps.

Wednesday, August 29
We lose Hutson, Shoemaker, and Nichols to the Base Engineer and 5 mechanics, a dispatcher to 1st Troops, also Slawson to Engineer.
Division has OK'd the 45 days TD and RR so we should know in a few days.

Thursday, August 30

Nothing new. Weather hot and humid. Still no word on the orders for going to the states.

Friday, August 31--Sunday, September 2

Nothing.

Tuesday, September 11

Today info came in--orders now can be written sending me home.

Wednesday, September 12

Today is even better. Two LCI's came in and it looks like I'll be on one of them to start on my way home.

Thursday, September 13

13TD Group SFAFUED--The deal and the LCI left at 1240 without me. Will have to wait until Saturday now to leave. Have all property and funds turned over to Lt. Spalding. Nothing to do now but sit and wait for the boat.

Friday, September 14

Still waiting for a boat.

Saturday, September 15--Wednesday, September 19

Still waiting--boat in tomorrow.

Thursday, September 26

Left Mindora 1445 on LCI 701. Very nice skipper and extra nice quarters. Food very good. The only thing lacking is good weather. Captain Farnsworth's calendar continues but it pertains only to his getting home to Denver. He arrived in Denver on October 16, 1945.

I have done very little editing of this account and have identified certain things in parenthesis. The words are his own and the only things left out were purely personal.

I thank him for this day to day account of the 728 Amphibian Tractor Battalion on Okinawa.

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The following information is a chronology of historical data of the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion and its predecessor the 775th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The information and dates were obtained from official documents and is accurate as to dates and places.

The 775th TD Bn is designated as a National Guard unit and allotted to the State of Tennessee, per NGB GO dtd 21 Feb 1942. The 775th TD Bn H (SP) is constituted and will be activated (less Co C), effective December 15, 1941, with permanent station at Camp Forest, Tennessee. Source unit 75th FA Bde AG 320.2 (1117-41) MR-M-C December 3, 1941.

The 775th TD Bn H is activated (less Co C) December 16, 1941 at Camp Forest, Tennessee--per MR Card dated December 16, 1941. For History see AG 421-775th TD Bn (2-21-42, 2d Ind dated March 13, 1942).

775th TD Bn is to transfer from Camp Forest, Tennessee to Camp Hood, Texas for a temporary change of station to arrive September 4, 1942--per 3/0.5/(TD) (R)-GEGCT (8-19-42) dated August 19, 1942 (R).

Departed Camp Forest, Tennessee August 30, 1942--per letter HQ Camp Forest, Tennessee dated August 30, 1942.

775th TD Bn closed in Camp Hood, Texas, September 2, 1942--per Radio AG 370.5 (9-4-42) MS from Camp Hood, Texas dated September 4, 1942 (R). The above letter is restricted--per 320.2/9 (Tk Destroyer) (R) GNGCT (9-4-42) dated October 20, 1942.

775th TD Bn will transfer from Camp Hood, Texas to Camp Bowie, Texas at the earliest practical date (R) after temporary change of station--per 370.5/79 (TD) (R)-GNGCT (11-11-42) dated November 11, 1942 (R).

775th TD Bn departed Camp Bowie, Texas December 4, 1942 for Camp Young, California. Expected date of arrival December 8, 1942--per Radiogram from Camp Bowie, Texas dated December 5, 1942 (R).

775th TD Bn departed Camp Hood, Texas November 19, 1942 and arrived Camp Bowie, Texas November 19, 1942 for temporary change of station--per par 10 SO #246, HQ TDC Camp Hood, Texas--per MR Card from Camp Hood, Texas, dated November 19, 1942.

775th TD Bn arrived at Camp Young, California December 7, 1942 for permanent change of station--per para 16, SO 260, HQ RDC, Camp Hood, Texas--per MR card from Camp Young, California, dated December 7, 1942.

775th TD Bn is attached to 6th TD Group, per GO 5, HQ Desert Training Center, Camp Young, California, dated January 12, 1943.

775th TD Bn will depart Camp Bowie, Texas, December 3, 1942 for Camp Young, California, on a permanent change of station and upon arrival is relieved from existing assignment and is assigned to Desert Training Center--per 370.5/81 (TD) (R)-GNGCT (11-28-42) dated 28 November, 1942.

775th TD Bn will move from DTC Camp Young, California to Camp Cooke, California. Movement will coordinate with movement of 607th TD Bn, so that both will use the same trans; this is a permanent change of station. Upon arrival unit is relieved from assignment to DTC and is assigned to II Armored Corps--per 370.5 (TD Units) (R)-GNCT (5-5-43) dated 1943 (R).

775th TD Bn will be reorganized at the earliest practical date in accordance with T/O 18/25 January 27, 1943--per 371/7 (TD Units) (R) GNGCT (5-8-43) May 8, 1943 (R). Reorganization completed May 31, 1943--per HQ 775th TD Bn, Camp Cooke, California dated 3-13-43.

775th TD Bn departed Camp Young, California May 12, 1943 and arrived at Camp Cooke, California on 13 May 1943--per Troop Movement Table, dated May 13, 1943 (S).

775th TD Bn is relieved from assignment to XVIII Corps and assigned to 4th Army effective midnight 31 Oct--1 Nov 43--per 322/1 (4th Army (C) (25 Oct 43) GNGCT 25 October 1943 (C).

Effective 15 January 1944, 775th TD Bn is relieved from assignment to Fourth Army and assigned to III Corps--per 322/1 (III Corps) (C) (14 Jan 44) GNGCT, 14 January 1944 (C).

775th TD Bn will move from Camp Cooke, California, to Fort Ord, California at the earliest date for a permanent change of station. Assigned to III Corps (Remains)--per 370.5/344 (R) (23 March 44) GNGCT, 23 March 1944 (R).

775th Tank Destroyer Battalion is converted to the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion and will be organized at the earliest practical date in accordance with Tentative T/O 17-125, 1 Jan 44. When T/O & E is FINALLY PUBLISHED will govern, and this unit will be reorganized in accordance therewith without further instruction T/O PUBLISHED AND DATED. Assigned to III Corps--Due to reorganization Reconnaissance Co, will be absorbed into the battalion--per AG 322 (23 March 44) CB-I-GNGOT-M, 28 Mar 1944 (R).

775th TD Bn departed Camp Cooke, California 2 April 1944--per Radiogram from Camp Cooke, California (R).

775th TD Bn arrived Fort Ord, California, 2 April 1944--per Radiogram from Fort Ord, California, 2 April 1944 (R).

775th TD Bn was reorganized effective 15 April, 1944--per HQ III Corps, Presidio of Monterey, California, 26 April 1944.

728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion is reorganized effective 12 June 1944 in accordance with T/O&E 17-125 (29 April 44). Company C is absorbed upon reorganization of 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion pursuant to authority contained in AGF 320.3/36 (R) (11 Oct 43) GNGCT dtd 11 Oct 43--per HQs III Corps, Office of CG, Presidio of Monterey, California 320.2 GNNAG 23 June 44 (R).

728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion will move to the Seattle Port of Embarkation for further movement by water transportation per 370.5 (4 Jul 44) OB-S-X-M dtd 5 Jul 44 (C).

728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion departed Fort Ord, California 22 July 44 and arrived SPE 24 Jul 44--per Troop Movement Table on 25 Jul 44.

728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion departed Seattle P/E aboard PERPETUA 7 Aug 44 and arrived Hawaii 14 Aug 44--per Departure and arrival Sheet dtd 22 Aug 44.

728th is assigned to CPBC--per station list USAF Central Pacific Area dtd 15 Aug 44.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn is stationed at Dulag, PI per Ch #14 HQ Adv UASFFE APO 501 dtd 19 Nov 44.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn is relieved from assignment to the CPEC and is assigned to 10th Army--per SO 20 HQs POA AOP 958, dtd 10 Feb 45.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn is assigned Ship #941118-CG under TO&E 17-125 (18 Off, 2 WO, 448 EM)--per HQs XXIV Corps, APO 238, dtd 15 Mar 45.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn is assigned 8th Army effective upon arrival in SWPA--per AG 370.4 (15 Jul 45) Geb Hq USA Pac dtd 16 Jul 45.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn is relieved from assignment 10th Army effective upon arrival in SWPA--per AMS Special Orders 13, HQ USAF Middle Pacific dtd 14 Jul 45.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn departed for AFPAC effective 18 Aug 45--per USAF Middle Pacific dtd 24 Aug 45--UM-IN 24731 (25 Aug 45).

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn is entitled to battle honors for participation in RYUKUS Campaign--per GO 58, HQs USAFMP dtd 18 Oct 45.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn will be moved from Okinawa to a port in Continental US on transportation....ROBIN LANCASTER--per ltr 370.5 (AIC) HQs Okinawa Base Command dtd 27 Nov 45.

728th Amphibian Tractor Bn will be inactivated at the earliest practicable date--per radio--effective 15 Dec 45 at Luzon--per radio from AFPAC Manila SO 373 HQ UASF Western Pacific dtd 8 Dec 45.

The following was found in the USA in World War II history:

LEYTE: The Return to the Philippines:

FIRST JAPANESE EFFORT

In the meantime the first phase of the Japanese plan to regain the initiative had begun. At 0245 on 27 November, three enemy air transports with lights on flew over Leyte Gulf at an altitude of about fifty feet. Ten minutes later one of these aircraft crash-landed in the water about twenty-five yards offshore in the area of the 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, which was about two miles south of Rizal and about three miles north of Tarragona.

A guard from the battalion, assuming the plane to be friendly, approached it and climbed on the wing to offer assistance. The Japanese emerged from the plane and threw grenades at the guard. The men of the tractor battalion, hearing the noise, came on and killed two Japanese with small arms fire. Three others, however, escaped and reached a swamp west of the landing point.

One of the other two planes (Japanese) crash-landed on the Buri airstrip and all its occupants were killed. The remaining plane crashed landed near the Bito River, north of Abuyog. Opposite, across the river, elements of the 11th Airborne Division were encamped, With the exception of one soldier, who was killed at dawn, all of the Japanese in this plane escaped. The 728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion found many demolition charges in the abandoned plane. In view of this discovery, and the fact that the enemy made no attempt to follow up the landing by an airborne attack in force, the Americans concluded that the Japanese were on a suicide mission of demolition and destruction in the Dulag and Burauen airfield areas...728th Amphibian Tractor Battalion Unit Rpt 30, 27 Nov 44, and 20th Armored Gp Unit Rpt 5, in 20th Armored Gp Opns Rpr Leyte.

In the US Army in World War II History, The War in the Pacific,

OKINAWA; The Last Battle, I could find very little information concerning the action of the 728th Tractor Battalion except the XXIV Corps Assignment of Shipping Charts for the assault of Okinawa. Headquarters 728th was on LST 612 and went ashore in the 4th Wave, on White Beach. Companies are not identified but the Battalion carried elements of the 96th Division ashore on White Beaches 1, 2, & 3, and Brown Beach 3. The 381st Regt 96 Div on White 1, 2, & 3, and 2d Bn, 383d Regt, 96th Div on Brown 3.

The following is an account of an action by elements of the 728th AmTrac Bn during the Okinawa campaign. This information was taken from the After Action Report of the 20th Armored Group to which the 728th Am Trac Bn was assigned.

a. TSUGEN JIMA:

Although an assault landing had already been made on the island of TSUGEN JIMA, and friendly troops withdrawn from the island, reports were still reaching headquarters XXIV Corps in mid-April that the enemy was present there. Information came primarily from pilots who were flying over the island, so no definite estimates of the size of the enemy group were available, although it was believed to be fairly small. Also, there were some unfounded report that artillery fire was being directed on the main island of OKINAWA from TSUGEN some 4500 yards off the tip of KATCHIN HANTO, the large peninsula on the central east coast of OKINAWA. The Commanding General XXIV Corps, ordering that the island be reconnoitered by troops on foot, assigned the mission by verbal order to the Commanding Officer 20th Armored Group the morning of 22 April 1945.

By nightfall 22 April, plans were drawn, orders issued, beaches for loading out and landing were selected, and a task force briefed. The Task Force under command of the Group Commander, Colonel Walter A. Jensen (later Major General), consisted of the following elements:

Command Section from Group Headquarters
150 men-Company B, 728th Amph Trac Bn (dismounted)
17 LVTs-Company B, 728th Amph Trac Bn
Company B, 780th Amph Tank Bn
Air Liaison Party

A bivouac area was selected near the eastern end of the KATCHIN peninsula the night of 22 April where the small task force assembled and made ready for its shore to shore operation the following morning.

According to plan, tractors and men moved to the rendezvous area 1000 yards off the landing beach the morning of 23 April and formed waves. Amphibian tanks formed the first wave and provided initial assault fires. This wave landed in 1004. Amphibian tractors carrying troops followed the tanks, and when no opposition was met at the beach all vehicles continued to move down the island. Progress was steady and unimpeded as a platoon of amphibian tanks covered the advance from a position off the west coast. Coming to a tank ditch midway down the island, however, the vehicles could move no farther and troops dismounted to continue on foot.

The phase line was reached at 231000 and as the troops continued on the small village of TSUGEN, small arms fire was received from the south. The enemy, it seemed, was established in a rocky hill mass interlined with caves. By 1350 the Japanese fortification was reduced, the action resulting in the capture of three Japanese machine guns and a grenade launcher. One of our officers was slightly wounded. (Editor's note: Someone from B Company should remember this officer's name.)

Reconnaissance patrols ranged over the island without encountering the enemy in any size and the Task Force Commander notified XXIV Corps that TSUGEN JIMA was cleared at 231530. Before departing the island at 1635, demolition parties destroyed one 75mm field piece, and two serviceable 5" guns, (at the same time other patrols rounded up a total of 366 civilians, all of whom were carried to OKINAWA, where they were placed in the custody of military government authorities at KOZA.) Caves containing huge supplies of grenades, mines, 75mm and 5" ammunition and assorted pioneer equipment.

The return to OKINAWA was accomplished without further incident, and provisions were made for a party to revisit TSUGEN for the purpose of destroying and remaining enemy or enemy supplies.

On 26 April a detachment of 10 enlisted men of the 20th Armored Group Headquarters Company under Major Westervelt returned to TSUGEN JIMA in 3 DUKWs to complete the reconnaissance mission of 23 April. (Editor's note: I went on this trip) The detachment killed one Japanese, captured another, destroyed small quantities of stores and ammunition, and sealed those caves which were still open, and returned to OKINAWA with an additional 56 civilian interns.


In its operation on TSUGEN, the group counted a total of 51 Japanese killed, but investigation of destroyed caves by construction parties in June reported the finding of 382 dead Japanese bodies so that the complete total of Japanese killed on Tsugen is estimated at 433.

The above information was extracted from the 20th Armored Group Action Against the Enemy Report that was sent to the Armored School, 2 August 1945, by Colonel Walter A. Jensen, the group commander.

The following information is from the book "The Deadeyes--The Story of the 96th Division." I can find no mention of the 728th as a unit in this historical account except that the following personnel are listed as having received the Bronze Star Medal for action on Okinawa.

Captain Clair L. Russell
T/4 Stanley H. Huelskaup
T/4 Joseph F. Kern
T/4 Herbert D. Lowry
T/4 Joe T. Martin

In compiling this paper I used all the material that I was able to come by. Rex Gass, George Ikard, John King, Joe Abril, and Harold McCoy have all contributed material for this paper. I am sure there must be information that other members of the unit wrote home in letters, old orders, old rosters or maybe diaries. If you do send me either the original or copy. I'll see that it is incorporated into the paper and that the material is returned to you. I am including as inclosures copies of any orders, rosters, etc., that I have obtained so far. Also, I am including extracts from the Camp Cooke, California newspaper that contains references to the 775th TD Bn.


Walter K. Freeland
Elizabethtown, Kentucky 42701
January 1983

J. Freeland