

STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN JESSE L. GUSTAF JR., Commanding
Company "A" 170th Tank Destroyer
Battalion

As company commander of "A" Company, I moved my company from the vicinity of Graen-Rodending, France, to Anverscher, Germany, by forced march, on the night 15-16 March 1945, where I was instructed to contact the regimental commander of the 254th Infantry, as I was to support his regiment in their assault on the Siegfried Line.

My company moved to an assembly area in Nischeln on 16 March 1945, and that night I received instructions from Colonel Warren, regimental commander of the 254th Infantry Regiment, in regard to supporting his attack on the Siegfried Line the next day. The plans for attack hinged on our ability to bring direct fire on the pillboxes and the infantry was to wait until we decided that visibility was good enough for us to bring accurate fire on the boxes. As soon as visibility permitted, we informed the infantry and opened fire from previously reconnoitered positions. The enemy fire from our left rear and front was extremely heavy. Two destroyers received direct hits and one gun commander, Sergeant Barthurst, was wounded. Despite this heavy fire we continued to fire until all our ammunition was expended and then withdrew to positions down a road which the enemy covered accurately with direct fire. When our over-watching platoon fired into the enemy defense line on our left, it drew some extremely large caliber enemy fire.

The infantry assault under our cover, at this time, was not successful, so after we had re-supplied our destroyers, we moved to fire in newly reconnoitered positions on the right of Nischeln in the vicinity of the airfield. The enemy again brought down large caliber artillery fire on us and very accurately laid down a smoke screen in front of us. We continued to fire when visibility permitted, until we had again expended all of our ammunition. At this time the infantry was successful in getting up into the first pillboxes. We moved back to our assembly point to re-supply.

During the night the engineers were able to get up behind the infantry and blow a gap in the dragon's teeth. Shortly thereafter, the infantry was forced to withdraw by heavy enemy fire and counter-attacks. That night I again received instructions from Colonel Warren to reconnoiter some positions to give him closer support, as it was imperative that we breach the line at this point. Early the next morning I reconnoitered positions on the right flank and was pinned down by machine gun fire from a couple of pillboxes. However, our party managed to get back in a short while. I returned from the reconnoitering post and met General Hamlin, the Assistant Divisional Commander, who again impressed on me the necessity of breaching the line at this point.

After all preparations had been made, we again moved out to assault the line. We moved into positions from 200 to 400 yards from the pillboxes. The third platoon, through rapid maneuver and alert observation, immediately

destroyed three 75mm anti-tank guns, which were emplaced in the pillboxes. The first and second platoons, which moved to within 500 yards of the line and opened fire, were forced to maneuver into positions about 500 yards from the pillboxes because of the intense enemy mortar fire. By keeping two destroyers in reserve initially, we were able to keep a continuous fire on the boxes at all times. During the entire assault, heavy mortar, rocket and artillery fire fell on our positions, forcing us to maneuver continuously as we fired. At about dusk the infantry was again able to get into the pillboxes.

At this time I was called to the Regimental Command Post and met there General Hibbs, the Division Commander, who told us that he wanted to be certain that I placed tank destroyers in the pillbox line with the infantry that night, in order for them to make strong points to hold the line. He again impressed on me the fact that it was imperative that we hold this breach and widen it the next day. I immediately ordered a platoon to go to the gap and there succeeded at about 2300 hours and the guns moved through taking up positions with our infantry, approximately 50 yards from the enemy infantry in the fire trenches and some other pillboxes.

At daylight the next morning the assault was resumed and our control of the first belt of the line at this point was firmly established. We then began to fire on the second line of pillboxes and one of my platoon leaders had his destroyer knocked out by a penetration. Again this day there was heavy mortar, rocket and artillery fire on our positions. A number of times my platoon leaders made foot reconnaissance through this heavy fire in order to find better firing positions. However, during most of the day, because of the restriction on maneuver between fire trenches, our destroyers were forced to sit and fire from a few almost fixed positions, making it doubly difficult for them to continue their assault. By late in the afternoon, we had sufficiently reduced the two lines of pillboxes to enable the infantry to assault them. They moved on through and we passed our third platoon through the first and second platoons to take up new positions. During this passage we were subjected to one of the most intense concentrations of rocket and heavy caliber artillery of the entire assault. Shortly after the third platoon took up its positions in the second line, the fire died away and the breach of the diagonal line was completed.

The men of this company have met the enemy on many battlefields through their long course of combat. The consensus of opinion among the men was that this was the worst pounding we had ever received.

John L. Gurnill
JOHN L. GURNILL JR.
Captain, RA
Commander Company "A",
775th TB Bn.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 5th day of May, 1945

John T. Galvin
JOHN T. GALVIN
1st Lt., Inf

STATEMENT OF TEST, COLONEL D. E. MOOREHEAD

On March 15, 1945, the Battalion was released from the 44th Infantry Division. Upon receiving instructions of attachment of my Battalion to the 63rd Infantry Division, I reported to the Commanding General, 63rd Infantry Division. Acting on orders received, the Battalion was moved to the vicinity of Luerzacker, Germany, closing at 0400 hours. The mission received was to support two assaulting infantry regiments, the 55th and the 58th, in an attack on Siegfried Line positions.

Respective company commanders were given their orders, a ground reconnaissance was made, and plans were completed with the respective infantry regiment.

At 1500 hours on March 16, 1945, General Hibbs emphasized to me the importance of continuous accurate fire in order to breach the Siegfried Line fortifications as soon as possible. The plan for a sudden break-through and junction with Third Army forces in the Saar-Palatinate area depended on a penetration of the Siegfried line at this point where the exploiting forces were massed. Plans were again reviewed and the importance of this mission was made known to all officers and men.

During the following two days destroyers of companies "A" and "B" of this battalion occupied reconnoitered firing positions and through continuous accurate fire neutralized and destroyed Siegfried Line fortifications in the 63rd Infantry Division sector making possible the breaching of the line and the passage of the exploiting armored division.

D. E. Moorehead

D. E. MOOREHEAD
Lt. Colonel, F. A.,
Commanding

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 5th day of May 1945

John T. Galvin

JOHN T. GALVIN
1st Lt., Inf.,
Adjutant

SPOT STATEMENT OF WITNESS BY JAMES E. REAY

As driver of the lead destroyer of the 2nd platoon of "F" Company, I led my platoon from Omersheim to firing positions at the edge of the woods south of Omersheim before daylight on the morning of 19 March 1945. The platoon fired its complete load of ammunition on pillboxes in the staggered line from this position. While reloading with ammunition we received instructions from Lieutenant Ritter, our company commander, to move to positions north of Omersheim and alternate firing positions with the 3rd platoon. As we moved to these positions on the bare hillside north of Omersheim, we received very heavy artillery and rocket fire. The smoke and dust from enemy artillery fire combined with the smoke from our own gun tank so thick in the driver's compartment during this action that my head ached continually.

All during the rest of this day and starting at daylight the next morning we continued to load up with ammunition to go out to fire and returning again. We would pull into positions 200 to 400 yards from the dragons teeth and fire at the pillboxes directly behind the teeth. Both while we were on the road coming and going to the positions and while we were firing we received heavy artillery, rocket and small arms fire. The glass in my periscope was shattered by sniper fire, and I was forced to drive back "unbuttoned" on that trip. On one occasion Lieutenant Ritter, my platoon leader and sergeant Reel were out on foot contacting an infantry CP and they beckoned for me to join them in order to relay a message to one of the other destroyer commanders. As I started to get out of the destroyer, heavy machine gun fire bounced off the side of it. I jumped down behind the destroyer, waited a few moments and then ran for it to where they were consulting with the infantry commander. I was sniped at again when returning to the destroyer, so rather than have the lieutenant and the sergeant risk it, I drove the destroyer over near where they had taken cover.

Early the next morning we attempted to go through the dragons teeth, where the engineers had gaped it, but found that there was still one tooth which prevented our passing. By this time the enemy knew where the gap was and was holding it under heavy artillery and mortar fire. My platoon leader, Lieutenant Ritter, dismounted from the destroyer and made his way through the teeth and went forward to contact the engineers, who were at that time taking cover in one of the captured pillboxes. We waited about 50 or 75 yards from the gap for it to be completed. During this period, the enemy fire was so intense that we moved five times trying to stay out of the barrage.

Finally the time came to go through the gap. It was with great reluctance that I started that trip because all the time we had been waiting, we had watched shells bursting among the dragons teeth and knew that there was no way to avoid driving into the enemy fire. As I went through the teeth one of my tracks hung up. I continued to jockey it back and forth until it finally came loose, and

we proceeded on. After we got through the teeth, we made our way between the barbed wire and the fire trenches to the right, where the infantry was assaulting a group of pillboxes. Along the way we received machine gun fire from a couple of pillboxes as we shot our 90mm gun into them, which was a good way to stop the fire from the pillboxes, but we were still sniped at, presumably by enemy infantry still holding out in the fire trenches. We continued on to the right across the main highway and across the bridge over the anti-tank ditch.

We then continued to work forward through the pillboxes with the infantry, firing point blank range as we went. The artillery and mortar fire was still very heavy, and whenever anyone stuck his head up out of the turret to observe, he was immediately sniped at. Quite a number of prisoners surrendered to the infantry, coming out of the pillboxes when we opened fire on them, but the sniping still continued from the fire trenches. Soon we were running low on ammunition but were unable to return to reload because the bridge across the anti-tank ditch had collapsed after we had crossed it. A destroyer from the 1st platoon brought ammunition for us and for the infantry as far as the anti-tank ditch and then we had carried it to our destroyers to replenish our load.

Most of the time while driving in this area, due to the barbed wire, the fire trenches and other obstacles, I was forced to drive with my hatch open, otherwise I was afraid of throwing a tank and being unable to proceed. After dark the intensity of the artillery fire tapered off and the enemy resistance was broken.

The driving in this action was the most difficult I have ever performed in over two years of combat duty, in that the intense artillery, rocket and small arms fire made driving with a periscope very advisable, but the many obstacles in the way, fire trenches, barbed wire and anti-tank ditches, necessitated my being able to watch carefully at all times so that my destroyer was not immobilized.

James W. Seay

James W. Seay, 34057452
Tosco IV, Company "C" 775th TD Bn.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 24th day of May 1945

John T. Galvin

JOHN T. GALVIN
1st Lieut., Inf.
Adjutant

STATEMENT OF SERGEANT SHARLEY A. SHERRON

On 17 March 1945, as destroyer commander of the third destroyer of the second platoon of "A" Company, I moved with my platoon forward from the assembly area in Busheim to bring direct fire on the disarmed defenses north of the town. The third platoon and our platoon moved out to the north and opened fire on the pillboxes at a range of approximately 2,000 yards. Soon after we opened fire, we received heavy artillery fire from the direct front and some direct fire from the left.

Meanwhile the first platoon, which was in an over-watching position on a hill to our left rear, returned fire on the weapons to our left, receiving in return a very heavy artillery and mortar barrage. Despite the artillery and mortar fire we were receiving, we fired until our ammunition load was exhausted. We then returned to Busheim, down the main road, the direct fire following us all the way back into town. One round of high explosive hit my destroyer giving all of my crew a good shaking up but no serious damage was done to the destroyer. After reloading we moved to a position near the airfield where we opened fire on the pillboxes. Again we received very heavy artillery fire, rocket fire and some direct fire from the left. We fired until an enemy smoke screen became so heavy we could not see the pillboxes. As soon as the smoke would dissipate enough we would open fire again. We continued this process until our ammunition supply was exhausted.

During the night we managed to refuel and reload with ammunition despite heavy artillery and rocket fire, which harassed our area throughout the night. On 18 March 1945, we moved out of Busheim on the main road to the north about a mile and a half to a position north of the Busheimhof farm, where we opened fire on the pillboxes at a range of about 800 yards. We received heavy mortar and artillery fire in this area. We would fire a few rounds and then maneuver to a new firing position in an endeavor to avoid as much of this enemy shelling as possible. As soon as we had fired our load of ammunition we would return to reload with ammunition and return to continue our firing.

By that night the infantry had moved through the dragons' teeth. My destroyer moved up to the gap in the dragons' teeth and waited there until the engineers could fill the crater, made by the blowing of the dragons' teeth, and clear a lane through the mine field. By about 0300 hours the way was cleared and we moved through the dragons' teeth into the area of the pillboxes. At this time only one of the pillboxes was completely cleared of the enemy. Throughout the remainder of the night we received continuous artillery and rocket fire and it is my belief that at least some of the artillery fire was observed by an observer in one of the nearby pillboxes, as artillery continued to bracket my destroyer until finally a direct hit was received. This hit blew off the radio operator's hatch. SFC Canterbury, my radio operator, retrieved the hatch and replaced it.

Some time about the middle of the night enemy infantry launched a counter-attack in our area. In repelling this counter-attack and protecting our destroyer we expended all of our grenades and small arms ammunition. At daylight friendly infantry proceeded to clear the pillboxes in our immediate vicinity, taking several prisoners from a pillbox approximately 50 yards from the position where we had spent the night. We then moved our destroyer on up to the crest of this ridge and brought fire on the next row of pillboxes. Soon our ammunition load was expended and we returned through the dragons' teeth released and returned to fire again.

Throughout the morning, while firing from these positions, we were under intense artillery, rocket and mortar fire. At about 1000 hours Lt. Britz' destroyer, about 50 yards to my right, was hit and burned by a panzerfaust, fired from one of the fire trenches in rear of his destroyer. About 1100 hours my gun failed to fire and it was necessary to pull back and have the company gun mechanic repair the recoil system. While he was fixing the gun we grabbed a bite to eat, the first we had eaten for about 24 hours. As soon as the gun was repaired we returned to our former position and continued to bring fire on the second line of pillboxes. Throughout this time, the road leading from Eschheim to the firing positions was under heavy fire. Soon after we returned to the firing positions, my platoon leader's destroyer received a mortar hit on the edge of the turret killing my acting platoon leader, Staff Sergeant Waggoner and Sergeant Blackland and wounding other members of the crew.

Late in the afternoon, the third platoon moved through us to take up positions to complete reduction of the next line of pillboxes. We received especially heavy fire as they were assaulting the second belt. The artillery fire tapered off after dark and enemy resistance was broken.

During the course of this action, we were subjected to more concentrated artillery, rocket, mortar and small arms fire than I have ever known in over 500 days of combat including the assaults on Cassino, Italy, the Gothic line in the vicinity of Rimini, Italy and the German counter-offensive of 1 January 1945, near Bialling, France.

Stanley P. Shurson
Stanley P. Shurson, Private
Sergeant, 7th
Company "A", 775th Tn Bn.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 5th day of May 1945

John T. Galvin
JOHN T. GALVIN
1st Lt., Inf.
Adjutant

SWORN STATEMENT OF 2/SGT OLIVER J. STEINER

On 15 March 1945, as acting platoon leader of the 1st platoon of "B" Company, I accompanied Lieut. Alfredo, my company commander, on a foot reconnaissance to select firing positions to bring fire on the Siegfried line north of Ommersheim. We went to the infantry front line south of Hockendalshaus but as we still could not see the pillboxes from this position we had the infantry raise the defensive artillery fire and we proceeded on up to the crest of the ridge where we came under considerable small arms and mortar fire but we were able to see the pillboxes from this location.

I then returned to my platoon and set up road-blocks on the eastern edge of Ommersheim. We maintained these road blocks until just before daylight. The next morning we moved to the positions we had looked at the afternoon before south of Hockendalshaus. These positions were approximately 400 to 500 yards from the first line of pillboxes.

As we pulled into these positions we received a heavy rocket barrage. During the night the infantry had pushed forward and secured the forward slope of the ridge overlooking Hockendalshaus. Leaving the destroyers behind the ridge I went up to see a major of the infantry and planned our firing with him.

When he gave the word we rolled up over the ridge and started firing. We immediately received heavy artillery, mortar and rocket fire in return. The fire was so heavy that the infantry commander ordered his men to take cover on the reverse slope. We stayed in this position and continued to fire until our ammunition was gone. We then pulled back, loaded with ammunition and went up and fired again. All the time we were there artillery and mortars and rockets were coming in as well as machine gun and sniper fire from the town. After dark that night we moved out of these positions to Ommersheim where we spent the night refueling and reloading with ammunition.

The next morning we continued the attack on the line. Lieut. Alfredo and I went up the road to make reconnaissance for a position to shorten the range to the pillboxes and found a place approximately 400 yards north of Ommersheim. I went back and brought up the destroyers. As we moved into these positions we found them untenable because we were receiving direct mortar and piercing fire from the vicinity of Hockendalshaus. We tried to move about 300 yards to another spot but received the same fire again, so I moved the destroyers back into a covered position. After another foot reconnaissance we moved out the northeast edge of town on the high ground and fired at the pillboxes. In these positions we received heavy artillery fire. We did this all day expending our ammunition, go back to load up and then moved up to fire again.

The next day an all out effort was launched to get through the dragons' teeth and smash the enemy resistance. Initially the 1st platoon was to move through the dragons' teeth under the covering fire of the 1st and 2nd platoons but as one of the infantry companies on the right flank was stopped by machine

gun fire in pillboxes in that sector Lieutenant Cohen took the 3rd platoon up the main road to relieve the pressure on this infantry. The 2nd platoon was then sent to pass through the teeth while my platoon provided covering fire. When the second platoon reached the dragons' teeth they found that the gap which had been blown by the engineers was impassable due to a tooth which was still intact. The engineers finally got the dragons' teeth gapped and the 2nd platoon moved through. The 2nd platoon added the infantry in clearing out the pillboxes, knocking out one particular strong point at 25 yards range. While inspecting the pillboxes later I found where one round went right through the armor plate in a pillbox and took the head and shoulders off a machine gunner. All during this assault they were subjected to heavy artillery and small arms fire.

As soon as the 2nd platoon had reached the main road leading to Oberwarbach where the second section set up a road block, my platoon went up through the gap in the teeth in support of "C" Company of the infantry which was to move through "Z" and "R" companies and proceed to the right to neutralize the pillboxes. As the destroyers went through the dragons' teeth and swung to the right we came under a barrage of heavy artillery, the heaviest I have ever been under. From looking at some of the shells it appeared to be about 210 mm. As we started to cross the anti-tank ditch just east of Oberwarbach road the tank ahead of us fell through the temporary bridge of the ditch thus leaving my platoon in column in an exposed position with no room to maneuver because friendly infantry were in the fire trenches on either side. Seeing that the tank was stuck blocking the road ahead of us, we sprang up my destroyer and tried to hook on and pull it out. As we moved the destroyer up to hook on to the tank we came under very heavy enemy fire. Because of the lay of the ground we were unable to get close enough to pull the tank out of the ditch. Realizing that we would need engineer aid to get across the ditch I returned through the teeth to advise my company commander of the situation.

On the way back to Demersheim a company commander of the infantry whose men were pinned down on the road by enemy machine gun fire from the left asked for help. I reported this situation to my company commander who dispatched two destroyers from the 2nd platoon to go to the relief of this infantry. When I reported to my company commander, the infantry regimental commander and battalion commander were also with him. Because of the heavy enemy fire knocking out their communications they were very anxious to get a report on the situation of their men. After discussing the situation with these commanders it was decided to take all but two men out of my destroyer crew and to carry engineers and bridging equipment to the site of the enemy in bridge. After loading up the material and the engineers we took off. By this time the enemy had evidently re-occupied some of his lost positions as we received machine gun fire when we were still 200 yards from the dragons' teeth.

As we came under this machine gun and artillery fire which was more intense than before the engineer officer said, "nothing can live down there, shouldn't we go back?" I informed him my orders were to take him down there the bridge was out. The regimental commander had told me that it was imperative that the engineers get down there and get across the ditch as the success of the operation hinged on getting more armor across and knocking out the second

row of pillboxes. The enemy machine gun fire continued as we approached the anti-tank ditch and artillery concentrations became heavier. It was obvious that the enemy could see the tishers on the destroyers and probably knew our mission. When we got to the bridge side the logs were unloaded and we set up to cover the engineers while they worked but as they were subjected to such an intense artillery and mortar fire the engineer officer commanded his men back into the destroyer. By his appraisal of the situation it was too "hot" for them to work. He gave me an order to take them back. On the trip back to the dragons' teeth artillery and machine gun fire was very heavy. The enemy had laid smoke in on the gap and my driver nearly missed the opening but over-ran one tooth and we got through it.

When I arrived with the engineer officer back at the camp command post where I reported the situation, I found that our 2nd platoon and the infantry supported behind the anti-tank ditch were running short of ammunition. I took my platoon to the company ammunition dump and loaded ammunition for the 2nd platoon on the destroyer docks. We went down through the dragons' teeth and the enemy artillery and small arms, which we knew would be waiting for us, and transferred the ammunition by hand to the destroyers behind the ditch. With the coming of darkness we made our plans to continue the assault the following morning but the remaining enemy withdrew during the night and the line was broken.

In this operation the enemy artillery and rocket fire, direct air fire and all types of small arms fire exceeded any I have experienced in all the other assaults that I have been in which includes the crossing of the Volturno River, the assault on Cassino, the Gothic line break-through and the operations around Mateur in Africa. The spirit and discipline of my men was very high not withstanding the fact that this action required us to deviate from our usual methods in that we had to sit in open exposed positions and slug it out in order to give the infantry the direct support which they needed to reduce the Siegfried Line.

Oliver J. Stevens

OLIVER J. STEVENS, ELDERES
S/Sgt - Platoon Sergeant
1st Platoon Company "C"
768th Tank Destroyer Battalion

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 8th day of May 1945.

John T. Galvin

JOHN T. GALVIN
1st Lt., Inf.
Adjutant