

808TH Tank Destroyer Battalion  
AFTER-ACTION REPORT  
1 - 4 MAY 45

During this period the battalion continued to be attached to the 65th Infantry Division and XX Corps, United States Third Army. On the 1st Division came out of Corps Reserve and went on line again joining the pursuit of the enemy. The line companies were placed in support of the infantry regiments: "A" Company supporting 260th, "B" Company supporting the 261st, and "C" Company supporting the 259th.

No resistance was encountered until the battalion reached the INN River. There on 3 May in PASSAU and SCHARDING the battalion had its last real engagement before cessation of hostilities. On that day the 3d Platoon of "B" Company with part of the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon, formed a portion of a task force consisting also of the 2d Battalion, 261st Infantry and "C" Company, 748th Tank Battalion. The task force was assigned the mission of taking the city of PASSAU and establishing a bridgehead over the INN RIVER.

The assembly point was two miles west of the city along the DANUBE RIVER. At 1000 hours "B" Company of the Infantry was dispatched to encircle the city and drive home an attack from the Southwest. At the same time the balance of the task force, with the reconnaissance elements in the lead, advanced along the South bank of the DANUBE into the city. Behind the reconnaissance elements the task force was deployed with Company "C", 748th in the lead, carrying "F" Company of the Infantry. The Tank Destroyer, carrying "C" Company, brought up the rear.

Scattered resistance was met on the march into PASSAU, but was quickly overcome. Entrance into the city met with no resistance at all. The streets were deserted, the big city seemed devoid of all life but us. Friendly troops on the North bank of the DANUBE RIVER notified our troops that the bridge across the INN RIVER was prepared for demolition and heavily mined. The platoon had proceeded about four or five blocks from the edge of the city when it paused to reconnoiter. Reconnaissance elements brought back with them eight prisoners who stated that a strong enemy force was located in the South and Southwest side of town.

It was decided that the tanks and TD's, with the tanks leading, would make a dash for the bridge in an attempt to save it from destruction by the enemy. Unloading the infantry the reconnaissance platoon leader started out, running ahead in his jeep to observe the bridge approaches and warn the rest of enemy activity. The Reconnaissance Platoon Leader came back and advised that the bridge had been blown. The tanks withdrew back to a large turnaround, firing about fifteen rounds of HE at active enemy sniper posts who were blazing away sporadically at our forces by this time.

A squad of infantry was sent out to check over enemy positions in the South and Southwest positions of the city. They went about two blocks, met heavy enemy machine gun and small-arms fire which wounded two of their men, and withdrew, leaving their wounded lying in the

street. Two German and one American medical aid man attempted to reach the two wounded infantrymen, they were all fired upon by the enemy troops and were all hit. One of the Germans was killed.

Just after the squad had departed, three infantry 1 1/2-ton trucks, dragging 57 millimeter anti-tank guns, accompanied by one 2 1/2 ton 6 x 6 and one jeep, drove on up the street, turning right on the square containing the turnaround where the tanks were stationed. They had gone about a block when a group of enemy riflemen opened up on them from a barracks at the end of this street. Two of the trucks and one gun were quickly destroyed, another was badly damaged.

The Tank Destroyer Platoon Leader ordered two of his four M-36 Destroyers forward to a point near where the tanks were assembled. Employing one destroyer to cover the other, he advanced the lead destroyer to a position near where the infantry anti-tank elements had met disaster. As he was performing this maneuver, the reconnaissance platoon leader set up an OP and three sniper posts on the South side of the street near the same spot. The Destroyer fired fifteen rounds of HE shell into the building from which the enemy had struck at the same time, the men manning the sniper posts placed heavy, accurate fire upon all visible enemy positions, protecting the destroyer from panzerfaust attack and forcing the enemy to abandon several houses from which he had been fighting. The combined result of this action neutralized the enemy fire until the infantry anti-tank elements were able to evacuate their movable vehicles and their personnel. As soon as this had been accomplished the tank destroyer platoon leader backed his destroyer down the street about a hundred yards and went in search of the infantry battalion commander to learn his future plans. He was unable to locate the battalion commander so he returned to his position.

The company commander whose squad had attempted the reconnaissance asked the Tank Destroyer leader and the Tank officers to assist him in the rescue of the two wounded infantrymen who were still lying in the street a block and a half South and West of the lead destroyer's present position. A platoon of infantry, two destroyers, and two medium tanks, with the destroyers leading and the infantry working along both sides of the street flanking the armor, were formed for the rescue. They intended to clear out about five enemy occupied houses to enable our medical personnel to reach the wounded men.

The two destroyers, with the tank destroyed platoon leader in command, drove to a point near where the two wounded men lay and the lead destroyer placed both 90 millimeter and 50 calibre machine gun fire upon the enemy positions. The tanks did not leave their assembly area at the turnaround. The infantry platoon accompanied the destroyers to the point from which the destroyers were to support them in cleaning out the enemy positions. The infantry formed on both sides of the street, advancing from house to house and alley to alley. The infantry on the left side of the street were able to work within 25 yards of the destroyer, but the infantry on the right were unable to advance, being pinned down by machine gun fire. At this time the destroyer and the OP both spotted the enemy fire, which was

immediately neutralized by 90mm and Caliber .50 MG fire. Other targets were spotted on the left and taken under fire by the destroyers. This effectively neutralized most of the enemy fire in the vicinity.

At this point the Inf. Co. Commander received orders not to go forward as negotiations were under way for surrender of the town and the infantry withdrew and took cover. As soon as the enemy saw this he opened up with everything he had. From the OP and the sniper posts set up our men were constantly engaging enemy machine gunners, riflemen, and panzerfaust teams. The Op spotted an observer with a BC scope in a small opening by a large clock on a public building. The first round of 90mm HE hit the clock dead center. The loud noise and the dust created by the activity made accurate observation difficult; the lack of supporting foot troops for the destroyers made them very vulnerable to panzerfaust attack. The Tank Destroyer Company Executive Officer brought some personnel of the company headquarters platoon to give the destroyers flank protection from panzerfaust teams. He had spotted some enemy sniper positions and occupied one destroyer and directed fire upon them until their fire was reduced.

After this had been accomplished one of the OP's spotted an enemy Mark IV tank that had moved into position just back of a street intersection some two hundred yards in the front of the lead destroyer, from which position it was screened from observation by the tank destroyer platoon leader and destroyers. It was planned to leave the lead destroyer where it was and move the other destroyer a block South and a block East to a position between two buildings from which he could dart forth and engage the enemy tank if opportunity presented itself to catch the enemy unaware.

The encircling destroyer proceeded about halfway to his new position under heavy sniper and machine-gun fire, then it was charged by six enemy rocket grenadiers. In attempting to back into position from which to ward off this attack the destroyer driver dropped the vehicle into a large shell crater, temporarily immobilizing it. The assistant driver and loader left the destroyer and made their way back to the Tank Destroyer Platoon Leader, to whom they reported the incident. The Tank Destroyer Platoon Leader ran under heavy enemy fire to the shell crater to determine the extent of the damage. Before he arrived, however, the gunner had fought off the grenadier attack, killing all six of the enemy; firing both Caliber .50 MG and 90mm HE at point blank ranges; and the gunner, destroyer commander, and the driver had managed to extricate the destroyer from the shell crater and proceed to their destination to wait in readiness to attack the enemy tank. The Tank Destroyer Platoon Leader returned to the OP, picking up the destroyer commander along the way, and pointed out to him the enemy tank, explaining in full the plan of attack.

The Mark IV tank then started to fire at the sniper personnel located in the building, and also at the OP. He then switched his fire on the house behind which the Tank Destroyer was located and in which the Platoon Commander and destroyer commander were located. If the Mark IV tank moved out further he would expose himself to the tank

destroyer fire and if the tank destroyers moved further forward they would be exposed to his fire. The distance between the tank and the tank destroyers was about 150 yards. During this time small arms and bazooka fire was continual. Panzerfausts were spotted trying to move into position to the rear of the second tank destroyer. A machine-gun and crew were placed in a building so they covered the rear of the tank destroyer, and they were able to keep the enemy down with machine-gun fire and force them to withdraw again to the buildings.

The platoon commander exchanged fire with the enemy tank for quite sometime without result; both being in a position from which they could not be hit by the exchanged fire.

The destroyer commander of number one destroyer was then ordered to move his destroyer in the direction of the enemy tank as fast as possible, come to a halt, race his motor, then withdraw immediately. He was covered by small arms fire from the sniper posts for protection against the Panzerfausts. This maneuver persuaded the Mark IV tank crew to move their vehicle forward in order to get a shot at the destroyer. The destroyer commander of the 2d destroyer was waiting for the Mark IV tank to make this move. He fired a round of HE into the wall above the enemy tank, showering them with a blinding cloud of dust. The tank was so located that it was not possible for the destroyer gunner to place direct fire upon it, so he placed four rounds of APC in front of it on an angle that ricocheted two rounds into the tank and sent it up in flames. The destroyers then withdrew.

The engagement lasted for more than five hours, during which we used virtually all of our firepower. Our machine gunners and snipers killed a known 30 dead and wounded many more with the 90mm. An American soldier who had been captured two days before and held prisoner in one of the buildings in town reported that the first round of 90mm fired in the town went through a doorway of the German barracks and killed 6 and wounded at least 11 more.

The following day PASSAU surrendered, yielding around five hundred prisoners. It was discovered that another Mark IV tank was in the town, abandoned and burned by the crew.

#### ANALYSIS

This after-action report is an interesting account of an armor/infantry team clearing an urban area. Combined arms was stressed at all times, and the tank destroyers were used to great effect in Passau itself. Of particular interest was the ingenuity displayed in ferreting out the MKIV, blinding it by showering it in debris, and then killing it by ricochet fire.