

# THE SIEGFRIED BATTLES

## RACING FOR THE SAAR

On November 20th the 607th TD Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 95th Infantry Division and attached to the 90th Infantry Division for the second time. Company A moved their CP to Woippy. A reconnaissance company was formed at Ste. Marie aux Chenes.

On the 21st of November the Battalion, minus the reconnaissance company, marched across the Moselle River at Uckange and moved east to join the 90th Infantry Division. The Battalion CP moved to Monnern (eleven miles east of Thionville) with the gun companies in adjacent towns.

The following day the Battalion was ordered to rejoin the 95th Infantry Division and on the 23rd moved back to the Moselle River, where they were joined by the Reconnaissance Company and thence proceeded south along the river to the vicinity of Ars Laquenexy (six miles southeast of Metz). The gun companies assembled in towns in that general area.

As the 95th Infantry Division pushed to the northeast, the enemy fought a delaying action back through the Maginot Line toward the Saar River and the Siegfried Line which bordered on the east side of the Saar. In support of the 377th Infantry Regiment, Company A, with 2nd Reconnaissance Platoon attached, moved to Volmerange with two platoons crossing the Nied River and assembling in Boulay. Company C, with the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon attached, advanced with the 378th Infantry to Macker with platoons at Momerstraff and Zondrange. The Battalion CP plus the Reconnaissance Company, less two platoons, moved to Coucelles Chaussy and then to Varize. Company B, in reserve, moved to Helstrof.

Passing through the almost undefended Maginot Line, the 1st Platoon of Company C, moving into an assembly position east of Niedervisse, was fired upon by an enemy 75 mm AT gun. The track of the leading destroyer was knocked off but by quick action the crew destroyed the Jerry gun and took fourteen prisoners. Later the 1st Platoon knocked out three pillboxes and destroyed three enemy 20 mm flak guns near Momerstraff.

The following day the Battalion CP and the Reconnaissance Company, minus two platoons, moved to a railroad station at Teterchen (five miles northeast of Boulay).

For the remainder of the month, the companies, supporting the regiments, moved on about a seven mile front up to within three miles of the Saar River near Saarlautern.

At one point in the advance the German artillery laid down a fierce barrage from the high, dominating hills southeast of Falck. 1st Lt. George King of Company C was charged with defending the town pending the arrival of reinforcing infantry. Numerically superior German infantry moved down the southern ridge onto the town as Lt. King deployed his tank destroyer platoon with the few automatic weapons at his disposal into a defensive position. Under a further barrage of artillery and mortars the Germans struck stealthily, endeavoring to infiltrate the American positions, but Lt. King's platoon fought back fiercely and repulsed them. Again and again the enemy repeated his tactics, only to find the defense impenetrable. Credit for the successful defense of Falck against overwhelming enemy numbers was largely due to Lt. King's initiative and gallantry for which he was awarded the Silver Star. To the other Company C men awarded this medal in the vicinity of Falck were Pvt. Franklin D. Monroe, for

retrieving a half track loaded with ammunition and gasoline in face of heavy shelling, and Sgt. Oscar Kaiser, for evacuating a wounded comrade 800 yards in front of friendly lines while under furious enemy fire.

Just north of Falck one of the most costly single battles occurred. On November 28th the 3rd Platoon of Company C, commanded by Lt. Leroy C. Baker, moved from a reserve position to relieve the 1st Platoon, which was supporting the 1st Battalion of the 378th Infantry in Falck. The platoon leader was given the mission to proceed according to a time schedule up the main road from Falck to Merten and to meet the infantry on the edge of a Merten. It was understood that the infantry was to storm the town by flanking attacks from the north and the south prior to the platoon's entrance into the town. The platoon proceeded according to the time schedule towards the town through artillery fire which was falling along the road. The leading destroyer reached the west end of Merten where it was stopped by an anti-tank barrier. It fired several rounds into the town which was still occupied by the enemy. In an effort to bypass the barrier, the destroyer became bogged in the mud and was fired upon and destroyed by an enemy anti-tank gun. The second destroyer of the platoon, following the first, turned around and made its way back to Falck after the first was hit. The third destroyer received a hit from an AT gun, and losing a track, its swerved off the road into a ditch where it was set afire by the enemy AT gun. The fourth destroyer had the mission of covering the advancing three. Observing the flash of the AT gun, it attempted to return the fire but the gun failed to function. Trying to turn the destroyer around ended with it also becoming bogged down in the mud. This destroyer was later recovered. The remnants of the platoon assembled in the vicinity of Falck and later returned to the Company CP. Pfc. Benjamin T. Oakley was awarded the Silver Star for voluntarily going to the vicinity of Merten, under heavy shellfire, and assisting in the evacuation of the wounded.

During November the Battalion fired 5590 rounds indirect fire, took 206 prisoners and destroyed the following listed enemy equipment by direct fire.

- 3 Anti-tank guns
- 6 Anti-aircraft guns
- 3 Machine guns
- 4 Pillboxes
- 3 Ammunition carts
- 2 Light vehicles
- Several enemy strong points and OP's.

## **THE BRIDGEHEAD**

A tremendous job now lay before the Division. Two barriers were in their path; namely, the Saar River and the Siegfried Line. This portion of the West Wall lying in front of the 95th Division was as thick as any point on the western front.

The Division continued to close on the Saar, meeting small arms, mortar, artillery, and direct fire. If the roads were not blocked by anti-tank ditches, they were blocked by mines and AT guns.

On December 1st a tank held up the infantry at Ste. Barbara (three miles northwest of Saarlautern). The tank was situated so that direct fire could not be brought on it without suicidal exposure to its fire. A bazooka team, under Sgt. Roy E. Holcomb, crawled toward the enemy tank. Covered by friendly small arms fire, the team moved to within 75 yards of the tank and opened fire, but

without effect. Sgt. Holcomb approached from another direction and when he was 50 yards from the tank he again opened fire, partially disabling it and causing it to retreat. As he made his way back to his platoon, another enemy tank moved into the position previously occupied by the one he had damaged. Thereupon, armed with a bazooka, he again crawled toward the tank and fired four rounds at it and partially disabled it but was killed by return fire. His courageous determination and his heroic devotion to duty were of the highest order. In recognition of his heroism he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Further attempts to destroy the tank by bazooka fire failed. Lt. Knapp, the platoon leader, then directed Sgt. Rollins, destroyer commander, to fire several rounds of 90mm through the buildings in the direction of the tank. S/Sgt. Schoessler (then Cpl.), gunner, dismounted from the destroyer and made a foot reconnaissance to determine the gun-target line through the buildings. He reentered the destroyer and fired several rounds into the building adjacent to the tank. Again dismounting and going forward through heavy enemy mortar and small arms fire, Sgt. Schoessler ascertained the effect of his fire, returned and fired four additional rounds in the direction of the tank. This firing created a smoke-dust cloud which enabled the destroyer to be moved to a more advantageous position to bring direct fire to bear on the tank. Four more rounds fired through the smoke-dust cloud at the tank caused it to burst into flames. For his initiative and outstanding bravery S/Sgt. Schoessler was awarded the Silver Star.

Saarlautern, a city of some thirty thousand people, lies mainly on the west side of the Saar River, with the suburbs of Fraulautern and Saarlautern-Roden just east of the river. When the 95th Division reached the outskirts of the Saarlautern two of the three bridges crossing the Saar in the city had been blown; the one still intact being in the center of town.

The plan of attack was to occupy part of Saarlautern and then with a reserve force shoot across the bridge and establish a bridgehead before the enemy could blow it.

Company A supporting the 377th Infantry Regiment, was the first to reach the Saar. On December 2nd their 1st and 3rd Platoons moved to Beaumaris (just north of Saarlautern) and prepared to support any crossing of the river.

Company B sent its 3rd Platoon with the 2nd Battalion 379th Infantry Regiment in their assault of Saarlautern and the 1st Platoon moved to the rear of the assaulting Battalion of the 379th and prepared for an early crossing.

On the night of December 2nd, the 379th sent the 1st Battalion across the river in boats, killed the guard on the northeast end of the bridge and cut the wires to the demolition charge. It consolidated its hold on the east bank while an attack launched by the 1st Platoon of Company B closely followed by infantry cleared the west bank down to the bridge. On December 3rd Lt. Calvin R Stone moved his platoon across the bridge to protect the bridgehead. This early crossing made at great risk before the bridge was completely cleared of demolition, and through a curtain of fire, was to prevent the enemy from counterattacking in an attempt to regain the bridge. Before daylight on the 4th, Lt. Robert L. Arrison moved his platoon across to support the Infantry moving east. When the Germans attacked from the north, he placed his guns to aid Lt. Stone in the defense of the bridgehead. The enemy attacked with tanks and infantry supported by heavy artillery fire. The skillful employment of the M-36's and the 50 caliber machine guns, coordinated with the infantry, repulsed the attacks time after time. A midnight attack, that had as its mission the destruction of the bridge across the Saar, was also repulsed. Four tanks were destroyed with a loss of one TD. For their superb leadership and gallantry the two officers were awarded Silver Stars.

In the initial attack five tanks approached the bridge. The leading one was hit and burned up. Cpl. Eugene L. LaFontain, Company B gunner of another TD blanked out due to smoke, pulled out past the burning tank. His destroyer was hit by an overwatching tank knocking off the track. Undaunted, Cpl. LaFontaine destroyed the nearest tank. Another round went through his destroyer cutting off Cpl. LaFontaine's leg. In spite of his serious wound, Cpl. LaFontaine continued to fire until his ammunition was exhausted. For his supreme devotion to duty Cpl. LaFontaine was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Company C, supporting the 378th in their attack on the southern part of Saarlautern and Lisdorf, sent the 2nd Platoon to reduce a road block in one of the streets. One section proceeded to do the job and as the two destroyers moved down the street a window shutter was opened and a German bazooka crew fired on the lead destroyer, hitting it on the turret. A bed roll and the lifting ring set the bazooka round off, preventing it from damaging the destroyer. The covering destroyer fired on several houses in the vicinity causing 35 Germans to run to the street to surrender. On December 5th Company C supported the successful crossing of the Saar River at Lisdorf by the 378th Infantry, neutralizing several pillboxes, the 3rd Platoon knocking out "Teters Pillbox" (containing a 75mm AT gun) while under heavy enemy artillery fire. This bridgehead was doomed never to be enlarged very much. On the same day the Battalion CP, plus Reconnaissance Company, minus three platoons, moved to Felsberg from Ittersdorf.

Upon reaching the main belt of the Siegfried Line the attacking forces were slowed down. To aid in the expansion of the bridgehead Lt. Richard A. Reynolds, Company B, moved his platoon across the bridge and supported the infantry, attacking north. He repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire while directing his platoon. On one occasion, while heavily engaged with stubbornly resisting forces, he halted his destroyer in an exposed position and personally rescued members of another crew who were trapped in a burning tank destroyer. During subsequent action, while directing fire against enemy pillboxes, Lt. Reynolds was killed. For supreme devotion to duty and conspicuous heroism Lt. Reynolds was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The bridgehead continued to expand and the fighting moved slowly into Saarlautern-Roden and Fraulautern, the attackers conducting a systematic destruction of pillboxes and houses being used for strong points. Sgt. Joseph F. Costa, Company A, was awarded the Silver Star Medal for moving his destroyer across a causeway in Fraulautern in the face of mortar and direct artillery fire in order to replenish badly needed rations and gasoline. In another action on this same date, Sgt. James Sheeran, Company A, was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action. Disregarding his own life, he left his place of safety to carry a wounded comrade from a street which was under heavy mortar fire to a building where first aid could be administered. All advances were met with very heavy mortar and artillery fire. In a single day 1800 rounds were received in Fraulautern. Company A relieved Company B in the bridgehead area, Company B going to Ittersdorf for maintenance and reorganization. Sgt. (then private) Eugene Esposito, Company C, promptly took command of a destroyer when his gun commander was killed by machine gun fire. He opened fire on the machine gun, silencing it and killing its crew. He then moved his destroyer forward and annihilated a bazooka team, which was situated behind a stone wall. Spotting a flame thrower creeping up beside the wall toward his destroyer, Sgt. Esposito opened fire and knocked down the wall, killing the enemy. He then eliminated another machine gun nest. For his heroic and positive action Sgt. Esposito was awarded the Silver Star. On December 9th an enemy tank destroyed an M-36 of Company A as it crossed a railroad track in Fraulautern.

Company C continued to fire on pillboxes, houses and OP's that could be seen across the river from the vicinity of Lisdorf. An artillery shell fragment hit a TD of Company C on December 13th, causing it to burn. December 17th found Company C, which had replaced Company A in the bridgehead, relieved by the 818th TD Battalion. Part of Company C, with the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon attached, continued to support the 378th Infantry, firing at targets of opportunity in Ensdorf. The Battalion CP moved to Merten.

On December 21st Company A and Company B relieved the elements of the 818th TD Battalion and the Battalion moved back to Felsberg. Company C assembled at Berweiler going into indirect fire positions. The Pioneer Platoon working with a reconnaissance platoon conducted 81mm mortar training, firing into Ensdorf. A group of fifteen enemy was seen and fire was placed on them. One was killed, four were wounded and the remainder dispersed.

## **THE DEFENSIVE**

Because of the enemy's penetration into the Ardennes, it was feared that he might launch an attack into our weakest point, the gap between our right flank and the 103rd Division's left flank, an area being screened by the 106th Cavalry Group. A reconnaissance for defensive positions was initiated both by the Division and the 607th. The 3rd Reconnaissance Platoon established OP's and listening posts near Werbein and maintained contact with the 106th Cavalry Squadron on the Division's right flank.

On December 25th Company B assembled in Merten, being relieved by Company A, and on December 26th the Battalion CP plus Reconnaissance Company minus detached platoons, moved to Berus. The 1st Reconnaissance Platoon moved to the right flank of the Division (south of the 3rd Platoon) and established their CP and contact with 121st Cavalry Squadron at Carlsbrun. They reconnoitered routes and terrain in the area and located OP's from where it was possible to observe any enemy attack coming out of Forbach. (four miles southwest of Saarbrücken). Companies B and C reconnoitered defensive positions in the vicinity of L'Hopital and St. Avold, respectively, to meet any enemy threat. On December 27th these same companies placed platoons in indirect fire positions in Merten. and Berweiler. On December 29th the Pioneer Platoon, supporting the 206th Engineer Battalion, prepared nine roadblocks, which would be blown in case of an attack in the vicinity of St. Avold.

During the month of December 1945 the Battalion chalked up the following score:

In direct action fired 3719 rounds of 90mm HE, 1209 rounds of APC.

In indirect action fired 1590 rounds on 86 missions.

Destroyed - 8 tanks (1 MK III, 6 MK IV, 1 MK V). [Figure 4-1]

10 75mm AT guns

9 machine guns

8 20mm AA guns

90 pillboxes

Prisoners taken – 94

During the week January 1-7 the Battalion continued to improve its defensive plans. The companies were rotated and the reconnaissance platoons continued to maintain contact with the units on the right flank of the Division. In Saarlautern the hammering at the Siegfried Line continued.

On January 7th, Company B, with the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon attached, was attached to the 6th Cavalry Group, which, with the 94th Infantry Division, was holding a portion of the southern shoulder of the Ardennes bulge. This area was located just northeast of the boundary between France, Luxembourg and Germany and at the edge of the Siegfried Line. Company B moved into an assembly area near Halstroff. After reconnoitering for gun positions they were reattached to the 94th Division on the 14th when they were committed, one platoon assisting in the capture of and then providing AT defense for Tettingen. The Company CP and other platoons moved to Sehndorf. On January 18th the enemy attacked with undetermined number of tanks and half-tracks. Company B having guns in Tettingen, Nennig, and Besch, repulsed the attack in the Tettingen area, destroying five tanks.

Back around Saarlautern 3rd Platoon of Company C assisted in repelling a heavy enemy counterattack, losing a destroyer to bazooka fire. On January 14th Company A had moved to St. Avold ready to go into firing positions in case of an enemy attack and on the 18th assembled near Merten, having been relieved by the 704th TD Battalion.

Company B continued to support the 94th Division until January 23rd when it was relieved by Company A. Company B assembled in Merten. On the following day Company A destroyed five tanks. They were relieved by the 704th TD Battalion and returned to Berus on January 25th

Company C continued to support the 95th Infantry Division in their attack in the Saarlautern area and the reconnaissance platoons maintained contact with units to the south.



**Figure 4-1**  
**Another Tank to our Credit – A Mark IV**

## **AGAINST THE SIEGFRIED AGAIN**

On January 27th the 95th Division was relieved by the 26th Infantry Division and was ordered to assemble in Belgium north of Bastogne. The Battalion, on the coldest day of the winter, marched 150 miles to the vicinity of Houffalize, Belgium via Boulay, Uckange, Longwy, Arlon and Neufchateau, with the Battalion CP and Reconnaissance Company going into of Taverneux.

During January the Battalion destroyed 7 MK V tanks, 3 MK IV tanks and 9 pillboxes; fired 2510 rounds in indirect fire. Two M-36's and one jeep were lost to enemy action,

On February 2nd, 1945 the Battalion was relieved from attachment to the 95th Infantry Division and attached to the 87th Infantry Division. This Division was closing on the enemy as he withdrew from

the Ardennes bulge. Passing through St. Vith, Belgium, Company A, with the 2nd Reconnaissance Platoon attached, moved northeast 30 miles to join the 347th Infantry Regiment in their area near the Belgian-German border. The platoons were employed near Bertherath and Losheim with the Company CP in Manderfeld. On February 4th, Company C, with the 1st Reconnaissance Platoon attached, joined the 346th Infantry Regiment and supported them in the towns of Auw, Rothand and Wecherath. On February 5th the Battalion CP moved to Laudesfeld, Germany from Schonberg, Belgium.

For the third time the Battalion was facing the Siegfried Line. Complicated by mud, which made cross country movement impossible, the attack began. Roads became so bad that stretches had to be corduroyed. to carry traffic.

Company B supporting the 345th Infantry, advanced into the pillbox area [See Fig.1] along the Schnee Eifel Ridge and took one pillbox with 50 caliber machine gun fire. The 1st Platoon advanced until all destroyers were stuck in the mud. Two were pulled out and continued on the attack. On February 7th, near Roth, Lt. Calvin Stone led his platoon on foot through heavily mined areas, keeping abreast of the advancing rifle elements. Encountering a well-fortified enemy position Lt. Stone voluntarily advanced alone and threw a grenade into the structure. Following the explosion he charged inside firing his carbine, killing two and capturing six of the enemy. During the ensuing action, Lt. Stone continuously exposed himself to enemy fire while directing his tank destroyers in locating other enemy installations. For his devotion to duty and courage he was awarded the Oak Leaf Cluster to the Silver Star. The same day Company B destroyed four more pillboxes and during the next couple of days whittled their way through pillboxes to take Olzheim and Neuendorf. [Figure 5-1] On February 11th Company C extended its front and relieved Company B, which moved into Division reserve at Wascheid (one mile west of Auw).

Due to the terrible condition of the roads little advance was made and no relief of the forward elements could be accomplished. Company A fired indirect, Company C continued to support the 345th Regiment, and Company B continued maintenance of equipment and supplied men to help construct and maintain roads. The Pioneer Platoon worked on roads and prepared alternate positions for destroyers. The attack began again on February 26th, but moved very slowly because of the mud and mines.

During February the Battalion destroyed 1 half-track, 2 horse-drawn artillery pieces, 8 machine guns, 5 pillboxes, fired 1605 rounds of 90mm in indirect fire.

On March 1st the 1st Platoon, Company A, with one platoon of tanks, formed two armored groups consisting of two medium tanks and two tank destroyers. One group was led by the tank platoon leader and one was led by the tank destroyer platoon leader. These two groups moved in support of the infantry as it assaulted the town of Ormont. After the TD's had fired 26 rounds of 90mm and 2000 rounds of 50 caliber, the tanks firing about the same amount, the town was captured by the infantry.

During the next couple of days, the companies hammered their way through more pillboxes of the strongly fortified line. With the key points of Ormont, Neuendorf and Nolzheim taken, the Siegfried Line was breached and resistance slackened.



**Figure 5-1**

**One of the Many Siegfried Pill Boxes our T.D.'s Neutralized**