

GL-303-D-B
33

TDs

Document: Siegfried Line Cont'd.

HEADQUARTERS
803D TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 230, U. S. Army

12 October, 1944.

SUBJECT: Documentation of Siegfried Line.

TO : Commanding General, XIX Corps, APO 270, U. S. Army.

DOCUMENTATION OF SIEGFRIED LINE

1. Two (2) companies of the Battalion were used in the assault of the formidable Siegfried Line. To facilitate closer cooperation and faster employment, one company, was put in close support of each of the assaulting infantry regiments. Contrary to normal Tank Destroyer tactics the company was broken down and a platoon was placed in close support of each infantry battalion. This variance from normal doctrine is essential when TD's are employed on a tank mission. The infantry must have immediate direct fire support. It is emphasized the Tank Destroyer company when used in its proper role can contribute considerably toward destroying the numerous enemy counter-attacks. It should never be used to seek-out enemy tanks that are not definitely located. Only through wise decisions of the TD platoon leaders can these seeking out missions be avoided as friendly infantry commanders are frequently requesting such missions from us.

2. "B" Company, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in support of 119th Infantry Regiment. In the vicinity west of Rimburg on 2 October, 1944, the 119th Infantry Regiment, with one company of the 743rd Tank Battalion and Company "B" 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in close support pushed off on the attack against the Siegfried Line. Each platoon was equipped with a 300 series radio borrowed from the infantry battalion whom they were supporting. This net was composed of the Battalion Commander, the company commanders and the TD platoon leader. The primary mission was direct fire on pillboxes which come, in most cases, from the company commander. (All pillboxes encountered were in pairs, mutually supporting. The TD platoon was employed with two (2) guns firing, one into each of the pillbox embrasures and the other two guns overwatching. This pinned down the enemy personnel and allowed our infantry to infiltrate to the blind side. When in position to make final assault, infantry would call by radio for fire to be lifted. In a few cases the fire from the M10 would drive the enemy out of his position, however these were believed to be inexperienced troops. Unless the M10 could get into position to fire into the embrasure its usefulness in the reduction of the pillbox was useless. No amount of fire from the 3" inch gun could penetrate the thickness of these defenses.) After the M.L.R. had been penetrated the majority of missions were destruction of OP's, machine guns and personnel strongpoints.

Documentation of Siegfried Line Cont'd.

Equipment destroyed (period 2 - 9 October, 1944) "B" Company 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion:

Machine guns	4
Pillboxes (neutralized)	9
OP's	9
Mark V tank	2
Mortars	2
Personnel killed	40
PW's	40

Own Losses:

M10's (two are repairable)	3
Officers KIA	1
Officers WIA	3
Enlisted men KIA	3
Enlisted men WIA	12

3. "C" Company 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in support of 117th Infantry Regiment.

In the vicinity of Scherpenseel (K829601) on 2 October, 1944, the 117th Infantry Regiment with one company of the 743rd Tank Battalion and Company "C" 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion in close support pushed off on attack against the Siegfried Line.

Prior to the initial jump-off, all platoons fired on all possible enemy observation posts with 50% H.E. and 50% A.P. to deny the enemy the use of same during initial stages of the attack. Three hundred (300) rounds of ammunition were expended on this mission. No other direct fire support was possible during the first phases of the attack due to the inability to secure satisfactory firing positions. Our support actually consisted of establishing a strong anti-tank defense within the initial breach of the line.

The attack succeeded in breaching the Siegfried line in the vicinity of Palenberg (K855595) and establishing a bridgehead across the Wurm river (K849599). This bridgehead enabled the third platoon of Company "C" 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion to cross the river and move into defensive positions within the 1st battalion 117th infantry regiment perimeter defense just South of Palenberg. This crossing and movement was accomplished only after extensive mine clearance and reconnaissance of positions under heavy enemy artillery fire. The first platoon Company "C" 803rd T. D. Bn. was successful in moving into positions just east of the bridge crossing in order to protect it from enemy counter-attack and to offer close support of the 2nd battalion 117th Infantry Regiment which was in defensive positions in this vicinity.

On the morning of the 3rd October, 1944, the 2nd battalion 117th Infantry Regiment received strong enemy counter-attacks from the North of Palenberg and the 1st platoon Company "C" assisted in repelling these attacks by 3"inch H.E. and .50 caliber machine gun fire. This type of support was given twice during day and contributed considerably in smashing these attacks.

Documentation of Siegfried Line Cont'd.

As the attack progressed and the town of Ubach was taken, all three platoons were moved to the vicinity of the town to establish a strong anti-tank defense in this sector. The movement into Ubach by our platoons and the subsequent occupation and defense of this town for the next two (2) days was accomplished under the most intense enemy artillery that our troops ever experienced. (Described as worse than our experience at St. Lo) Due to the fact that our gun crews are protected by a certain amount of armor, we were able to accomplish this anti-tank mission with few casualties whereas all towed guns were unable to move.

No anti-tank ditches, dragons teeth, or other heavily constructed anti-tank obstacles were encountered in our sector.

The one enemy pillbox this company had an opportunity to fire on was quickly neutralized but not destroyed by a few rounds of H.E.

The enemy dug-in anti-tank guns, roving tanks, heavy artillery and stubborn infantry constituted much more of a problem than did any of the permanent emplacements of the Siegfried Line. These above mentioned enemy activities still constitute a problem toward rapid advances in this sector.

Equipment destroyed (period 2 - 9 October, 1944) "C" Company, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion:

OP's	5
Pillboxes (neutralized)	1
Machine guns	1
Personnel killed	8
PW's	8

Own Losses:

MLO's	0
Officers KIA	0
Officers WIA	0
Enlisted men KIA	2
Enlisted men WIA	0

Charles W. Goodwin
 CHARLES W. GOODWIN,
 Lt. Col., 803rd T. D. Bn.,
 Commanding.

G'-303-①B

(Bazooka fired from box
135 PW's from 2 boxes)

HEADQUARTERS
7TH ARMORED GROUP
APO 230

2AD-THC

15 October 1944

SUBJECT: Documentation of the Siegfried Line.

TO : Commanding General, XIX Corps, APO 270, U. S. Army.

1. In accordance with instructions contained in 1st Indorsement, letter, Headquarters First United States Army, dated 4 October 1944, subject as above, the following report is made of the experience of the tank battalions presently assigned to XIX Corps in the assault and breakthrough of the "West Wall".

2. The 743rd Tank Battalion with the 30th Infantry Division reports:

a. Effect of Tank fire on defenses.

(1) Tanks fired 75mm and machine guns at embrasures and entrances from ranges of 75 to 1000 yards. This stopped enemy fire from the pill boxes, and caused some enemy casualties when embrasures were hit directly, but did not drive the enemy from the positions, even at the shortest ranges with direct frontal hits.

(2) Assault guns fired 105mm HE ammunition with delay fuze at the pill-box embrasures and the resultant concussion was often severe enough to drive the enemy from the pillboxes.

(3) In the opinion of the Battalion Commander, the effort to reduce these pillboxes, which had concrete walls 6 or 7 feet thick, by fire of tanks and assault guns was a waste of ammunition unless the morale of the occupants was initially low. However, as covering fire for Infantry and Engineers in their approach for an assault, the tank fire was very effective in preventing the enemy in the pill-boxes from firing.

b. Methods of assault.

(1) Fire from tank weapons and assault guns on embrasures and entrances. (See paragraph 2a above).

(2) Tankdozers covered embrasures and entrances in the instances where these were low enough to the ground. This was done whether fire came from the pill-box or not, and since the action moved rapidly the battalion has not checked whether or not any personnel were trapped in the pillboxes.

(3) Only two antitank ditches were encountered, and these were incomplete and easily bypassed.

(4) Mines were not a serious problem. One minefield was encountered southeast of UBACH and one tank was lost in it. Mines also were found close in around pillboxes, but these were not hit by any tankdozers, and tanks did not approach the pillboxes close enough to run on the mines.

c. Method of Sealing Fortifications.

(1) Tankdozers covered embrasures and entrances. (See paragraph 2b (2) above).

d. Due to the delay in bridging the WURM RIVER, the tanks were not in the assault on the first fortifications of the "West Wall", and as the action turned south very few pillboxes were encountered. The Battalion Commander stated that the concrete fortifications, minefields, and antitank obstacles were a very minor part of the resistance which the tanks met. The most effective enemy resistance came from AT guns and bazookas placed around the concrete works in dug-in emplacements, which were assaulted in the customary manner.

3. The 747th Tank Battalion operating with the 28th Infantry Division (V Corps) at the time in question reports:

a. The methods of assault, fire, and pillbox sealing were similar to those of the 743d Tank Battalion.

b. The Battalion Commander concurs with the opinion expressed in paragraph 2a (3) above on the effectiveness of tank and assault gun fire on the concrete fortifications. The walls of the pillboxes encountered were of similar thickness.

c. Bazookas in the pillboxes were a bit troublesome but the greatest difficulty encountered was artillery and mortar fire.

d. "Dragons teeth" antitank obstacles in the path of the battalion were breached by the engineers before the arrival of the tanks. Mines were no problem, being planted close around the fortifications and causing no tank casualties.

e. One tankdozer was a casualty while covering a pillbox embrasure, from a bazooka in the pillbox.

4. The 744th Tank Battalion was not employed in the assault of the defenses of the Siegfried Line.


CHARLES G. RAU,

Lt Col., 7th Armored Group,
Commanding.

HEADQUARTERS
743rd Tank Battalion
APO 230, U. S. Army

13 October 1944

SUBJECT: Penetration of the SIEGFRIED LINE.

TO : G-2, 30th Infantry Division, APO 30, U. S. Army.

1. In compliance with ltr. Hq. 30th Infantry Division, 12 October 1944, Subject: "Documentation of the Siegfried Line", the following information is offered.

2. This battalion had two medium tank companies and an Assault Gun Section attached to the 119th Infantry Regiment; one medium tank company, an assault Gun Section, and a Mortar platoon attached to the 117th Infantry Regiment; one light tank company attached to the 120th Infantry Regiment. Because of these attachments this battalion aided in the break through of the line along the entire Division front.

3. The plan of the segment of the line as well as fields of fire encountered were as indicated on the uncontrolled Mosaic. No individual or detail study of them were made by this unit after passing by the various pillboxes. The terrain which comprised of rolling ground, with an occasional clump of woods and several large size towns offered both good offense country for our tanks and defensive country for the enemy. The terrain in front of the 119th Infantry sector was similar to that of the 117th Infantry once the high and heavily wooded bluffs on the East side of the Wurm River was cleared. The greatest obstacle to tanks was the Wurm River and its banks. The Wurm River was 10 to 15 feet wide, 4 to 6 feet deep and very swift--with a muddy bottom. The banks of the river, both on the approach and the exit were steep and four to six feet above the water level. Where the bank was not naturally steep, the enemy had dug it steep. Because of continual wet weather, the ground within fifty yards of either bank was soft, boggy and muddy. The enemy had incompleated anti-tank ditches which could be crossed only with a great deal of difficulty. However, they were not extensive and the tanks were able to flank them.

4. The enemy active defenses consisted of pillboxes surrounded by communication and firing trenches of a hasty and standard type. From these trenches, the enemy offered their greatest resistance until driven inside the pillbox by our artillery, mortar, small arms and tank fire. The enemy anti-tank guns and mortars as well as heavy machine guns were fired from these trenches and even when driven inside, the enemy always attempted to have two or three men outside the pillbox observing and reporting our advance and positions.

5. When tanks operated with infantry, the tanks would lay down a base of fire with 75 APC and machine gun fire and the accompanying 105mm Assault tank of the Assault Gun Platoon would fire 105 HE with T105 Concrete Smashing Fuse. This

fire would continue on the embrasures until the enemy came out or until the infantry was within 50 yards of the box, then the tanks fired only 30 Caliber machine gun fire until the infantry were within 25 yards of the pillbox, when the tank fire would cease and the tanks maneuver on beyond the box to protect the assault units as they assaulted the box.

6. The enemy artillery, mortar, anti-tank, and tank fire was much more of a problem to the attacking forces than the pillbox.

7. The mines were found mainly on the streets entering and leaving town, near bridges, and at important crossroads. The number of mines located in open fields or in front of fortifications along this division's front were negligible.

8. The enemy fought stubbornly from the pillboxes, communication and firing trenches. Once caught out of these, he surrendered willingly. It should be emphasized that the enemy always attempted to keep two or three men in the trenches outside the pillbox even during the heaviest firing to observe our movement and location. Thus by keeping mortar, artillery, small arms and tanks firing on or near these pillboxes, we were able to account for a great many enemy casualties.

9. Local counter-attacks were usually from company to battalion strength supported by 4 to 6 tanks. The attack was usually launched just before dark or just prior to daylight. During the hours of darkness, small groups of enemy would attempt and often succeeded in infiltrating back into the pillboxes. Counter-attacking troops would invariably attempt to re-enter pillboxes.

10. A good example of the above mentioned infiltration is concerning the pillboxes just across the Wurm River South of Palenberg. The 117th Infantry had taken the pillboxes on the 2nd of October 1944 and bivouaced during the night around them after having searched and cleared the pillboxes. On the morning of the 3rd of October, a platoon of tanks from "B" Company, under Captain Aas, left the 119th Infantry area where they were unable to cross the Wurm River, moved to Marienberg and crossed, entered Palenberg, moved South along the high ground where the pillboxes were located and opened fire on enemy in the woods along the river bank North of Rimbürg Castle. When the tanks fired on the woods, they received fire from two of the pillboxes not over 50 and 100 yards away and in the rear of the 117th Infantry. The tanks proceeded to fire direct fire APC and HE in the embrasures of the pillboxes and in a short time 135 prisoners left the two boxes. The prisoners were turned over directly to the Infantry and the tanks continued on their mission.

11. This organization has no active S-2 section because of the way it is split up in the division, so most of the intelligence information requested in par (e) of Ltr. "Documentation of Siegfried Line" is not available. However, the fighting quality of the troops encountered from 2 October to 8 October was generally good; leadership was fair, and their combat experience varied greatly among the individuals. The troops opposing us from the 9th to 13th of October are superior to the others.

12. It was again observed that the average German soldier, when not well protected or concealed, is extremely afraid of our tanks. After leaving Ubach and advancing on Alsdorf, one of the greatest difficulties was to get our own infantry forward to take over prisoners captured by the tanks without our infantry close support. If the enemy had not been frightened, he could have destroyed our tanks with bazooka fire in many cases, especially while the tanks went through the small village of Flores, Southeast of Ubach without close Infantry support.

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13. During the period 2 October to 13 October this unit had 2 light tanks and 18 medium tanks disabled or destroyed by enemy fire. Four of the above were hit by bazookas, indicating that enemy soldiers were willing to wait until our tanks were within fifty yards of them without firing and that our own infantry was failing to give close support to the tanks at that time. It is absolutely essential that tanks have close infantry support when near pillboxes or when passing over terrain spotted with enemy occupied foxholes in order to avoid unnecessary loss of tanks and crews.

14. To indicate enemy resistance other than pillboxes, this Battalion has destroyed the following between 2 October and 12 October 1944:

<u>Vehicles</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Probable</u>
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Tanks:

M IV	3	2
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M V	7	2
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M VI	1	2
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Armored Cars	2	0
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Anti-Tank Guns	8	0
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Artillery pieces 105 or larger	2	0
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Several small artillery Pieces		
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/s/ William D. Duncan

WILLIAM D. DUNCAN

Lt. Col., Inf.

Commanding

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

HEADQUARTERS
823rd TD Bn.
APO #230

GL- 3-① B 7D
34

14 October 44

SUBJECT: Siegfried Line.

TO : G-2, 30th Division
APO #30

Before the actual assault of the Siegfried Line two companies were in indirect fire position and fired 7701 rounds of HE on pillboxes and houses inside Germany.

After we took up direct fire positions close to the Siegfried Line 164 rounds of APC and 986 rounds of HE were fired direct into pillboxes and OP's, at ranges from 1500 to 2800 yards. The effect in most cases was good. After 5 rounds of APC was fired a crack or hole would appear in the pillbox then 10 to 15 rounds of HE was thrown in enlarging the hole to about two feet in diameter. If the pillbox didn't appear to be on fire more HE would be thrown in the hole. On firing on ranges of 2600 yards and over dispersion was great and sensings were very difficult, therefore, more ammunition was required. [The average being 10 APC and 30 HE. The best effect was at ranges from 1500 to 2000 yards.] The guns had to be moved and dug in position at night because of enemy observation.

On one occasion a pillbox was identified but we were unable to fire from our position on it, so one gun and one half track was moved over a hill down into a flat for a distance of 500 yards and in plain view of the enemy. The gun went into position, fired 16 rounds, destroying the pillbox and returned to its former position in eight minutes.

On the actual assault of the line one company gave close support to the attacking infantry, firing on pillboxes and enemy personnel. After the initial breach of the line and the attack turned South one company stayed on the West side of the Wurm River and fired into the enemy pillboxes and personnel from the flank. With fire from one company coming from the North and fire from another from the West the enemy would come out with a white flag and surrender to the approaching infantry. On some occasions he would abandon the pillbox and fight which gave us an excellent opportunity to fire direct into him with HE.

Most of the enemy captured were from various units and the morale was low.

Enemy artillery was very heavy throughout the operation.

For the Commanding Officer:

/s/ George W. Sitz,
GEORGE W. SITZ,
Captain, Cavalry,
S-2.

Annex 4f