

COMBAT HISTORY
OF THE
51ST ARMORED INFANTRY
BATTALION

Tuesday 11 July 1944

Co "A" left the marshalling area at 0945 and arrived at Hard S-2, Southampton Harbor, at 1210. They boarded LST 347 at 1630, left port at 1830, and anchored at the harbor after joining the convoy.

Wednesday 12 July 1944

LST 347 lifted anchor at 0130, the USS John R. Park at 0830, and USS Thomas Scott at 0900. Co "B" left the marshalling area at 0600, arrived at the hard at 0735, where breakfast was served. Just before noon, the company started to load on LST 347. It left the port at 1530 and stayed in the harbor until midnight. Co "A" arrived at Utah Beach at 2030 and disembarked. Gen Dager met the company at Transit Area "B" and sent it to a bivouac area one mile north of Canville, where the men spent the night. The USS Thomas Scott, with Co "C" aboard, dropped anchor off the Utah Beach at 2030 and the USS John R. Park with Hq and Hq Co aboard, at 2045. They spent the night aboard the ship, and the men had to sleep in the hold that night. The crossing was uneventful and the Channel was calm. Upon arrival at the beach, personnel were interested in studying the hulks of sunken Allied ships, and, on land, in the distance, they could see signs of action. There were tremendous fires on shore. During the night, there was air activity after dark, and anti-aircraft fire could be seen.

Thursday 13 July 1944

Co "B" lifted anchor and crossed the channel with its convoy at early morning. En Hq and Hq Co began to unload aboard an LCT at 1716. Only a few half-tracks were put aboard the LCT, which pulled away from the ship at 1855 and beached at 1913. Waiting for the tide to go out, the craft was unloaded at 2005 on Utah Beach. Major Alanis was in charge of the group, which was the only one to leave the USS John R. Park that night. The rest of the unit remained on board for another night. The vehicles and men that were brought ashore were driven to Transit Area "B", arriving at 2130. There Gen. Dager formed a column which left St Germain-de-Varreville at 2130. The column went through St Mere Eglise, Orglandes, Ste Colombe, Blandamour, St Jacques de Nebou, le Vakdecie, and then to the bivouac area, where Co "A" had guides to lead the vehicles of the 51st to their area near Canville.

Co "C" started to unload vehicles on an LCT at 2100 but didn't go ashore. Everyone remained aboard the ship that night. Co "B" debarked at 2230 at Fox Beach and arrived at the Transit Area at 2400.

Friday 14 July 1944

The detachment from Hq and Hq Co closed in bivouac at 0115

The first boat-load of Co "C" left for shore at 0530 and proceeded to the bivouac area, the first vehicle arriving at 1330. Co "B" left the Transit Area at 0600 and arrived at bivouac area at 1000. Vehicles from all companies continued to come into the bivouac area all day and night. Some vehicles of Co "C" had not arrived yet. The Battalion set up a tactical bivouac. Men dug slit trenches.

Saturday 15 July 1944

A telephone system was established at the area. The Bn was completely assembled upon the arrival of the last vehicles from Co "C". The first mail was received. Men were learning about the French cider. Intermittent shelling could be heard in the distance. Was was finally becoming a reality to this unit. There were conjectures about the part the battalion was to play. At the time, the Division was in rear of the 79th Inf Div, which was on the front. Men were warned to be careful of infiltrating enemy.

Sunday 16 July 1944

The big topic of the day was whether collars of the shirts would be buttoned at the neck. Orders on the subject were changed about four times, and it finally ended by requiring men to keep their collars buttoned. The men treated it as a big joke. Here they were only eight miles from the front, and subject like that was emphasized. Cleaning of weapons and equipment continued. The first church services in France were held near the Bn CP. Chaplain Berquist conducted Protestant services at 1330 and Chaplain Ernst Catholic Mass at 1630. The men took warm showers during the day at a shower point established nearby, mainly for the use of the 79th Inf Div. There they listened to the men who had just come out of the line relate their experiences. The Bn Commander and S-3 took a trip to the front to visit the 79th Div sector. Upon their return, they held a meeting of the Staff and Co commanders and described what they had seen. They showed some samples of German mines they had picked up there.

There was a check on clothing and equipment, and shortages were requisitioned. Men complained about the "B" rations, which were slim-- particularly bread. The Personnel Section, including company clerks, left at 1900 to join the Division Administrative Center. Most of the men managed to obtain plenty of cider, and some became drunk. There was a shooting at Hq Co in which two men were wounded. They were the 157 casualties, although non-battle, for the Battalion in France.

Suddenly, at 2330, word was received that the unit would be ready to move to the front lines by 0900 the next day to replace the 4th Inf Div. Everybody went to sleep feeling intense excitement, but morale was excellent.

Monday 17 July 1944

Field Order No 1, Hq 4th Armored Div, was received to cover the movement. The Div was assigned to the VIII Corps, 1st Army. The Bn moved out at 1100 as part of Combat Command "B" which was in the lead. And the 51st led the column, with the third platoon of Co "B" as the

point. The unit moved through Ste Colombe, Orglandes, Entrenville, Appeville, Bouste, and went into an assembly area one half mile east of Blehou. The trip was approximately 40 miles. Men dug in, and everybody was interested in examining and collecting German equipment that was found lying around. There conjectures about whether the unit would be shelled, but the day passed quietly, except for some noise of guns in the distance. Men were extremely wary of mines and booby traps, but evidently there were none in the area. Documents found in the area indicated that the 6th Parachute Regt and the 2nd Parachute Training Regt were the enemy units that had been there previously. Everybody slept in his slit-trench that night, but no enemy artillery fell in the area.

Tuesday 18 July 1944

Brig Gen Dager visited the Bn CP in the morning. The men worked to improve their positions and to dig in deeper. A dead American soldier was found in the area and the Graves Registration Officer had his first evacuation job. Later in the evening word was received that the 53rd Armored Inf Bn was being attacked in its positions and the Bn was alerted to move into the front lines to help them. At 2315, the unit moved out hastily and up to a position one mile West of Sainteny. There was a great deal of confusion and members of the 53rd were coming to the rear telling stories about their unit being wiped out. Co "B" moved up to support the 10th Armored Inf Bn, which was taking over the 53rd positions. Co "A" followed Co "B" but was later ordered to come back in reserve. Co "C" remained in position in reserve. Co "B" remained in support of the 10th. Casualties were evidently heavy in the 53rd and 10th, but the 51st was in the rear and not subjected to much fire. Still the men were frightened after hearing the weird tales from soldiers returning to the rear from the other two infantry battalions. Capt Marshall, Hq Co CO, was the first battle casualty of the battalion. It was believed that he was hit by a stray bullet.

Wednesday 19 July 1944

Everybody was awake all night and the men searched for infiltrating enemy. There was great fear of snipers. Instructions were passed around for the men not to use ranks of "Sir" in addressing officers or NCO's. Service Co picked up a load of ammunition--the first in combat. The Bn CP moved back up the road about a thousand yards at 0630. Co "A" also was pulled back in the rear of the CP. Co "B" spent the day in moving into defensive positions behind Co "A", 10th Armd Inf Bn at 0630. Then they were ordered to move back to protect the left flank and rear. All this took place under heavy shelling and the company suffered five casualties that morning. They remained in support of Co "A", 10th. Sgt Elsbernd, Co "B", was the first man to be killed in the battalion, and Sgt Pralle, Co "B", received the first Purple Heart awarded by the Battalion Commander. Service Co trucks returned with ammunition at 1230. The Bn CP was strafed at 1500 by an ME 109. Co "A" was also strafed. There were no casualties. Co "C" saw a pilot bail out of a German plane 3/4 of a mile south of their bivouac area. A patrol was sent to investigate and reported the pilot had been taken prisoner by the 4th Cavalry. At 1630, Co "A" was alerted and moved up on foot at 1900 to take up a position behind Co "B". The Bn Comdr returned from CC "B" from a meeting at 1905, and the Bn CP was alerted and moved up a short

distance at 1945. The CP closed in at new area one mile west of Sainteny at 2010 in an orchard near a group of farm buildings. Co "D" suffered 8 casualties for the day and that was the total for the battalion.

Thursday 20 July 1944

At 0100, Co "B" relieved Co "A" of the 10th on the front line. There was continued shelling in their area. It started to rain a heavy downpour during the afternoon, making conditions in the foxholes miserable. The enemy put down a heavy barrage about 1840 and continued it during the entire night. The enemy counter-attacked and, although Co "B" and Co "A" suffered heavy casualties, they held their positions, and repulsed the counter-attack. The 1st platoon of Co "A" and one squad of the 2nd platoon moved forward to fill in the area of Co "D". At the Bn CP, there were wild rumors coming back, with exaggerated reports of casualties suffered. There was a great deal of confusion at the CP. Our artillery fired short because the artillery commander had heard a report from a hysterical soldier that we had withdrawn. Thus, a barrage landed in our own front lines. There were many stragglers. One soldier returned to the Bn CP and gave a clear picture of the situation. He reported that the companies were receiving heavy fire and suffering casualties, but that the situation was not desperate and the companies would remain in their positions despite everything. The assault guns and mortars fired for the first time, and the Reconnaissance Platoon moved forward and reinforced the front lines. The drivers and anti-tank platoon of Co "A" moved in to protect the road and flanks of their company and the Recon Platoon of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion also went to the front. Every available man was established in perimeter defense around the CP. There was a total of 134 casualties in the battalion. Co "B" had 72, Co "A" had 59 and Co "C" had 3. Lt Leskovar and Lt McIntire were killed.

Friday 21 July 1944

The big concern of the early morning hours was to evacuate the casualties and to supply the front line companies. There was a light shelling during the morning. Gen Wood and Gen Dager visited the Bn CP about noon. Co "C" was alerted to relieve "A" and "B" and moved into position. During the afternoon, a detail under Lt Dorf went forward to evacuate our dead and was shelled, wounding one man. Co "C" completed its relief by 2200. The 83rd Div was on the left flank and was contacted. The 90th Div was on the right flank of the 10th area. Casualties for the day were seven.

Saturday 22 July 1944

Co "C" spent a comparatively quiet night at the front but used the time in improving positions prepared by "A" and "B". The latter had a chance to reorganize. Co "A" and "B" moved forward on foot to be able to support "C" in case of another attack. The Bn CP changed position to one mile Southwest of Sainteny at 1245. There was little enemy activity all day. Co "A" moved into position on the left of "C" and contacted the 329th Inf Regt of the 83rd Inf Div. Patrols were sent out by "C". Salvage was gathered out of material left by units in position before use. Service Co moved into position just Northeast of Sainteny from a position 1 mile east of Blehou. Two casualties for the battalion today.

Sunday 23 July 1944

It was an unusually quiet day - this first Sunday in actual combat. The men had their first view of air support attacking enemy installations to the immediate front. Positions remained static. There was slight intermittent shelling and sniper fire on "C" and patrols were sent out to deal with them and to maintain contact with units on the flanks. Supplies came in to replace losses. At 1815, the Bn CP received artillery fire, but the Commanding Officer's peep and the Executive Officer's air mattress were the only casualties. 1st Sgt's call was held by the Adj in a foxhole during a shelling. PX rations were distributed. Five men were wounded during the day.

Monday 24 July 1944

This was the quietest day since arrival in this sector. Co "A" was disturbed during the night and feared an attempted enemy attack but it did not develop. Our artillery was active. Men began to write letters. One man in Co "A" was killed by a mortar shell while relieving himself in the middle of a field. The sun came out for a change. There were three casualties.

Tuesday 25 July 1944

At 0100, the Bn CP was alerted with information that an enemy patrol had broken through. All men were awakened, but finally a double guard was left on duty. There was sniper fire in Co "B" area at 0230. Lt Miller was seriously wounded while leading a patrol to get the snipers. The men were all thrilled by the spectacular array of bombers which passed overhead and bombed enemy installations to the front from 0930 to 1100. There were hundreds of planes that could be seen. News was received that a big push was about to begin. At 1145, Gen Dager presented Purple Hearts to 23 enlisted men of the battalion at the 6P. The first replacements, one officer and 66 enlisted men, were received. Service Co collected head nets and intrenching tools from their men and sent them to the line companies. German propaganda leaflets were dropped in Co "C" area. There was a warning of a big push by the divisions on our flanks the next morning. Men were instructed that our mission was to hold and that fox-holes should be improved in case of an enemy counter-attack. There were seven casualties in the battalion.

Wednesday 26 July 1944

All personnel of the Battalion were awakened at 0530 in case of an enemy counter-attack, but all that happened was that a terrific concentration of our artillery was laid down on the enemy. It was the biggest barrage seen by the unit up until this time. Co "C" reported hearing enemy vehicles moving between 0200 and 0300. The front line companies had their first hot meal in seven days when kitchen trucks were brought forward. There was a great deal of maintenance and supply work. Some enemy artillery was received, but it was light. At 1300, Co "A" discovered its left flank was exposed when a patrol failed to find the 329th Infantry there. The company established its own security there. The first recommendations for the Expert and Combat Infantryman badges were submitted. There were two casualties in the battalion.

Thursday 27 July 1944

From 0001 to 0100, there was a heavy enemy barrage in the battalion area. It was believed that the enemy infantry was withdrawing along the entire Corps front. Orders were expected at any moment for the unit to advance. Lt Col Naybach and a patrol from Co "C" were the first Allied troops to enter the town of Raids. Men packed and turned their duffle bags for storage with the hope of obtaining them during rest periods. It rained again. Lt Bowen collected money that men wished to send home. Lt Plumley's mine-clearing detail in front of the position discovered six Teller mines. Co Comdrs were called to the CP at 1300 for orders on probable movement the next day. There were no casualties for the day.

Friday 28 July 1944

At 0300 the Commanding Officer issued warning orders for the battalion to be ready to move at 0800 as part of CCA. The battalion did not move. Thirty-three replacements were received. At 1900, the unit was put under command of CCB. The absolute quietness of the day seemed strange. There was no enemy or friendly artillery. An abandoned 1 1/2 ton truck was picked up in front of the unit's position, repaired rapidly by Service Co and turned over to the Communications Section as an extra vehicle for its use. The Battalion finally moved out at 1900 after waiting for most of the day for other units of the Division to clear the IP. The unit was far back in column as part of CCB, which followed CCA. The order of march was, Co "B", mortar platoon, Co "C", assault guns, Hq and Hq Co, Co "A" and Service Co. Bn Hq passed through Raids at 1952, Periers at 2009, St Sauveur Lendelin at 2030 and halted on the road outside of Coutance from 2055 to 2130. There was a dead German sniper lying at the road junction. The towns along the route were badly demolished and there were few civilians. This column was passing an endless column of the division's vehicles. The unit continued through Fontuchon at 2155 and pulled into bivouac one mile northeast of Coutance at 2205. Co "A" went into position in support of the 53rd Armd Inf Bn on the south side of the town. The distance of the march was 14 miles. The division was still assigned to the VIII Corps, 1st Army. No casualties were incurred.

Saturday 29 July 1944

The Bn moved forward at 1315, passed through Coutance at 1318 and proceeded southeast and moved into bivouac one mile north of Longrone - a distance of 15 miles. Many prisoners were being sent to the rear and passed along the road. The first two German prisoners were captured in Service Co by T/5 Christie and Pfc Maso, who were awarded 500 francs by the Battalion Commander. The Bn closed into bivouac at 2330. There were no casualties for the third straight day.

Sunday 30 July 1944

Co "B" captured two officers and 19 German prisoners early in the morning - the first large haul of the battalion. They were members of the 942nd Grenadier Regiment. Lt Gorton acquired a German Volkswagen and had it converted for use. The battalion left the bivouac area at 1130, passed through Lengronne, Ver and halted 1 1/2 miles south of the town, where Co "B" ran into light enemy resistance at Loiretel. An enemy delaying action caught the company on a