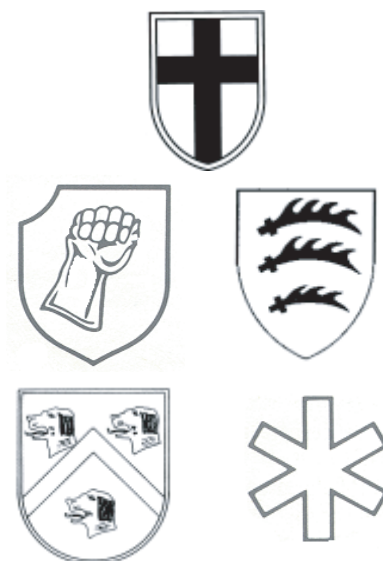




# **FRIENDS AND Enemies OF THE CENTURY**



**Military Units Which Supported or Opposed  
the 100th Infantry Division  
in the European Theater of Operations,  
1944-45**

**Keith E. Bonn**

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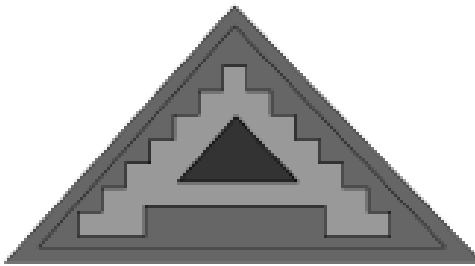
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# Units Which Supported the 100th Infantry Division

Although the 100th, like all US infantry divisions in WWII, was a combined arms organization with its own infantry, light and medium artillery, combat engineers, and mechanized cavalry troop, it was supported by a variety of separate Corps and Army assets in the execution of most of its missions.

At various times, the 100th was supported by a vast array of corps and Army artillery units, and the list is too long to reproduce here. Suffice it to say that all artillery fires, including at times 155mm rifles and 8-inch howitzers from corps artillery and even 8-inch rifles and 240mm howitzers from Seventh Army artillery, were all controlled by the 100th's DIVARTY, and their fires integrated with the DIVARTY fire support plans. None of these supporting artillery units were ever attached to the 100th, but only designated to fulfill varying reinforcing or direct support roles.

This section provides information about the major combat outfits that were actually attached to the 100th, in part or entirely, throughout almost all of its combat in the ETO. By contributing unique battlefield capabilities and providing mobility or firepower beyond that available from integral Division resources, each of them played a vital role in the Division's victories.



The 100th Infantry Division was assigned to the Seventh Army throughout the Division's combat operations.



The 100th was assigned to VI Corps, 2-27 November 1944 and 25 March-24 April 1945



The 100th was assigned to XV Corps, 27 November 1944-22 March 1945



The 100th was assigned to XXI Corps, 22-25 March 1945

# 781st Tank Battalion

## Combat History

The 781st Tank Battalion was activated at Fort Knox, Kentucky, on 2 January 1943 as a Light Tank Battalion. The officers and NCOs in the cadre included numerous veterans of service with other units, but many of the officers were fresh out of Officer Candidate School. The majority of the soldiers were recent products of the Armored Replacement Training Center.

Most of the battalion's first year was spent supporting testing by the Armored Force Board at Fort Knox, especially with evaluations of the M4A3 tank. The results of the evaluations indicated the superiority of the V-type eight-cylinder Ford engine, and it was with exactly this type of vehicle with which the 781st was subsequently equipped, as were many of the rest of the US Army's tank units.



Should patch worn by members of separate tank battalions.

In late 1943, the 781st was officially reorganized as a medium tank battalion, and transferred to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. There, it conducted platoon, company, and battalion training before being transferred to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. After honing its collective combat skills at Jackson, the battalion moved on to Camp Pickett for intensive exercises in combined arms operations, supporting the 78th Infantry Division in its pre-deployment training.

While the battalion (-) was training in the States, Company D, the light tank battalion, was training with the elements of the Canadian Army at Camp Wainwright, Alberta. The tactics and techniques for combined arms operations using smoke were later adopted by British and Commonwealth forces, and were put to use in northwest Europe during Operation VARSITY, the crossing of the Rhine River.

The 781st Tank Battalion staged at Camp Shanks, New York, and embarked on the *USS Lejeune* in the New York Port of Embarkation on 13 October 1944, just one week after the 100th Infantry Division departed from the same location. The passage to Marseilles took two weeks, and the battalion debarked to marshal and prepare for onward movement to the front in the Vosges Mountains as part of the Seventh Army.

That deployment, however, was significantly delayed by the loss of 1,000 crates of the battalion's equipment during the process of overseas deployment. After waiting for weeks with no word of the equipment's whereabouts, a complete battalion resupply had to be effected. As a result, it was 7 December until the battalion went into the line, with its companies attached to the 100th Infantry Division.

As the 100th pursued elements of the *361st Volks-Grenadier Division* through the Low Vosges, the 781st's maneuver elements were attached as follows: C/781st, plus one platoon of light tanks from Company D/397th Infantry; B/781st, plus one platoon of light tanks from Company D/398th Infantry; A/781st, plus one platoon of light tanks from Company D/399th Infantry.

Company A was the first to see action, taking part in the 399th Infantry Regiment's attack on Lemberg. There, the deadly fire of German self-propelled automatic anti-aircraft cannon was halted by A/781st tanks, which broke the defenses of the *2d Battalion, Grenadier Regiment 953*. Similar contributions were

A Sherman of the 781st Tank Battalion damaged in the 100th's assault on Lemberg, December 1944. [Story of the Century (SOC)]



made by C/781st crews in support of the 397th Infantry's assault against the defense by *1st Battalion, Grenadier Regiment 953* at Mouterhouse.

After the twin strongpoints of Lemberg and Mouterhouse had been cleared of the enemy, the 398th Infantry, with B/781st attached, passed through its sister regiments and led the attack on the Maginot Line fortifications in the immediate vicinity of Bitche. The foremost of these fortifications, Fort Schiesseck, was a major Maginot Fortress, boasting guns of up to 135mm caliber in a combination of disappearing steel turrets and steel-reinforced concrete casemates.

As the assault guns from Headquarters Company contributed their 105mm rounds to the bombardment of the fortifications around Schiesseck, a tank fitted with a dozer blade, also from Headquarters Company/781st, helped neutralize some of the casemates by burying them under tons of earth after 398th infantrymen had rooted out the defenders, or forced them deep underground in the warren of galleries and tunnels that connected the parts of the great Maginot fortress.

When the 3rd Battalion, 398th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for its achievement in seizing Fort Schiesseck, 33 members of the 781st were also awarded the coveted emblem for their part in the assault.

As a consequence of the Germans' Ardennes Offensive, which began on 16 December 1944, the Third Army had to suspend its offensive into the Saar and attack to the north and northwest to relieve the pressure on First Army. To cover the lengthy gaps that would otherwise be left by departing Third Army elements, the Seventh Army was forced to halt offensive operations and assume a geographically extended defensive front stretching from the Rhine to the Saar Valley to the west. On 21 December, the 781st Tank Battalion was detached from the 100th Infantry Division and its tank companies assigned to support different divisions. Over the course of the Germans' last offensive of WWII in the west, Operation NORDWIND in January 1945, elements of the 781st supported five different divisions in some of the hardest fighting on the Western Front.

Elements of C/781st were the battalion's first to enter Germany, in support of the 79th Infantry Division at Rechtenbach, just north of Wissembourg. When the 79th withdrew to more defensible positions along the Maginot Line on 3 January, Charlie Company tanks covering the withdrawal were the last to leave German soil.

Attached to the 276th Infantry Regiment of Task Force Herren (newly-arrived infantry echelons of the 70th Infantry Division, the rest of which was still stateside), Company B participated in the brutal combat around the village of Wingen-sur-Moder. In the wake of the destruction of VI Corps' Task Force Hudelson, elements of two battalions of *SS-Mountain Infantry Regiment 12, 6th SS-Mountain Division NORD* successfully infiltrated through the hastily-constructed new defensive lines of both the 45th Infantry Division's 179th Infantry and the 276th to seize Wingen and capture more than 250 members of the 179th. After three days of vicious combat, 4–6 January, the 276th (with 2d/274th Infantry and B/781st attached) managed to retake Wingen upon the withdrawal of the small remnant of *Kampfgruppe Wingen* to the north. Although no German armor was involved, Baker Company nevertheless lost two Shermans and four men killed to skillfully and courageously employed *Panzerfaust* teams; this was a very hard way to learn about the effectiveness of this weapon. As a result of these encounters, 781st crews began adding layers of sandbags to their tanks to neutralize the effects of the chemical energy warheads of the German antitank rockets.

Supporting the 232d Infantry Regiment of Task Force Linden (the infantry echelons of the 42d Infantry Division, attached to the 79th Infantry Division in the same fashion as Task Force Herren units were to the 45th), A/781st engaged German armored forces on the Alsatian Plain in the first weeks of January. At Gambenheim, where elements of *XIV SS Corps* crossed the Rhine in an attempt to link up with German forces attacking the Bitche area, and again at Sessenheim, Able Company crews found themselves in bitter and costly fighting. On 17 January, while supporting 1st/232d Infantry, A/781st crews destroyed two Panzer IVs during a counterattack to relieve an encircled infantry company in Sessenheim. Two days later, while supporting the 411th Infantry Regiment's attack in the vicinity of Sessenheim, the crews of A/81st encountered some of the heaviest armored vehicles to ever see combat—"Hunting Tiger" (*Jagdtiger*) tank destroyers of the *653d Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion*, mounting powerful 128mm main guns, protected by almost 10 inches of frontal armor. In this action on 19 January, Able Company lost six Shermans and sustained serious damage to two more in one eight-minute engagement. The company lost 11 men killed or missing and fifteen seriously wounded before being able to disengage.

Other actions by elements of the battalion were more successful. For example, while attached to the 79th Infantry Division's 79th Cavalry Recon Troop, the 1st Platoon of Company D surprised a battalion of Germans from the *553rd Volksgrenadier Division* in Stattmatten on 6 January. When the carefully coordinated attack was over, the Americans had seriously disrupted the German battalion, killing at least 60 and capturing 30 more, including the battalion commander and his staff. Three members of Company D were killed and one wounded in the lopsided victory.

After Operation NORDWIND had been contained, like most of the rest of the Seventh Army, the 781st Tank Battalion refitted, participated in reconnaissance and security missions, and prepared for the final push into Germany.

That final push, dubbed Operation UNDERTONE, began on 15 March 1945. The 781st was once again attached to the 100th Infantry Division, with one company of medium tanks supporting each of the three infantry regiments. Bitche was cleared against little direct resistance, although the artillery, rocket, and mortar fire was heavy. In all its centuries of war, no attackers—Austrians, Prussians, or Bavarians—had ever seized the fortress town by force of arms. Even in 1940, the Bitche garrison held out for a week after the rest of the French Army surrendered, capitulating only when the Germans threatened to start attacking unarmed French units elsewhere.

M4A3E8 of the 781st Tank Battalion leads Combat Team 398 elements through the Camp de Bitche, March 1945. [National Archives (NA)]



However, the whole Seventh Army was advancing on line from the Saar in the west to the Rhine in the east, and the Germans' back was broken. After a siege that had begun with the attacks on the nearby Maginot fortifications in mid-December, Bitche was in American hands on 16 March 1945.

781st crews supported the infantrymen with more than anti-armor fire-power. A sandbag-protected 781st M4A3 transports a squad of infantrymen into Germany. (SOC)



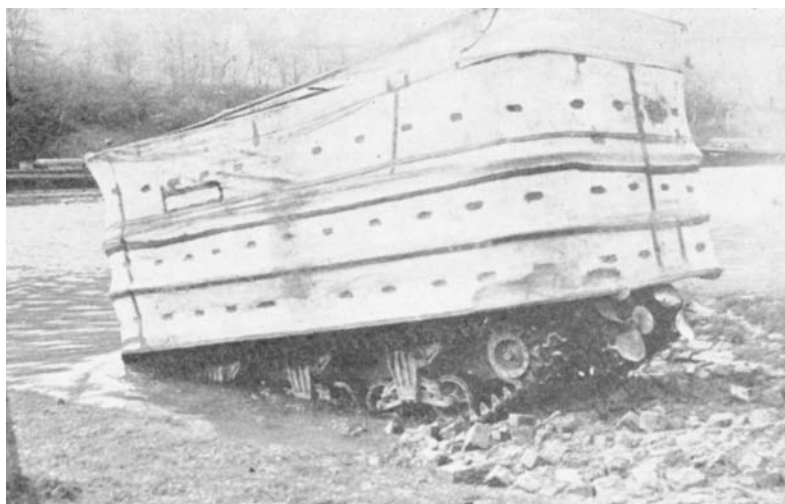
After crossing the Rhine at Mannheim/Ludwigshafen, the 781st rolled on with the 100th Infantry Division through part of the Rhineland, then the ancient region of Swabia. At Heilbronn, the Germans decided to make a stand in the rubble and ruins created by an RAF raid that mistakenly hit the city months before. With just a month left in the 12-year life of the Thousand Year Reich, the men of the 781st and the 100th Infantry Division paid dearly for that navigation error as a citizenry animated by the hatred engendered by the bombing of non-military portions of the city pitched in and helped convert the wreckage of their home town into a fortress in which several German units, aided by the local *Volkssturm* militia, would truly make a "last stand."

While B/781st supported the 398th Infantry's bridgehead north of Heilbronn, the battle for the city itself raged between the infantrymen of both sides. For the first several days, German artillery deployed in the hills to the east of the city zeroed in on and blasted every bridge the engineers attempted to erect. As a result, the only way to get armor across the swiftly-flowing Neckar River into Heilbronn was with floatation kits. Although the kits worked, the eastern bank of the river was too steep for the M4A3s to climb, and three slipped to the river's bottom.

German artillery emplaced in the hills east of Heilbronn destroyed several pontoon bridges almost as fast as they were erected, depriving the 100th's infantry on the east bank of the Neckar of desperately-needed armored support. (SOC)



With bridging not an option, 781st crews resorted to using floatation devices to cross the Neckar. Steep banks on the east side of the river kept tanks from crawling out of the river; several sank into the swiftly-flowing current. (SOC)





Even moving the location of the bridge sites failed to resolve the problem as German artillery destroyed bridge after bridge and prevented vehicular reinforcement of the infantry.

“Hunting Panther” heavy tank destroyer would have been trouble for the 781st’s Sherman. Apparently, this one was hit by some very accurate 8-inch howitzer sharpshooting, adjusted from 100th DIVARTY spotter planes. (SOC)



From 4 to 8 April, all the 781st could do was to add its firepower—now strengthened by the recent addition of 4.5-inch rocket launchers to two Headquarters Company tanks—to the blistering combination of light, medium, and heavy artillery and mortars firing in support of the infantry in their costly block-by-block, building-by-building assaults on the east bank.

The rubble-strewn streets of Heilbronn provided excellent cover and concealment for the German defenders, many of whom had to be blasted out of their positions by 781st tanks. (SOC)



Finally, under cover of darkness on the night of 7/8 April, the engineers were able to complete a treadway bridge, and Company C crossed into Heilbronn commencing at 0630. The addition of American armor helped turn the tide, and by the end of 11 April, Heilbronn had been cleared of enemy. For its outstanding performance of duty in Heilbronn, Company C was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation.

Shortly after the fall of Heilbronn, the 781st was permanently detached from the 100th Infantry Division and reassigned to support the 103rd Infantry Division’s

A 781st M4A3  
crosses a  
pontoon  
bridge into  
Heilbronn.  
(SOC)



drive through Bavaria to the Alps. Passing first through Oberammergau and Garmisch-Partenkirchen, crews from C/781st drove their Shermans through the Brenner Pass to link up with elements of Fifth Army, which were completing the liberation of Italy.

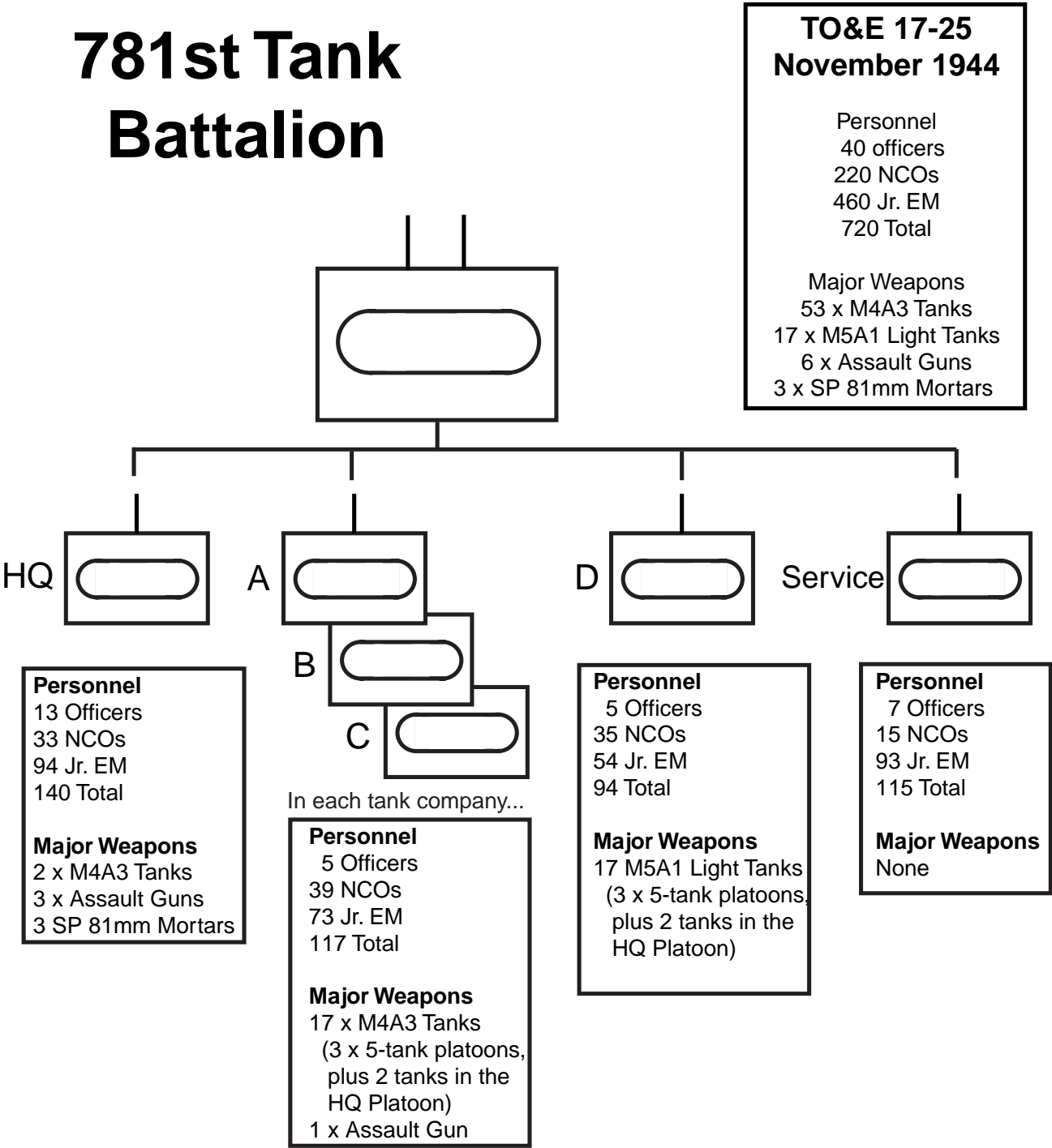
After occupation duty in Austria, the 781st was shipped back to the States in July pending onward deployment to the China-Burma-India theater. Before that deployment could begin, however, the war ended and the 781st Tank Battalion was inactivated at Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

In the more than 2½ years of its active duty service, the 781st Tank Battalion established a fine reputation with the 100th Infantry Division. In testament of this, on 14 July 1945, Major General Withers A. Burress, Commanding General of the 100th Infantry Division throughout its entire active service to that point, transmitted a message to the Commanding General, US Forces European Theater which read as follows,

During a large part of the combat activities of this Division, the 781st Tank Battalion was attached to it. I consider this battalion a superior combat unit. Its conduct was such that it gained the respect and admiration of the entire Division, and I have it from the Commanding Officer of that unit that it felt the same way towards this Division. I therefore request, in the interests of the combat efficiency of this unit, that, if feasible, the 781st Tank Battalion be attached to the 100th Infantry Division for any combat operations it may be called on to conduct.

Organization

# 781st Tank Battalion



# Equipment

## M4 Series Medium Tanks

M4A3 Sher-  
mans of the  
781st Tank  
Battalion line  
up on the  
main street in  
Lemberg in  
December  
1945. The lead  
tank mounts  
the 76mm  
“high veloci-  
ty” main gun,  
while the  
remaining  
tanks mount  
the original  
75mm pieces.  
(SOC)



The workhorse of the 781st—and of all US Army medium tank battalions in WWII after 1942—was the M4 Sherman tank. Four variants served in combat with the 781st in Europe. Shermans equipped with the 75mm main gun were at a serious disadvantage, as by 1944, this weapon lacked the lethality and accuracy necessary to duel with most German tanks at typical engagement ranges. All US armored vehicles were vulnerable to attack by German *Panzerfaust* (“Armored Fist”) or *Panzerschreck* (“Tank Terror”) rocket launchers. The former was the forerunner of the modern Soviet RPG series of antitank rocket launchers, and was an inexpensive, mass manufactured weapon with a short range (50 yards or less), but with an enormously powerful rocket-propelled chemical warhead capable of penetrating

M4A3 with  
76mm gun  
and sandbags  
for protection  
against Ger-  
man antitank  
rockets. (SOC)



the armor of any Sherman with its jet of hyper-heated gas and high explosive. The latter resembled an American bazooka, but was manufactured in a much larger caliber (88mm vs. 60mm, or 2.36 inches), making it a much more formidable weapon.

To nullify the effects of these ubiquitous and deadly weapons, crews of the 781st often decked their tanks with sandbags. Although the weight slowed down the vehicles, the sandbags detonated the Germans' rocket warheads and dissipated their chemical energy before the armor could be penetrated.

Some units of the 781st possessed the M4A3 with a 3-inch, or 76mm main gun. This much more powerful weapon was more than a match for the most common German tank at this stage of the war, the Panzer IV, or the most common assault guns faced by the 100th Infantry Division, the *Hetzer* and *Sturmgeschütz* III or IV, all of which were equipped with a 75mm gun of slightly inferior performance. Otherwise, this variant provided the same reliable service and moderate armor protection as those M4A3s equipped with 75mm guns.

781st Shermans with 76mm guns were more than a match for German armored vehicles equipped with the medium caliber-length 75mm gun, such as this *Panzerjäger* 38 *Hetzer* ("Harrier") tank destroyer/assault gun. (SOC)



Another variant of the Sherman serving with the 781st was the M4A3E8, or "Easy Eight." This version also carried the 3-inch, or 76mm gun, which fired its 15.4 pound armor piercing projectile at a muzzle velocity of 2,600 feet per second (or almost 27% faster than the 75mm gun M3 equipping many of the M4A3s in the battalion!). When equipped with this weapon, Shermans were more than a match for the German Panzer IV or any other German armored vehicle equipped with the standard German caliber-length 46 or 48 main gun. (such as the *Hetzer* tank destroyers employed by the 17th SS-Panzer Grenadier Division around Rimling, or *Sturmgeschütz* III or IV assault guns employed by elements of German XC Corps around Lemberg during Operation NORDWIND.) Even with this 76mm main gun, however, crews of the 781st who were fortunate enough to be so equipped were outgunned by the 21st Panzer Division's Panther tanks supporting the 17th SS at Rimling, which mounted a 75mm gun with a much higher muzzle velocity (3,066 feet per second). They were grotesquely outgunned by the behemoth 128mm guns mounted on the "Hunting Tiger" (*Jagdtiger*) tank destroyers from the German 653rd Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion, some of which were also attached to the 17th SS

during Operation NORDWIND. Aside from its improved main gun, the only other significant difference of this variant of the Sherman is reduced ammo storage; due to the larger bulk of the 76mm projectile, it could carry only 71 rounds.

A Sherman crew's nightmare: a *Panzerjäger VI Jagdtiger* ("Hunting Tiger"), the most heavily-armed, most heavily-armored fighting vehicle of the war. (NA)



The Headquarters Company's Assault Gun Platoon possessed Shermans armed with 105mm howitzers, as did the Headquarters Platoons of each medium tank company. While this main gun had very limited usefulness as an antiarmor weapon, it was extremely useful both in the indirect fire mode, and in direct fire against field fortifications or buildings. Otherwise, its performance was very similar to a standard Sherman. Sometimes, all six assault guns were brigaded together to form a provisional battery. During NORDWIND, the 781st created such an organization, under the command of Lieutenant Yonkers. Designated "Battery Y," it included all of the indirect fire assets in the battalion, including the battalion 81mm mortar platoon and all of the battalion's 105mm-equipped Shermans.

In the spring of 1945, as the 781st supported the 100th Infantry Division's drive into Germany during Operation UNDERTONE, Headquarters Company M4A3 tanks were equipped with the US Army's answer to the dreaded German *Nebelwerfer* rocket launchers. These two vehicles were rigged with 4.5-inch rocket launchers, each capable of "ripple firing" up to 60 rockets in a single barrage lasting only 30 seconds. These vehicles provided much-needed fire support to elements of the 397th and 398th Infantry Regiments during their assault crossing of the Neckar River at Heilbronn in April 1945.

M4A3 Assault Gun with 105mm howitzer. Photo taken at Fort Hood, Texas, by Jim Weller. (Used with permission.)



M4A3 of  
Headquarters  
Company/  
781st Tank  
Battalion  
equipped with  
4.5-inch rocket  
launcher.  
(SOC)



### **M4A3 Sherman—Specifications**

**Height:** 9 feet

**Width:** 8.7 feet

**Length:** 19.4 feet

**Weight:** 37 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):** 100 miles on roads

#### **Armor:**

Front: 2 inches

Side: 1.5 inches

Turret Front: 3 inches

Turret Side: 2 inches

Mantlet (Armored shield on front of turret)

M4A3: 1.75 inches

M4A3E8: 3.2 inches

#### **Maximum Speeds:**

Road: 26 mph

Cross-Country: 15 mph

#### **Armament:**

Main Gun Muzzle velocity:

(75mm) 2,050 feet per second

(76mm) 2,600 feet per second

(105mm How) 1,550 feet per second

Bow Machine Gun: .30-caliber

Co-axial Machine Gun: .30-caliber

Anti-aircraft Machine Gun: .50-caliber

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*



## M5 Light Tank

M5A1 tanks  
in action in  
the European  
theater. (NA).





Company D was equipped with M5A1 “Stuart” light tanks. An early war design, these extremely nimble, fast, but lightly armored tanks mounted 37mm main guns that were completely useless against German tanks of 1944–45. As a result, the platoons of this company were typically used for reconnaissance or screening duties, in which mobility and protection from shrapnel or small arms fire were important, but in which engagement with German tanks was unlikely.

#### **M5A1 Stuart—Specifications**

**Height:** 7.5 feet

**Width:** 7.5 feet

**Length:** 15.9 feet

**Weight:** 16.9 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):**

160 miles (road); 100 average conditions.

#### **Armor**

Front: 1.5 inches

Side: 1.1 inches

Turret Front: .5 inches

Turret Side: 1.25 inches

Mantlet (Armored shield on front of turret): 2 inches

#### **Maximum Speeds:**

Road: 36 mph

Cross-Country: 20–25 mph

#### **Armament:**

Main Gun: 37mm

Muzzle velocity: 2,600 feet per second

Bow Machine Gun: .30-caliber

Co-axial Machine Gun: .30-caliber

Anti-aircraft Machine Gun: .30-caliber

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*

## **M3 Half-Track**

The M3 half-track was used as a command and control vehicle by headquarters staff elements in the 781st Tank Battalion, and a modified version served as the basis for the self-propelled 81mm mortars used by the Mortar Platoon in Headquarters Company. Although fast and relatively mobile, the main drawback of the lightly armored half-tracks were their open tops, which made them vulnerable to shrapnel pelting downward from artillery, rocket, or mortar projectiles which may have detonated above the vehicle. In the heavily-wooded Vosges Mountains, where the tall trees frequently caused such projectiles to detonate before they hit the ground, this was an especial weakness for the design.

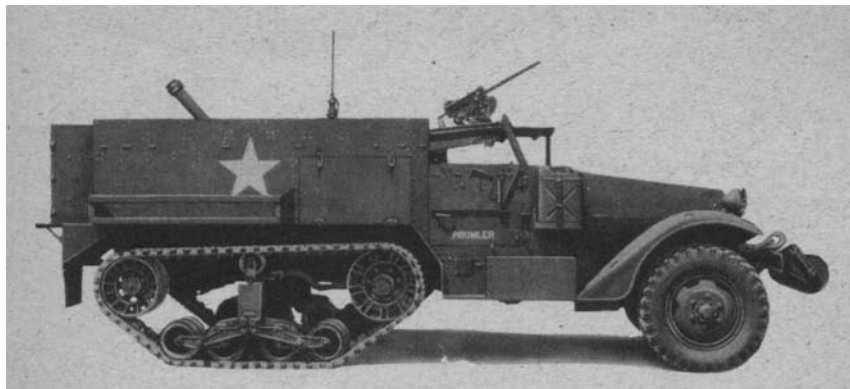
M3 Half  
Track (NA)



M3 Half  
Track  
(TM 9-710,  
February  
1944)



M4A1 81mm  
Mortar  
Carrier  
(TM 9-710,  
February  
1944)



### **M3 Half-Track—Specifications**

**Height:** 6.75 feet

**Width:** 7 feet

**Length:** 20.25 feet

**Weight:** 10 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):** 220 miles (road).

**Armor**

Front: .5 inches

Sides, rear: .25 inches

**Maximum Speed:**

Road: 45 mph

**Armament:**

1 x .50-caliber MG

1 x .30-caliber MG

The self-propelled 81mm version was designated the M4A1. Its secondary armament consisted of a single M1919A4 air-cooled .30-caliber MG, but the vehicle otherwise possessed similar performance characteristics.

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*

# 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion

## Combat History

The 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion was activated at Fort Lewis, Washington, on 20 December 1941. The unit which served as the basis for its formation was the Provisional Antitank Battalion of the National Guard's 76th Field Artillery Brigade, which had been called into federal service (on active duty) in April of the same year.

At the time of formal activation, the 776th's personnel were Guardsmen from the following units and areas:



Unofficial distinctive insignia of the 776th TD Battalion.

Headquarters Company: Battery G, 183rd Field Artillery Regiment; Pocatello, Idaho, as well as individual soldiers from Headquarters Battery, 76th Field Artillery Brigade and from the 183rd and 188th Field Artillery Regiments.

Company A: Battery G, 188th Field Artillery Regiment; Minot, North Dakota.

Company B: Battery H, 188th Field Artillery Regiment; Lisbon, North Dakota.

Company C: Formed in January, 1942, consisting of personnel from the other companies within the battalion.

Recon Company: Battery H, 183rd Field Artillery Regiment; Rexburg, Idaho.

Initially, the battalion was equipped with truck-drawn 75mm guns of WWI vintage. In April, 1942, the Battalion was reequipped with half tracks mounting the same type of 75mm gun on which the Battalion's soldiers were already highly trained. Additional equipment included 37mm antitank guns mounted on M1937 weapons carriers and .50-caliber machine guns.

The Battalion departed Fort Lewis in late July 1942 for further training at Fort Hood, Texas. Fortunately for the soldiers of the Battalion, in November 1942, the M-10 Tank Destroyer was issued to the 776th to replace the primitive and obsolescent weapons with which they had previously trained. With its 76mm gun, the M-10 was, at that time, the most heavily armed armored vehicle possessed by the Western Allies, capable of outgunning all but the newest of German tanks or tank destroyers.

Its men and equipment departed the New York Port of Embarkation on 14 January and arrived in Casablanca, French Morocco, eleven days later. In late February, the Battalion moved to Algeria, and in March, it was committed to combat in Tunisia.

M3 Self-Propelled Gun. A half-track with a WWI-vintage 75mm field gun welded to the deck, it was an improvement over the towed 75s first issued to the 776th. [US Army Military History Institute (MHI)]



The 776th experienced its baptism of fire at the battle of El Guettar, the first major victory by the US Army against the Germans. Throughout the next two months, often attached to the 1st Armored Division, the 776th saw a great deal of action against the veterans of *Army Group Afrika*, as they took part in most of the important battles of the Tunisian campaign.

The veterans of the 776th next saw combat in Italy, where they went ashore at Salerno in mid-September 1943. Attached to the 34th Infantry Division, the battalion conducted extensive reconnaissance and countermine support for the infantry and indirect fire missions in reinforcement of the Red Bull Division field artillery.

Subsequent battalion operations in Italy included the fiercely-contested assault crossing of the Volturno River, the infamous and costly battle for San Pietro, the crossing of the Rapido, and the legendary battle for Cassino.

After a brief period off the line in March/April, the 776th was attached to the 85th Infantry Division and participated the great drive on Rome. After the fall of Rome, the Battalion supported the 34th and 91st Infantry Divisions and the 1st Armored Division as the Fifth Army continued its offensive up the “boot” of Italy.

In early September 1944, the Battalion was relieved from assignment to Fifth Army and ordered to embark from Naples for France, where it would be reassigned to the Seventh Army. Before the 776th left Naples, however, it was reequipped with the most powerful antitank weapon in the Allied inventory: the M36 “Slugger” tank destroyer, mounting a high velocity 90mm main gun.

After a two-day passage of the Mediterranean from Nisidia, Italy to Marseilles in early October, the Battalion marshalled and began the movement by train and truck convoy to the front near Lunéville. On 30 October, the 776th was attached to the 44th Infantry Division nearby.

During the transition of missions from the penetration of the Saverne Gap to the pursuit of German units withdrawing toward the Ensemble de Bitche in the Maginot Line in early December, using *Panzer Lehr Division* Panthers it had previously knocked out, the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion conducted two evaluations to determine the effectiveness of two common US infantry anti-tank weapons, namely the 2.36-inch (60mm) rocket launcher (the “bazooka”) and the 57mm Anti-Tank Gun. The results, which were disseminated throughout the Seventh Army,

M36 Slugger of the 776th TD Battalion parked near a badly damaged Maginot Line casemate, December 1944. (*An Informal History of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion*)



were important for determining the character of anti-tank defenses to be built in late December, when the Seventh Army was forced to assume a defensive posture later due to the impact of the German offensive in the Ardennes.

As the divisions of XV Corps (44th and 100th Infantry and 12th Armored Division) approached the Maginot Line and the German border in early December, the enemy stubbornly delayed by forming strongpoints around key road junctions. Advancing along the rolling hills where the Saar River plain meets the western edge of the Low Vosges Mountains (on the left flank of the 100th Infantry Division), the 44th was opposed by elements of the *11th Panzer* and *25th Panzer-Grenadier Divisions*. These experienced, tough German units ultimately occupied positions in pillboxes and forts of the Maginot Line to the west of Bitche.

The most formidable Maginot position occupied by the Germans in this sector was Fort Simserhof, a major Maginot fortress (*gros ouvrage*). A combined arms team built around the 44th's 71st Infantry Regiment attacked Fort Simserhof from

776th TD Battalion Slugger in hull-down position in the snow, December 1944. (*Informal History of the 776th TD Battalion*)



14-19 December, and M36 tank destroyers from the 776th TD Battalion played a key role in this attack.

Two destroyers were sited about 2,000 yards from one of Simserhof's blocs, and were used as 90mm "sharpshooters" tasked with the mission of destroying the enemy ensconced in the impenetrably thick, steel-reinforced concrete fortifications by firing 90mm rounds through the narrow firing and observation apertures. This unusual mission was accomplished by elements of A/776th, even as the rest of the Battalion was performing its more traditional anti-armor missions.

It was during this period that elements of the 776th first provided support to the 100th Infantry Division during its parallel assault on Fort Schiesseck, another Maginot fortress two kilometers east of Simserhof. On 18 December, M36 Sluggers from 3rd Platoon, A/776th fired at a bloc of Fort Schiesseck as Combat Team 398 was continuing its assault, begun on 14 December.

Just after the fall of Forts Simserhof and Schiesseck, all Seventh Army offensive operations were halted due to operational requirements generated by 12th Army Group's reaction to the Germans' Ardennes Offensive, well to the north. To cover the area about to be vacated by Third Army in their attack north to relieve the pressure on First Army in Belgium and Luxembourg, the entire Seventh Army had to go over to the defensive and shift its positions to the west.

Still supporting the 44th Infantry Division, the 776th took up defensive positions between Sarreguemines and Rimling commencing 22 December. In addition to occasional direct fire anti-armor missions, the battalion fired its 90mm main guns in reinforcement of DIVARTY, 44th Infantry Division.

Just before midnight on New Year's Eve, the German *1st Army* commenced their last offensive in the west, Operation NORDWIND. The 44th Infantry Division was attacked by the *19th* and *36th Volks-Grenadier Divisions*, and by elements of the *17th SS-Panzer Grenadier Division*, heavily supported by armor. Over the next ten days, the crews of the 776th TD Battalion engaged and destroyed Panzer IVs, *Sturmgeschütz* III and IV assault guns, *Hetzer* tank destroyers, half tracks, and a wide variety of other German armored vehicles.

The heaviest action for the 776th occurred on the 44th's eastern flank, between Rimling and Gros Réderching, where the *17th SS*, supported by at least 70 assault guns and a company of Panthers from the *21st Panzer Division*, pushed hard to

A *Sturmgeschütz* III Assault Gun after a catastrophic kill by a 776th TD Battalion Slugger, January 1945. (NA)



break through to the south and east to encircle the 100th Infantry Division and regain the Saverne Pass.

In this fighting, several units of the 776th were subordinated to the elements of the 100th Infantry Division. On 8 January, 1st Platoon of A/776th was attached to Combat Team 397 and went into action in the vicinity of Rimling, which was being attacked in force by elements of the 17th SS. On the following day, a crew from this platoon, under Lieutenant John C. Britz, knocked out a "Hunting Tiger" (*Jagdpanzer VI*, or "*Jagdtiger*") from *Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion 653*, the first such vehicle ever knocked out on the Western Front. This behemoth armored vehicle—at 79 tons, the heaviest ever committed to combat in the 20th century—was completely destroyed by hits from the 90mm main guns of the M36s in A/776th. (Interestingly, in a history of *Battalion 653* which appeared in 1997, the veterans of this unit claim that the vehicle was destroyed by a bazooka hit.)

Captain Jack Rothschild, 776th TD Battalion, examines the wreckage of the first Hunting Tiger ever destroyed on the Western Front, killed by the crew led by Lieutenant John C. Britz. Near Rimling, January 1945. (NA)



On the same day, 1st and 2d Platoons of B/776th were also attached to CT 397 and went into action in the vicinity of Rimling. Over the next few days, they covered elements of 2d and 3d Battalions, 397th Infantry, as they withdrew from Rimling, where, for over a week, the infantry had been fighting while surrounded on three sides. In the process, at least one more Panther was destroyed by a B/776th crew, at the extreme range of 3,000 yards.

On 11 January, B/776th was attached to the 398th Infantry, occupying defensive positions in depth near Guising and Bettviller. This company remained there for the next eight days, providing heavy anti-tank firepower along the Rimling-Rohrbach and Rimling-Petit-Réderching armor avenues of approach, and firing harassing and interdiction missions into Rimling.

Even as elements of the 776th were providing important combat support to the 100th, some of its crews were providing training support that would prove invaluable to the Division in the days to come. Starting on 16 January, one crew from Company A and two from Company B were detailed to train personnel from the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed AT Gun) in the operation and maintenance



of self-propelled tank destroyers. By March, the 824th would turn in its 3-inch (76mm) towed anti-tank guns with their half-track prime movers, and be reequipped with M18 "Hellcat" tank destroyers; thus equipped and trained by the veteran 776th, they would support the 100th Infantry Division in its drive through the Siegfried Line and across the Rhine, and provide critical support in vicious fighting during the assault crossing of the Neckar River at Heilbronn in April.

By 19 January, the 776th TD Battalion was once again attached in its entirety to the 44th Infantry Division. Its destroyer crews spent the next two months conducting desultory indirect fire missions in reinforcement of the 105mm and 155mm howitzers of the 44th's Division Artillery.

Finally, on 15 March 1945, the battalion was attached to the 63rd Infantry Division to support its penetration of the *Westwall*, or as the Allies called it, the "Siegfried Line." Companies A and C were awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for their part in the furious battle to breach the Reich's last line of defense on 16 and 17 March 1945.

After a brief rest in late March, the 776th was again attached to the 44th Infantry Division for the final drive across Germany. Between 26 March and 8 May, the Battalion covered hundreds of miles from Fischbach, Germany to Mannheim, Heidelberg, Fohrbach, Ehrbach and Ulm, before crossing the Danube and heading into Austria. V-E Day found the 776th in the East Tyrolian village of Ehrwald, Austria, in the shadow of the Zugspitz Mountain.

In its 550 days in combat, the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion only supported the 100th Infantry Division for less than two weeks, but they were critical ones. Elements of the 776th provided crucial heavy anti-tank firepower exactly when it was needed most—when the 100th was facing its only major German armored attack in its own six months of grinding combat in the European Theater. However, the highly experienced veterans of the 776th also indirectly aided the 100th by imparting their knowledge gained in the sands of North Africa, the mountains of Italy, and the bitter snows on the edge of the Vosges Mountains to the anti-tank gunners of the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which supported the Century Division during its last two months of combat in Germany.

Hailing mostly from small towns in the Great Northwest and upper Midwest United States, but later including replacements from all over the nation, the citizen-soldiers of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion forged a sterling record with which the veterans of the 100th Infantry Division can be proud to have been associated.

Organization

776th Tank  
Destroyer  
Battalion

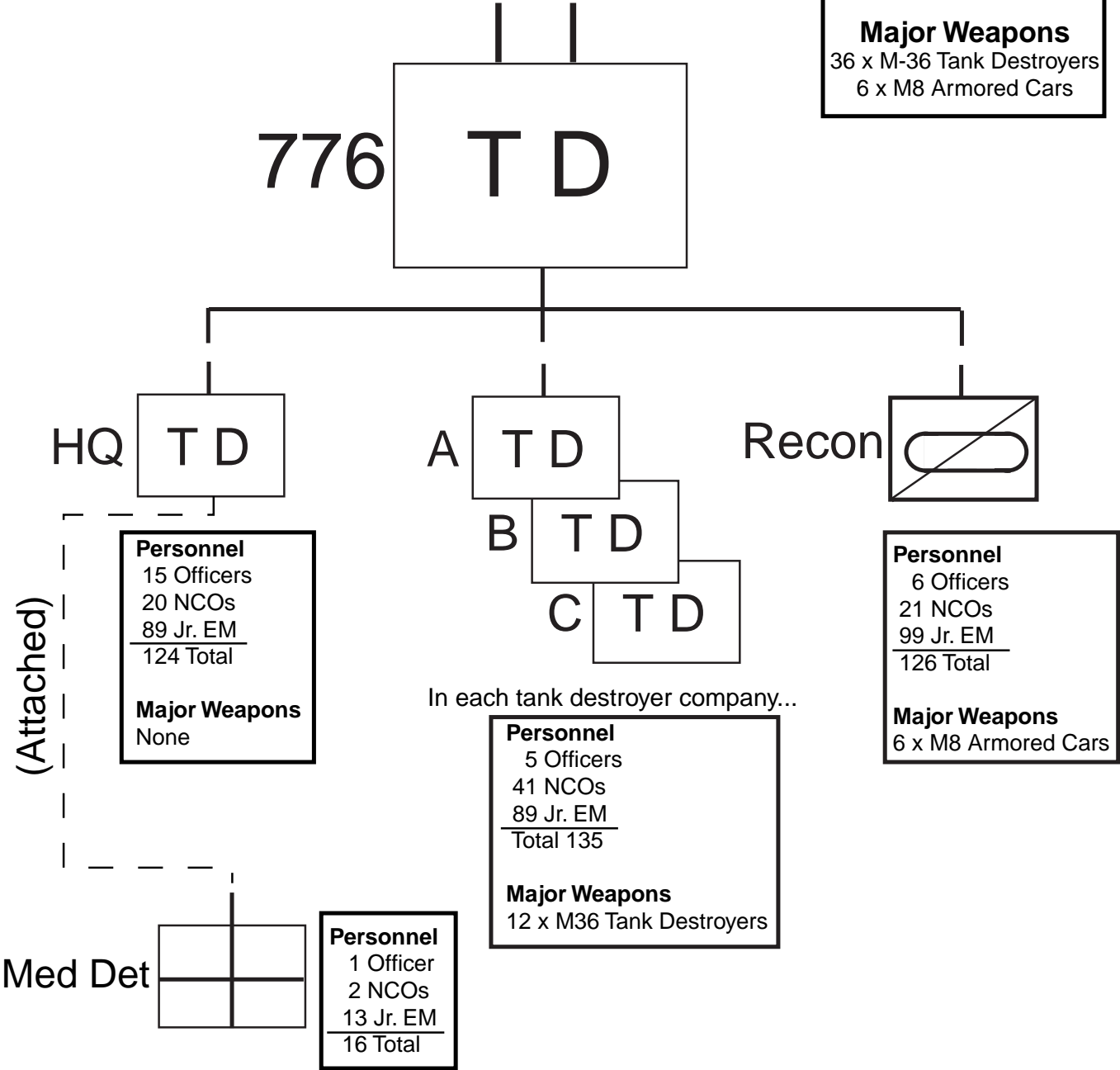
**TO&E 18-25**  
**March 1944**

**Personnel**  
36 officers  
164 NCOs  
455 Jr. EM  

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655 Total  
(Does not include attached medics)

**Major Weapons**  
36 x M-36 Tank Destroyers  
6 x M8 Armored Cars



# Equipment

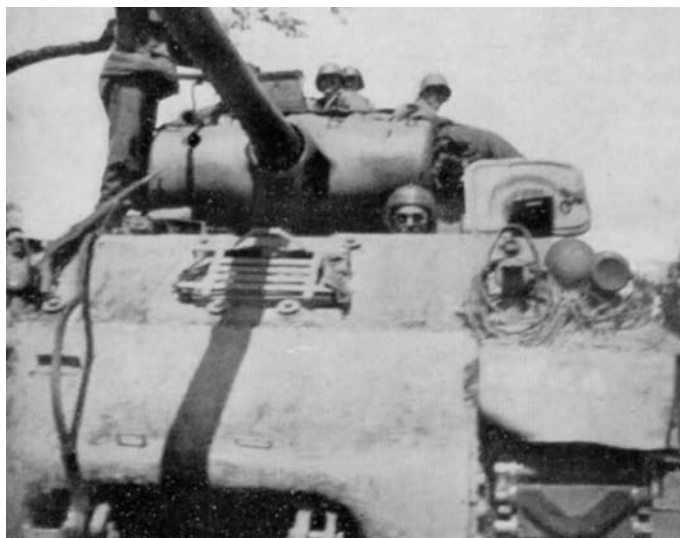
## M36 "Slugger" Tank Destroyer

By the time the 776th supported the 100th Infantry Division in January 1945, it was equipped with the M36 "Slugger" tank destroyer which carried the most powerful US antitank weapon to see combat in WWII, the M3 90mm gun. The M3 was more than a match for the especially long-barrelled 75mm guns of the *21st Panzer Division's* Panthers encountered near Rimling, and was only outgunned by the behemoth 128mm main guns of the 653rd Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion's "Hunting Tigers" that supported *XIII SS Corps'* attack during Operation NORDWIND.

An unusual feature of this vehicle was that its turret was open-topped to provide maximum observation for the commander and crew at the long ranges at which engagements with enemy tanks were envisioned by the designers. Unfortunately, it also meant that turret crews were vulnerable to shrapnel from above.

Despite these vulnerabilities, it was the crews of 776th TD Battalion Sluggers who scored the first kill of a Hunting Tiger ever recorded on the Western Front in the first week of January 1945, just outside Rimling!

M36 Slugger  
(NA).



### M36 "Slugger"—Specifications

**Height:** 10.4 feet

**Width:** 10 feet

**Length:** 19.6 feet

**Weight:** 30.5 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):** 155 miles (road);  
110 miles cross-country

#### **Armor:**

Front: 1.5 inches

Side: .75 inches

Turret Front: .75 inches

Turret Side: .75 inches

Mantlet (Armored shield on front of turret): 3 inches

**Maximum Speed:** 26 mph (road); 5–20 mph cross-country

**Armament:**

Main Gun: 90mm M3

Muzzle velocity: 2,800 feet per second

Anti-aircraft Machine Gun: .50-caliber

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*

## M8 Armored Car

The reconnaissance platoons of tank destroyer battalions' Reconnaissance Companies were equipped with M8 Armored Cars. These light, fast vehicles were ideal for the reconnaissance and screening missions typically allotted to them, but were completely vulnerable to antitank fire from even the smallest and lightest German guns arrayed against them in 1944–45.

### M8 Armored Car—Specifications

**Height:** 7.5 feet

**Width:** 8.3 feet

**Length:** 15.7 feet

**Weight:** 8.2 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):** 250 miles (road)

**Armor:**

Front: .625 inches

Side: .375 inches

Turret Front: .875 inches

Turret Side: .75 inches

**Maximum Speed:** 55 mph (road)

**Armament:**

Main Gun: 37mm M6

Muzzle velocity: 2,900 feet per second

The M8 Armored Car equipped the reconnaissance platoons of both towed and self-propelled tank destroyer battalions. (MHI)



Coaxial MG: .30-caliber  
Anti-aircraft Machine Gun: .50-caliber

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*

## M20 Armored Utility Car

The primary command and control vehicle for commanders and staff in tank destroyer battalions was the M20 Armored Utility Car. Essentially an M8 with its turret removed and a ring mount for an anti-aircraft MG mounted on the roof of the vehicle, its only defense against enemy armor was a bazooka stowed inside. Nevertheless, it provided excellent mobility and protection against small arms fire and shrapnel for its passengers. It also contained additional radio sets to facilitate the exercise of command and control.

### M20 Armored Utility Car—Specifications

**Height:** 7.5 feet

**Width:** 8.3 feet

**Length:** 16.5 feet

**Weight:** 8.2 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):** 250 miles (road)

#### **Armor:**

Front: .625 inches

Side: .375 inches

**Maximum Speed:** 56 mph (road)

#### **Armament:**

Anti-aircraft Machine Gun: .50-caliber M2

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*

The M20  
Armored  
Utility Car.  
(MHI)



# 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion

## Combat History

The 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Heavy, Self-Propelled) was activated on 10 August 1942 at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. Comprised of officers, NCOs, and junior enlisted men of the Regular Army and the Army of the United States, it was reorganized as a "Towed Anti-Tank Gun" tank destroyer unit in July 1943; organized as such, it departed the New York Port of Embarkation on 14 October 1944, and arrived in Marseilles 14 days later. The 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion entered combat on 28 November 1944, with Companies A and B attached to the 397th Infantry Regiment, which was in turn attached to the 45th Infantry Division. During this period, the mission of both of these Seventh Army divisions was pursuit of German 1st Army elements which were conducting a skillful delay on successive lines northward to the Franco-German frontier, from the Saar Valley region in the west to the Rhine in the east.



Tank Destroyer Command patch worn by members of all TD units

For the next three weeks, the 3-inch guns of the 824th were mainly used to provide anti-tank defense in the event of a German counterattack supported by armor, and as "bunker busters," firing their powerful cannon at dug-in German positions in support of advancing 100th Division infantrymen. While a coordinated tank/ infantry counterattack by the 21st Panzer Division did materialize in the 103rd Infantry Division's zone near Climbach (where elements of the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion [Colored] [Towed AT Gun] earned a Distinguished Unit Citation), none occurred in the 100th or 45th Infantry Divisions' zones. The 824th's missions continued as before. Even these proved deadly, however, as the Battalion sustained numerous casualties and damaged equipment from German indirect fire, the first of which were sustained in 3rd Platoon, Company A

Crew of a 3-inch gun observe the primary armor avenue of approach through a nearby village, winter 1944-45. (MHI)



on 29 November when German mortar rounds killed one man and wounded three others from the same crew.

After the 397th Infantry Regiment was returned to 100th Infantry Division control, the entire battalion continued to provide anti-tank defense and support to the Division's steady grind against German strongpoints in the Low Vosges. After the 100th's assaults on dug-in German units at Lemberg and Mouterhouse, elements of the 824th continued to engage stationary targets and conduct mobile reconnaissance missions. One of the more spectacular achievements of the recon missions was the discovery and capture by a lieutenant in A/824th of a full set of German maps indicating the positions the enemy intended to occupy in the Maginot Line.

In mid-December, as the 100th Infantry Division began its assault against the formidable Maginot positions surrounding Bitche, the 824th took on three new missions in addition to providing anti-tank defense. By elevating their 3-inch guns to high angles, crews were able to fire illumination shells over enemy positions in support of infantry operations. Other guns were used against Maginot Line pill-boxes; on 17 December, a crew commanded by a Sergeant Weingold fired 74 of the 15-pound projectiles and knocked out one of the steel-reinforced concrete fortifications. The 3-inch pieces were also occasionally used as field artillery, with guns not emplaced for anti-tank defense firing interdiction missions on supply and communications routes well behind German lines.

On 21 December, the Seventh Army was forced to suspend offensive operations and cover part of Third Army's sector while General Patton's units attacked into the left shoulder of the Germans' Ardennes salient. To bolster anti-tank defenses on the far left (western) flank of the Seventh Army front, A/824th was attached to the 106th Cavalry Group. The remainder of the Battalion remained attached to the 100th: on Christmas Eve, Company B arrayed its guns in anti-tank firing positions in depth in the vicinity of Rohrbach, Guising, and Bettviller (in the sector of the 397th Infantry Regiment); Company C did the same in Lemberg, Enchenberg, and Petit-Réderching (in the 399th, 398th, and 397th sectors, respectively). According to the 100th Infantry Division's plan for its defense in sector, Plan TENNESSEE, the guns emplaced in each sector were to reinforce regimental anti-tank plans as requested by the respective regimental commanders.

When the Germans' NORDWIND offensive began, just before midnight, 31 December 1944, the 824th's crews were waiting. Although some elements in the 399th's sector were redeployed to cover the new flank created by the collapse of the 117th Cavalry Recon Squadron on the right (east), most of the crews and guns stood their ground and awaited action. Fortunately, no major German armor threat materialized on the right flank (the breakthrough having been made by the 257th and 559th *Volks-Grenadier Divisions*, with only their assault gun companies providing armored support), and the 397th Infantry held fast on the left (western) flank around Rimling.

On 8 and 9 January, the crews of B/824th duelled with German armor supporting the attack of the 17th *SS-Panzer Grenadier Division* in the vicinity of Rimling and to the south. The fortitude of men like Sergeant Frederick O'Connor of B/824th, who refused to withdraw in the face of heavy German attacks, helped shore up the line that had already been so tenaciously held for over a week. Several

German halftracks and a tank were confirmed destroyed, with the loss of one 3-inch anti-tank gun. Two more guns were abandoned by their crews when German tanks advanced more quickly than the guns could be taken out of battery and withdrawn, but both were subsequently retrieved and put back into action after a gallant night patrol led by Sergeant Martin C. Ready penetrated German lines and recovered the frozen weapons. A/824th was reassigned to the 44th Infantry Division on 11 January, but the remainder of the Battalion continued operations in support of the 100th Infantry Division. Throughout this time, selected crews fired illumination missions, but most were occupied with improving primary anti-tank firing positions and reconnoitering and improving alternate and secondary sites.

On 16 January, crews began rotation to an orientation course provided by the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion (in the 44th Infantry Division sector) designed to familiarize them with the different tactics and maintenance requirements of a self-propelled tank destroyer battalion. By the end of January, A/824th had been returned to battalion control, and the entire battalion was again attached to the 100th Infantry Division. With the defeat of the Germans prosecuting Operation NORDWIND, the battalion resumed its indirect fire missions in reinforcement of DIVARTY, 100th Infantry Division, and crews continued to prepare for the upcoming organizational transition from a towed to a self-propelled T/O&E.

Throughout February and the first half of March, the crews of the 824th occupied anti-tank firing positions in depth throughout the 100th Infantry Division sector, and continued their highly effective indirect fire missions against enemy targets to the Division's front. The main enemy activity encountered, therefore, was mortar and artillery fire, which inflicted several casualties on the 824th.

On 9 March, the first six M18 "Hellcat" tank destroyers arrived, but the 824th had to delay its conversion due to the requirements of the upcoming Seventh Army offensive through the *Westwall* (the "Siegfried Line"), Operation UNDERTONE. From 15-19 March, the 824th provided fire support to the 100th's assault on and beyond Bitche, while simultaneously covering potential German armor avenues of approach. From 23 March to 1 April, the Battalion completed its conversion to the self-propelled organization, just in time to provide critical support to the 100th's assault crossing of the Neckar River at Heilbronn. Throughout the first half of April, C/824th supported Combat Team (CT) 397; B/824th CT 398, and A/824th CT 399th. During this time, B/824th provided direct fire support to 2d/398th in their bridgehead at Jagstfeld, and C/824th fired in support of the elements of the

M18 Hellcats of the 824th TD Battalion supporting the assault crossing of the Neckar, April 1945. (SOC)





397th Infantry Regiment engaged in vicious building-to-building combat in the center of Heilbronn.

After several frustrating days on the Neckar's west bank—caused by continuous destruction of pontoon bridges across the Neckar by extremely accurate German artillery directed from the heights east of the city—most of C/824th crossed the river on the morning of 8 April. In concert with tanks of the 781st Tank Battalion, the newly-acquired M18s provided crucial fire support to the 397th that enabled them to make greater progress in the fighting in the ruined city center. By blasting the buildings that had been turned into block after block of fortresses by the remnants of several German regiments, *Volkssturm* battalions, and a citizenry

An 824th TD  
blasts German  
positions in  
support of the  
100th's  
advance, April  
1945. (SOC)



still enraged by an earlier RAF raid against the city's population center, C/824th contributed enormously to the final seizure of the city, completed on 12 April.

As the Division resumed offensive operations after clearing Heilbronn, A/824th supported CT 399's successful attack at Beilstein, and the remainder of the Battalion continued supporting the other elements of the 100th Infantry Division. Over the next two weeks, as the 100th dashed across Swabia to the outskirts of Stuttgart, the exceptionally high speeds of which the M18s were capable became an important asset, not only for mobile fire support with their 3-inch (76mm) guns, but as transportation for infantry units advancing faster than the crumbling German defenders could react. As the 100th's offensive activities came to an end east of Stuttgart, on 25 April the 824th was reassigned to the 103rd Infantry Division, headed through Bavaria toward Austria. The Battalion finished the war attached to the 103rd in the vicinity of Innsbruck.

Throughout its five more than months of combat, during which it was almost exclusively attached to the 100th Infantry Division, the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion provided valuable firepower and, after its reorganization as a self-propelled battalion in late March, critical mobility as well. From late November through mid-March, its 36 3-inch (76mm) anti-tank guns not only greatly reinforced the anti-tank capabilities of the 100th's infantry regiments (equipped only with the much-less capable 57mm pieces), but, more importantly, provided substantial, crucially important reinforcing fire support to the 36 105mm and 12 155mm howitzers of the 100th's Division Artillery. At Jagstfeld, Heilbronn, Beilstein, and beyond, the heavy firepower and exceptional mobility of the new M18s—the fastest tracked armored vehicle of WWII—allowed Centurymen to bring the war to the Reich, and quickly and decisively end it.

Infantrymen of the 100th Infantry Division speed forward on an 824th TD Battalion Hellcat, passing a Sherman tank recovery vehicle, April 1945. (SOC)

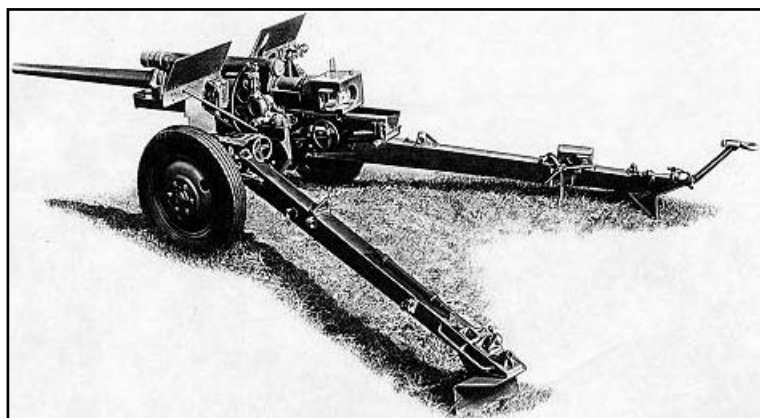


## Organization

(See facing page)

## Equipment

When the 824th first arrived in the ETO, its major anti-tank weapon was the 3-inch (76mm) gun, towed by M3 half-tracks. (MHI)



### 3-inch Gun

#### **M5 3-inch Gun on M1 Gun Carriage—Specifications**

**Caliber:** 3 inch (76.2mm)

**Tube Length:** 50 caliber lengths (150 inches)

**Height:** 5 feet, 2 inches

**Width:** 6 feet, 10 inches

**Length:** 23 feet, 1 inch

**Weight:** 4,875 pounds

**Maximum elevation:** 31 degrees (551 mils)

**Depression:** 5 degrees (89 mils)

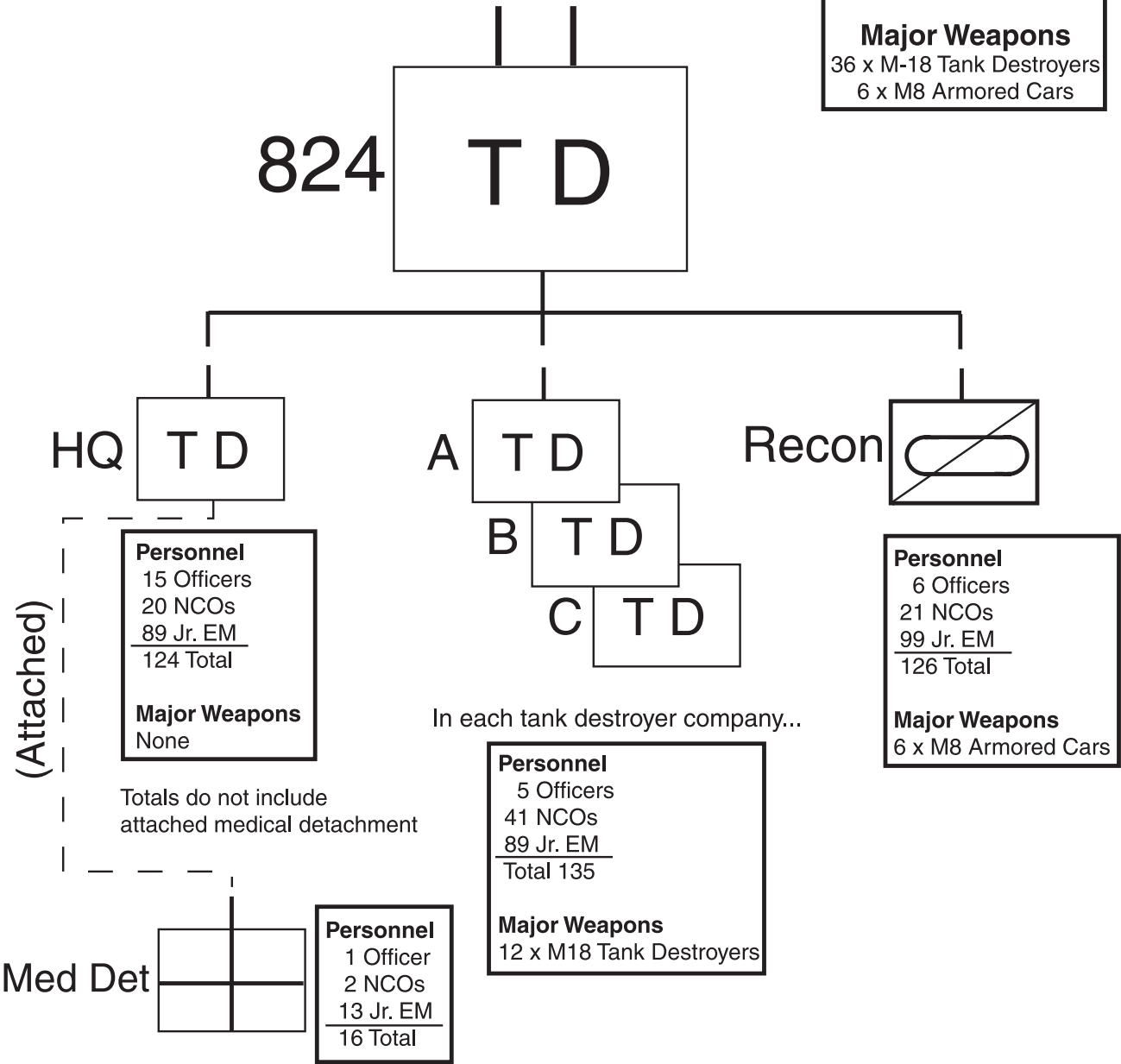
**Maximum traverse:** 45 degrees (800 mils)

# 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion

**TO&E 17-25**  
**November 1944**

**Personnel**  
36 officers  
164 NCOs  
455 Jr. EM  
655 Total  
(Does not include attached medics)

**Major Weapons**  
36 x M-18 Tank Destroyers  
6 x M8 Armored Cars



**Maximum Range with high explosive projectile and point detonating fuse:**  
14,200 yards

**Muzzle Velocity firing armor piercing cap (APC) projectile:** 2,800 feet per second

**Weight of APC projectile:** 27.24 pounds

**Weight of AP propellant charge:** 4.62 pounds

**Rate of Fire:** 15–20 rounds per minute (maximum); 5 rounds per minute (sustained)

*(All data from TM 9-322, 3-Inch Gun M5 and 3-Inch Gun Carriage M1, March 1943)*

## Half Tracks

*(See page 15)*

## M18 Hellcat

824th TD  
Battalion M18  
Hellcat (SOC)



In March, 1945, the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion was reequipped with the M-18 “Hellcat” tank destroyer. This vehicle packed considerable offensive punch with its 76mm main gun, but depended on exceptional speed and mobility – rather than good armor protection – for its battlefield survivability. Like its heavier cousins, the M10 and M36 tank destroyers, its turret was open-topped, to facilitate maximum observation for the commander and crew at the long ranges at which engagements with enemy tanks were envisioned by the designers. Unfortunately, it also meant that the turret crews were vulnerable to shrapnel from above. Fortunately, by the time the 824th was attached to the 100th Infantry Division, the days of fighting in the heavily-forested Vosges were all but over, and the race into Germany was on. Still, open-topped vehicles were vulnerable to attack from above when

fighting in urban environments, and this was a definite consideration during the fighting for Heilbronn, in which elements of the 824th played a major role in the first half of April 1945.

### **M18 Hellcat—Specifications**

**Height:** 8.33 feet

**Width:** 9.1 feet

**Length:** 17.5 feet

**Weight:** 19.5 tons

**Combat radius (how far one can go on a tank of gasoline):** 150 miles (road); 105 miles cross-country.

#### **Armor:**

Front: .5 inches

Side: .5 inches

Turret Front: .75 inches

Turret Side: .5 inches

Mantlet (Armored shield on front of turret): .5 inches

**Maximum Speed:** 45 mph (road)

#### **Armament:**

Main Gun: 76mm M1A1

Muzzle velocity: 2,600 feet per second

Anti-aircraft Machine Gun: .50-caliber

*(Source: US Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds Series)*

### **M8 Armored Car**

*(See page 26)*

### **M20 Armored Utility Car**

*(See page 27)*

# 898th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons)

## Combat History

The 898th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons) was formed from the 2d Battalion of the 209th Coast Artillery Regiment (Anti-Aircraft) on 18 March 1944. The 209th was a National Guard unit from upstate New York, primarily from the Buffalo area, and was augmented by personnel from the 121st Cavalry Regiment, from around Rochester. The original strength of about 1,400 Guardsmen—present when the 209th was called into federal duty on 10 February 1941—eventually grew to over 4,000 by early 1944, and included officers, NCOs, and junior enlisted men of the Regular Army and the Army of the United States as well as the New York Guard.

The 209th was a distinguished unit in several ways. From its ranks came 840 enlisted men who were ultimately commissioned as officers—more than any other anti-aircraft regiment. After additional training at Camp Stewart, Georgia, the 209th, including the 2d Battalion that was to become the 898th, was the first US Army anti-aircraft regiment sent to the European Theater. The Regiment departed the New York Port of Embarkation aboard the *Queen Mary* on 10 May 1942 and arrived in the Firth of Clyde six days later. There, it transferred to a smaller vessel and was transported to Belfast, Northern Ireland three days later. During seven months in Ulster, the Regiment conducted both anti-aircraft training (in the vicinity of St. John's Point, County Down) and actual anti-aircraft duty for the Lough Foyle US naval base and the Lough Erne seaplane base, as well as the city of Londonderry itself.

On 10 December 1942, the Regiment was transferred across the Irish Sea to Liverpool. Shortly thereafter, the 209th left by ship for North Africa, and arrived in Mers el Khebir, in Free French Algeria, on 3 January 1943.

From January through August, the various elements of the 209th performed anti-aircraft duties at locations across French North Africa, including Oran and Algiers in Algeria and Oujda, French Morocco. For these activities, the Regiment was awarded campaign participation credit for the Tunisian campaign, which ended with the capitulation of the Germans' *Army Group Afrika* in mid-May 1943.

After training with the 1st Armored Division in Algeria in September and October, the 209th sailed with the "Old Ironsides" Division to Italy, where it arrived in Naples on 28 October. By mid-November, as the Fifth Army attacked the German "Winter Line," the Regiment was deployed for anti-aircraft duty in the vicinity of Vitulazio, about 21 miles north of Naples. There, the men of the 209th

encountered their first major German air raid. On 20 November, crews of the 209th shot three Focke-Wulf 190s out of the Campanian sky to tally the Regiment's first kills of the War.

After II Corps penetrated the Winter Line and reached the southern banks of the Rapido River—the edge of the next major belt of German fortifications, the “Gustav Line”—the 209th displaced forward to occupy anti-aircraft firing positions in the vicinity of Venafro. There, on 3 January 1944, the 209th claimed four more German aircraft, this time Messerschmidt Bf-109s.

As the Fifth Army's II Corps and British X Corps battled to breach the Gustav Line, US VI Corps landed at Anzio in late January in an attempt to outflank the formidable German defenses further south. However, the VI Corps was quickly bottled up and the main effort again turned to penetrating the Gustav Line. After four more months of ferocious and costly fighting across the entire Italian Peninsula, in mid-May, Allied forces south of Anzio launched Operation DIADEM, in which French troops achieved a breakthrough of the Gustav Line near Sant' Ambrogio, and units of the Polish Corps did the same at Monte Cassino.

Throughout this period, the 209th provided protection against low-flying German aircraft in the vicinity of San Pietro and Mignano. On 18 March, elements of the Regiment's 2d Battalion were detached and became the 898th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons), and the 209th was redesignated as the 209th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Group. From early-April through mid-May, the 898th was deployed for anti-aircraft defense near Montesarchio, Castel Volturno, and Biai.

As Allied forces broke through the Adolf Hitler Line and the Anzio beachhead to the north, the 898th advanced with the Fifth Army to successive firing positions south of Rome (Itri, Borge Fauti-Littoria) and, after the city fell on 5 June, north of the city, in Tuscany (Santa Marinella, Montaltro di Castro, Morrona, Grosseto, Fauglia, Valtriano).

From 25 July to 13 August 1944, the 898th served on the Arno River Line as a provisional infantry battalion, engaging German infantry and mountain infantry units. Missions included defending fixed positions, ambush and reconnaissance patrols, and firing harassing and interdiction missions with machine guns and mortars. During this period, the battalion suffered more casualties than in the rest of the war combined.

In mid-August, the 898th was withdrawn from action and moved to the vicinity of Naples, where it prepared for shipment to Ajaccio, Corsica. Throughout August, September, and most of October, the Battalion conducted anti-aircraft training on the island. However, in recognition of the growing shortage of infantrymen in the European Theater and the air superiority—and even air supremacy—being enjoyed by US forces almost everywhere in the ETO, the 898th also conducted infantry training while on Corsica.

Finally, on 24 October, the 898th departed the Corsican port of Propriano aboard LST 288, bound for Marseilles. The Battalion landed two days later, marshalled, and moved north to join the 100th Infantry Division, elements of which (Combat Team 399) were already in combat near La Salle by the time the 898th joined them on 5 November. From that day until the end of the war in Europe, the

Crew of an M1 40mm gun in position near Epinal, autumn 1944. (MHI)



898th would be attached to the 100th: its soldiers would endure the same hardships, participate in the same battles; and play an important role in the same victories as the Centurymen they supported.

As the 397th and 399th Infantry Regiments opened the VI Corps attack on the German Winter Line in the High Vosges the 898th deployed its 40mm cannon and quad .50-caliber machine guns to defend the four field artillery battalions of the 100th DIVARTY. As the Centurymen of the Division's three infantry regiments broke through the deeply-ensconced defenders of the *708th Volks-Grenadier Division*, the 898th fought off at least eight sorties by Bf-109s which broke out of the low cloud cover to threaten the Division rear.

On 3 December, as the Division pursued delaying elements of the *361st Volks-Grenadier Division* north through the Low Vosges quad .50-caliber and 40mm cannon crews of Battery B/898th engaged a Messerschmidt Bf-109 over Bouxwiller (18 kilometers south-southeast of Mouterhouse) and scored a probable kill on the German attacker.

Over the next three weeks, the crews of the 898th's guns displaced ever forward, continuing to provide local anti-aircraft defense for the gunners of

Crew of an M51 "Quad Fifty" scans the low-ceilinged winter sky for attacking German aircraft. (MHI)





A “deuce and a half” (2½-ton capacity) prime mover and an 898th AAA crew haul their M1 40mm gun through the late autumn mud, early December 1944. (SOC)



DIVARTY while they pummelled the *Grenadiers* barring the way to Bitche. Hostile air activity was practically non-existent in the Division area during this period; the *Luftwaffe* was hoarding its dwindling fuel and depleted ranks of pilots for use in the Ardennes Offensive, which began in mid-December in the US First Army area. When, like the rest of the Seventh Army, the 100th Infantry Division suspended its offensive operations and went over to the defensive as a result of the great German attacks in the north, the 898th took up anti-aircraft positions throughout the Division area, with the Battalion CP moving up to St. Louis-les-Bitche from Wingen-sur-Moder on 23 December.

Even before the Germans’ Army Group G launched Operation NORDWIND, the last *Wehrmacht* offensive in the West just before midnight on the last New Year’s Eve of World War II, the 898th had been engaging a puzzling array of aircraft. This pattern continued throughout January, and has been a source of rumor and speculation by thousands of veterans of not only the 100th and its supporting units since the war, but by veterans of adjacent units – such as the 44th, 45th, 63rd and 70th Infantry Divisions – as well.

Beginning on 29 December, Batteries B and C began engaging flights of P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers attacking targets within the 100th Infantry Division sector. At first, these were assumed to be captured American aircraft flown by German pilots; indeed, the Germans did have a aerial special operations unit (*Kampfgeschwader 200*) which operated a number of captured (crash-landed and rebuilt from parts) US Army Air Forces aircraft, but there is little reason to believe that these were used in such mundane roles as strafing or bombing US artillery positions. Although this unit’s activities were shrouded in secrecy during the war, no post-war evidence has ever been gathered that indicates that captured Allied aircraft were ever used in ground-attack missions by the *Luftwaffe*.

Circumstantial evidence also mitigates against the use of captured USAAF fighter-bombers against the 100th Infantry Division from December 1944 forward. As an operational security measure, even the ground units of Army Group G which were to attack on New Year’s Eve were strictly forbidden to conduct even the most minor reconnaissance missions in preparation for their upcoming offensive. (The infantrymen of the 100th who watched the attackers run straight into minefields in the initial phases of the offensive witnessed the consequences of this German command decision!) It is, therefore, extremely unlikely that precious, rare assets of the *Luftwaffe* such as meticulously reconstructed Thunderbolts would be

used to attack American positions that were about to be attacked by units which were utterly dependent on the element of surprise for their offensive's success!

Finally, the sheer quantity of aircraft involved in some of the attacks on the 100th's sector practically preclude the possibility that these were German-flown aircraft. While clear evidence has been established of the Germans' possession of a handful of flyable Allied aircraft of many types (including P-51s and P-47s), there is absolutely no indication that the Germans would have been capable of launching strikes in squadron (+) strength, such as the raids by 18 P-47s on Enchenberg on 2 January or 10 more P-47s later that same day against Division positions near Bining.

The unfortunate conclusion which must be reached is that these attacks were mistakenly mounted by American pilots. On 30 December, raids by six P-47s killed seven Americans and wounded six more. The heaviest attacks, on 2 January (43 P-47 and P-51 sorties against 100th Infantry Division targets in the Enchenberg, Bining, Petit-Réderching, Rahling, and Montbronn areas) could at least reasonably be attributed to USAAF fighter-bomber pilots zealously pitching in to defeat the attacks by *XIII SS Corps* on the Division's left flank and *XC Corps* on the Division's right. Ground troops and even tanks and artillery pieces are difficult to identify precisely at 300 miles per hour and several thousand feet of altitude. The paucity of close air support which had been available to the Seventh Army throughout its autumn campaign—due to bad weather, heavily-wooded terrain, and SHAEF priorities elsewhere—had done little to sharpen the air-ground cooperation skills of either the pilots of the supporting XII Tactical Air Command or the leaders and crews of Seventh Army ground maneuver elements. The results were that numerous 100th Infantry Division positions were attacked by friendly aircraft on 1, 2, and 5 January 1945, and that these errant aircraft were engaged by all four firing batteries of the 898th AAA Battalion (Auto Weapons) with hundreds of rounds of 40mm and thousands of rounds of .50-caliber ammunition during this period of intense combat.

Adding to the confusion and turmoil of this period is the undeniable fact that there were some *Luftwaffe* attacks in support of the German ground effort. On 1 and 2 January, flights of Bf-109 fighters attacked Division rear area positions near

A Seventh Army convoy rumbles through the snow of the worst winter in Alsace in 50 years, with a "Quad Fifty" for rear security, January 1945. (MHI)



Bining; on 2 January, one of the Messerschmidts was confirmed shot down by Battery B. Two more Messerschmidt sorties were noted on 5 January, but after this date, as the Germans' NORDWIND thrust was contained, *Luftwaffe* air activity diminished to nil in the 100th's sector throughout the remainder of the month. Fortunately, so did the US Army Air Force's!

Neither the 898th nor the 100th had seen their last aerial "friendly fire" incidents, however. On 22 January and again a week later, Century Division positions around Petit-Réderching, Bining, Enchenberg, and Montbronn were subjected to strafing and even bombing attacks by P-47s and P-51s; Battery D was awarded official credit for shooting down one of a flight of four Mustangs which attacked 397th Infantry positions around Petit-Réderching on 29 January!

In preparation for the Seventh Army's final drive through the *Westwall* and across the Rhine, Operation UNDERTONE, XII TAC fighter-bombers began preparatory attacks two days before the scheduled jump-off. Again, in addition to attacking German targets around Bitche, dozens of USAAF fighter-bombers mistakenly hit positions in the 100th's area. Once again, the crews of the 898th did their best to beat them back. On 13 March, Battery D was awarded a confirmed kill of a P-47 attacking Division positions around Enchenberg, and three of the other seven attacking American aircraft were observed sustaining hits from both 40mm and quad .50-caliber rounds.

Fortunately for all concerned, German defenses quickly crumbled once the ground offensive began on 15 March, and after this date, no aerial targets were observed or engaged by 898th crews anywhere in the Division's rapidly-evolving area of operations for the remainder of the month.

The last anti-aircraft activity of the war for the 898th came in the month of April, when, as the Battalion intelligence summary for the month put it, "The *Luftwaffe* was aggressive" in its last-ditch defense of the Fatherland. On 1, 2, and 7 April, various German aircraft were engaged, albeit to no effect, near Illgen, Liemen, and Schwetzingen. Interestingly, several of these aircraft included jets, such as the famous Me-262 twin-engine fighter and the lesser-known Arado AR-234 light bomber. A large formation-huge, at this stage of the war-of 14 Bf-109s was engaged near Horrenberg on 2 April, and a single Junkers JU-88 made an

The crew of an 898th AAA "Quad Fifty" on the alert for attacking Bf109s, FW190s, or . . . P47s or P51s! (SOC)



appearance on the 7th to round out *Luftwaffe*'s air activity in the 100th's zone as the Division charged across the Rhine and into Swabia to the southeast.

The final important combat mission of WWII for the 898th came as the Battalion supported the 100th's assault crossing of the Neckar River at Heilbronn, 4–11 April 1945. Elements of the battalion provided anti-aircraft defense of the crossing sites, which were already under fierce attack from German artillery ranged to the east of the city. Fortunately, no German air threat materialized to further hamper the Division's difficult crossing operations.

Throughout its combat service, capped by a six-month attachment for operations to the 100th Infantry Division, the 898th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons) performed its various missions in an exemplary fashion. As part of the very first Coast Artillery Anti-Aircraft regiment deployed to the European Theater, it was in combat much longer than most; whether protecting ports in North Africa, airfields in Italy, field artillery positions in the Vosges Mountains, river crossing sites in Germany, or even while serving as a provisional infantry battalion on the Arno River, the men of the 898th served with distinction. The 100th Infantry Division, threatened by its own forces' aircraft more than by the *Luftwaffe*, was nevertheless fortunate to have such an experienced, battle-hardened, and supremely competent unit to provide its anti-aircraft defense from the Meurthe to the Neckar and beyond.

*[Sources: Battalion operations and intelligence records in the National Archives boxes 407 427 17459 and 17460, and other records graciously provided by Mr. John Merchant, a WWII combat veteran of the 209th Coast Artillery Regiment (Anti-Aircraft).]*

## Organization

(See facing page)

## Equipment

### M51 Multiple .50-Caliber Machine Gun ("Quad Fifty")

Every gun section in the 898th was equipped with one quadruple-mount .50-caliber MG. These truck-drawn, trailer-mounted guns were capable of pouring a deadly hail of lead at low-flying aircraft. They were also devastating against ground targets, although as an automatic weapon over 11mm in caliber, by the international conventions then in force, this weapon was only to be so employed "in self defense."

#### **M51 Multiple .50-Caliber Machine Gun—Specifications**

**Caliber:** .50 inches (12.7mm)

Muzzle Velocity: 2,930 feet per second

# 898th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons)

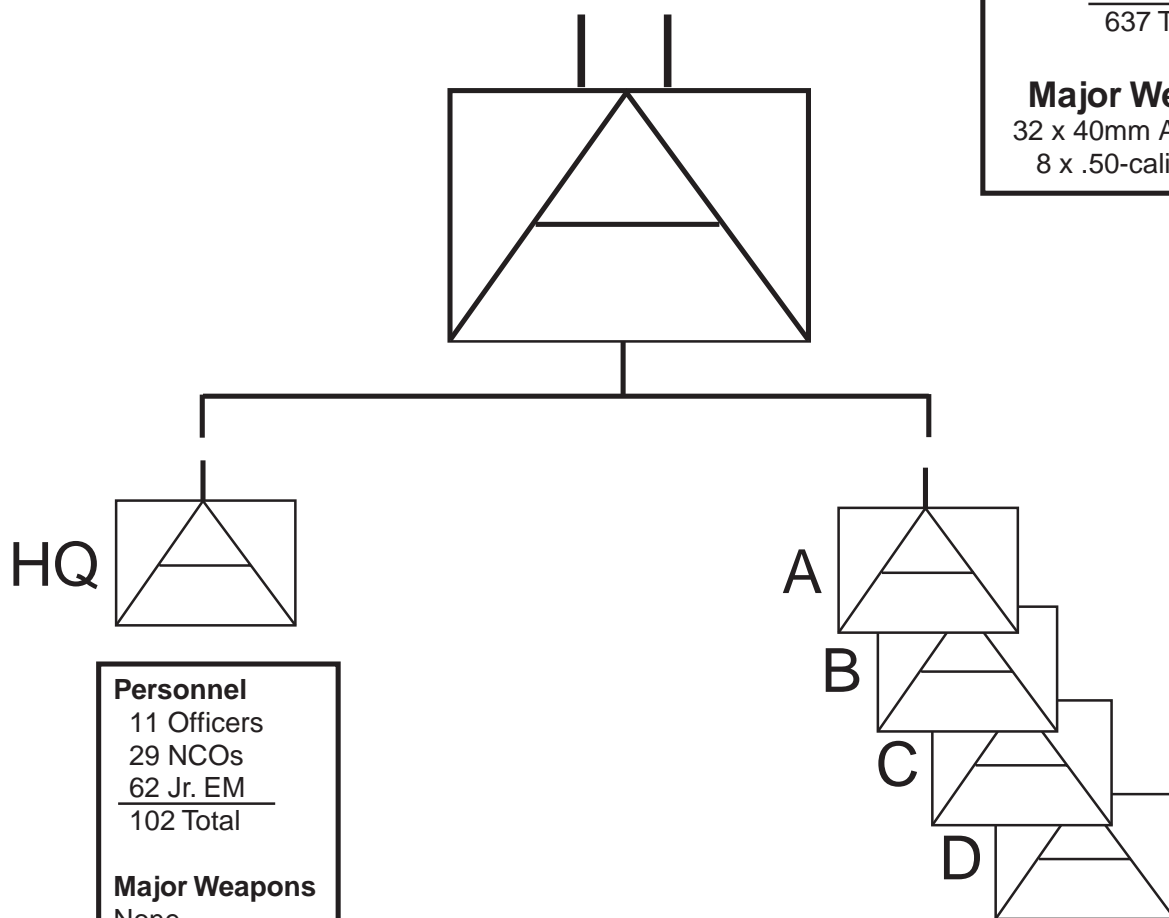
**TO&E 44-25**  
**April 1944**

**Personnel**

39 Officers  
159 NCOs  
481 Jr. EM  
637 Total

**Major Weapons**

32 x 40mm AA Cannon  
8 x .50-caliber MGs



**Personnel**

11 Officers  
29 NCOs  
62 Jr. EM  
102 Total

**Major Weapons**

None

In each Gun Battery..

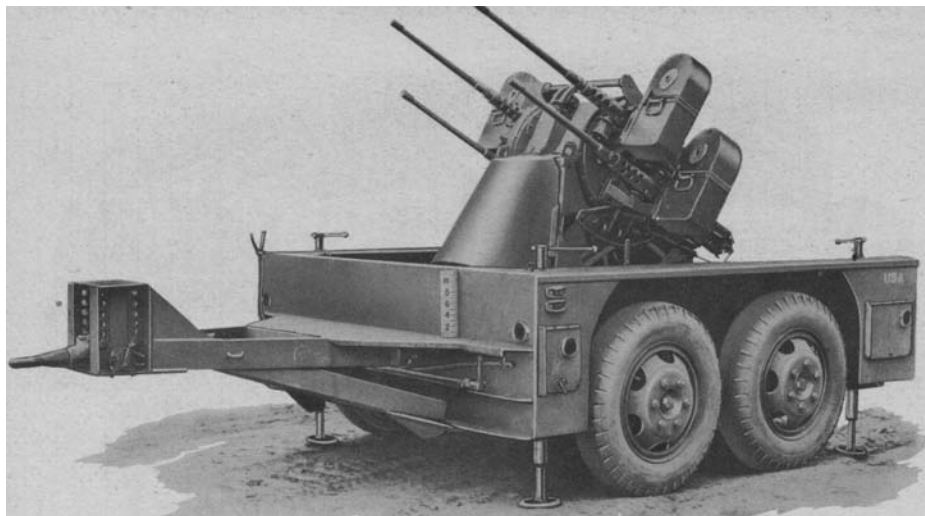
**Personnel**

6 Officers  
32 NCOs  
140 Jr. EM  
178 Total

**Major Weapons**

8 x 40mm AA Cannon  
8 x Quad .50-caliber MGs

M51 Quad  
.50-caliber  
Machine Gun  
on Trailer  
Mount (TM 9-  
223, Twin Cal.  
.50 Machine  
Gun Mount  
M33 and  
Multiple Cal.  
.50 Machine  
Gun Mount  
M45, July  
1944)



**Effective range:** 2,500 yards

**Rate of fire:** 1,600–2,200 rounds per minute

**Weight:** approximately 2,400 pounds

**Height (guns level):** 55 inches

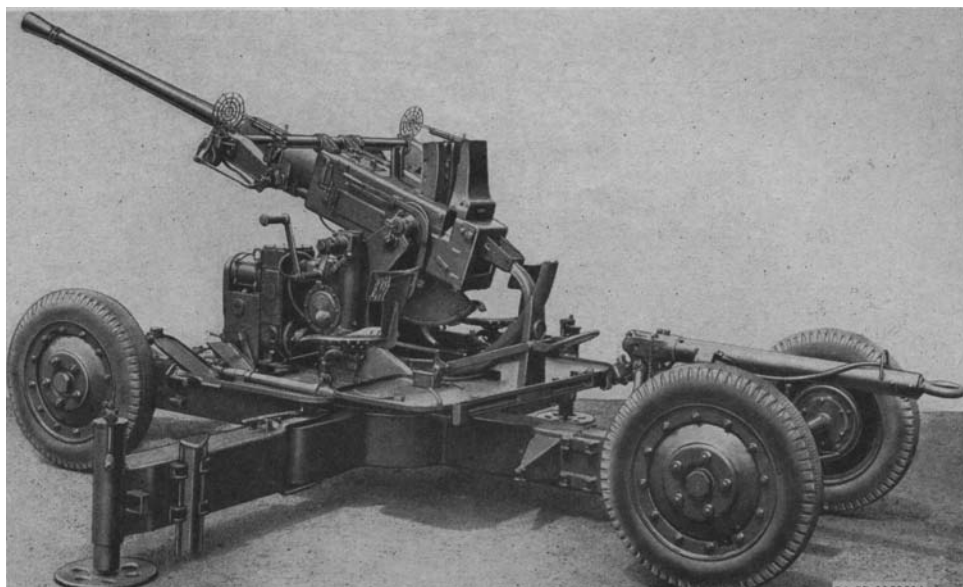
**Height (guns fully elevated):** 75 inches

*(Data from TM 9-223, Twin Cal. .50 Machine Gun Mount M33 and Multiple Cal. .50 Machine Gun Mount M45, July 1944.)*

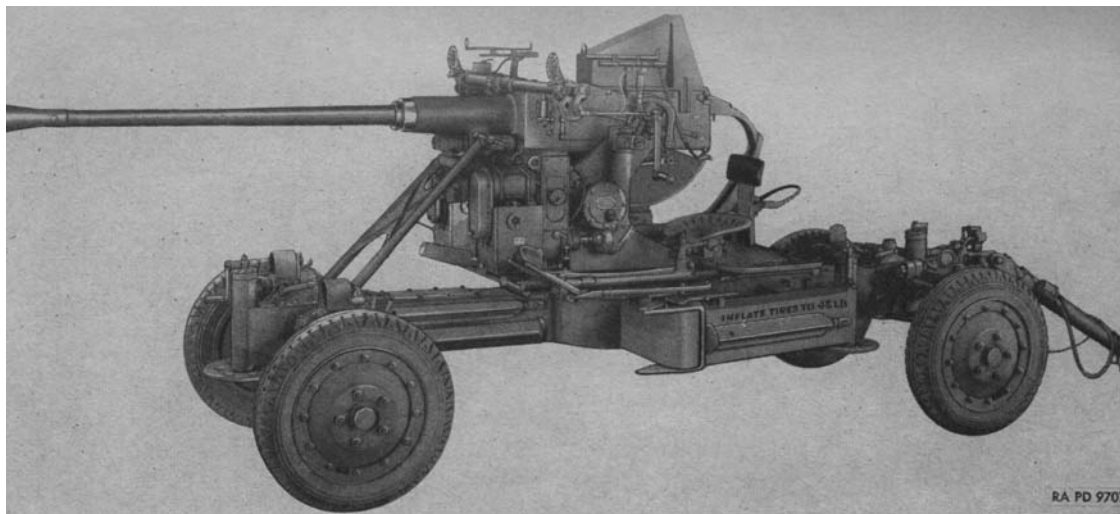
## M1 40mm Gun

Every gun section possessed one truck-drawn 40mm gun. Based on a design by Bofors, a Swedish firm, the gun itself was also used extensively by the US Navy, in twin and quadruple mounts, aboard just about every type of vessel, from battle-ships to transports.

M1 40mm Gun,  
emplaced with  
outriggers.  
(TM 9-252,  
May 1952)



M1 40mm  
Gun, rigged  
for traveling.  
(TM 9-252,  
May 1952)



### **M1 40mm Gun—Specifications**

**Caliber:** 40mm (1.57 inches)

**Muzzle Velocity:** 2,870 feet per second

**Range, Horizontal, with Armor-Piercing Shot:** 9,475 yards

**Range, Horizontal, with High Explosive Tracer:** 5,200 yards (to tracer burnout)

**Range, Vertical, with High-Explosive Tracer:** 5,100 yards (to tracer burnout)

**Type of Fire:** Single or Automatic

**Maximum Rate of Fire:** 120 rounds per minute

**Capacity of auto loader:** 7 rounds (manually loaded); 8 rounds (in clips)

**Weight of complete weapon with computing sight:** approx. 5,900 pounds

**Wheelbase:** 10 feet, 6 inches

**Length (rigged for travel):** 18 feet, 9.5 inches

**Width (rigged for travel):** 6 feet

**Height, in battery, at maximum elevation:** 13 feet, 9 inches

**Maximum elevation, manual:** 90 degrees

**Maximum depression, manual:** -6 degrees (on carriage)

**Maximum depression, manual:** -11 degrees (with jacks on level ground)

**Traverse:** 360 degrees

**Emplacement:** Maximum slope on which weapon may be leveled: 5 degrees

*(Source: Data from TM 9-252, 40-mm Automatic Gun M1, 40-mm Antiaircraft Gun Carriage M2A1, and 40-mm Gun Mount M3, May 1952.)*

# Chemical Mortar Battalions

## Combat History

At various times, the 100th Infantry Division was supported by elements of three different chemical mortar battalions.

Although originally designed primarily to deliver dense sheafs of poison gas and other chemicals, these units nevertheless possessed tremendous conventional firepower as well. Firing primarily white phosphorus (WP) projectiles to create smoke screens and high explosive (HE) shells for the usual tactical purposes, with 36 4.2-inch (107mm) mortars to a battalion, chemical mortar battalions packed a punch essentially equal to an entire division artillery brigade's three 105mm howitzers, albeit at shorter range.

Even a single company of "four deuce" mortars (12 pieces) firing "Willie Peter" or HE could match the firepower of a full battalion of 105s.

The following Chemical Mortar units supported the 100th Infantry Division during the periods specified.

2d Chemical Mortar Battalion (Supported the 100th Infantry Division 3-23 December 1944 and 15-22 March 1945)

83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion (Supported the 100th Infantry Division 7-26 November 1944 and 31 March-24 April 1945)

99th Chemical Mortar Battalion (Supported the 100th Infantry Division 2-3 December 1944 and 21-25 March 1945)

A crew of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion fires their M2 4.2-inch mortar in support of advancing Seventh Army units in the Vosges Mountains, late autumn 1944. (MHI)





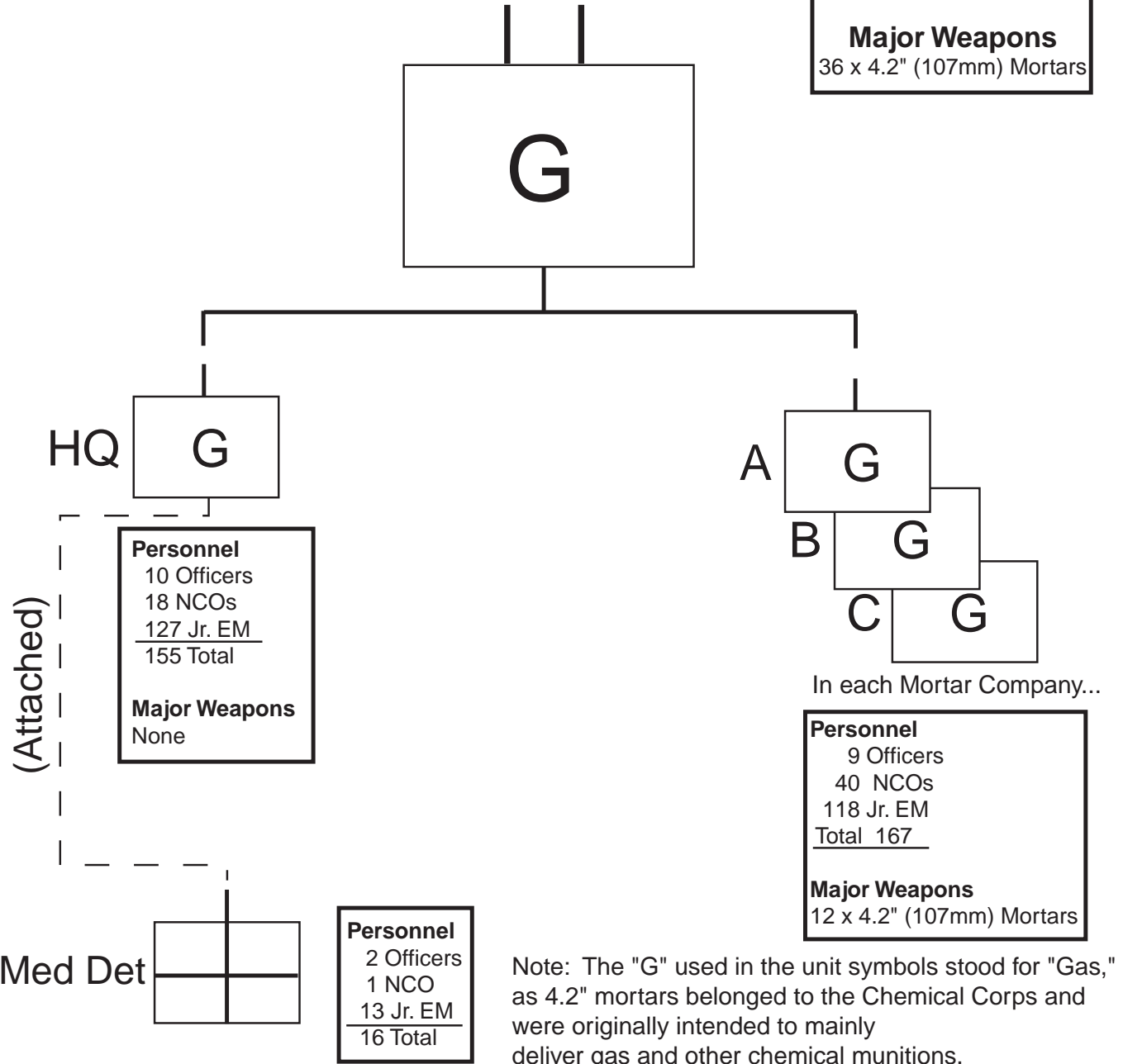
Organization Chart for a Chemical Mortar Battalion,  
September 1944

Chemical  
Mortar  
Battalion

**TO&E 3-25**  
**September 1944**

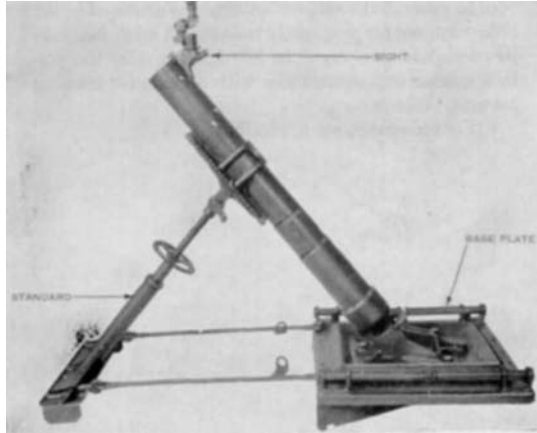
**Personnel**  
37 Officers  
138 NCOs  
481 Jr. EM  
656 Total  
(Does not include attached  
medics)

**Major Weapons**  
36 x 4.2" (107mm) Mortars



# Equipment

The M2 as depicted in FM 23-92, 4.2-inch Mortar M2, April 1951



M2 4.2-inch (107mm) Mortar

## **M2 4.2-inch (107mm) Mortar—Specifications**

**Caliber:** 4.2 inches (107mm)

**Barrel Length:** 48 inches (barrel is rifled)

**Weight:** 333 pounds, complete

**Maximum elevation:** 1065 mils

**Minimum elevation:** 800 mils

**Maximum traverse:** 350 mils right or left of center

**Maximum Range with high explosive projectile and point detonating fuse:** 4,400 yards

**Minimum Range:** 565 yards

**Types of Ammunition used during WWII in the ETO:** High Explosive; White Phosphorus; Smoke; Illumination

### **Rate of Fire:**

First two minutes: 40 rounds

First 20 minutes: 100 rounds

Sustained Fire: 80 rounds per hour

*(Source: Data from FM 23-92, April 1951)*

The crew of a 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion M2 4.2-inch mortar fires in support of advancing elements of the 100th Infantry Division, 6 December 1944. (MHI)



# Enemies of the Century

The German Army of late 1944 was not the German Army that brought Western Europe to its knees in a few weeks in the spring of 1940, nor was it the German Army that quite nearly defeated the Soviet Union in the second half of 1941. It was far better equipped than it had been at any time previously: its tactical units possessed some of the best tanks of the war, and their artillery was essentially as good as any in the world; many infantry units were finally receiving semi-automatic rifles to replace the WWI-technology Mauser bolt action weapons with which Germany had fought for five years; every single infantry squad was equipped with a true machinegun, either a rapid-firing MG34 or an even more rapidly firing MG42.

If there were weaknesses in the German Army in late 1944, they were in the area of training and morale. The German units that opposed the 100th Infantry Division had suffered heavy losses either in Normandy or Southern France, and several had suffered severe casualties in the Soviet Union before their defeats in the West. As a result of their practice of fighting units “down to the nub,” many of the units that fought in the Vosges lacked the cohesion borne of long periods together, and morale suffered concomitantly. However, unlike previous phases of the war, the German Army in Alsace and Lorraine was now fighting on the doorstep of the Reich (technically, Alsace and Lorraine were part of the German *Reich!*), and perhaps Gerhard Graser, the author of the history of one of the German divisions that fought in the High Vosges in late 1944 summed it up best:

In the wooded mountain terrain the formation of a contiguous front was not possible. The individual strongpoints were far apart. The intervening land could only be covered through flanking fire of heavy weapons and artillery. The fighting always consisted of small battles in the underbrush, man on man. The American infantryman, accustomed to the protection of superior airpower and artillery, and used to advancing behind tanks, suddenly found themselves robbed of their most important helpers. The persistent bad weather hindered their air force, and the terrain limited the mobility of their armor to a significant degree. Here, the individual soldier mattered the most. For the German soldier, there was the courage of despair that gave rise to the utmost resistance: after many years of combat all over Europe, his back was to the wall of the homeland. On their side, the Americans believed that the banner of victory was already half-fastened to their colors and that it would take only one last energetic exertion for them to victoriously end the war. So both sides fought with unbelievable bitterness and severity. (Graser, *Zwischen Kattegat und Kaukasus: Weg und Kämpfe der 198. Infanterie-Division* (*Between the Kattegat and the Caucasus: The Route and Combat of the 198th Infantry Division*), Tübingen: 198th Infantry Division Veterans' Assoc., 1961.)

According to all of the commanders of the divisions that attacked the 100th during Operation NORDWIND in January 1945, morale soared to highs not seen for years at the commencement of the offensive. However, once the last German

offensive in the West failed, morale began to sink as the realization that final defeat was only a matter of time, and that unconditional surrender was the only possible fate for Germany. Still, although most German units collapsed quickly upon the initiation of the Americans' final thrust into Germany, some were still capable of deadly tenacity; one need only review the 100th's casualty lists for the first half of April 1945 to realize that the German military behemoth, although mortally wounded, could still inflict great pain, even in the last 30 days of the war!

## Volks-Grenadier Divisions (VGDs)

Most of the units which opposed the 100th during its tenure in combat belonged to this category of German infantry units. Although common after September of 1944, they remain one of the most misunderstood of all types of German combat units.

Originally conceived by Colonel Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg (Hitler's would-be assassin in the 20 July 1944 plot), these divisions were raised in the late summer 1944 as a new wave of combat forces to help halt the Allied onslaught as they broke out of Normandy. Although some battered infantry divisions were rebuilt with a hodgepodge of separate units and designated "*Volks-Grenadier*," many VGDs were built around a cadre from a division that had been mauled fighting on the front, and were then completely reorganized and rebuilt. The remainder (whose numerical designations began with the numeral "5," i.e., 553d, 559th, were organized as VGDs from the time of their activation in the summer of 1944.

Designed to operate defensively, their mobility was extremely limited; the infantry had to march wherever it went, and the artillery was horse-drawn, much the same as in almost all German infantry divisions since 1939 (or World War I, for that matter). The Allied armor threat was addressed only by the inclusion of a tank destroyer battalion which included a company of 75mm antitank guns and another company of self-propelled tank destroyers, or assault guns; anti-armor fighting was to be done mainly by attached tank or tank destroyer units, or by the infantrymen themselves, who were accordingly lavishly outfitted with *Panzerfaust* and *Panzerschreck* (the German bazooka) antitank rocket launchers.

The tactical concept behind the design of VGDs was seriously flawed. The three regiments only had two battalions each, instead of the usual three present in a conventionally-organized infantry division. To supposedly compensate for the loss of firepower sustained by the abbreviated organization, the soldiers of two of the three platoons in each line company were issued the new generation of assault rifles — MP-43s and MP-44s — vast improvements over the bolt-action Mauser KAR 98k, the basic design of which the German Army used through two world wars.

In concert with the nine MG42 machine-guns organic to each rifle company (as opposed to the thirteen in previous infantry formations), these selective fire rifles were to give *Volks-Grenadier* units so much more firepower that they could provide the same defensive coverage of much larger organizations of the old type.

Of course, the validity of such a concept was completely illusory. Although the volume of fire available from such weapons was indeed several times greater than before, the loss of four machineguns per company greatly diminished the differential between the old organizations' capabilities and the those of the new. Further — and even more significantly — the effective range of the new assault rifles

was about the same as the old Mausers had; thus, each company could only cover a sector of the same size as previous units. Worse, with only six infantry battalions per division, each VGD could only adequately cover a frontage two-thirds the width of an old-style division, in the standard two-up, one-back formation. To cover a sector of the same width as an old-style unit, all six battalions would have to be deployed forward, leaving no reserves at all!

The personnel situation within the VGDs was also less than optimal. While the survivors of battered divisions provided some combat experience to the leadership of the newly-reorganized outfits, there was a down side to this, as well. Survivors of destroyed units often do not have the highest morale and confidence in the chain of command. The units that these experienced, but battle-weary men were to lead were filled with non-infantrymen who required extensive retraining. Most were recently-reclassified *Kriegsmarine* (Navy) and *Luftwaffe* (Air Force) men who, by virtue of the destruction wrought on the vessels and aircraft of the German armed forces by this stage of the war, were now available for reassignment. In some cases, the VGDs were manned by ex-factory workers and minor government officials whose protected jobs in industry and civil service had been recently reclassified as non-essential to the war effort. Like many of the men assigned to the 100th who had not originally been infantryman, these new *Volks-Grenadiers* could become outstanding fighters, however, given the right individual and collective training.

Unlike their counterparts in the Century Division, however, none of the men of the VGDs got this training. Due to the pressures being exerted by the Allies at the front, none of the new VGDs were allotted more than six weeks to assemble and conduct individual and unit training; several didn't even get that, and were rushed into combat with only four weeks together as a unit.

Predictably, although the men of the VGDs usually fought gallantly and well, they couldn't overcome the disadvantages of flawed organization and incomplete training. Worst of all, the offensive actions to which they were committed in the Low Vosges as part of Operation NORDWIND placed them in a tactically impossible situation. Without the organizational capability of maintaining a practical reserve, all the infantrymen were on the line all the time; there was practically no way to hold units in reserve, even for hours or a day. With few motorized vehicles, weapons and equipment had to be manhandled up and down the icy trails and forest roads. With only a few weeks' conditioning or training for the rigors of offensive infantry combat, the VGDs were at a very serious disadvantage in the prosecution of attacks. Despite the best efforts of many brave German soldiers and tenacious, experienced leaders, the men of the VGDs were seriously handicapped by organizational and training limitations from the start of NORDWIND.

*Note:* The terms "*Volks-Grenadier*" and "*Volkssturm*" should never be confused. The *Volkssturm* was the German militia, called out in the autumn of 1944 for the defense of Germany. It was organized into battalions only, had no offensive capability or heavy weapons at all, and consisted of all remaining men between the ages of sixteen and sixty (and sometimes younger or older) who had not already been called to arms. As made clear above, *Volks-Grenadier* divisions were fully-equipped, combined arms combat forces designed for front line use, and although handicapped by faulty organization and inadequate training, were nevertheless capable of effective defensive operations.

# The 708th Volks-Grenadier Division

Although the 399th Infantry had been committed over a week before, the dense forests and steep hills of the High Vosges east of the Meurthe River provided the setting for the 100th's first combat as a division. As a unit, the defenders of this formidable terrain were as green as the American attackers.

The *708th Volks Grenadier Division* had been created in Breslau, Silesia, on 15 September 1944, built around a cadre from the remnants of the *708th Infantry Division*. A coastal defense division, the *708th Infantry Division* had been assigned coastal defense missions since its creation in April 1941, but had been battered into remnants in the summer battles in western France in the summer of 1944. It was withdrawn for reconstitution as a *Volks-Grenadier Division (VGD)* in August, and was trained in Slovakia for six weeks prior to being committed in the Vosges.

The *708th VGD*'s first mission was to relieve the *21st Panzer Division* in their strong positions overlooking the Meurthe River east of Baccarat, and north to the approaches to the Saverne Gap. Although a significant number of NCOs and junior officers were veterans of the summer battles in Normandy, most of the men occupying these defensive works during the first and second weeks of November were from very different backgrounds. Like so many men of the 100th Infantry Division, who were "retread" antiaircraft gunners, Air Corps crewmen, and ASTP "whiz kids," many of the NCOs of the *708th Volks-Grenadiers* were reclassified *Luftwaffe* and Navy crewmen; most of the *Landsers*, or infantry soldiers, were inexperienced replacements between the ages of 18 and 45. Nevertheless, they entered the battle at close to full strength, which, for a *Volks-Grenadier Division*, meant three regiments of two battalions each (although the *708th* was reinforced by a battalion of the *361st Volks-Grenadiers* near Raon l'Etape). The *Landsers* were also equipped with the new MP44 assault rifle and one MG42 machine gun per squad. Thus, not numbers, not equipment, but training and leadership would make the main difference between the two units, and it would show in this first encounter of the two combat neophyte divisions.

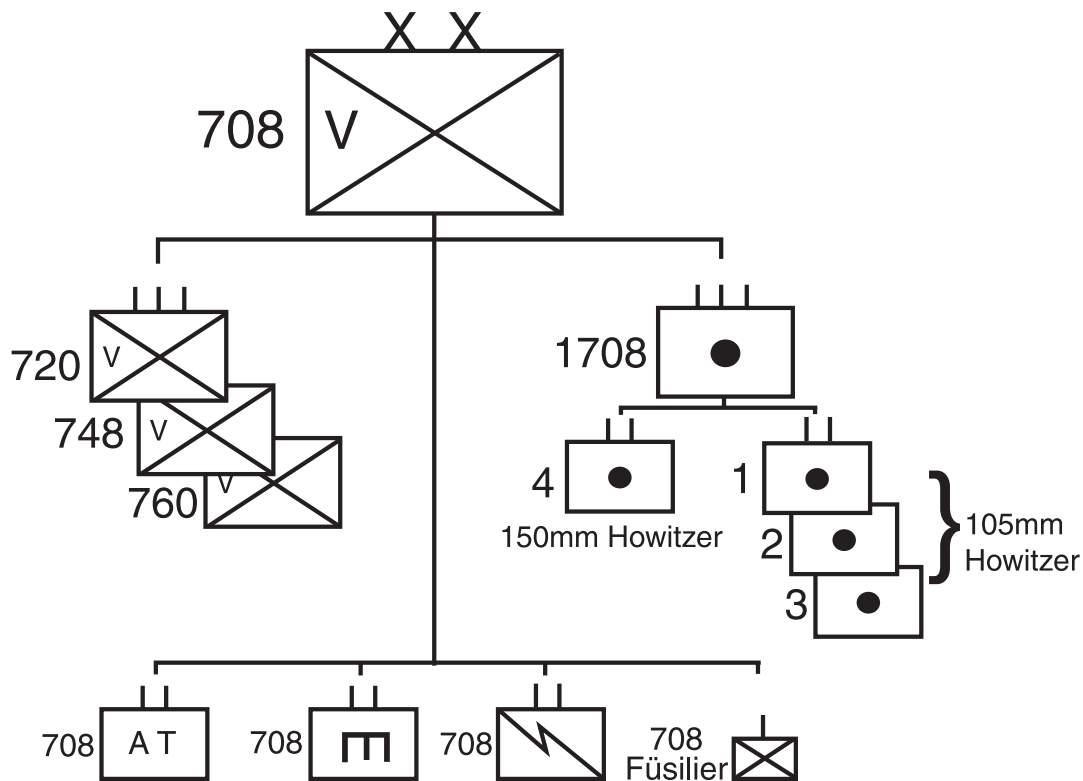
The main elements of the *708th* facing the 100th Infantry Division in the brooding Forêt du Petit Reclos came from *Grenadier Regiment 748*, although elements of the 100th later encountered elements of *Grenadier Regiments 760* and *951* (the latter detached from the *361st VGD*). Between the pounding the two southern regiments of the *708th* took from the 100th in the fog-shrouded ridges of the High Vosges, and the beating the northern regiment of the *708th* (*Grenadier Regiment 720*) sustained at the hands of a regiment of the 79th Infantry Division in its drive on the Saverne Gap, the *708th VGD* was practically destroyed as a fighting entity by 17 November. The *708th*'s commanding general was relieved at noon on that day.

*Generalmajor* Josef Paul Krieger was a 51-year old Bavarian infantryman who had successfully commanded a regiment on the Eastern Front. A World War I veteran who had commanded infantry companies and battalions in that war, like most

German officers, he had been forced out of the Army after 1919. Also like many German Army officers, until 1935, when Hitler formally repudiated the Versailles limitations on the *Wehrmacht* and began openly rebuilding Germany's Armed Forces, Krieger had served as a police officer.

After a second reconstitution, the 708th served on the north shoulder of the Colmar Pocket until February 1945, after which it was amalgamated with the 106th *Infantry Division* in the Black Forest in the closing days of the War.

## The 708th Volks-Grenadier Division



### Notes:

1. At full strength, a *Volks-Grenadier Division* had 10,072 men.
2. Each infantry regiment ("*Grenadier Regiment*" in German parlance) of a *Volks-Grenadier Division* possessed two battalions. At full strength, a Grenadier Regiment mustered 1,854 men.
3. Each 105mm artillery battalion possessed two batteries, each with four howitzers. The 150mm battalion was equipped with twelve 150mm howitzers.
4. The Antitank Battalion contained nine 75mm towed antitank guns, fourteen self-propelled, turretless 75mm guns ("assault guns" of various types), and nine 37mm automatic cannon. Dual or quad 20mm antiaircraft cannon were sometimes substituted.
5. The *Füsilier* Company was a group of about 200 soldiers, specially chosen for their fitness and experience. It was usually used for reconnaissance and other special missions.

# The 361st Volks-Grenadier Division

The 100th Infantry Division first encountered the *361st Volks-Grenadier Division* during the drive north from Sarrebourg, toward Bitche. It was elements of the *361st* that captured most of Company A/398th in Wingen-sur-Moder on 4 December, and it was this division that so stubbornly opposed the 100th's advance at Lemberg and Mouterhouse.

The first division to bear the number "361" was activated 24 September 1943 in Denmark. It was built around a cadre from the remnants of the *86th Infantry Division*, which had been almost destroyed in the battle for Kursk, in the USSR, just a few months before. Replacements came from the Rhineland and Westphalia to form around this core, and after about five months of training, the *361st*, commanded by *Generalleutnant* Siegmund Freiherr von Scheinitz, entrained for the Eastern Front.

From March to August 1944, the *361st Infantry Division* fought the Soviets in Belorussia and Poland, as part of *Army Group Center*. By late summer, the *361st* was all but destroyed, and the division was disbanded.

The second unit to bear this number was the unit which fought in the Low Vosges. It was organized as a *Volks-Grenadier Division* and was built around an infantry cadre. Again, it included mostly men from the Rhineland and Westphalia, but this time, many of them were reclassified Navy ratings and *Luftwaffe* troops who by virtue of the fortunes of war, were out of a job. The ex-antiaircraft gunners, ASTP men, and former Air Corps "flyboys" who ended up as infantrymen in the 100th Infantry Division weren't the only ones who got more than they bargained for.

The new *361st VGD's* commanding general, *Generalmajor* Alfred Philippi, was a 41-year old infantryman from Austria who had earned the Knight's Cross for valor on the Eastern Front. Commenting on his new charges' attitude toward the Army, he remarked that few of them were enthusiastic about duty as combat infantrymen. However, he added that, "The combination of men from Westphalia and the Rhineland proved favorable: the tough, persevering character of the Westphalian and the light temperament and verve of the Rhinelanders were a good mixture."

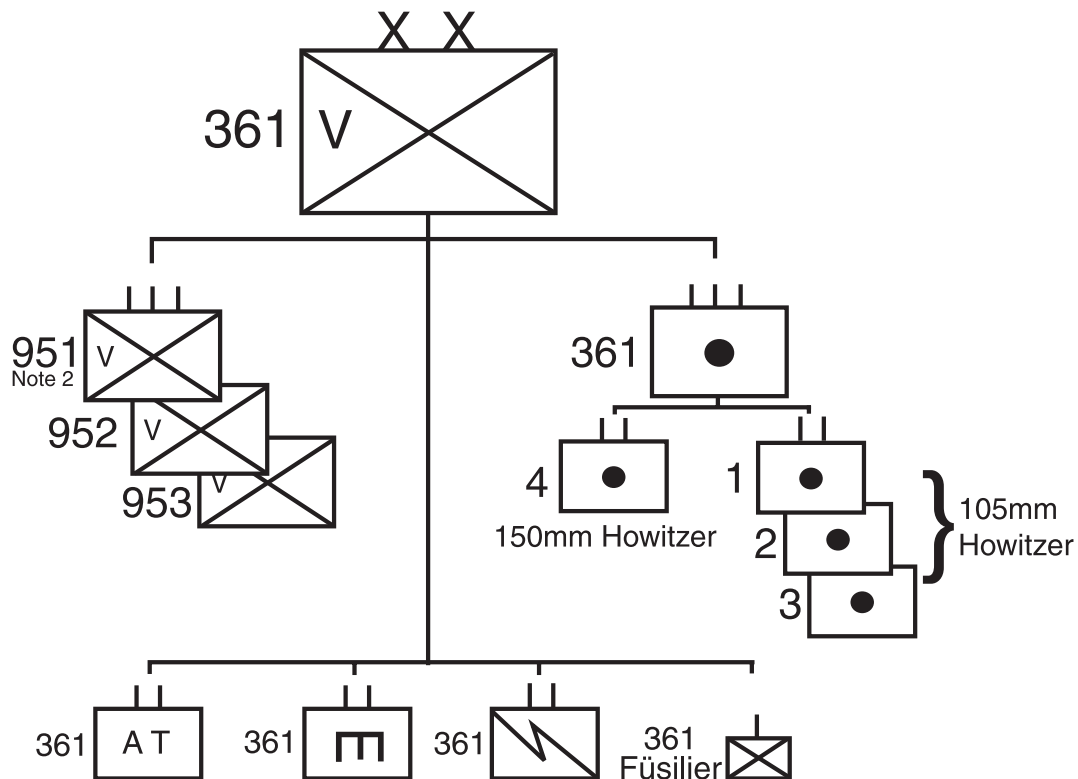
After about five weeks of training, the *361st VGD* was deployed in Lorraine, fighting defensive and delaying actions against elements of the US Third Army. In November, they opposed the advance of the 44th Infantry Division near Sarrebourg, and in December, they grudgingly gave ground as they fought tenacious delaying actions from south to north through the Low Vosges. Elements of the *361st* opposed the 398th at Wingen-sur-Moder, the 397th at Ingwiller and Mouterhouse, and the 399th at Lemberg. After becoming familiar with the terrain between Bitche and the German border in this way, many of the *361st's* leaders had a distinct advantage when they led their units over the same ground during the commencement of NORDWIND—an advantage that would be extremely useful when



they attacked in early January, straight through the positions of Task Force Hudelson on the 100th's right (eastern) flank.

For all practical purposes, NORDWIND was the 361st's last operation. Part of the division was absorbed by the 559th VGD in late January, and the rest was withdrawn for a reconstitution which never came.

## The 361st Volks-Grenadier Division

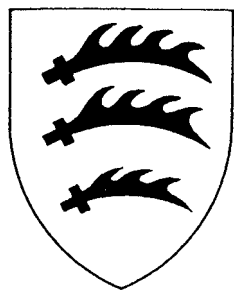


### Notes:

1. Strength and structure details are the same as for the 708th VGD, except as noted.
2. By December 1944, *Grenadier Regiment 951* had only one battalion; the other had been lost while attached to the 708th Volks-Grenadier Division in combat with the 100th Infantry Division in November.

# The 25th Panzer-Grenadier Division

The 100th's opponents during the drive on the Bitche defenses included the *25th Panzer-Grenadier Division*. As an infantry division made up of Swabians and Bavarians, it participated in the invasions of Poland and France, but it was reorganized as a motorized infantry division in late 1940. As such, during Operation



25th Panzer-  
Grenadier Division  
insignia

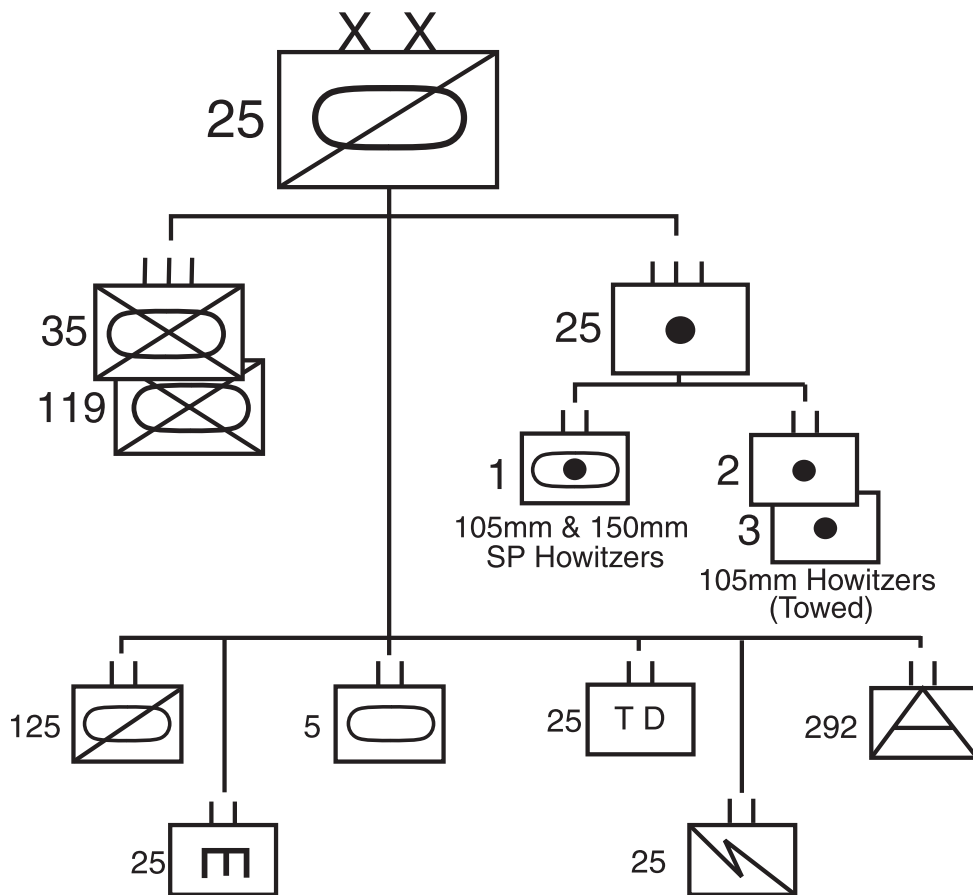
BARBAROSSA in June 1941, the *25th* attacked as part of *Army Group Center* and fought in the Soviet Union for two years before being reorganized as the *25th Panzer-Grenadier Division* in June 1943. After another year of heavy fighting, the division was almost destroyed near Minsk; the survivors were reorganized at the training area at Mielau as *Panzer Brigade 107*. Within a few months (early November 1944), this organization was eventually upgraded to divisional status at the Baumholder training area, and was re-christened the *25th Panzer-Grenadier Division*.

In its final form, the division was initially committed to the defensive action against US Third Army near Sierck-les-Bains (near the convergence of the German/Luxembourg/French borders), but was pulled out and recommitted near Bitche in December. There, it fought a delaying action between the *11th Panzer Division* and the *361st Volks-Grenadier Division*, near the Maginot fortifications west of Bitche, including Forts Simserhof and Schiesseck. Although it was little more than a reinforced battalion in size, the commanding general of its parent *XIII SS Corps*, *Obergruppenführer* (Lieutenant General) Max Simon rated its soldiers' morale as "excellent."

After the Seventh Army's offensive operations were halted in mid-December as a result of the German Ardennes Offensive (Operation WACHT AM RHEIN), the *25th* was pulled out of the line and assembled near Zweibrücken. It was gradually reconstituted during the coming weeks, and it was kept in *Army Group G* reserve during the initial blows of Operation NORDWIND, along with the *21st Panzer Division*. Together, these divisions were to exploit the penetrations made by either the *XIII SS Corps* in the west, or the *LXXXIX* and *XC Corps* in the east, and subsequently drive to the Alsatian Plain to cut off US Seventh Army from the 1st French. While the 100th's stubborn defense of its sector contributed in large part to the frustration of the Germans' intentions, the *25th* nevertheless saw considerable action when the focus of NORDWIND shifted to the Plain of Alsace during the second week of January. There, under their charismatic and highly-experienced commander, *Oberst* (Colonel) Arnold Burmeister, they collided with elements of the 42d and 79th Infantry Divisions and 14th Armored Division.

After the hard fighting on the Alsatian Plain, the division was transferred to Poland to confront advancing Soviet forces. Ultimately, it was destroyed in the eastern suburbs of Berlin in the closing days of the war.

# The 25th Panzer-Grenadier Division



## Notes:

1. At full strength, a Panzer-Grenadier division possessed 13,876 men; infantry strength included the panzer-grenadier regiments (3,043 each) and elements of the recon battalion (511).

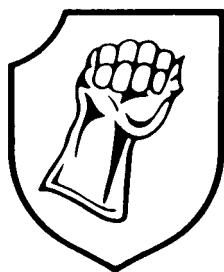
2. When it opposed the 100th Infantry Division in mid-December 1944, the Division was about the size of a brigade, that is, about half its normal strength. By the time it took part in Operation NORDWIND on the plain of Alsace, it was down to about a reinforced regiment composed of a company of tanks, two weak battalion-sized units of panzer grenadiers, and a few batteries of artillery.

# The 17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division

## “Götz von Berlichingen”

Götz von Berlichingen (1480–1562) was a late-medieval nobleman who was a sort of Germanic Robin Hood. A fiery Swabian warrior, he lost his right hand at the siege of Landshut in 1504, and had it replaced with a prosthetic fist made of iron. The men of the hard-driving *Waffen-SS* formation named for him took especially great pride in his most famous quotation, a defiant retort to a surrender demand in one of his many campaigns which can best be translated as, “Kiss my ass!”

On 3 October 1943, Adolf Hitler ordered the creation of the *17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division*, and decreed that it be named after this legendary figure of Germanic lore. It was raised in France with an officer and NCO cadre from experienced *Waffen-SS* divisions, and soldiers from all over Germany as well as *Volksdeutschen* (“racial Germans”) from central and southern European countries; there were also a minority of *Volksdeutschen* from Belgium, Luxembourg, Alsace, and Lorraine. Many of the initial complement of *Volksdeutschen* were conscripts, and as the division received replacements for its casualties in 1944–45, draftees became the norm.

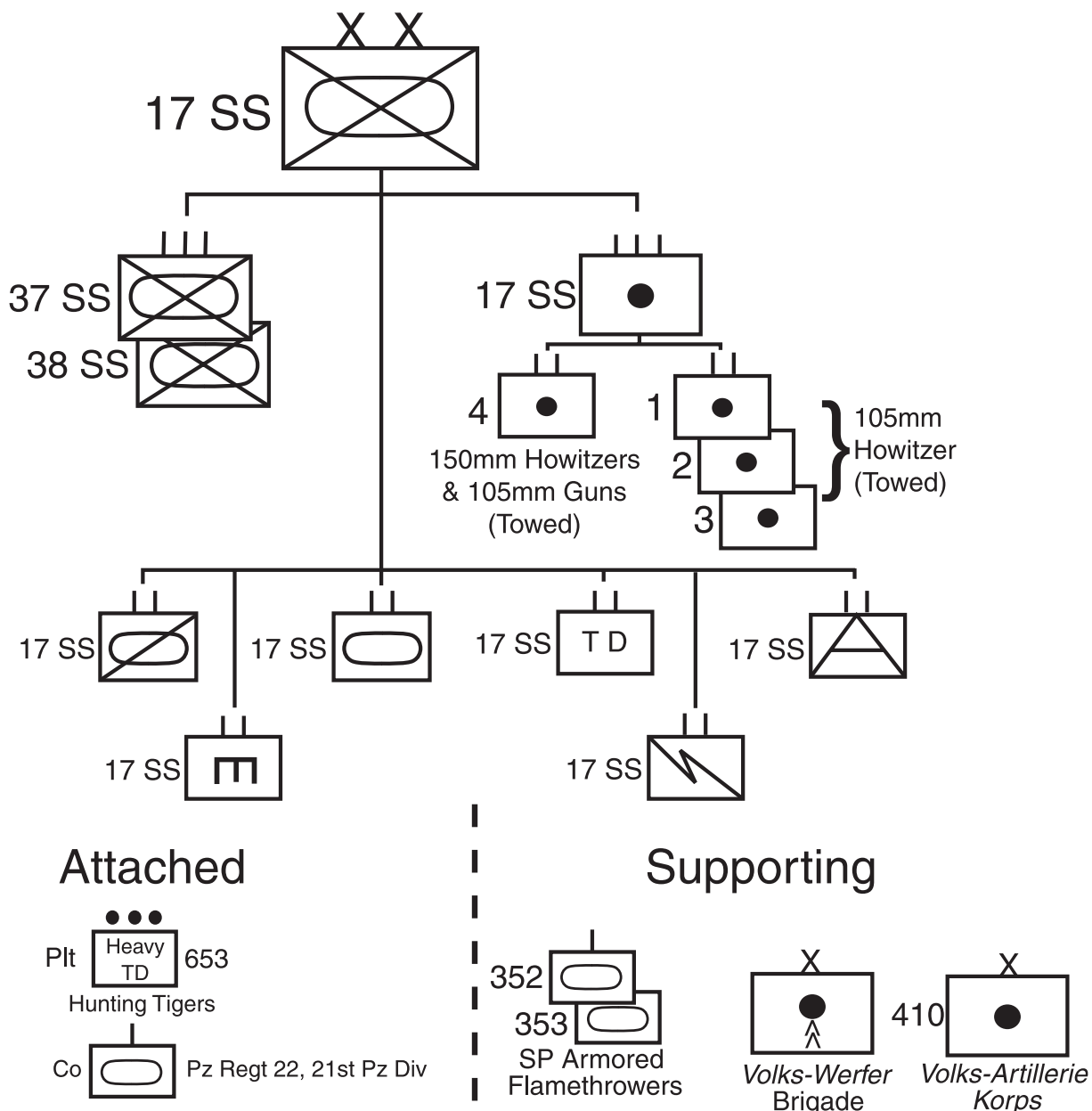


17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division insignia

From the beginning, the *17th* was especially trained in night operations, to compensate for the conditions its leaders anticipated for the battlefields of the Western Front, where the *17th* was specifically expected to fight. Its leadership insisted on at least 25 percent of all tactical training being conducted under these conditions. By the time of the NORDWIND attacks against the 397th Infantry near Rimling and the 44th Infantry Division to the west, however, whatever proficiency the *17th's* infantry units had developed in night operations must have been lost with the casualties it suffered in Normandy—only this can account for the crude “wave” attacks its *Panzergrenadiers* launched at Schlietzen and Schlossberg Hills in the first week of January 1945.

The *Götz von Berlichingen Division* fought extensively in the Normandy campaign, and suffered heavy losses of men and materiel there and during the subsequent withdrawal across France to Lorraine. During its protracted combat, it absorbed the *49th* and *51st SS-Panzer-Grenadier Brigades*, and fought against US Third Army elements near Verdun and Metz. During the period October to January, the *17th* was commanded by no fewer than four different commanding officers, and just before it was committed to NORDWIND, it received a large contingent of Russian “*Volksdeutsche*” as replacements for its two depleted *Panzer-Grenadier* regiments. These factors—lack of cohesion borne of little opportunity to train together and turmoil in the division command structure—combined with the tenacious defense of elements of the 44th and 100th Infantry Divisions to spell failure for the *Götz von Berlichingen Division* in NORDWIND.

# The 17th -Panzer-Grenadier Division "Götz von Berlichingen"



## Notes:

1. At full strength, as the 17th SS was on the eve of Operation NORDWIND, an SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division possessed 13,876 men; infantry strength included the panzer-grenadier regiments (3,043 each) and recon battalion (942).
2. At the time of Operation NORDWIND, the 17th possessed at least 70 assault guns and medium tank destroyers in its panzer and antitank battalions; a company of 15 Panthers was attached, along with a platoon of Hunting Tigers and at least 20 armored flamethrowers built on Hetzer chassis.

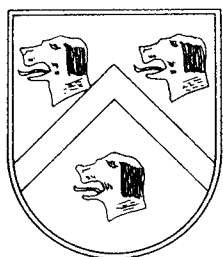
Ordered to conduct the main attack for the *XIII SS Corps* in NORDWIND, the 17th's mission was to penetrate the American defenses and open the road to Diemeringen to the south; it was also to link up with elements of *XC Corps*, attacking from east of Bitche. Supported by attacks by the 19th and 36th *Volks-Grenadier Divisions* against the defenses of the 44th Infantry Division to the west, the 17th's success in this maneuver would allow *Army Group G's* armored reserve (the 21st *Panzer* and 25th *Panzer-Grenadier Divisions*) to dash to Saverne and beyond, as well as annihilate the 100th Infantry Division. Determined resistance from the 44th and 100th Divisions prevented this penetration and encirclement, however, and completely frustrated the intentions of the German command. The epic stand of the 397th Infantry's 2d and 3d Battalions at Rimling against repeated, spirited attempts by the 17th to take the town contributed especially to the 17th's failure—and was recognized by a Presidential Unit Citation for the 3d Battalion and Company H of the 2d, as well as a posthumously-awarded Medal of Honor for Technical Sergeant Charles Carey, one of the many stalwarts of Rimling's defense.

The failure of the 17th *SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division* to accomplish its mission resulted in the relief for cause of the division operations officer and other key staff members on 3 January; a few days later, the 29-year old division commander, *Standartenführer* (Colonel) Hans Lingner was captured by elements of the 44th Infantry Division. Although the 17th continued to attack for the next several days, the commanders of 1st Army and *Army Group G* had given up hope for any success, and the 17th was eventually withdrawn.

The *Götz von Berlichingen Division* eventually withdrew fighting across Germany and met its end at the hands of Seventh Army units south of Nürnberg (Nuremberg). In the process, elements of the 100th again fought against the 17th, when the 398th Infantry assaulted Jagstfeld in April.

# The 559th Volks-Grenadier Division

It was the *Landsers* of the 559th Volks-Grenadier Division who charged into the 399th Infantry's positions between Reyersviller and the Division's right flank on New Year's Eve, 1944/45.



559th Volks-Grenadier Division insignia

The 559th was activated on 11 July 1944 as a "*Sperr-Division*" (a "blocking" division), but was redesignated a *Volks-Grenadier Division* on 9 October. It saw its first action against elements of Third Army near Metz. During September, October, and November, its men saw almost continuous action during the defensive and delaying actions through Lorraine to the *Westwall*.

Withdrawn from *First Army's* LXXXII Corps sector near Saarlouis on 22 December, its infantry echelons had sustained heavy losses. Massive replacements infused during the last week of December brought two of the three infantry regiments to full strength, although the third (the 1125th) was for all purposes still nonexistent by the time of NORDWIND.

Like all elements which participated in NORDWIND, the leaders of the 559th VGD were, in an attempt to achieve surprise, specifically denied the opportunity for more than a quick reconnaissance of their attack zone prior to 2300 on 31 December. This—and a lack of training on the part of the hastily-built-up infantry and engineer units of the Division—accounts for the almost suicidal charges into the minefields and machinegun crossfires of the 399th's defensive works.

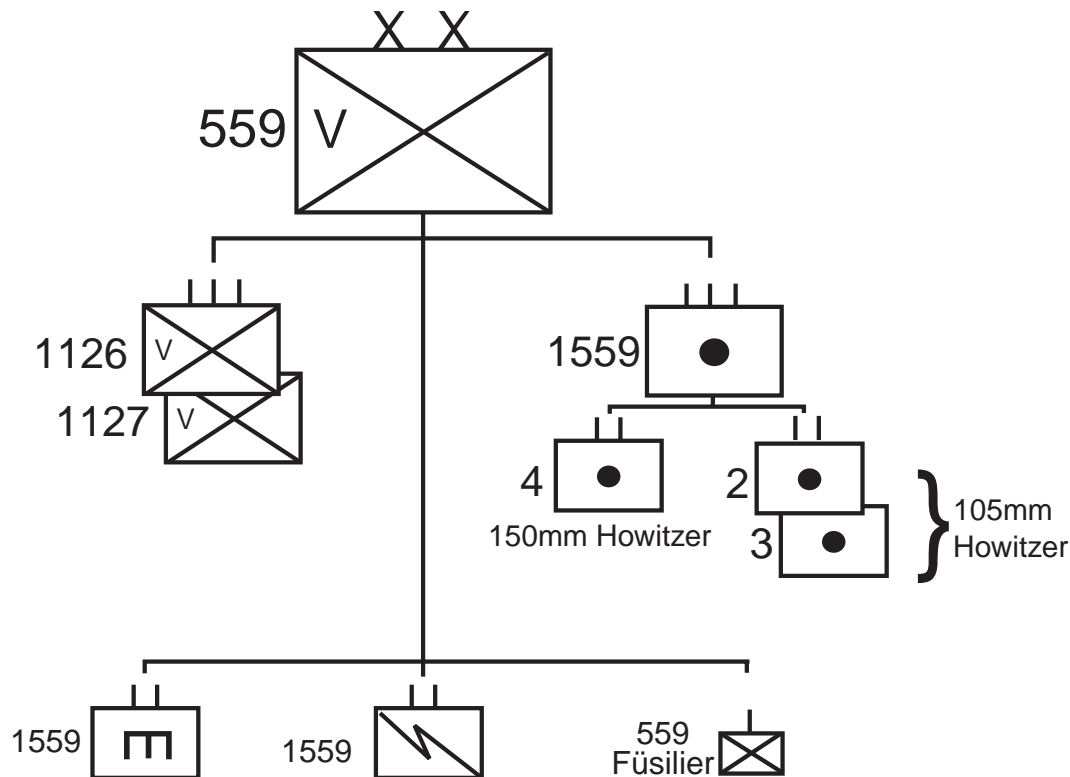
Just as with Major General Burress of the 100th Infantry Division, the 559th VGD was commanded by only one officer, from its activation to the end of the war. *Generalmajor* Kurt *Freiherr* (Baron) von der Mühlen was 39-year old Swabian nobleman who had joined the *Reichswehr* (the Army of the Weimar Republic) in 1923, and served ever since. A career infantryman who had served extensively in combat in the East, Baron von der Mühlen had earned the Knight's Cross for valor. In commenting on his unit's condition on the eve of NORDWIND, he had this to say,

"Commanders and company grade officers of the infantry were experienced in defensive combat. Enlisted personnel included a large number of young replacements whose morale was good. Both officers and men had had little training for attacks in forest areas. The engineers had suffered severe losses which were replaced by young troops poorly trained, especially in mine clearance.

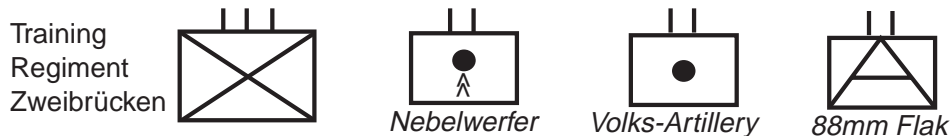
"The Division's artillery was good and combat seasoned."

The mission of the 559th VGD in NORDWIND was to penetrate the American lines west and south of Bitche and seize Lemberg and the high ground in the vicinity of Rohrbach and Bining. There, they would link up with the 17th *SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division* attacking south from Rimling, and complete the annihilation of the 100th Infantry Division by encirclement. Although they achieved some initial success against the 399th Infantry near Bitche, the 559th's attacks fell apart in the face of the 100th's resistance well short of their objectives. By the end of 3 January,

# The 559th Volks-Grenadier Division



## Attached Units



### Notes:

1. Strength and structure details are the same as for the 708th VGD, except as noted.
2. By late December 1944, the 559th's *Grenadier Regiment* 1125 existed as a skeleton force only, and did not effectively participate in NORDWIND. The other two regiments were "almost completely up to strength," according to the division commander, *Generalmajor* Kurt, Freiherr (Baron) von der Mühlen.
3. The antitank battalion and 1st Battalion of *Artillery Regiment* 1559 were not available for participation in NORDWIND. In compensation, the division received the attachments indicated above, as well as a platoon of tank destroyers.

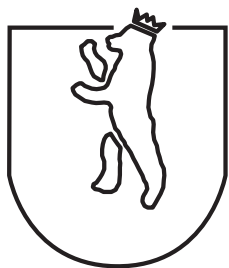
the commanding generals of XC Corps and 1st Army had given up hope for further offensive success by the 559th; they ordered the division to suspend offensive action and defend the ground it had taken. Following their unsuccessful attacks against the 100th Infantry Division, the exhausted and decimated 559th VGD was pulled out of the line in late January. After a very brief refitting period, they were again committed in the Saar, where they fought until they were pushed back to the Rhine in March. There, near Oppenheim, they were savagely mauled by the Third Army. Remnants of the 559th managed to withdraw, and later faced the 100th Infantry Division again—at Heilbronn and Backnang.



# The 257th Volks-Grenadier Division

As an organization, the *257th Volks-Grenadier Division* fought around Bitche twice during World War II.

Originally raised in March 1939 in Potsdam, near Berlin, the *257th Infantry Division* (the “Berlin Bears”) participated in occupation duties in Poland before charging through the weakest part of the Maginot Line in the Saar in June of 1940. After penetrating the Maginot to the west of Bitche, General von Viebahn’s division circled around and attacked the outer works of the Ensemble de Bitche from the south—the same direction from which the 100th attacked in December 1944! Unlike the 100th, however, the *257th* failed to make a dent in the Maginot fortifications there, although they sustained about the same number of casualties in their futile attempts to do so.



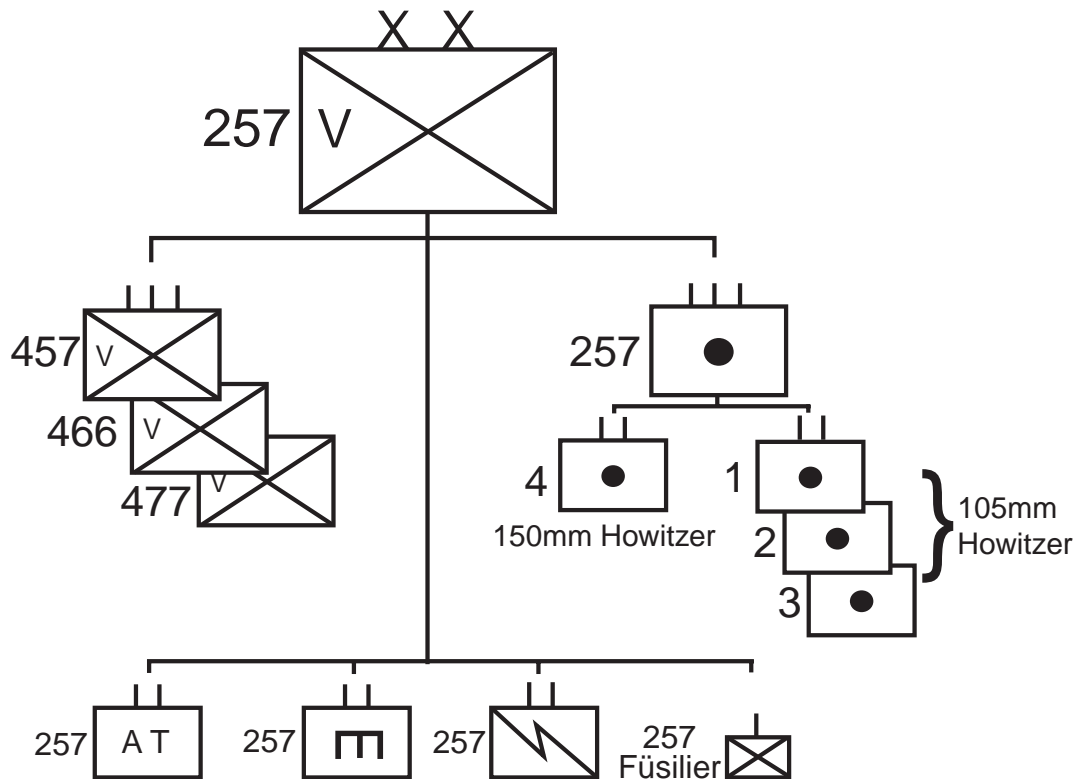
257th Volks-Grenadier Division insignia

The *257th Infantry Division* saw extensive combat on the Eastern Front, and was actually pulled out twice for refitting, once in the summer of 1942, and again in the autumn of 1944. In October 1944, the Division was converted to a *Volks-Grenadier Division* (only two battalions in each infantry regiment, but they were equipped with assault rifles and the newest machineguns), reconstituted with Army (previously wounded) veterans and reclassified Navy and *Luftwaffe* NCOs. The division trained together in occupied Poland and, again, in its home area of Berlin for about five weeks prior to being shipped to the West, and committed against the 100th Division near Bitche. After all of the vicissitudes of the last four and a half years, perhaps there were still a few men in the *257th* who remembered the success with which the French defenders of the Ensemble de Bitche had thwarted their division’s attack from the south in 1940; if so, they were in for a rude surprise as the 100th and 44th Infantry Divisions penetrated the Maginot positions around Bitche by 20 December.

While the Combat Team 398 was assaulting Fort Schiesseck, and the 44th Infantry Division’s 71st Infantry Regiment was attacking Fort Simserhof a few kilometers to the west, the *257th VGD* was withdrawn to assembly areas north and east of the Camp de Bitche in preparation for the NORDWIND offensive. Here, the units of the Division were brought to nearly full strength, and last minute preparations were made for attacking into the Low Vosges east of Bitche—the sector held by Task Force Hudelson. After breaking through the thinly-held defenses there, the *257th* was to swing around to the west, seize Lemberg, and go on to Goetzenbruck/Sarreinsberg, thus securing the western end of some of the critical routes for German armor to pass through the Low Vosges and onto the Plain of Alsace. It would also, in tandem with the *559th VGD*, complete the encirclement of the 100th Infantry Division!

The *la* (German equivalent of a US division G-3, or operations and training officer) of the *257th* summed up the *257th*’s situation before NORDWIND this way,

# The 257th Volksgrenadier Division



Note: Strength and structure details are the same as for the *708th VGD*.

"The morale and attitude of all of the replacements had to called very good, which represents a noteworthy fact considering the long duration of the war and our critical military situation. . . .

"The material equipment of the Division was supplied according to plan . . . it corresponded to the tables of equipment—except for some unessential deviations—and was of the newest make and excellent. Only the equipment with motor vehicles was deficient in quality as well as quantity. . . .

"The initial success of the Ardennes Offensive—starting on 17 December—had an extremely favorable effect on the morale and attitude of the Division after having luckily passed its first engagements."

Nevertheless, the same officer (*Oberstleutnant* Ernst Linke) also noted that before *NORDWIND*, the *257th Volksgrenadiers* had never before participated in an offensive operations together, and that although morale was high and the chain of command was experienced, the mission of attacking in winter into unfamiliar terrain was a daunting one indeed.

The mission of the 257th VGD in NORDWIND was to penetrate the American lines east of Bitche, seize Lemberg to cut off the 100th Infantry Division, and gain control of the Tieffenbach-Wimmenau road on both sides of Wingen-sur-Moder. This would facilitate the breakout of *Army Group G's* armored reserves (the 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer-Grenadier Divisions) on the Plain of Alsace via the Ingwiller exit from the Low Vosges.

After slashing through the screen of Task Force Hudelson's mechanized cavalry units on the right, the 257th VGD closed in on Lemberg and Goetzenbruck against resistance from the 399th Infantry and elements of the 398th. As a result of apparent confusion in German higher headquarters, the 257th and the neighboring 559th VGD could not coordinate their assault on the town, however. While the staff of XC Corps to which they belonged hammered out the problems, reinforcements from the 36th Infantry Division's 141st Infantry Regiment and the 14th Armored Division's 19th Armored Infantry Battalion arrived to shore up the beleaguered defense. Although they tried for four days to break through to the south and west, the *Landsers* of the 257th were repulsed, and never secured the key road to the south. One of their regiments, *Grenadier Regiment 477*, was transferred to the LXXXIX Corps just to the east, in a fruitless attempt to break through the VI Corps defenses near Lichtenberg and Reipertswiller, but the rest of the division was ordered over to the defensive on 4 January, to hold the ground it had won.

# The 6th SS-Mountain Division

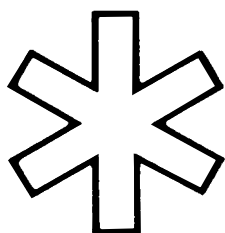
## “Nord”

Organized in early 1941 in Norway as a motorized SS Combat Group, formed around the 6th and 7th Death's Head (*Totenkopf*) Regiments of the *Waffen-SS*. Considered unready for combat due to lack of unit training at the time of its commitment to the invasion of Russia.

The division's first combat was as a full-fledged SS motorized division in northern Karelia in July 1941, as part of XXXVI Corps' attack to cut the Murmansk railway, a critical supply line for the receipt of Lend-Lease equipment from the States. It suffered a critical defeat at the Soviet fortress of Salla, and was subsequently retrained and infused with younger men specifically trained to *Waffen-SS* standards. Reorganized and redesignated as an SS mountain division in 1942, the division assimilated a significant number of *Volksdeutsche*, or ethnic Germans, from mountainous regions such as the South Tyrol and the Balkans, as well as some Scandinavians who chose to join the SS – although these latter did not accompany the Division to the Vosges. Although the *Nord* Division never did break through to the Murmansk railroad, long-range patrols frequently conducted raids against it during the next three years of bitter combat against the Soviet Army, bands of partisans, and three near-Arctic winters. After Finland concluded a separate armistice with the Soviets in September 1944, *Nord* fought the rearguard actions for the withdrawing 20th Mountain Army against Finnish units, which had, up until the month before, been allies. After marching 1,000 miles from Finland through Norway, the Division was taken by ferry to Denmark later in December 1944, and a combat group built around *SS-Mountain Infantry Regiment 12 “Michael Gaissmair”* arrived by train in time for participation in the opening blows of NORDWIND, and made the fateful attack to seize the key crossroads town of Wingen-sur-Moder in the first week of 1945. By 9 January, the rest of the division was committed.

The division commanding general had this to say about Nord's condition at the time of its commitment a few kilometers east of the 100th's sector in Operation NORDWIND, “[The Division] was fit for any commitment. Officers and men were, with few exceptions, soldiers of long service, with particular experience in forest and mountain fighting. Morale and fighting spirits were outstanding . . . [the Division was] until then unbeaten and victorious. . . .”

Although its *SS-Mountain Infantry Regiment 11 “Reinhard Heydrich”* mauled six companies of the 45th Infantry Division's 157th Infantry Regiment on the hills north of Reipertswiller in the third week of January, like the results of Operation NORDWIND overall, most of *Nord's* operations fell short of intended goals. The two battalions of the *Michael Gaissmair Regiment* committed in the attack on Wingen suffered most significantly, losing 70 percent of the mountain rifle companies it committed to that mission. By February, the division had been ordered to conduct defensive operations in its sector in the Low Vosges, and part of this sector was

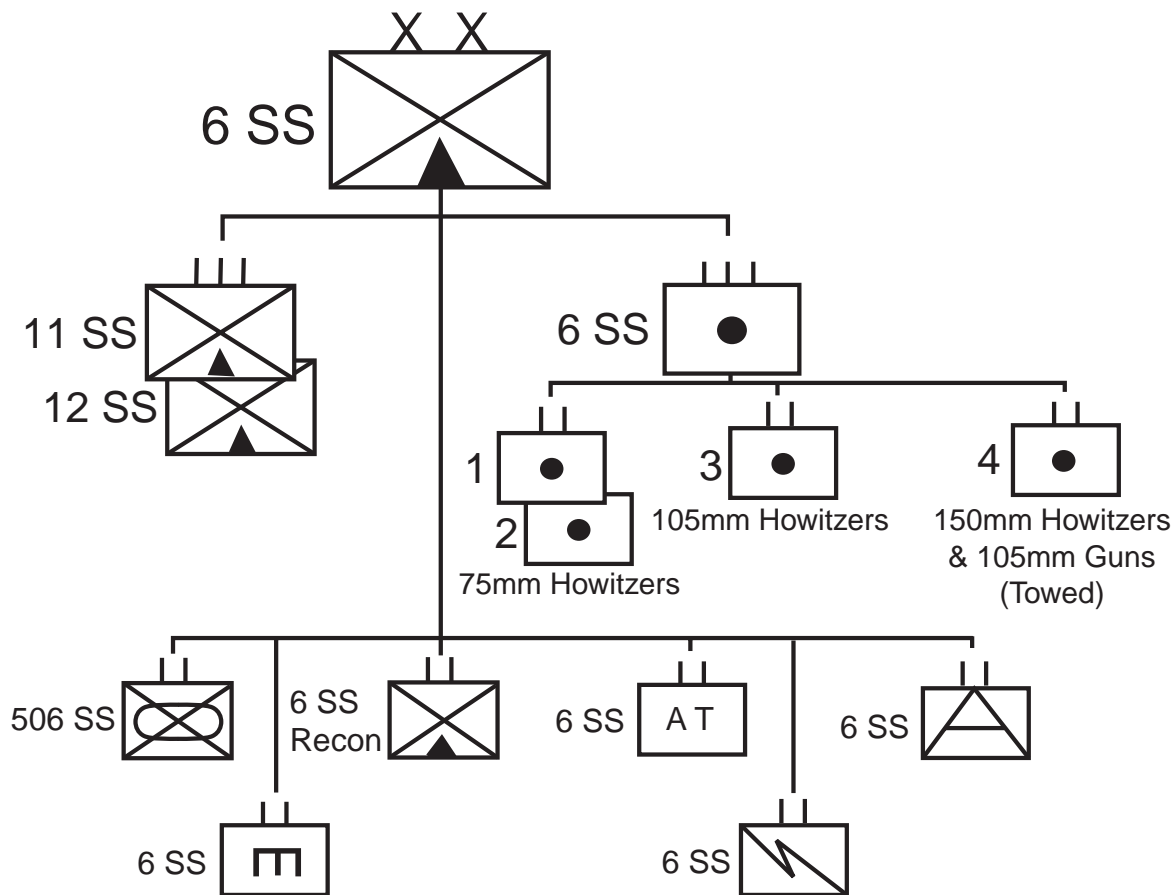


6th SS-Mountain  
Division insignia

opposite the 100th Infantry Division's. Throughout much of the remaining time until the commencement of Operation UNDERTONE, the Seventh Army's drive to and across the Rhine in mid-March, many 100th Infantry Division elements encountered the fierce and highly experienced SS mountain infantry of *Nord* during their protracted period of patrolling and local defensive operations in the war's last bitter winter.

In March, *Nord* was transferred to the Saar-Moselle Triangle, where it was engaged by Third Army and ultimately pressed back into Bavaria, where it capitulated just days before the end of the war in Europe.

## The 6th ~~SS~~ Mountain Division "Nord"



### Notes:

1. At full strength, the 6th SS-Mountain Division "Nord" possessed about 15,000 men; infantry strength included the mountain infantry (Gebirgsjäger) regiments, which included about 3,064 men each, plus the reconnaissance battalion, which numbered 650, and SS Panzer Grenadier Battalion 506, which included 867 men.
2. Senior veterans of the Division say that the infantry units were at about 90% strength at the time of their commitment to Operation NORDWIND, but that their strength (especially that of SS Panzer-Grenadier Battalion 506 and the 1st and 3rd Battalions, SS-Mountain Infantry Regiment 12) were significantly depleted at the time of their commitment across from the 100th in February and March 1945.

# From Bitche to Stuttgart...

From the time of the fall of Bitche on 16 March 1945 through the remainder of the 100th Infantry Division's combat service, it would be misleading to identify specific large units which fought against the Division. Rather, the 100th was opposed by hastily-organized, *ad hoc* amalgams of available units, often lacking significant armored, mortar, or artillery support.

When the 100th first burst through the lines beyond Bitche and headed through the Palatinate toward the Rhine at Mannheim/Ludwigshafen, it was opposed by scattered units of the *17th SS-Panzer Grenadier Division* and by *Volkssturm*, or local defense, units. It is in these latter units that the "14-year-old boys and 70-year-old grandfathers" that so many Centurymen remember as their quarries during the war's final phase were assigned. However, there were sometimes also fanatical members of the Hitler Youth in these outfits, and they could make life difficult for both their fellow *Volkssturm* members (who might be inclined toward surrender) and attacking Centurymen. However, the *Volkssturm* were strictly last line of defense outfits, members of which were often clad in a sad sack mixture of German Army, *Luftwaffe*, police, and even *Reichswehr* (the pre-Nazi era German armed forces) uniforms, and equipped with odd lots of rifles, machine pistols, and, of course, the ubiquitous *Panzerfaust* anti-tank rocket launcher.

The last semblance of organized resistance met by the 100th was at Heilbronn, from 4–12 April 1945. Although the German defenders were truly remnants of regular infantry and other units, the mixed bag of *Volks-Grenadiers*, *SS-Panzer-Grenadiers*, infantrymen, and training unit troops that were brought together to resist the Division's crossings of the Neckar gave a good account of themselves during more than a week of ferocious fighting in and around the city. The following list of German units and related information was gathered by the late Dr. Günther Beck of Beilstein from American PW records (especially the 100th G-2's) available in the US National Archives.

Without doubt, the most well-organized and highly motivated defenders of the Heilbronn area were the elements of *SS-Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 38* of the 397th's old nemesis from Rimling, the *17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division*. The better part of two weakened, but hard-fighting battalions of this regiment opposed the 398th Infantry near Jagstfeldt. In fact, they were the same two battalions that attacked Rimling in early January.

*Combat Group (Kampfgruppe) Bodendörfer* (built around a remnant of *Grenadier Regiment 689* of the *246th Volks-Grenadier Division*) fought in the city center and industrial quarter, opposing the 3d/398th and the 397th Infantry Regiment. It counted among its ranks soldiers from a confusing array of combat and training units. The core unit, *Grenadier Regiment 689*, was originally activated as an integral part of the *337th Infantry Division*, which was raised in November 1940, in Bavaria. After performing occupation duties in France, it was transferred to the *246th Infantry Division* in combat in the Soviet Union in late 1941. After over 2½ years of fierce combat there, the *246th* was transferred to Germany and reorganized as a *Volks-Grenadier* division and committed in the ferocious fighting in the Hürtgen

Forest. After being brought back up to strength with the addition of many former *Luftwaffe* personnel and participation in the Ardennes Offensive in December, it was committed to defensive operations in Germany.

*Combat Group Bodendörfer* also apparently included remnants of *Grenadier Regiment 223*, formerly of the *16th Volks-Grenadier Division*, veterans of fighting in the High Vosges and Colmar Pocket; a company-sized element of the *2nd Mountain Division's Mountain Infantry Regiment 136*, veterans of three years of fighting above the Arctic Circle against the Soviets near Petsamo; and part of the *553rd Volks-Grenadier Division's Grenadier Regiment 1121*, which had fought in the Saverne Gap in November and counterattacked across the Rhine during NORDWIND in January. Several of the non-combat units pressed into defensive service, also evidently under *Combat Group Bodendörfer's* command, included the locally-stationed *Training (Ausbildungs-und-Ersatz) Regiment 525*, *Flak Regiment 42*, and even *Punishment Battalion 292*, a penal unit for errant German soldiers. Several of these units disappeared after the 100th seized the Heilbronn area, but *Combat Group Bodendörfer* continued to exist as an identifiable entity and withdrew toward Beilstein where it continued its defensive operations until destroyed.

*Combat Group Krebs* (built around a remnant of the *719th Volks-Grenadier Division*) fought primarily around the south of Heilbronn, near Sontheim and Flein. The *719th* was organized as an infantry division in 1941 in the Brandenburg region, in and around Berlin. It performed three years of occupation duty in the Netherlands and coastal defense duties along the North Sea coast. In September of 1944, it fought British and Commonwealth forces in the Netherlands and Belgium before being redesignated as a *Volks-Grenadier Division* and transferred to the Saar to fight US Third Army units.

*Combat Group Mockros* (principally *Grenadier Regiment 423* of the *212th Volks-Grenadier Division*) also fought in the southern districts of the city and its surroundings. Another unit raised in Bavaria, the *212th*, had been activated in early 1939 as an infantry division and took part in the invasion of France in 1940. After three years of combat in the Soviet Union, it was transferred to Germany, quickly refurbished and reorganized as a *Volks-Grenadier* division, and thrust into the Ardennes as part of the massive German offensive there in December 1944. Coincidentally, most of the division ended the war in its home region of Bavaria after a long series of defenses and withdrawals across much of Germany.

By the end of the fighting in Heilbronn, both *Combat Groups Mockros* and *Krebs* had ceased to exist as recognizable units, and were incorporated in the *559th Volks-Grenadier Division*, known to the 100th from the fighting in January around Bitche. Elements of the *559th*, namely the company-sized *Combat Group Maier*, also fought in the Heilbronn area against units of the 100th, but further participation by this old foe of the Century Division is unconfirmed. The *559th* withdrew toward Backnang and Münsingen, finally surrendering in those areas in late April.

Even as the 100th settled into occupation duties in the closing days before and just after the German unconditional surrender, there was one last foe with which Centurymen had to contend. Having viewed the havoc caused by partisans against the German armed forces in occupied lands, Heinrich Himmler and his SS had created a network of guerillas intended to hamper Allied and Soviet conquerors if

Three *Werwolf* suspects captured in Winnenden outside Stuttgart, spring 1945 (SOC).



and when they set foot on German soil. Called the “*Werwolf*” movement, these highly-motivated irregulars were to perform the full gamut of guerilla tasks, from gathering and communicating intelligence on the enemy, to ambushes, sabotage, and even intimidation and terror against German “collaborators” who may have lapsed into cooperation (read “not resisting against”) the Allied and Soviet occupiers of their local regions.

Ultimately, the *Werwolf* concept did not live up to Nazi hopes, and lost momentum significantly after the final German surrender. In fact, many incidents that were attributed to the *Werwolf* by the Allied side turned out to be simple criminal acts by unconnected individuals. However, terror and crime incidents—especially violence against Allied soldiers, retribution against German “collaborators,” and black marketeering aimed at raising funds for the movement—did continue sporadically all the way to 1947. Overall, however, like the “Alpine Redoubt” in which high-ranking Nazis were supposedly going to carry on the war indefinitely, the *Werwolf* movement was a Nazi pipe dream which a demoralized and thoroughly defeated German population was too exhausted and too poor to support.



(NA)



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Much of the information about both US and German units has been derived from pertinent documents in the US National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. Unit historical reports and operations reports for the 781st Tank Battalion, 776th and 824th Tank Destroyer Battalions, and 898th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons) and its original parent organization, the 209th Coast Artillery Regiment (Anti-Aircraft) are all available in Records Group 407 and may be accessed by the public at the facility. Similarly, the 100th Infantry Division intelligence documents which serve as the principal basis of Dr. Beck's description of German units defending the Heilbronn area are also available in the boxes of this record group which contain 100th Infantry Division G-2 records.

## Supporting Units

The diagrams of the US unit structures are derived from the original tables of organization and equipment found at the US Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. The specific TO&Es are listed with each wire diagram that was derived from them; the corollary company TO&Es used to determine company strengths can also be found at the MHI.

In conjunction with the primary source documents from the National Archives, the following published unit histories were used in the development of this book:

*Rounds Away! Two Years of Combat with the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion.* Innsbruck, Austria: Wagner'sche Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1945.

*An Informal History of the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion.* Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1945.

*Up From Marseilles: History of the 781st Tank Battalion.* Nashville: Benson, 1945.

Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Elliott, US Army (Retired), a rare, two-war (WWII and Korean War) Chemical Mortar Battalion veteran, has created a world-class website dedicated to the history of these unique units. The URL is [www.4point2.org](http://www.4point2.org).

## German Units

A great deal of the information about the German units comes from documents available in the Captured German Documents section of the Archives in College Park. Some of it has been included in a series of books edited by W. Victor Madej produced by Game Publishing Company in Allentown, Pennsylvania (now apparently known as Valor Publishing in the same city). Other information is from the *German Army Group G Kriegstagebuch*, or daily war journal, available on microfilm at College Park. Finally, much of the information about German units is available in the books and other sources listed below, all of which have either already been placed in or will, by the end of January 2002, be in place in the General Withers A. Burress and 100th Infantry Division Historical Collection at the George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, Virginia.

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# To Learn More About the 100th Infantry Division in World War II...



The 100th Infantry Division Association Board of Trustees, with Aegis Consulting Group, have made reprints of these unit histories, operations reports, and maps available:

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## Operations Reports

See the summaries of operations of each battalion and separate company of each of the three infantry regiments—as reported by each regimental commander to General Burrell on a monthly basis during combat—in these original operations reports. Copied directly from the originals in the National Archives, these 20–40 page documents provide the who, what, when, where, and how of each day's operations throughout the six months of the 100th's combat service in France and Germany. A “must” for understanding the big picture in every context, as well as for all who seriously want to understand the “whys” and “wherefores” of Century Division operations in WWII. **\$32 for a six-month set of regimental operations reports**, except for the 925th FA, which is **\$20**.

397th Infantry **[r7set]**

398th Infantry **[r8set]**

399th Infantry **[r9set]**

925th FA **[R10set925thfabn]**

325th Engr **[100-r5setoprep325eng]**

## Maps

From the US Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA, are copies of the *original* US Army topographical maps of the Division's area of operations, produced in 1944. Ever wonder where you were, exactly? Tired of trying to guess, based on modern, small scale maps that don't show all the villages, terrain features, or roads, as they existed during the war? Guess no more! These tactical maps, produced in 1:50,000 scale (except the Karlsruhe and Ellwangen mapsheets, which are in 1:100,000 scale), show the kind of detail last available mainly to the “higher

echelons” during combat. Useful for every veteran for reminiscing, discussions with buddies or children, or serious historical research. Especially useful for following along with the terrain features and map coordinates used in the Monthly Operations Reports. **\$6.00 each**

## RGT./MONTH CORRESPONDING MAPSHEETS

### 397th Infantry Regiment

Nov. 1944	St. Dié <b>[MP36/17]</b> ; Cirey-sur-Vezouse <b>[MP36/16]</b> ; Lunéville <b>[MP35/16]</b>
Dec. 1944	Bouxwiller <b>[MP37/14]</b> ; Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
Jan. 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
Feb. 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
March 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b> ; Walschbronn <b>[MP37/12]</b>
April 1945	Karlsruhe <b>[MPV/3]</b> ; Ellwangen <b>[MPV/4]</b>

### 398th Infantry Regiment

Nov. 1944	St. Dié <b>[MP36/17]</b> ; Rambervillers <b>[MP35/17]</b> ; Lunéville <b>[MP35/16]</b>
Dec. 1944	Bouxwiller <b>[MP37/14]</b> ; Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
Jan. 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b> ; Sarre-Union <b>[MP36/14]</b>
Feb. 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
March 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
April 1945	Karlsruhe <b>[MPV/3]</b> ; Ellwangen <b>[MPV/4]</b>

### 399th Infantry Regiment

Nov. 1944	Rambervillers <b>[MP35/17]</b> ; St. Dié <b>[MP36/17]</b> ; Lunéville <b>[MP35/16]</b> ; Cirey-sur-Vezouse <b>[MP36/16]</b> ; Molsheim <b>[MP37/16]</b>
Dec. 1944]	Sarre-Union <b>[MP36/14]</b> ; Bouxwiller <b>[MP37/14]</b> ; Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
Jan. 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
Feb. 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b>
March 1945	Bitche <b>[MP37/13]</b> ; Walschbronn <b>[MP37/12]</b>
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