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Oct
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COMMANDER'S NARRATIVE FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 1944
OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE 191ST TANK BATTALION

MAP REFERENCE:

France, 1/1000,000, Sheet 150, Luneville-Epinal

S E C R E TCommander's Narrative for the Month of October 1944
of the Activities of the 191st Tank Battalion

By the first of October it had become apparent that the 45th Infantry Division was up against a strong enemy line extending from east of Bru (WV-820726) generally south to Grandvillers (WV-200605). The enemy was well dug in and appeared to be reinforcing his positions with little thought of the possibility of being forced to vacate them. Our rate of advance was retarded primarily because of the lack of local numerical superiority; secondly, due to the fact that our troops were worn by long continued usage; and thirdly, because of the characteristic German stubbornness. From the armor standpoint, another factor - terrain - exerted a great influence in the balance of power and mobility. Continued rainfall had rendered the surrounding territory unfit for cross-country maneuver. In addition, much of the action took place in densely wooded areas, where the employment of tanks was extremely dangerous. The roads, particularly through woods, were little better than good trails.

The advance, during the last week of September, had gradually lost its driving force and became stalled. Rambervillers (WV-185725) had been entered by A Company with the 157th Inf. Regt. on the 30th. With the understanding that the objective for October 1st was to secure the line Anglemont (WV-207761), Bru, Jeanmenil (WV-820710), the third platoon of A Company attacked toward Jeanmenil at 0830, meeting strong resistance of mortar, artillery, and rocket fire with extensive mine fields. The latter caused two tanks to be immobilized near Jeanmenil, one of which also received an A.P. penetration. Shortly thereafter, the attack bogged down when enemy artillery fire proved to heavy to permit engineers to sweep the road.

Meanwhile, the second platoon had begun the attack toward Bru with the third battalion, their route laying NE toward Anglemont as far as the road junction at 212750 and thence south to Bru. Little resistance was encountered up to a point some 1500 yards north of the town where mine fields and intense artillery fire again stalled the attack.

In the 180th Regiment's sector, the second platoon of C Company supported the 3rd Bn. in defensive positions at Autrey (WV-223668), a protrusion in the line which continued to exist despite the presence of the enemy on both flanks. The third platoon supported the 2nd Bn. in an attack from Pierrepont (WV-192632) toward lower Fremifontaine (WV-216634). West of the village (approx. WV-214635) one tank struck a mine and, in attempts to by-pass it, two others became bogged down.

B Company, with one platoon of light tanks from D Company, continued to hammer at Grandvillers, where the enemy had been fiercely resisting for three days. It was first attacked by the 1st Bn, 179th Regt. with one platoon of C Company and one platoon of D Company in support. However, they were able only to penetrate the defenses

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in the west end of town and were stopped just short of the church (WV-206606). B Company moved into the occupied portion of town on the 30th and, assisted by a platoon of light tanks, continued the attack on the 1st. From positions on the North side of the town (WV-200605) the second platoon placed direct fire on the woods to the NE (WV-205610) to cover the advance of A Co., 179th. When the woods were occupied by the infantry, the third platoon moved by way of Girecourt and Pierrepont to approximately WV-207615 to protect the advance of C Co., 179th to high ground 1500 yards east (WV-219612). The tanks executed their mission but the foot-troops were held up 600 yards short of their objective by small arms and mortar fire.

The following morning, October 2, the third platoon advanced on the town astride the road from the north as far as it could be swept of mines and then proceeded to place heavy fire on the houses south of the center of town (WV-205600). The other two platoons, with infantry, executed a leap-frogging maneuver along the main road from the west. The infantry advanced while the tanks covered them by fire; then the engineers cleared the road to permit the tanks to move up. By 1700 the town was cleared of the enemy. In all, 180 prisoners were taken and a great number of enemy infantrymen (76 by actual count) were killed. Two tanks were put out of action by mines during the day, and a third was temporarily immobilized by artillery fire, but was recovered and returned to action a few hours later.

A Company with the 157th Regt. was continuing the attack on Bru and Jeanmenil, but the unyielding resistance allowed only unappreciable gains. At 2200 all three platoons assembled at Ramber-villers in regimental reserve.

C Company supported the 180th in mopping up Fremifontaine and in maintaining the defensive positions at Autrey. Later in the afternoon, two platoons were returned to Destord (WV-173643) as regimental reserve.

Relief of B and C Companies, the first since the start of the offensive SW of Epinal, was completed on the third. When B Co. assembled in Gugnecourt, the 2nd platoon of D Co. remained with the 179th in the defensive system at Grandvillers. Another light tank platoon was left at Fremifontaine while two of the assault guns took over the positions at Autrey.

The two light tank platoons went into action immediately: The 1st Platoon advancing from Fremifontaine with the 180th, 3rd Bn progressed to the vicinity of WV-240625; the third platoon, the 179th 1st Battalion's support, moved from Grandvillers to WV-240605. The following day the 1st platoon reached high ground overlooking la Mortagne (WV-248619), while the third was stopped by a mined road block just short of Brovelieures (WV-245601)

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All of this action was in close support of the infantry advancing through thickly wooded areas against small arms, mortar, and artillery fire.

One platoon from A Company was moved into indirect firing positions near Vomecourt on October 5th. It was registered in by the 158th F.A. Bn. and began at once to fire missions in support of that unit.

The three medium tank companies were still in reserve, occupied with greatly needed maintenance and reorganization. The first and third platoons of D Co. made no advances but did considerable firing on enemy infantry. One tank of the 3rd platoon was disabled by bazooka fire, and Lt. Pedersen, platoon commander, was killed while on foot reconnaissance. The second platoon was committed in support of the 179th, 2nd Bn. in an advance SE toward Bruyeres (WV-245565).

On October sixth the enemy exerted noticeable increased pressure in the 179th and 180th sectors; the third platoon of D. Co. assisted in repelling two counterattacks west of Brovelieures. Just two kilometers to the north the first platoon with the 180th, 2nd Bn. were forced to withdraw when the enemy infiltrated behind them from the NE. During the withdrawal 10 prisoners were taken and a number of enemy were killed. The second platoon continued its slow advance toward Bruyeres and had one tank disabled by bazooka fire.

C Company was alerted at noon to prepare to assist the 180th in an anticipated attack from Fremifontaine the following day. However, movement of enemy tanks in the 180th sector seemed to indicate the imminence of a counterattack and, accordingly, C Co. received orders to move to the crossroads west of Fremifontaine (WV-205633) at 1600. Two platoons moved out of Fremifontaine before dark; one to approximately WV-223637, the other further south to WV-223633.

Supporting the 3rd Bn, 180th, the tanks pushed off at daylight with the mission of seizing and holding the road from WV-228632 to WV-228639. We engaged five enemy tanks and destroyed one before taking the objective. At 1500 one section of tanks supported two infantry patrols moving N from 228639, meeting heavy small arms, mortar and tank fire, and were finally held up by darkness at 225637. The platoon on the right was successful in repelling an enemy counterattack at 1700.

Early the same morning, October 7th, B Company had moved into Grandvillers, relieved the light tank platoon which had been in position SE of the town, and sent one section of the first platoon to reinforce the road block at WV-232613. At 1700 the second section was moved up when the enemy infiltrated south of the road block and all five tanks engaged in a stiff fire fight which lasted until the enemy were driven off at about 2300. The second platoon had been supporting the 179th, 2nd Bn. as they advanced through the woods along the Grandvillers-Bruyeres road. No heavy resistance was met.

To assist in maintaining contact with the 179th, D Co., first platoon shifted SW to the 180th, while the third platoon was still engaged with the 179th, 3rd Bn. just west of Brovelieures.

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It was observed that the enemy supply route for the entire Fremifontaine-Grandvillers sector lay over the bridge at 241642. On the eighth, A Co. indirect firing battery was registered on the bridge by an artillery cub plane and for the next two days the battery gave the bridge its undivided attention, maintaining a continuous fire at the rate of one round per minute.

C Company rotated one platoon in position near the road junction at WV-229639; the second and third platoons were relieved at 2300 and moved back to Destord, leaving one platoon at 230620 until the following morning.

B Company had no aggressive action but maintained roadblocks at the east end of Grandvillers (WV-213606) and at the RJ north-east of the town (WV-232613). At 1800 two platoons were relieved and returned to Gugnecourt with one platoon remaining just outside of Grandvillers.

October ninth saw our companies disposed as follows: A Co. at Rambervillers with one platoon in indirect firing positions; B Co. at Gugnecourt, with the exception of the one platoon on the road block at Grandvillers; C Co. at Destord; and D Co. at Aydoilles.

We supported the 45th Div. Reconnaissance Troop in the Bruyeres sector on the tenth when The third platoon of C Company made an attack to seize the road junction and high ground near WV-229579. These tanks were held up by mined and blocked trails and by difficult terrain. One platoon of D Co. with the 1st Bn, 179th attempted to seize the high ground in the vicinity of 232583 and to make contact with the 45th Div. Recon. Troop, but heavy machine-gun fire from the left disorganized the attack and forced it to swing east to meet this new threat. The light tanks pushed to within 100 yards of their objective destroying several enemy machine gun positions. The next day, October 11th, B Co. platoons were relieved while the light tanks were used in tank-infantry combat patrols to knock out MG positions near WV-225596. One tank platoon from C Co. was moved into indirect firing positions near A companies' battery at Vomecourt.

A tank-infantry counterattack occurred at 1700 on the twelfth, between Brovelieures and Bruyeres (WV-225585), and 1st platoon of B Co. was instrumental in repelling it.

D Co. second platoon destroyed four more machine guns and assisted in the capture of 15 prisoners south-west of Brovelieures. During the day the tanks made an advance of about 700 yards and at 1700 the enemy launched a heavy counterattack when a great number of enemy foot troops were killed although both our tanks and infantry were forced to give ground.

For the succeeding week until October 21st, all the action in our sector was of a probing and holding nature and even though we inflicted heavy casualties on enemy personnel, only very limited gains were made. Mines, bazooka fire and rugged terrain constituted the most troublesome opposition.

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On the 14th our assault gun battery went into position at Pierrepont (WV-98630) and, because the situation was semi-stabilized, they were in use constantly. A Co. was moved down from Rambervillers on the 17th to give some relief to C Co. in the 180th sector. The 7th and 15th Inf. Regts. of the 3rd Division moved quietly into the Bovelieures-Bruyeres sector in preparation for a push on the 21st.

The new offensive went well from the start. The 3rd and 7th Inf. Regts. met only moderate resistance in seizing the high ground between Brovelieures and Bruyeres (WV-2458). The 179th advanced into Brovelieures from the south with B Co. in support while C Co., in support of the 180th, made less spectacular gains in pushing almost to la Mortagne river (WV-242631).

The following day B Co. first platoon attempted to reach the river to the north of Brovelieures meeting very heavy resistance but seized the ground overlooking the river at WV-254618.

C Company lost three tanks due to mines east of Fremifontaine and made only slight gains. At 0630 the next morning, October 23rd, the first platoon was in position overlooking the river (240643) and fired to cover the infantry in their crossing. One tank struck a mine when attempting to move down along the railroad track to take a hostile MG position under fire.

The first platoon of B Co., having swung to the north, advanced with G Co., 179th to the crossroads at 252635 and cleared the hill to the west. The second platoon advanced toward Mortagne (WV-260640) and inflicted considerable damage on enemy vehicles and infantry; the third platoon assisted the third Bn. in capturing Bout du Milieu and approximately 50 prisoners.

C Co. first and third platoons crossed the river on the 24th and set up defensive positions along the road from 251657 to 250650 while to the NW, B company made substantial advances, the third platoon assisting in the capture of Hill 513 (WV-273650) and later cutting the road at WV-277663).

On the 25th A Co. again went into action in support of the 157th Regt making a thrust from Autrey toward Housseras (WV-240685). Early in the morning one section of the first platoon went into position at WV-231665 to place direct fire on Wuillaume Fontaine (WV-238662), and the second section took positions on the Autrey-Housseras road (WV-233675) to fire into the woods behind Housseras. In the afternoon of that day the first platoon moved up just south of Wuillaume Fontaine to bring greater volume of fire on the woods east of Housseras.

One tank of the 2nd platoon struck a mine while in support of the 3rd Bn advancing along the Autrey-Housseras road. Two tanks then moved cross-country to the NE destroying 3 MG nests and one mortar position; after meeting AT fire, they became mired down at WV-246678. The third platoon remained in its indirect firing positions until 1500 when it supported K and L Companies, 157th in an attack on enemy position SE of Housseras (WV-250670 to 250678).

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The second platoon of B Co. moved through the woods to WV-266659 while the first platoon was stopped by difficult terrain at 275656. In the 180th sector, C Co. also made very short advances.

After a stay of almost a month the battalion C.P. left Girecourt and moved to St. Helene (WV-195660).

B Co. continued to push through heavy woods with the 179th on October 26th. At 277664, the third platoon flushed about 100 enemy infantrymen, killed some, and took a number of others prisoner. As one tank of the second platoon turned into the trail at WV-269663 it was hit by A.P. fire and burned which blocked the trail for some time until the burned tank could be dragged off the trail.

The assault gun platoon moved into new positions at Autrey and C Co., with one platoon in indirect firing, saw little action. One platoon of A Co. was still bogged down and the others were in defensive positions.

On the 27th, the third platoon of A Co. made an attack over poor terrain from 265687 to 276693 where they were stopped by a mined road block and enemy fire. After the road block was cleared the tanks were able to advance until darkness halted them at 283698.

B Co. was engaged in mopping up operations near 274664. After the burned tank had been removed, the second platoon went to Hill 504.

In the next two days A Co advanced steadily north to cut the main road from Jeanmenil to La Salle (WV-325695) and the secondary road from Jeanmenil to the road junction at WV-290705. Both roads were physically severed and road blocks were established. On A Company's right, the third platoon of B Co. with the 2nd Bn, 179th, advanced over rough country to approximately WV-304688. The 1st and 2nd platoons were in company reserve.

The Bn. C.P. was moved to Housseras (WV-238686) and on the 30th, C Co. assisted the 180th Regt. in taking St. Benoit (WV-260735). The first platoon attacked at 0730 from the vicinity of the secondary road at 263718 with the 3rd Bn. The second platoon attacked from Fraipertius (WV-240701) and was in position on the south edge of St. Benoit before dark.

On the right flank, B Co. made small advances while A Co. 1st and 2nd platoons advanced to the vicinity of WV-290710. The following day the tanks advanced some 2 km. toward St. Remy (WV-325725) and established road blocks at WV-314695 and 317693. The third platoon of A Co. lost one tank due to a mine in advancing along the St. Benoit-Raon L'Etape road.

C Co. attacked up the main road from St. Benoit and made an advance of about 1700 yards. At 1530 we successfully repelled an enemy counter-attack. As the month drew to a close we were steadily approaching the reputedly strong Baccarat-Raon L'Etape - St. Die line.

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3 Incls.

Incl. 1 - S-3 Journal for the Month of October 1944.

Incl. 2 - Casualties for Month of October 1944.

Incl. 3 - Lessons Learned.

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	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>ENLISTED MEN</u>
Killed in Action	1	2
Missing in Action	2	10
Wounded in Action (Evacuated)	4	37
Psychoneurosis	5	29

VEHICLES

	<u>M-4</u>	<u>M-5</u>	<u>M-4, A3</u>
Lost	24	1	0
Lost Through Mines	16	0	0
Recovered	14	0	0
Total Lost	10	1	0

Mileage covered along axis of advance - 11 miles.

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INCLOSURE #2

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1. The bottom armor of light tanks under the driver and bow gunner has been reinforced by welding an additional piece of armor on the floor. This has reduced casualties from Reigel Mines in light tank crews.
2. We have found that the normal ammunition load in medium tanks is insufficient when working with infantry. Steel studs have been welded between the sponson racks and on the floor of the turret basket. 75mm ammunition is stocked behind these studs, the studs serving to keep the rounds from slipping. This has increased the amount of ammunition carried by fifty percent.
3. In wooded terrain, when fighting along trails, we have found that a team of one medium and two light tanks works best. The medium follows the trail with a light tank on each flank to take care of bazookamen.
4. When approaching towns, we have found that shooting up the highest buildings pays dividends. Usually the highest building is the church steeple. This has reduced artillery and mortar fire. Two rounds of H.E. delay and one round of smoke discourages observers.
5. When fighting in woods, it is advisable to set most of the fuzes on delay before loading the 75mm ammunition in the tank. This enables loaders to load faster as most targets call for fuze delay.
6. Caliber .50 machine guns should be removed when fighting in the woods. Limbs damage the gun and cradle as well as endangering the tank commander by causing the gun to swing around.
7. Do not send wheel vehicles down the road first after mine sweepers have sept the road. They often miss deeply buried mines.
8. When working with infantry at night, the tanks should follow the infantry. The tank platoon leader or the tank platoon sergeant, however, should advance on foot with the leading elements of the infantry. When tank targets are located he can them quickly bring up the tanks, since he knows the location of our own infantry.
9. Fighting in woods requires tank commanders with initiative and resourcefulness, often his platoon leader cannot see him and direct his movements. Tank commanders must make their own decisions and act upon them.
10. The most effective ammunition in dense woods is APC with base detonating fuze or H.E. with fuze set on delay. Super quick H.E. is dangerous to use.

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INCLOSURE #3

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11. Tanks should rarely be left in the front lines at night. Their machine guns are not as effective as ground machine guns on final protective lines as their fire is mostly plunging. Likewise, the 75mm is not as good as the 57mm AT gun. In addition, tanks must be resupplied at night which is often impossible in the front lines due to the weight of 75mm ammunition and gas. This necessitates resupplying them after daylight which might slow up planned operations. The belief that their morale value to the infantry justifies their staying in the front lines could be largely overcome in infantrymen were told why it was necessary to withdraw them after dark. When it is decided to leave tanks in the front lines at night, the infantry battalion or regiment should furnish 2-ton trucks and 2-ton trailers, or 3/4-ton trucks to haul ammunition and gas. Tank battalions do not have the necessary light transportation.

12. Tanks should not be used on roadblocks. When offensive operations are temporarily halted, tanks should be pulled back far enough for maintenance of the vehicles. If tanks are kept on roadblocks, when the offensive is resumed, the tanks will not be in condition for sustained operations.

13. Operation in woods requires closer coordination between tanks and infantry than operations in open terrain. Physical contact must be gained with the infantry before the attack is launched or contact might never be gained. Tanks should not precede infantry in very dense woods. That is, woods with undergrowth so thick that visibility is less than the minimum range of the turret gun when it is depressed. A small number of tanks are usually sufficient. Best results are obtained when they are used along trails with infantry out on the flanks. When tanks are moved from one sector to another in wooded terrain, guides from the infantry are necessary to insure that the tanks arrive at the proper place in time for the action. It is often advisable to make up small infantry-tank teams for specific operations, such as reducing hostile road blocks or knocking out located machine guns.

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From the collection of:

[The 45th Infantry Division in World War II: An Unofficial Guide to Resources](#)

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