

= 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion =

The 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion was a tank destroyer battalion of the United States Army active during the Second World War . It saw service during 1944 ? 45 in the European Theater of Operations , primarily attached to the 100th Infantry Division in an infantry support role . After fighting through France and southern Germany , the battalion ended the war in Austria .

The 824th was originally formed in August 1942 in Oklahoma , and trained in the United States for two years . In October 1944 , it deployed to France equipped with towed 3 " anti @-@ tank guns , and was assigned to support the Seventh Army , then fighting in Alsace . Here it supported the 100th Division as it pushed steadily eastwards towards Germany , and on 8 ? 9 January 1945 was employed to repel a SS panzergrenadier attack during Operation Nordwind , the only time the unit is recorded as having destroyed an enemy tank .

After conversion to M18 Hellcat self @-@ propelled tank destroyers , the battalion moved into Germany , helping force a bridgehead over the Neckar River at the Battle of Heilbronn . After reaching Stuttgart it was reassigned to the 103rd Infantry Division , and with them reached Innsbruck in Austria by VE Day . After two weeks of occupation duties it was ordered to prepare for service in the Pacific ; however , while it was reforming in the United States , the Japanese surrender was announced , and the need for more combat units ended . The battalion was demobilized in September 1945 .

= = Early service = =

The battalion was formed at Camp Gruber , Oklahoma , on 10 August 1942 , with a cadre of 31 officers and 77 men . It received 829 draftees from Camp Upton , New York , in mid @-@ January 1943 , bringing it up to slightly over full strength . The unit was nominally organised as a " tank destroyer battalion , heavy , self @-@ propelled " ; after some experimentation in 1941 @-@ 2 , this had become the standard organisation for tank destroyer units . Under this structure , the battalion would have three gun companies , each with three platoons of M3 self @-@ propelled 75mm guns ; each platoon had four gun crews and twelve additional men for command and security duties . These were supported by a fourth reconnaissance company with three reconnaissance platoons and one platoon of pioneers , and various headquarters and support elements .

After the men had been assembled at Camp Gruber , the battalion departed for Camp Bowie , Texas , where it carried out three months of basic training , and in mid @-@ April was transferred to Fort Hood , Texas , where it trained at the Tank Destroyer Tactical and Firing Center . While the 824th was at Fort Hood , a new organisational structure was announced for tank destroyer battalions , converting them from self @-@ propelled guns to towed 3 " anti @-@ tank guns ; the 824th was officially reorganised to the new pattern in July . This had the same number of guns - three companies , with three platoons of four guns - but the reconnaissance company was reduced to two platoons and merged into the headquarters company , while the pioneers were removed entirely .

On completing unit training at Fort Hood in August , the 824th was transferred to Louisiana for field maneuvers , returning to Camp Bowie in January 1944 . The battalion finally left the United States in October 1944 , sailing from New York aboard the USS Lejeune on 14 October and landing at Marseilles on 28 October .

= = Fighting in Alsace = =

The battalion first saw frontline service on 28 November , when two companies were attached to the 397th Infantry Regiment ( 100th Infantry Division ) , which was itself temporarily attached to the 45th Infantry Division , fighting in the Vosges Mountains under the Seventh Army . The battalion took its first casualties the following day , with four men in A Company killed and three wounded by artillery and mortar fire . The following day , a gun crew of the same company fired the battalion 's first shots in anger , destroying a machine @-@ gun position . The battalion pushed eastwards with

the 100th and 45th Divisions until mid @-@ December , with individual gun crews providing direct fire support to infantrymen assaulting German defensive positions , as well as indirect artillery fire .

On 21 December , after the start of the German offensive in the Ardennes , the Seventh Army was ordered onto the defensive . A Company of the 824th was attached to the 106th Cavalry Group , covering the far left flank of the Army , while the other two gun companies remained with the infantry of 100th Division . The anticipated enemy offensive , Operation Nordwind , began on the night of New Year 's Eve . After heavy infantry fighting , German armored units were engaged on 8 ? 9 January 1945 , when the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division attacked the 397th Infantry Regiment , supported by B Company of the 824th ; one gun was lost in return for one tank and several half @-@ tracks . This is the only occurrence noted in the battalion history in which the battalion engaged enemy armor . Two guns were temporarily abandoned by B Company when their supporting infantry retreated . A group of eight men returned to recover them the following night ; all were awarded Bronze Stars for bravery . Additionally , one gun commander was awarded the Bronze Star for holding his gun in an exposed position during an attack .

Through the rest of January and February , the battalion remained in defensive positions , with crews rotating to the neighboring 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion in order to train on self @-@ propelled tank destroyers . The 824th was prepared for conversion to the new equipment by early March , but this was delayed in order to support the 100th Division 's attack on Bitche as part of Operation Undertone from 15 ? 19 March .

= = Advance into Germany = =

In the last week of March , the battalion finally withdrew to refit with the M18 Hellcat self @-@ propelled tank destroyer . In so doing , it reverted to the old self @-@ propelled battalion organisation ; three companies of twelve tank destroyers , plus a fourth reconnaissance company with a platoon of pioneers . The new organisation was smaller than the old - fewer men were needed for vehicle crews - and so even after the creation of the new Reconnaissance Company on 27 March , the 824th finished the month with a complement of 646 all ranks , down from 750 .

Following the refit , it crossed the Rhine on 1 April , and was almost immediately returned to combat to support the 100th Division 's attack on Heilbronn , an attempt to force a bridgehead across the Neckar River . The fighting began on 4 April , with C Company crossing the river into the centre of the city on 8 April ; in the absence of enemy armor , they provided close fire support to infantrymen engaged in house @-@ to @-@ house fighting .

Once Heilbronn had been secured , the 100th Division , and the 824th with it , moved south towards Stuttgart . On 25 April , the 824th was reassigned to the 103rd Division , which was moving eastwards through Bavaria towards Austria ; it finished the war , on VE Day , outside Innsbruck . After the end of hostilities , six men were awarded the Silver Star , and twenty @-@ two more men were awarded Bronze Stars ? one posthumously ? bringing the battalion 's total to six Silver Stars and thirty @-@ one Bronze Stars .

The battalion carried out security and occupation duties , until handing over to the 384th Field Artillery Battalion on 17 May . It was then ordered to prepare for redeployment to the Pacific Theater of Operations , via the United States . In mid @-@ June , the 824th headed west , leaving their vehicles at depots in northern France , and sailed from Le Havre aboard the SS John Howland and SS Thomas Cresap on 1 July . On arrival , the men were given one month of leave ; on 18 August , however , the battalion was notified that it would be demobilized due to the surrender of Japan . Three weeks later , on 11 September , the battalion was formally demobilized at Fort Jackson , South Carolina , and ceased to exist .