

727TH AMPHIBIAN TRACTOR BATTALION

BATTALION HISTORY TO LEYTE OPERATION

The 727 Amphibian Tractor Battalion, activated at Fort Ord, California 26 January 1944, and commanded by Major FRANK R. McLAVY, embarked on 16 June, 1944, at San Francisco, California, for foreign service. After an uneventful voyage on USAT Willard A. Holbrook, the Battalion landed on White Beach, Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, on July 16, 1944. The Battalion was assigned to 6th Army. Approximately within a month the Battalion moved 6 miles to a new location on Tami Beach, same base, where tractors were put into condition. Warning orders were received at this location of an impending operation on the Island of Leyte, Philippine Islands.

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HISTORICAL REPORT OF LEYTE OPERATION (KING TWO)

The Battalion less "B" Company, was alerted for participation in the Leyte operation (King two), on 5 September, 1944. The Battalion was attached by Sixth Army to I Corp for further attachment to the 24th Infantry Division for this operation.

The 24th Infantry Division ordered the Battalion to be employed as follows: 1st Platoon "A" Company to support the 19th Infantry Regiment. 3rd Platoon "A" Company to support the 34th Infantry Regiment. Remainder of Battalion to arrive at subsequent dates at which time they would be employed as the situation of the 24th Infantry Division required.

On A day, 20 October, the 1st and 3rd Platoons were launched from APA's off Red Beach at approximately H plus 30 minutes and joined sixteenth wave hitting beach at H plus 95 minutes. All LVT's immediately unloaded mobile loads of artillery ammunition at the appropriate dumps. While awaiting assignments tractors aided in towing swamped vehicles which were delaying further unloading of landing craft.

Next day platoons performed troop carrying, supply, and casualty evacuation missions for the supported units, 19th and 34th Infantry Regiments. Terrain was ideal for LVT operation and maximum use was obtained from vehicles. Other tractors aided signal personnel on wire laying detail, and used as command and reconnaissance vehicle for C.O. 34th Infantry Regiment.

On A plus 2 as on previous day tractors were indispensable for troop, supply, and evacuation missions. 1st Platoon continued support of 19th Infantry Regiment in and around hill #522 and Palo. 3rd Platoon supported 34th Infantry Regiment driving across rice paddies on the right flank of the 19th Infantry Regiment. Tractor crew composed of Cpl Rade Allen, T/5 Andrew J. Sapp, and T/5 Leonard Monick volunteered for pillbox attack mission when approached by Major GOCIA of the 34th Infantry Regiment as to the possibilities of the LVT ability to withstand that type mission. Crew proceeded out of defilade position and advanced along highway #1 with vehicles, weapons strafing native houses, ditches, and prepared machine gun positions. Jap infantryman placed land mine under tractor, after LVT had traveled approximately five hundred yards, and disabled tractor. Cpl Allen and T/5 Sapp received leg wounds from the land mine explosion. Crew continued firing from disabled vehicle until rescued by a second tractor of the platoon. Mission was an enormous success, for the following results were obtained: Tractor crew was credited with killing sixty of the enemy: Allowed for the advance of the infantrymen who had been pinned down in position for previous twenty four hours: Enabled infantry to reach casualties who were exposed to enemy fire which prevented rescue: Had a decided effect on morale of infantry troops who witnessed brave act of tractor crew. Tractor crew has been recommended for "The Silver Star" award.

The LVT crew who effected the rescue of their disabled comrades were Sgt Charles Beach, T/5 Clifford Copeland, and T/5 Hervey Ashcraft. Crew taking in situation and using initiative immediately went to the assistance through intense machine gun and mortar fire. This crew has been recommended for "The Bronze Medal" award.

Tractors were employed as bulldozers in clearing fields of fire for "B" and "C" Batteries of the 63rd F. A. Bn. Tractors continue laying signal lines and also for use on reconnaissance missions.

A plus 3 again finds LVT's operating over terrain impassable to other type vehicles and carrying great amounts of troops, supplies and casualties. Tractor crews receive high praise from Medical Officers for speed and efficiency in evacuating casualties to medical clearing stations.

A plus 4 sees LVT's operating as on previous day. Tractors use Palo River route for speed in support of 19th Infantry Regiment and 63rd F. A. Battalion in town of Palo. Snipers very active along Palo River. Tractors supporting 34th Regiment assaulted enemy positions and were given credit for killing 20 Japs. Sections of Battalion Headquarters and 2nd Platoon "A" Company debark from LST amid heavy bombing and strafing attack. Battalion Commander was Embarkation Group Commander for units of 24th Infantry Division in this convoy. Battalion Commander's vehicle moves to 24th Infantry Division C.P. for liaison purposes. Tractors were dispatched to X Corp and 1st Cavalry Division as ordered.

Battalion activities for the next five days included numerous supply trips to Palo and vicinity, from beach dumps via Palo River. Transporting 85th Chemical Company to new location northwest of Palo. Laying communication wires for antiaircraft bivouac area in town of Palo. On supply mission for 34th Infantry Regiment and unit of 1st Cavalry Division in vicinity of Castilla. Transporting units of 19th Infantry Regiment to Pastrana. Aiding in salvage operations of bombed and sinking LST.

From A plus 10 through A plus 13 Battalion displaced from Palo bivouac area to new site on Red Beach. Continued moving supplies up Palo River to forward supply dumps. Aided in moving of X Corp Headquarters to Alangalang. Battalion received orders to move forward to Carigara. Battalion in night movement covered thirty three mile road march in approximately two and a half hours and set up defensive position for the night.

The following morning, A plus 14, the Battalion moved two miles northwest to new bivouac. Platoon of LVT's made an amphibious landing of a reinforced company of the 34th Infantry Regiment on a beach four miles of Capoccan. Infantry position became untenable, necessitating tractors moving unit back to Capoccan. One tractor received a 47 MM hit in sponson. Remaining tractors on supply missions from Carigara to Capoccan via Carigara Bay.

For the next three days all tractors were employed night and day shuttling supplies to forward positions in vicinity of Capoccan via Carigara Bay and ferrying troops, casualties, and light vehicles across river three miles northwest of Carigara while engineers were in process of constructing pontoon bridge.

On a plus 19 group of LVT's leave for Calubian, Usan Pt., and Tuktuk with fuel and rations for Amphibian Tanks of the 24th Division. Reconnaissance Troops, making a reconnaissance of those locations and Rabin Point. These tractors returned the following day. Remaining tractors at Carigara continue supply missions to Capoccan this and following day.

From A plus 21 to A plus 30 Battalion's primary mission was support of the 34th Infantry Regiment. Commencing with A plus 21 LVT's made amphibious landing of 1st Battalion 34th Infantry Regiment to a beach three miles north of Pinamopan. As Infantry Battalion pushed inland it became dependent of LVT's for all supply and evacuation missions. LVT's were dispatched daily, and occasionally two and three times a day, from Capoccan, new Battalion bivouac area, for support of 34th Infantry Regiment. From Capoccan tractors traveled through Biliran strait to Calubian, a three hour run. From Calubian they proceeded South on Naga River to Consuegra and frequently carried supplies overland to Infantry front line positions in vicinity of Agahang. Complete trip to forward position constituted six hours of operation. On return trip up Naga River one group of tractors evacuated two liaison flyers of the XXIV Corp and damaged artillery liaison plane from town of Leyte to Capoccan. LVT also transported Senator at Large Rafael Martinez; Mr. Menusa, Mayor of the town of Leyte, and party to Carigara for conference with President Osmeña and GHQ. Jap naval pilot taken by volunteer guards at Villalon returned and forwarded to G-2 24th Division. LVT's transported 7th Portable Hospital to Consuegra after being turned back to Capoccan by typhoon. Other events taking place during this period were daily dispatch of vehicles to S-4 34th Infantry Regiment for supply and evacuation missions in vicinity of Capoccan. Tractors attached to X Corp providing tactical supporting for 19th Infantry Regiment attack in mountains west of Jaro. Battalion relieved 17 Nov 44 from attachment to 24th Infantry Division and attached to 32nd Infantry Division: Dispatching LVT's to 127th and 128th Infantry Regiment for troop carrying and supply missions to Pinamopan.

For following sixteen day period from A plus 31 to include A plus 45, Battalion played important role in transporting 32nd Infantry Division and supplies to Pinamopan beachhead. LVT trips to Pinamopan were conducted under artillery, heavy machine gun, and small arms fire. Sgt Harry Williams, "A" Company, received chest wound on a mission to Pinamopan. LVT's at Pinamopan operated through heavy enemy fire laying signal cables from beachhead to Culasion Point while others attempted to provide shields for unloading of LCM's. One platoon of LVT's based at Calubian continued supply and evacuation via Naga River, 1st Battalion 34th Infantry from Consuegra. LVT's also employed for loading troops and supplies on LCM's lying off shore at Capoccan. During this period Battalion bivouac area at Capoccan was subject to Jap artillery shelling. Battalion then moved to new bivouac area between Capoccan and Carigara. LVT aiding Air Corp Intelligence personnel salvage Jap naval plane submerged in Biliran strait at Villalon. On 24 Nov, A plus 35, section Battalion Maintenance and more of "A" Company join the Battalion at Carigara. On 4 December 1944 tractors from Calubian pick up three survivors of B 25, shot down by enemy, at Daba.

On A plus 48, 7 December 1944, Battalion was released from attachment

to 32nd Division and now under direct control of X Corp. At the same time "A" Company, 826th Amph Tractor Battalion was put under control of the 727th Amph Tractor Battalion to form a provisional battalion. Mission of the 727th was to supply X Corp with six LVT's and dispatch other available tractors to the 32nd Division. Company "A" of the 826th continues to support 1st Cavalry Division. Maintenance Officer "A" Company, 727th, witnessed Jap landing forces at San Isidro and Daba. This information was relayed to X Corp. Shortly after Jap landing, LVT's evacuating last company of 34th Infantry Regiment from Consuegra, arrived at Calubian. Commanding Officer of 1st Battalion 34th Infantry Regiment assumed command of LVT platoon and together with Infantry Company prepared to defend Calubian. Tractors were with Infantry Company prepared to defend Calubian. Tractors were deployed for defense of ground and air attack. LVT communication between forces at Calubian and Battalion C.P. on 24 hour schedule handling heavy traffic to X Corp and outgoing messages to Calubian. Another group of tractors left Pinampoan in evening transporting reinforcements to Calubian.

Next six days saw battalion performing following activities: Calubian based tractors landing infantry platoon at Villahermosa and standing by for proposed amphibious attack on Daba. Tractors at Calubian undergo bombing and strafing attacks. Supplying constant communication between C.O. of 1st Battalion 34th Infantry Regiment and C.O. X Corp, CG 24th Division. Platoon at Calubian continues trips on Naga River handling supplies, casualties and prisoners for units of 32nd Division near Consuegra. Battalion also transported daily C.O X Corp, staff, and forward echelon to and from Pinampoan and Carigara. Remaining LVT's were sent daily to 32nd Division dispatcher at Capocan.

On a plus 55, 14 December 44, Battalion was relieved from attachment to X Corp and took over this Battalion's LVT's. On following day Battalion moved to staging area at Camiris Point between Palo and Tunawa to prepare for next operation.

During the Leyte Operation, all orders concerning this Battalion were of a fragmentary or of oral nature. Thus, their enclosure with this report is not practicable. Orders were received through constant liaison with units supported.

Attached below is special or noteworthy data of value:

Comment on Amphibious Landing at Point four miles north of Capoccan by reinforced company of the 34th Infantry Regiment on November 1944.

Eight LVT's operating on a supply route from Carigara to Capoccan via Carigara Bay were assembled by a Battalion Commander of the 34th Infantry Regiment at Capoccan for the above mentioned operation. LVT's were immediately loaded with infantry troops and shortly after left on mission without consulting LVT platoon leader as to condition or fuel supply of vehicles. Landing was affected and condition due to enemy resistance necessitated removing unit to Capoccan.

Tractors were dispatched for a known supply route mission. Policy of Battalion is to furnish all operating vehicles for this type work, for in case of vehicle failure it can easily be repaired under favorable conditions. Officer ordering platoon leader to undertake this combat landing mission without first consulting platoon leader made mission extremely hazardous. LVT's completed mission with a dangerously low gas supply.

LVT's Operating on Roads.

Numerous times Battalion has received orders for move to new area located inland. Only possible route for compliance with these orders has been on existing roads. Battalion is familiar with road damage sustained on these moves but has no other alternative if mission is to be completed. Without fail tractors have been delayed or forced to use unsuitable terrain for LVT operation and at times not completing mission.

POL Supplies

Upon attachment to 32nd Infantry Division, Battalion found POL supplies a critical item, due to Infantry Division not contemplating necessary 80 octane gasoline and 50 weight oil required to operate LVT's. This oversight resulted in battalion having to use stove fuel and 30 weight oil much to the detriment of the LVT's.

Company Maintenance

Company Maintenance is provided with two tractors for mobile loading tools and equipment. This mobile shop was invaluable in reaching water stalled LVT's and others inaccessible to any type vehicle but tractors, besides being assured of having the required repair equipment.

On November 1944 Battalion received orders from G-4, 32nd Division contrary to the advise of the Battalion Commander to dismount all maintenance equipment from these tractors and empty same in a tactical capacity. This resulted in a fifty percent increase in the number of deadlined LVT's. The increase of two additional LVT's for tactical purposes failed to increase the number of LVT's available, as the maintenance LVT's were responsible for removing five to ten platoon vehicles daily from dead status.

Rations for LVT Crews.

LVT's are at times dispatched to units for undisclosed missions. Numerous times crews have been sent on one, two, and three day missions without unit making provisions for supplying crews with rations. This could be easily remedied if this battalion were authorized to draw rations, for example, 10 in 1, for distribution to tractor crews when long missions are contemplated. For example, on one occasion tractor broke down on mission and was unable to obtain food for four days and had to eat monkeys.

Attachment of Battalion to Corp

Battalion was attached to two infantry divisions and a Corp in this operation. Opinion of this battalion is that the later attachment worked for smoothest operation. Assigning of Hq and Serv Company to Corp and detailing the two line companies to support each division of the corp would provide improved tactical, administration, and maintenance control for this type organization.

Communication

Battalion Commanders vehicle is equipped with SCR's 506 and 508. The LVT 12 volt battery is unable to carry the load required by these radios without continuous operation of the LVT, which is inadvisable due to excessive engine hour operation. A solution to this problem would be replacing SCR 506 with an SCR 193. SCR 193 operated on low power would decrease battery drainage.

Spare Parts

Spare parts were a critical item during one period of the operation. When unit was attached to the 24th Infantry Division it received excellent support from division ordnance. Upon attachment to the 32nd Infantry Division spare parts and ordnance service ceased to exist. Battalion again received necessary spare parts and excellent ordnance support upon attachment to the X Corp.

Bomb Lines and Aircraft Signals

Battalion had had reconnaissance missions which extended beyond set bomb lines. Information as to where bomb lines were or the current aircraft identification signal were not disseminated to this organization.

LVT's Employment of 50 Cal Anti-Aircraft Mount M-3

LVT's obtained improved anti-aircraft fire by substituting mount M-3 for standard LVT mount. This allowed for an increase of 30 degrees in elevation and a greater length of time for gunner to continue firing on target.