

# ANTI-TANK COMPANY

## 442ND REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

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By Tak Hattori

**M**any people even within our own Combat Team do not know about the Anti-Tank Company's unique history both within and outside the Combat Team.

Our days at Camp Shelby were much like those of all the other members of the 442nd who trained there. We did the close order drills, the long marches, rifle and machine gun ranges, mortars and bazookas and all the rest including our 37 mm anti-tank guns. Later we traded them in for the larger 57 mm anti-tank guns.

Our uniqueness came after we were in combat with the 442nd for about three weeks. We were given orders to withdraw and move to an area near Rome for glider training. We were to be attached to the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment. We trained in loading and lashing the British six pound anti-tank guns (similar to our 57 mm) into the gliders, also Jeeps, Jeep trailers filled with mortar and high explosive ammo, and all our equipment needed for combat after we landed in enemy territory. We took training flights with our equipment loaded in the gliders and towed aloft by C-47s. Every member of the Anti-Tank Company became qualified glider borne troops and were entitled to wear the Glider Badge.

With our glider training completed, we were moved to an airfield to prepare

for the invasion of Southern France. The plan was to have the paratroopers jump in and secure landing fields for the gliders. We would fly in with anti-tank guns, Jeeps, troops, ammo and supplies.

The paratroopers took off in the early morning light, and at 1600 hours the first of the 44 gliders assigned to us took off without mishap. The flight across the Ligurian Sea to the coast of France was uneventful, but confusion at the landing sight brought some surprises.

The gliders were supposed to come in three waves but all three waves arrived at once. Some flak was encountered as we arrived over the French coast, so the tow planes cut us loose at 3000 feet instead of 300 feet as was planned. That put the gliders in jeopardy from flak by being in the air longer. One of our gliders got some tail damage from flak but landed safely. Pilots were heading down fast to secure landing sites before someone else beat them to it. Confusion reigned as gliders collided trying to land in the same spot. Some had to find another spot at the last minute when someone beat him to his spot. With no motor to apply power and fly around they had only one chance and if they blew it they were in deep trouble. Very few gliders landed without damage and many were totaled with fatalities. Nine Anti-Tankers were injured; six were sent to the 517th Regimental Aid for treatment. The Anti-Tank Company gave the 517th protection

against tank and armored vehicles as they fought their way to the French-Italian border.

On October 20th, the Anti-Tank Company was released from the 517th. We withdrew and moved to a bivouac area on the outskirts of Nice. After a two day rest we convoyed north to rejoin the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Upon arrival, we were immediately committed to action. Due to the terrain where enemy tanks were unlikely we were used as utility troops. Most of us were used as litter bearers, ammo and supply carriers and front line riflemen. This is where our company suffered most of our casualties and KIAs. We had more casualties here than in all of the other campaigns combined. Two enlisted men and one officer were killed and fifteen were wounded during the three weeks in the Vosges Mountains.

On November 12th, our Anti-Tank Company was honored as the Color Company at a citations ceremony held near Le Panges, France. Members of our company who served as color guards were S/Sgt. Kaminishi, Sadaoka, Yamane and Sgt. Kokubun. The photograph taken of them that day is one of the most widely circulated photos of the 442nd.

After the Vosges campaign, the Combat Team's strength was down to almost half strength. We were sent to the French Riviera in Southern France to hold the French-Italian border and wait for replacements to bring our strength back to normal. For the Anti-Tank Company, this was "old home" where we were returning to many friends and acquaintances among the local citizens.

It was while we were in this area that another "first" for the Anti-Tank Company made history when members of the first platoon captured a one-man submarine in the bay of Menton. Two privates from our first platoon were looking for enemy movements when they saw what looked like a huge fish or whale entering the bay. Other members of the platoon rushed down with weapons drawn to capture the "fish." The fish turned out to be a one-man submarine. They removed the "bubble" and found a German who was lost and thought he was entering an Italian harbor. He was *really* puzzled when he saw Asian faces on the soldiers. He could not believe his captors were Americans of Japanese Ancestry.

The 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team was sent back to Italy to participate in the Spring Offensive and break the Gothic Line that held off two divisions for six months. Again where the terrain was difficult for tanks to negotiate, our company was used to evacuate the wounded, carry rations and ammunition, sweep the mines, man road blocks and guard the bridges. Where the terrain permitted we gave our Combat Team anti-tank protection in the event of mechanized enemy attack.

The Anti-tank Company did its job not only at its primary function but also as a multi-purpose jack-of-all-trades for the Combat Team. We also assisted the 517th Parachute Regiment in the glider invasion of Southern France. We are proud of our record and what we have accomplished to help the war effort during WWII.