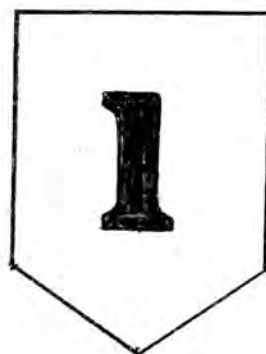


GOIST 'T-ID



by Bill Harper
from William E. TARDY,
former C.O.

Long months of campaigning stretched behind but time seemed only to sharpen the excitement of the incident as the lieutenant paced the kitchen floor of the farm house and told again how it happened.

"Scared? - I'm still scared every time I think of it." he said. "I shook for two days afterward-

"This infantry colonel was right down there beside the T-D yelling over and over: "G-- D-- man can't you see that tank! He's shooting hell out of my men!"

"But the smoke of battle blotted out everything in front of us and I couldn't see a thing-not a thing. The colonel kept hollering and I kept trying to pierce the smoke with my field glasses but it was no go. This kraut WAS raising hell too. He had let the infantry go through and now was shooting them up from the rear.

"Then it happened. The smoke rolled away and there he sat as big as life- a Mark VI about 500 yards away. We both had our field glasses glued on one another because he knew I was around too.

"I yelled down to the gunner: 'shoot man, for God's sake shoot!!' And - WHOOM! - the round was away. That one shot was plenty because it tore the top right off the German."

Lt. T. P. Welch, B company platoon leader of the 601st. stopped, waved his hands expressively for a few seconds and then added:

"The only thing that saved us was having the muzzle pointed almost at the German with a round already in the breech. That gave us the jump to mean curtains for him instead of us."

And that's the way it's been right down the line for the 601st. in nearly 29 months of overseas duty - enough of a jump on the krauts to leave a trail of ever-mounting German equipment and men along the wearisome trail through Africa, Italy and France.

And, somehow or other, the action of Lt. Welch and his men against that kraut tank near Artena, Italy, pretty well typifies the aggressiveness, the hell-take-the kraut attitude of the 601st. Tank Destroyers.

And, like typical officers of the 601st. Lt Welch insisted that credit be given his crew for that job - Tec. 4 Snuffy Callahan, Cpl. Joe Irving, Sgt. John Nowak and Cpl. Vincent Macri.

CLAIM RECORD COMBAT TIME

Men and officers of the outfit are loud in their claim that the 601st. - or at least elements of it - have had more combat hours against the enemy than any other unit in the ETO and to support that contention they point to the fact that during their fighting days they have seen duty with no less than a dozen divisions.

Action for the battalion started in Africa December 22, 1942, following the landing in Oran about six weeks before. Ask any man in the outfit what he best remembers about the dark continent campaign and you'll always get the same answer - El Guettar. El Guettar - where the 601st's. weapon was a 75 mm gun mounted on a half track to repel the best the krauts could throw their way. El Guettar, where gunners, watching the huns approach in magnificent maneuver, waited until they saw the "whites of their eyes" and then opened up to send 35 German tanks to the boneyard.

Briefly the battle of El Guettar shaped up like this as far as the 601st. is concerned: Supporting the 1st. Infantry division, the destroyers on the night of March 22, 1943, were to go out some 2,000 yards in front of the mountain pass and establish a solid line of armor. This was to be a protective or screening move for artillery setting up in the rear. The infantry was scheduled to move through on the morning of the 23rd. in the attack.

About 4:30 a.m. March 23rd. Lt. Joe Gioia of the T-D's spotted two krauts on a motorcycle. when the huns approached they asked --'Panzer? Panzer?'

"Hell, No!" yelled the officer. He killed one of the Germans, captured the other. Then he alerted the Americans by radio from his vehicle - Division G-2 had no information that hun armor was anywhere in the vicinity, while, as a matter of fact, the entire 10th. Panzer Division was moving in for a smash.

The attack came at dawn with some 85 German Mark IV and VI's rolling down in platoon waves toward the displaced half tracks. The krauts maneuvered their vehicles in column lefts and column rights in such fashion that a Mark VI on one corner supported a Mark VI on the other in a deadly cross fire. The same procedure was followed with the Mark IV's.

Silver Stars for the 601st. came out of El Guettar in bountiful supply, based on such action as that of S. Sgt. (now Lt.) Alfred E. Dyer, on the right flank, and his men who defeated seven tanks with two jeeps, a 37 and a 75.

The Germans kept coming. It finally developed that even artillery was shooting direct fire. The battle, which lasted from 5:30 to 8:30 in the morning, included a vicious dive bombing by the krauts.

When the smoke cleared and the booming stopped, 70 enemy tanks were left on the battlefield with half of them credited to the 601st. The outfit itself lost 21 vehicles, but 10 of them were back in action within 72 hours.

And that was El Guettar - high point of the 601st's. African campaign although Ousseltia Valle, Pichon, Faid - Sbeitla - Kasserine Pass carry memories too.

After the German collapse in Africa, the 601st. had little to do with the Sicilian campaign other than detailing six officers and 200 enlisted men to serve as a prisoner of war unit to transport captured personnel to Africa.

When Salerno came the 601st. was ready - all set with its present M-10 whose three-inch gun with a muzzle velocity of 2,800 feet per second has piled trouble on top of trouble for the Germans.

Two gun companies, plus elements of headquarters and the reconnaissance unit landed on D day at Salerno. You gather that the outfit was strictly on the busy side during initial phases of that operation from the statement of the CO Lt. Col Walter Tardy, that in the first 11 days the 601st. worked with two British divisions, the 82nd. Airborne, the 36th. and 45th. divisions and the Rangers.

'It was', remarked the colonel, "A bit difficult to maintain control."

FINDS A HOME

The battalion found its "home" September 20, 1943, when it was attached to the 3rd. Division, the infantry outfit with which it has been most largely associated ever since.

No. 2 memory spot for the 601st. lies in never-to-be-forgotten Anzio where in a period of five days, beginning February 29, its crewmen accounted for 26 enemy tanks - in other words, a goodly share of the 40 armed Leviathans it racked up during the entire beachhead period.

A check of available records, incidentally, credits the 601st. with no less than 70 tanks and self-propelled guns, plus 11 prabables, for the year 1944 thus far.

During the Anzio stalemate the battalion hugged the front lines on a perimeter defense for anti-tank protection; elements of the 601st. were up there during the entire period. In the smash to Rome, the T-D's gave the infantryman the same close support in blasting German strong points that has featured the action through France.

All combat elements of the 601st. landed on "D" day in southern France - disembarking from 19 different vessels.

THE FRENCH STORY

And it is France - with its mud, its misery and its victory - that this story of the 601st. will largely deal - a tale of incidents and men pieced together to embody the outfit as it really is. A throwback to Italy, maybe further, may be necessary now and then to round out the picture - a picture not yet complete.

Espirit de Corps marks the 601st. from top to bottom and it grows as the months overseas stretch one after the other.

You find it to a marked degree in Reconnaissance Company which has the unenviable task to contact the enemy, generally by shoving far enough ahead to draw fire but it can - and does - give a good account of itself through the medium of 50 caliber machine guns, 37mms on scout cars and jeeps. The company, commanded by Capt. Russell F.

Bakey, included a potent pioneer section whose mine removal and road block construction and destruction - is the pride of the battalion. The section has an enviable record, considering the danger of its jobs, in that it has had only one casualty in nearly 29 months of overseas service.

Of a different nature was the payroll incident of First Sgt. Alfred R. Barry, Lt. Leonard Lebo and Pfc. Omer LaFrance.

"About half of one platoon hadn't been paid in a long time and we had the money for them." explained Barry. "The only trouble was that they were on an OP directing artillery fire for the French. We called 'em and said: 'Hey, we got some dough for you guys - can we get up there?'"

'They said we could if we were crazy enough so we started - four miles up a mountain road with a Frenchman showing us the location of German mines.

"The OP was located like this - 200 yards to the right were French Ghoums and 200 yards to the left were the krauts. Both sides were having a big time throwing the stuff back and forth over the heads of our guys.

"Well, we worked the payroll deal this way. The three of us laid down by the jeep and the guys would crawl down from the OP one at a time. LaFrance called their names on the payroll, the lieutenant paid 'em off - then I'd collect from them for an old PX ration bill. Those gents claimed forever afterward that the only reason I came up there was to get that PX dough; it still doesn't do any good to deny it..."

More to the point of konking krauts was the action featuring Sgt. Johnny Ezzell and Sgt. Wiley J. Mann who, with other recon units, turned an expected rest into a hun busting expedition.

The recons had pulled up on a hill for a little breather when a column of enemy vehicles started moving out from a nearby town in an escape effort. Ezzell, forgetting the vacation, knocked off the first three cars with razzle-dazzle fire from a 50 caliber on a scout car. Mann closed off the column when he KO'd a truck at the rear. Thus boxed in, the Germans had nothing to do but take it - and plenty of it from nearby T-D's with a sweeping field of fire. Dozens of trucks, jeeps, etc. were shot up, hundreds of prisoners taken.

Like other scout units, the 601st's. Recon found the going fast and heavy - mostly fast - up from Southern France. In fact, it went so rapidly that Sgt. Ed Josowitz' commission couldn't catch up with him. But today he's safely a lieutenant.

This same officer, together with Sgt. Ezzell, Sgt. Brian Lyons, S. Sgt. (now Lt.) Vince Bonner and a French colonel sought to scout out one town for an infantry attack when they ran into a road block.

Ezzell killed two krauts guarding the block but not before their companions had sent up red flares calling down artillery fire.

All five men were cut off from their main body, but Ezzell, Bonner and Josowitz managed to make it back under a withering protective fire laid down by a couple of 37's. Lyons, closer to the road block, was pinned down for hours under machine gun fire but finally returned, minus clothing which had been ripped off in a barbed wire entanglement.

Krauts were posted all over the landscape and the shooting then was on a miniature battle scale. Scout cars accounted for plenty of krauts personnel in the scrap.

The French colonel ?

The next day he showed up safely with this story as told to Tec. 5 Claude Christmas:

During the scrap he had leaped into a fox hole and, while he wasn't ducking bullets and shrapnel, spotted German gun positions as they fired. He marked 'em all on a map and when his infantry outfit attacked the troops knew where everything was and the krauts were chased out with big losses.

The colonel, incidentally, was armed only with an ancient French rifle which contained three bullets. With two he shot Germans but the third he saved for himself - just in case, as he put it.

At Donzere a section of the Recons ran into something new in the way of German subterfuge while spearheading a task force in a fast punching action.

As they reached the town the leading elements noted a large group of civilians out waving flags and otherwise giving gestures of welcome but when the first jeep pulled in kraut machine gun fire started spitting.

It developed later that the Germans had turned their guns on the populace to force them to stand out and wave flags, thus giving the appearance of another liberated village.

The first jeep into town, piloted by Tec. 5 Christmas, headed straight for the kraut gunner and forced him away, enabling Christmas and five others to establish a bridgehead in the first house in the village. There they stayed for seven hours under the mistaken belief that foot troops were coming in to take the locality.

But that action never developed, although the crews of two Recon scout cars, also under the same delusion, roamed the town's outskirts shooting Germans where they saw 'em. Thus the six men in their lone American held house were right in the midst of a pitched battle.

Sharing that experience with Christmas were Sgt. Ezzell, Lt. Bonner, Tec. 5 Joe Slater, Sgt. Lyons and Sgt. Ted Jerzyk. The scout car crews were made up of Cpl. Clayton Bell, Tec. 5 Earl Campbell, Pfc. Elzie Widden, Pvt. Otto Bruski, Sgt. Mann, Pfc. Joe Delagado, Pfc. Howard Brown and Pvt. Levi Dreadfulwater.

The Seventh Infantry and the 601st's company A have a feeling akin to that of blood brothers inasmuch as the latter unit landed at Anzio with the 7th. an association which has lasted all the way through France.

"And," added Capt. Francis X. Lambert, "it has been an association we have enjoyed."

This "enjoyment" has brought sadness multiplied to the krauts on diverse occasions such as at Anzio where one platoon alone dusted off nine German tanks. It is the boast of the company that its armor in the platoon of Lt. Thomas Kelly was the first across highway six on the breakout from the Italian beachhead. The company racked up a hard-to-beat mark on the outskirts of Rome when the guns of another platoon accounted directly for three German tanks and forced the krauts to abandon nine others for a total bag of 12.

Back at Besancon the destroyers of company A gave a demonstration in fort busting that must have made King Arthur turn over in his grave.

Big doors on the fort which sheltered a number of krauts couldn't be knocked down so the T-Ds were called and a few rounds later the doors lay smashed under point blank fire, opening the way for doughboys to rush across the moat and get at the Germans. Then it was all over.

Destroyers in that action were manned by Sgt. Galant, Tec. 4 Joe Domsloy, Sgt. Max Andress, Pfc. Robert Hyde, Pfc. Arthur Joyce, Sgt. Dale Davis, Tec. 5 Ed Brenot, Tec. 5 Robert Sicard, Tec. 4 Holstein and Pvt. Joe McGowan.

Besancon also held another high point for the company when one of its platoons caught a kraut convoy on the northwest side of town and with some neat point blank firing erased 27 vehicles and dozens of their occupants.

"Our fire swept that road like a broom," was the way one man put it.

FAST ACTION

Sgt. Dante Cappiello and his crew didn't exactly have a "field day" like that but they did demonstrate the proper way to play hide and go seek with a kraut tank dug in on a hillside as a glorified pillbox.

The kraut was covering a main road and to approach in his view was an invitation to trouble - real trouble. So Cappiello maneuvered his vehicle in such fashion as to pull up around a corner hidden from the German's view.

Then, quick like the flash of an adder's tongue, the sergeant threw his destroyer around the corner and knocked off the hun before the latter realized the time of day.

"It was necessary that we get the first shot and we did." said the sergeant. His crew included Cpl. Art Buchman, Cpl. Werner Benesch, Cpl. Harold Claycomb and Pvt. George Grawe.

Over in B Company, commanded by Capt. Ambrose G. Salfen, they like to shoot the pages back to Italy for the really spectacular shoots, although the outfit has done plenty of brilliant "writing" in France.

But first take "Welch's Boneyard" back on Anzio which the lieutenant mentioned earlier and Sgt. Larson accounted for five kraut in believe-it-or-not style like this;

Seventeen - count 'em - 17 German tanks were approaching the American positions, threatening to overrun front-line infantry foxholes. The T-Ds had one gun in the immediate sector, concerned with this account and it was parked beside a building.

From the gun position it was impossible to see the approaching tanks because a long, continuous rise hid them from view.

To do the job the officer and the sergeant alternated at shooting the three inches and observing from the upstairs window of the building. The first shot picked off the lead tank in a column of five, the next blast knocked the last one. After that it was a matter of sweeping up and down the road to pick off the other three.

"I won't forget running up and down those stairs to watch the shells hit home," said the officer. "Our rounds were clearing the heads of the infantry by about four feet as they sailed up over that rise."

Later on three more of the 17 tanks were given the business by Lt. Welch's T-Ds and the junk heap thus formed was nicknamed "Welch's Boneyard."

A HALF DOZEN

Then, during the big counter-attack last February 29, the destroyers of Lt. John D. Christian's platoon took the measure of a half dozen kraut tanks in three days' time. As a sidelight of that affair, the sight clamp on the officer's tank was broken, making bore sighting a thing of the past. However, Kentucky windage as practiced by the gunner, Sgt. Henry Godlewski, proved deadly efficient against the Germans.

Proudest boast of the company insofar as Anzio is concerned was the distinction of never losing a destroyer to a German tank and, adds Capt. Salfen, "Our guns never rolled backward there - nor anywhere else for that matter."

"Kraut Woods," a German needle in the infantry's side during the breakout from Anzio, was cleaned out a mile southwest of Cisterna by the company's T-Ds. The dough-boys had been stopped cold there by murderous German machine gun fire.

The destroyers pulled up and, in an innovation for them, threw in tree burst which kept the Germans in their holes while foot troops went in and dug 'em out. More than 40 machine gun nests were mopped up in that one spot.

In France one of the big shoots put on by the company came in the vicinity of La Bourgançe. The destroyers were in position on a ridge looking down on a roadway over which the Germans were trying to move reinforcements.

An open area in the woods, about 200 yards long gave the destroyers a short, but as events proved, an adequate tracking space.

"It was something we had been waiting for because we had traveled miles through mud and mountains with the Germans looking down on us most of the time," said one sergeant. "Now it was our turn. As the Germans tried to move their stuff we'd let 'em have it and our platoon accounted for three Mark IV tanks, five large personnel carriers, three flak wagons, some horse drawn artillery and a couple of Jeeps - not to mention plenty of personnel."

Non-com leaders in on the shoot were Sgt. John Nowak, Sgt. John Mulcahy, Sgt. Rudolph Larson and Staff. Sgt. Coverino Lombardi. The same gentlemen were in on a big hill at Vesoul when the destroyers made a right flank run to cut off German columns trying to escape the on-coming Americans. This time they racked up 10 vehicles.

Describing the latter action, Sgt. Mulcahy said "we killed between 75 and 100 Germans. You could see 'em all bunched up, no place for 'em to go. It was slaughter."

No recital of B Company would be complete without a description of the block-off action near famed Montelimar. The destroyers were approaching that ill-starred village when a kraut escape convoy was spotted moving toward them. The T-Ds moved up another 1,000 yards and started firing.

The Germans were heading toward an alternate escape route, but the accurate 601st. gunnery got two large trucks which blocked the road and in general fouled up the Hun effort to flee Montelimar. What followed then under the pounding artillery, air corps and infantry is history - and a sad one for the Hun.

Youngish looking Capt. Sam Richardson emphasizes that no word picture of his C Company could be properly started other than by mentioning, offhand like, that the outfit had the first T-Ds across the Voltorno.

"We're proud of that one," he says simply.

But the company has been making noted moves since landing in France too, inaugurating its action at Collobrieres where some of its elements added 37 Germans to the PW cage under unusual circumstances - unusual for the krauts, that is -

The Huns were pedaling their bikes into the town for a rest, unaware that the Americans were there. Pvt. Richard Malone and Sgt. Clyde Choate accounted for 11 themselves.

The very next day Choate, whose deeds are retold around the company, fired his destroyer into a road block, killing 30 Germans and destroying an anti-tank gun just before it teed off on him. Sgt. Stafford T. White, Pvt. Charles Mitchell and Pfc. Jay W. Shively were in on that action too.

And Staff Sgt. Bill Harper, set up at a road block near another French town, still wonders just what was in the mind of one German when he stopped his lead truck in a small convoy, got out and started walking toward the T-Ds position, Harper didn't give him much time for reflection because he opened up his 50 - caliber pronto. Three Hun trucks were destroyed and eight of the personnel they carried were killed. Tech. 5 William T. Owens, Pfc. Charles Schirmer, Pvt. Delmar Orr, Cpl. Earl DeTienne and Cpl. George Dietz aided and abetted him.

At Brignoles the company's destroyer, hitting from the flanks in close conjunction with an infantry attack scored heavily against at least three anti-tank guns, personnel carriers, flak wagons, innumerable machine guns, and German foot troops.

"It was one of the best shoots we've ever had, some of the hottest action," said the captain.

Sgt. Joseph Scoggins has a crew which holds that economy is an excellent rule to follow on the battlefield as well as anywhere else and by way of proof they knocked out six German vehicles, including two Mark IV tanks, with just 12 rounds of well-placed ammunition.

The destroyer men saw one German halftrack at the edge of a small woods, the only enemy vehicle within miles - they thought. But after they had taken a shot and knocked it out the others started nosing around and were accorded similar treatment.

Scoggins claims that one shot got two vehicles because the explosion of one wrecked another. His crew included Tech. 5 Billy Carden, Cpl. Paul Hornsby, Pfc. Michael Molan and Pvt. Ralph Hardman.

Working with an infantry division new to combat and thus new to the tank destroyer, Sgt. Thomas Langan convinced a doubtful doughboy officer of the weapon's accuracy.

The krauts were using a house as a strong point to direct heavy mortar fire against American doughfeet dug in nearby. The infantry officer wanted to pull back his troops before Langan's T-D opened fire but the sergeant remarked. "I don't believe that'll be necessary, Sir, we'll get the house and never touch your men."

The first round tore into the building and sent a kraut sprawling from the roof where he had been observing. The destroyer threw in 36 more rounds and every one was a hit.

"The infantry officer needed no more convincing," smiled the sergeant. "He was dancing up and down for joy after we finished." The range was 2,500 yards. Langan's crew: Pfc. Wiley C. Ivey, Pvt. Emil LeMay, Pvt. Louis Doake and Cpl. Harold Frades.

Another excellent exhibition of long range firing occurred on a hill mass near St. Die from which Lt. Clifton Mooneyham's platoon zeroed in on a road some 3,000 yards away and accounted for at least seven German vehicles.

In fighting or fun, the 601st. to the man knows how the infantry man lives, how important he is to winning the war. That's why in support roles for the doughboot it does the most work, heaps the most destruction on the German.

You know the 601st. is up there from this tally of awards received: 480 Purple Hearts, 82 Silver Stars, 71 Bronze Stars, nine Croix de Geurre, four DSCs and two Legions of Merit.