

From SOUK-EL-KHEMIS A Company was attached to the French XIX th. Corps, (Foreign Legion) and sent to "Pichon". Arriving there on Xmas eve in late afternoon. Gloomy and still raining so therefore nobody had anything at all that was considered dry, not even a decent cigarette.

In those days some outfit had come out with a cigarette that had waterproof paper which was fine, but at this time the tobacco was soaked, so that was useless too. While still in bivouac, I had some of my crew dig a 6x6x6 and scrounge around the area for some likely poles and some firewood. But even that was drenched to the core. We then became a bit desperate and miserable, for it had been a solid week that we had traveled through the Atlas Mountains and it had rained every day for the whole eight hundred miles. So in desperation we had to have something dry to wear. I pryed off the slugs off of a couple 75 A P's, buried the rounds and used the gun powder to ignite a fire and thus dried some of our clothes. But that comforting gesture didn't last very long. In a couple of hours we were on the move again with our "Purple Heart Boxes" with the modified WW1 "75's".

From then on it was "David vs. Goliath" as far as the French were concerned. We were the Big Brother that could do the job. For a few weeks that my platoon was attached to the Legion and covering a 60 mile front.

The primary mission, or Operation "TORCH" as it was better known was, to constantly harrass the "Desert Fox's" flank. The 8th. British Army had dislodged the krauts from Alexandria and in their retreat, we were supposed to contain them near the coast and not allow them to spread out all over Tunisia, which constituted of a gigantic cat and mouse game for a few weeks, until they caught up with us at Ousseltia.

Up to this point, all the contacts that we had had with the enemy were of a daytime nature. It seems that just about every skirmish ended at just about sundown. And in Africa, in the winter time there is hardly any twilight. the sun goes down, and in fifteen minutes or less, it is dark.

Since the Foreign Legion was doing the reconnaissance for us, we would establish some position somewhere near where they had observed some enemy armor action the previous day, therefore sometimes 30 to 60 miles away. At sundown we would dismantle all the camouflage, refill all the foxholes and in general police up the area that we had occupied that day

And march order to the next location during the night, in total blackout of course and arriving in the early A.M., prepare the position, dig new foxholes, painstakingly erecting new camouflage to compliment the surroundings, get something to eat, and if we were lucky get a couple of hours of shut eye, all before "Photo Freddy " in his recon plane, could paye us a visit at first light. You could set your watch by him in the morning.

Shortly after, far off in the distance, some French soldier would spot some movement ahead, and fire his rifle. In answer some German or Italian would respond. This went on for a few minutes with several others chiming in until one side or the other would open up with the steccato of a machine gun, and soon it, also would be answered with more of the same. And then the mortors would start barking followed by the artillery and a solid war was in action. The enemy tanks were around and could be observed jockeying for some better position, just in case things got to be a little too ruff for the infantry boys and for their artillery support. Let us not forget that they at this time enjoyed air supremacy and very well took advantage of it, to our dismay. We at times experienced being bombed or - straffed at least once or twice an hour every day all day long and with not any signs of British or American planes for 8 to 10 days at a clip. It became very depressing and discouraging.

The logic behind all this moving around that we were doing, was to emphasize on the good Field Marschal Rommel that we were indeed a sizable force on his flank. By this time, the pressure on him from the south (Montgomery) was getting for him harder and harder to bare and his vast armada was getting thirsty for gasoline as at this time the American and British air commands were sinking just about every German ship that dared approach the African coast and his supplies were running short. Somehow he found out that there was a huge dump of the stuff at "Kasserine". To put things in the proper perspective, you inquired in your letter to Bill Harper; "What happened at Kasserine ? " Well sir, to the best of my ability and recollection, since I was in A company at the time, I will try to do my best to answer that.

A couple of days before this event, we, my platoon had rejoined the company and had been deployed at a point across Ousseltia valley. My group layed behind a knoll with just the gun and the turret overlooking the area ahead. We had Purple Heart Boxes deployed abreast on both sides of the road that ran right up and down the center of the valley for some two to three miles ahead to some Roman Ruins at the other end. On the other side of the knoll that I occupied I had placed a forward O.P., with a radio and binoculars.

I believe that we had borrowed from the First Armored Division (whom had just entered the battle area) some four or six M -5 light tanks, to reconiter the valley up ahead. They would go up the valley at about a hundred or so yards interval and at a very moderate speed so as not to raise too much dust, the road being pulverized to absolute powder from centuries of travel. This went on all day until about 4.30 P.M., and since there had been no action and consequently, nothing to report, just about all of us were careless of our actions.

As I previously mentioned, so far night activity had not been known. Well, now that the four M-5's had gone up to the ruins for their last time and were on their way back, my field radio "crackled ", it was Pvt. Duggan my man at the O.P. inquiring ? " Hey Dee, how many tanks went up the road the last time ? " I immediately replied, the usual four, why ? " Well, that's funny, I now count six, and they are close together, wait there's seven, there's ten, hell they are coming out from all over the place. The whole valley is loaded with them and they are coming out from behind every rock." About this time, we went into action, just about all of the T.D's had plenty of targets at eight hundred yards and much less, We were firing that 75 at just about everything in front of us that moved and now they were rolling toward us with everything blasing. They seemed to have the accurate range on almost everything, and that was the last that I have seen or heard from Pvt. Tommy Duggan.

Being past masters in the art of camouflage as they were, they had been there all day long observing our carelessness, completely undetected, and without a doubt listening in on all our conversations on the same radio frequency. Finally, they had caught-up with the black "Y" on the yellow square background. It turned out to be not so much of a "TIGER" after all.

A few days later, while at Sbeitla, again no day time activity, but at dusk, here they came. Without exaduration, we were confronted with no less than one hundred tanks, they were everywhere. A tank battle at night is not funny, but spectacular. Anyhow they succeeded in creating a "route " which continued on to the next day. In my estimation this became the "Non Glorious American 40 milè retreat ". We made the British at Dunkirk look silly. They pushed and pushed until we overran our supposedly reenforcements that never infiltrated our lines because as we later found out, theyhad abandoned their materiel. It consisted of brand new fighting equipment that we had never seen, like new 90mm Ack ack guns and much more. Up to now, the best and the biggest thing that we had to beat off the Stukas, was our ever faithful 50cal. machine gun. Those big and beautiful ack ack guns (several of them) were abandoned in some wadii (dry river bed) , by whom, we never did find out. Anyway, the Jerries, were hell bent for Kasserine because they were in need of that gasoline. In the dump there, it was estimated to have a few million gallons, and all in five gallon cans. As we retreated by, we pumped several hundred rounds of fifty into it and set it a fire, sending it up in smoke. The heat was so intence that some of the cans would swell up and then explode, sending them several hundred feet up in the air.

Jerry was still coming on strong, and since it was now daylight, down came the stukas and ME 109's. The road was completly jammed with all sorts of equipment and they were having a field day. You know, like shooting fish in a barrel. The "LUFTWAFFE" at this time had something very unique, that we saw for the first time. We nicknamed it the " Cartwheel maneuver ". It consisted of a group of four fighter planes, in this case , 109's I presume due to their fairly good mobility, the leader, as usual would come out of the sun at about a couple thousand feet or less and dive down on the columb with 20's all blazing for about a hundred yards or so, as he would pull up from the deck, the #2 man came down in the same fashion, all the while the leader is making a loop so that he is in a position to follow # 4 man and so on, consequently keeping everything that is under and in front of them, pinned down and without any hope of defence. Unless you were on the side of the road, you had absolutly no chance to recover and regroup. At this point I had the most admiration for my fellow man that I have ever had in my life.

We were in a jeep, (how we got there together, I can not recall) the jeep driver, this personage, and myself. There was no gun mount for it in the jeep, but amongst the numerous junk, bed rolls and stuff there happened to be a 50 and several boxes of ammo. It so happened that we had gotten off of the road when we saw the M.E's come down. This guy said to me, " Come on let's get one ". With that he grabbed the 50 and I picked up a box of ammo and set it on the ground as it was too heavy for me. I took the belt and fed it into the receiver, he closed the cover and pulled the lever a couple of times, picked up the piece, supported it with his left arm and began firing. Now we are talking about an 84 lbs. jerking monster bouncing up and down on this guy's arm. True he was a big fellow that weighed in the neighborhood of 200 lbs. or more, but this is a big feat and it had to take something just short of superhuman strenght. The planes were coming down so low, you just could'nt miss. After a while we got two, and the other two took off.

In the days before the war, there was no organized training camps for recruits. Each outfit trained their own. The person to whom I have referance to and also might add reverance was a very modest person and for some other reason was later awarded a battle field commission. His name was Lt. Leo Petitbon. When I first enlisted, a year before "Pearl Harbor ", he was my D.I.

It seemed at this time, that the only possible place that we could hope to stop this monstrous movement by the krauts, was at the "Kasserine pass " at the very end of the valley, so the rush was on. Have you ever seen a $2\frac{1}{2}$ ton G.M.C. truck pass up a jeep like it was tied to a post ? Well... Sir, I have. A lot of equipment was coming from all directions and headed for the pass, it became very clear that this would be a good safety zone and that we might stand a chance after all. Lo and behold, as luck would have it and the good lord must have been looking out for us, we discovered that some units of the Artillery had set up some positions in the winding road and on the other side of the pass. At several points in the pass the road was a mere 10 feet wide or less. The smaller enemy armor followed us through the entrance, and then a "Tiger " (Mark VI) rambling around one of those 80degree curves , followed by two more. The artillery opened up and when the smoke cleared the "JUGGERNAUT " came to schreeching halt as the pass was completly and hopelessly blocked.

Good thing for us, as about 12 miles beyond the pass, was the biggest supply depot in Tunisia and the Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was denied this illustrious prize.

As for the battle of "EL GUETTAR ", well, the Presidential unit citation very well depicts it. However, one paragraph in the book that you have on the history of the 601st., on page 14, says it all.

To paraphrase it, it goes like this;

Those who were close enough to "hear " will never forget the "Old Man's " greeting to the 899th. T.D. , with their brand new M-10's, when they came rolling down the road to join in the battle, and just as suddenly as they came, they lost two to the "Luftwaffe". As tough as the old man was, I actually saw him cry, that day. I was there and I'll never forget it. Just what ensued after that, the dialogue is not fit for print.

In your letter to the judge, you mention that from one source of information that you have, mentions that the 601 was " DISBURSED " . Personally I think that that was and very well could be a typographical error referring to the word " DISPURSED ", which we were very much so.