

ACR 602nd TDBn

Feb. 19, 1988

Re: "Combat actions - U.S.T.D.'s vs enemy tanks"
This is a follow up of my letters dated 11-17-87
and 1-18-88.

Bert Oliver.

These comments will not be specific "T.D. vs Tank" but memories that come to mind along the line of your request that your readers know of the sounds and smell and a sense of what it was like to be there. I'll put them on paper without regard to place, date, or continuity.

"At the time of the '42 La. maneuvers, our T.D.'s were 37mm towed guns in the back of a pick up truck. At Camp Hood we trained on halftracks. At Camp McCoy we trained on M 10's. In Tenn. we field tested the T-70 which became the M-18. When we got to England we found M-18's waiting for us. We were one of the first Bn.'s to be so equipped. When we landed in France we were surprised to find that even the officers of other U. S. units thought it was a German tank because of its different suspension system and long 76mm gun tube. The first day or so was spent painting bigger and brighter stars on them."

"We were near Nancy, France and 3rd Army had bogged down - lack of just about everything. They set up Red Cross, showers, PX, etc. in Nancy. For a few days we could send in a percentage of our men. Because of censorship, one of the men wrote his wife via V-mail that we were near "a town where these things were available and would she send him \$10.00 for toothpaste and stuff". She replied as soon as possible with a note that said "Enclosed find \$1.00 for the toothpaste, your stuff is here at home."

"Relative to the above about 'lack of things'. 3rd Army's dash across France (plus supplies going to other Armies) resulted in outrunning many of our vital needs. ie. gas, tires, tire tube patches, ammo., etc. We had over-run a German airbase. We used the gas for our vehicles. Being high-octane, we then had a problem of maintenance - burned valves on halftracks, etc.

Many times to move our unit forward, because of the lack of tires, we would have to strip wheels/tires off some vehicles to equip the first group making the move. We would then reverse the process. Take off some wheels/tires and haul them back. Then mount them and bring the rest of the vehicles forward.

During this period, you could hardly leave a vehicle unprotected. If you were driving down a road and stepped off into the trees because of a call of nature, you had to keep the vehicle in view. If you didn't, chances were that someone else coming along the road had stopped, had a wrench and was already stripping your vehicle for parts. Now after 44 years I'll confess we got pretty good at that too. A new outfit came up on line. We were detached from our previous outfit and the attached to one of their regiments. I was advised to

report to them in a small village. Checking the map, I could see that I could get there by going east on a road and then up a trail to the north. In getting there, along the trail, we came upon a brand new jeep stuck in a snow bank. The personnel had left. I called the motor sgt. on the radio, told him to go east and then follow my tracks north and he would find something of interest. When I retraced my route, the chassis of that jeep was sitting on the snow. To this day I feel sorry for those men who came back and found their jeep in that condition. But as someone once said, 'C'est la guerre. Being on our own so much, one felt one had to become an expeditor to make do and to remain independent. I forget the details of the TO/E and how many vehicles our Hq. Plat. was authorized. However, we could not have functioned if the (for example) the Co. Exec., 1st sgt., Commo. sgt., Motor sgt., Mess sgt., Supply sgt., Armorer, etc., had to share a vehicle or two. An example: During the 'tube patch' shortage, my Motor sgt. would take off in the morning, go to the rear and check as many C.P.'s that he could find to see if he could scrounge any. If he came back at the end of the day with 6 to 8, we all figured he had a good day. Without a vehicle of his own, this sort of thing would be impossible.

In order to augment our vehicles we rehabilitated some German vehicles and a motorcycle that we had overrun.

There's one other incident I recall.

Our forward C.P. was in a small village. An aid station had been set up there. It seems a soldier was bringing in a wounded soldier in a jeep. In turn the driver was wounded. Another soldier got in the jeep and drove it into the village with the two men. Having done so, he then left the jeep, slung his M-1 over his shoulder, and headed back to his unit.

The jeep just sat there. My Rcn. Sgt. gave it a look, I gave a nod and he drove it off. We now had one more vehicle to do all the things that needed to be done. Some time earlier we had a jeep demolished and left along a road (less any usable parts). It then seemed pertinent to revisit the chassis and remove the hood. In that way we exchanged hoods on the 'new' jeep so that the identification number then reflected it as being company property.

Sounds wierd now that these incidents are being recalled but didn't some^{one} once say 'all is fair in love and war'?"

"During the Bulge, temperatures were below freezing. That brings this thought to mind but I can't describe the feeling. While walking along some woods, I noticed an American G.I., wearing his overcoat etc., sitting with his back against a tree and his rifle across his lap. He seemed to be watching me but didn't react to my being there. I walked over, tapped him on the shoulder and asked 'Are you alright?'. Then in a few seconds it hit me. He was dead."

"Speaking of the Bulge, I'm reminded that in combat things can get less civilized than back home and at times it brings out some gruesome humor. Entering a town, I noticed a dead German soldier - on his back - his body covered with snow but with his right forearm and hand pointing directly to the sky. One of the rules of communication people when laying wire is to 'tie, test, tag & take off'. A U.S. wireman had decided that 'hand' was a good place to practice his 4 T's. In a day or two, that dead soldier was now helping our cause by firmly grasping about a dozen wires that had been tied to his hand."

"After the elimination of the Bulge, we were in an area that had been occupied by the 28th Inf. Div., mid-Dec., '44. Much to my surprise and dismay, dead bodies of the 28th Div. men were still scattered around that area. In a day or so, U.S. personnel had come up to recover and remove those bodies. The weather had turned from freezing to thawing. I don't think there is a stench on this earth worse than that of a decomposing human body.

Now you have to visualize what we looked like. Tired, muddy, perhaps unshaven, etc. One night, to get some sleep, the halftrack driver just put on his raincoat and layed down alongside the vehicle. At dawn, those of us who had been sleeping in the halftrack heard some commotion and we peered over the side and saw one of those recovery teams about to tag him. We said, 'don't tag him - he's one of ours'. As he woke up, you have never seen anyone climb back into a halftrack as fast as he did."

"Before going overseas, I was perhaps one of a minority that did not drink things that had an alcoholic content. (I had no problem with those that did) I have to give credit to the Engr's. They kept us supplied with water. However, when you saw them pumping water from a ditch, where there was a dead, bloated cow in the same ditch not too far away,, it was not too surprising to find something that had been corked or capped became more appealing. While the Engr's purified the water, its taste left something to be desired. However, when heated, it did prove useful when you decided to shave or take a bath in your helmet."

"For some time and with several attempts, I had been trying to get a S. Sgt. (His background was regular army) to take a battlefield commission to 2nd. Lieut. One morning about 3 AM I was up to the platoon position giving them the information they needed for that day. I took him aside and asked him again. At long last he agreed. I told him I would start the paperwork. Shortly after dawn, an artillery round landed near his position. A fragment hit him in the forehead and he was dead. What irony. What a loss. Initially he had been my Rcn. Sgt. but I moved him into a platoon where he could get a much deserved promotion in rank."

"For speed and mobility we had left our field kitchens back in France. That being the case, it should come as no surprise that our thoughts would at times turn to supplementing the ration. I'll have to admit we liberated many domesticated rabbits and guinea hens.

Some of our men came from farms. They knew something us city fellows didn't. They knew that one way to cure hams, etc. was to hang them in their fireplace chimney's. So when we went through a small village or farm area that had just been cleared of the enemy, we felt it imperative to check the fireplace chimneys. We found and liberated many pleasant surprises.

I also recall an event when we were firing as artillery. Our fire direction center was in a little shack in a field that the farmer used to store his tools. I heard a bunch of men whooping and hollering. As we had a lot of Texans in the outfit, I paid no particular attention. Then there were a few shots from what sounded like a .45 pistol. Next I could hear the tank retriever moving past our position and in a little while moving back again. A little later during a lull, I checked it out. A cow had wandered into our position.

It seems they viewed it as a supplement to our C rations. They tried to corral it with no luck so a .45 automatic was used. Now what do you do with a downed cow? Get the tank retriever of course. There was that cow suspended from the boom and the Mess Sgt. butchering it. Later he distributed the meat in about 1½" x 1½" cubes. We fried it on our individual gas stoves. It had good flavor and lots of juice but it was so tough it was impossible to chew and swallow.

I guess it was natural, considering the times and conditions, that we never considered reimbursing anyone for the rabbits, guinea hens, hams and that cow. In fact that idea never really hit me until the writing of these memories. I guess I'm guilty of war crimes of a minor nature."

"When the platoons were out in their positions, I would usually have the company forward command post in a position central to their positions with the company headquarters further back. When I wanted to get around I'd walk, use a jeep, M-20 armored car or halftrack. At any given moment the forward C.P. was made up of the vehicle I was using and sometimes the Rcn. Sgt. and his jeep.

This occasion was during the Bulge and I was using the halftrack. We were in a little village and it was night, dark and cold. We parked the halftrack alongside a farm house and bunked down in the basement. The farmer had harvested sugar beets and these were stored 2 or 3 feet deep in the basement. This produced a very bumpy surface. The Commo. Sgt. had rigged up longer wires so he could put a microphone and earphones in the basement. He'd sleep with the earphones on so he wouldn't miss any messages. However, the halftrack driver had to go out about every two hours to run the engine to keep it warm and up to charge.

The .50 cal machine gunner was of Mexican descent with a decidedly strong Mexican accent. He was trying to get some sleep with his blankets up over his head. On one of the driver's trips in or out (and now you have to visualize the scene), out of the total darkness a muffled Mexican accented voice could be heard to say 'Murray, you're fucking up. You're standing on my head.'

As it turned out, that basement wasn't too bad a place to be. During the night the upper part of the building was hit by artillery."

"During the Bulge we were short officers. In time, two brand new 2nd Lieuts. were assigned to me. After a period of about two weeks, one was to stay with our Co. A, the other would go to Co. B. After a couple of days of staying with the company headquarters so they could get used to the sounds and what was going on, I took them out to one of the platoons that was attached to an Inf. Regt. Being 3 of us, I drove the jeep. Upon getting to the platoon position we dismounted. Almost at once I could hear German rockets being fired. (they didn't call them 'screaming meemies' for nothing. I told the Lieuts. to hit the deck and we dove into a shell hole. At the same time some machine gun fire came from somewhere (never did figure out the source) that flew right over our heads so close you could have reached out and plucked off a tracer round as it went by. In a few moments when we got our heads up, we saw that one of the rockets had scored a direct hit on the jeep and it was blown to bits. Nearby, 4 of a T.D.'s crew were standing on the rear deck of the T.D. to keep warm. With the T.D. motor running, they didn't hear

the rockets or machine gun fire or they reacted too late and the 4 of them had been knocked off the T.D. One was injured more than the others. To be discreet, I'll say he had been hit in the 'privates'. I took my first aid kit, powdered the injured parts with sulpha powder and wrapped the dressing around the wound as best I could. All the time he kept asking where he had been hit - he had just married prior to service - wanted to have a family, etc. I told him several times that he was the luckiest man in the E.T.O., that something had passed between his legs taking chunks out of both his thighs.

Some Inf. medics watched all this from a nearby woods and came down with a litter and jeep and took him back to their aid station. The uninjured man (he had been inside the T.D. while all this was going on), with the 3 other injured men, drove the M-18 back to the Co. Hq. position where our medics took care of our men. The two Lieuts. and myself spent some more time with the platoon, picked up what we could from the shattered jeep and walked back. The Lieut. who ended up in B. Co. summed up the experience. He said 'you know, a guy could get killed here'. They must have learned the lesson very well. One now lives in Texas. The other in Arkansas. I got a nice letter from the evacuated man about a month later. He advised at the first aid station they looked at his wound and said 'get him back to Division'. There - one look and 'take him to the next higher level' and so on until within 2 or 3 days he had been flown to a hospital in Texas. There, at last they removed the dressing I had applied. Then he found out - yes he had been hit in the reproductive organs. In a couple of weeks or so they had assured him he could have a normal married life with children. He closed his letter to me by saying 'he may not have ended up being the luckiest man in the E.T.O. but that I certainly ended up being the biggest liar'.

I never saw or heard from the man again."

"There are many ways to get wounded or injured in a war. This case stands out as a little different. I got word that one of my Plat. Leaders was injured but oddly no details were provided so I went out to check it out. This is what happened.

The platoon captured a large horse drawn artillery piece (approx 155mm). The personnel were sent back as prisoners (remember my mention of all the Texans we had in the company) but they decided to keep the horses for a little while. (Don't ask me why). (The Lieut. had in fact been first commissioned as a Cavalry Officer. He often was referred to as 'trooper'). He sheepishly admitted he got hurt when he was thrown by one of the horses he was trying to ride. After that, they decided the best thing to do was to donate the horses to some farmer - which they did.

In writing this, it now occurs to me that this act may have balanced the books for some of the supplemental rations we picked up along the way."

"Being attached to other organizations other than our own Bn. as we were most of the time, we really had little one-on-one contact between the company and Bn. Hq. One exception was during the Bulge. Bn. Hq. had moved into Neufchateau. We were nearby and I decided to

go visit them one night. For some reason or other the Bn. C.O. decided he wanted to use my jeep and jeep driver to go visit B Co. in Recogne. I suggested his driver could do as well but he thought my driver would have a better 'feel' for it. In my view, which I expressed, I suggested the last thing someone might want to do under the circumstances was to drive up to Recogne. When he insisted (I would not expose my driver to this), I advised I would drive and use my Rcn. Sgt. to sit behind the .30 cal. M.G. I had no idea what the conditions were between the two towns but we took off. It was a compromise to drive fast enough to get there in a reasonable length of time and slow enough so as to 'listen' to what was happening along the way and to be able to 'see' hopefully some dangerous condition before barging into it. We could hear gunfire and see tracers off to our right but we pulled into the village without incident. We found B Co's. C.P. and entered. The C.O.'s first words were 'How did you get into this town? I gave orders to shoot at anything that moved'. I'm sure he had personnel along that road but fortunetly they were more discreet and let that lone jeep with its (at least two) spooked occupants on by. Regogne had been bombed from the air that day and they had 3 men killed and 4 wounded. We had our visit and using the slow/fast tactics fortunately got back to Neufchateau all in one piece."

"We were in Neufchateau - had parked the halftrack - and the total crew was in a building when the town was subjected to an air bombing. A bomb had exploded in the street and a fragment went through the back door and went up and put a huge dent in the .50 cal. M.G. ring mount. If you took a line of sight through that hole and where it hit the mount and considered where I would have been if I had been in the vehicle, this letter would never have been written. This, and other experiences, convinced me that 'luck' plus alertness had a lot to do with getting through the war."

"Being attached and detached continually as we were meant many continues days on the line where we found ourselves doing many things on our own. I can think of a few of these incidents. First, there was sort of an attitude. Our Bn. Hq. was way back. When attached to a new unit (replacing the unit we were detached from), they were glad to see us but no engagement or marriage ever took place. I guess they sensed when they were relieved by another unit, we in turn would be attached to them. In many cases they totally misunderstood our role and needs. I've observed in other letters on the failure in most cases to establish radio communication. At night you would hear a jeep come up to your position. It might be a Bn. S4 (God bless him) with 6 cans of gas in a trailer behind him and ask 'if we needed any gas?'. My reply might be 'yes, 180 (or some such number) 5 gall. cans'. (Fortunately at the company level we had our own 2½ ton trucks for gas and ammo.) He would just grunt something and disappear in the night. I guess what I'm saying is that Co. A was there, very much alone, fighting its own little war, as best it could, and doing its best to keep body and soul together. A part of this 'continuous days on line' resulted in the men having little time for personal maintenance. At times, when we could

appropriately do so, the Co. Hq. personnel would try to find a building where we could heat a room and produce some hot water. Then at the end of a day, we would have a vehicle and its crew drop back to the Co. Hq. location. There they could bathe, change clothes, dry out their things, perhaps shave and hopefully get a nights sleep. They would then go back to their platoon position the next morning. That afternoon, if possible, we would bring another crew back and so on.

Another example comes to mind. It was about the middle of the wind-down of the Bulge. We had been attached to a new Div. that came up on line. More specifically one of its regiments. I recall one night, maybe 10PM/midnight, being summoned to their Hq. It seems one of their Bns. had an Infantry Co. that had gone out and had taken a village. They wanted me to move my company of T.D.s out to join them. I advised to do so was contrary to T.D. tactics. That if we stayed in place where we were, we could provide a tank defense for a tank attack that might develop anywhere in their Regt'l area. That they would lose that capability if we were pinned down in one little village. That I didn't have a company of 12 T.D.'s, I was down to about 7 effective guns. That I didn't have a company of approx. 130 men, I was down to about 90. That in fact, having been on the line so long, they weren't even men, they were just walking zombies. They advised they would think of it a little more and let me know. In leaving, I remember slamming that door so hard I swear the whole building shook. (I've always been amazed that someone didn't call me back in and chew me out for such behavior.) In any case, I don't know if my logic or statements helped make the decision. I found out later they sent someone else out to support that company and we stayed in place.

In a few days we were detached from them and attached to someone else."

"After V-E Day, Co. A, as part of the 602nd T. D. Bn. was designated 'Army of Occupation'. Almost all the men had high points and could have started their way back to the U.S.A. but our points were 'frozen' so the unit would remain intact.

As the war was over, company meetings became more conversational than directive. I recall having the company together one day bringing them up to date on all that was going on. One of the men asked the question 'How long did I think we should remain there as A.of O?' My reply was not too happily accepted as I recall saying 'I don't trust the Russians. I think Europe is very vulnerable if Russia decided to overrun it. Therefore, while I had no specific time span in mind, I thought it should be a long time.' I think it was about October '45 that our points were unfrozen and the high point men started home.

Upon returning to the States, I joined the 28th Inf. Div., Pa. Nat'l Guard, as it started to reform. It became a 'hot' outfit belonging to a 6 Division contingency force.

In 1950 the Korean War (I still call it a war) broke out. One school of thought was that it may have been a diversion and perhaps the Soviet Union would try to overrun Europe. We were activated and these divisions (the 28th included) were shipped off to Europe where we would provide a deterrent if the Soviets were so inclined. I often wondered about the echo of my words in '45 coming back to me. Since then, since 50/52, we have maintained our forces in Europe for the very same reason. In Korea, nothing has changed. The North

Koreans have been looking south across the demarcation line while the South Koreans and the U. S. forces have been looking north. This has been going on since the so-called truce was signed."

"As I look back, I feel fortunate that even though only at the company level, there were certain independent actions that I took that I feel were for the betterment of the men of the company. Two things come to mind.

While we were stateside, I always felt that 'stew' was a lazy man's menu. Even though the Q.M. would deliver certain foods to the mess hall and designate 'stew' on the menu, I forbid the Mess Sgt. to prepare it that way. He was told to take the items issued and somehow produce a more attractive meal - no matter what it took - even if he had to make some additional food purchase.

When at last we were ready to come home after WW11, we finally ended up in a tent city near Marsailles, France. At the end of the first day, I noticed 'port' personnel had showed up at the end of the company street and had set up dice tables. I noticed my men took an immediate interest and began to participate. But the 'port' people were taking a percentage out of every pot. It only takes a second (we didn't know how long we would be there) to see that eventually every man in Co. A would be broke and the 'port' people would have all the money.

Within a short time after they set up, I had them run off the company street (oh yes, they were going to report me to the port commander, etc.). I told the First Sgt. to set up our own tables with the tables to be run by our own N.C.O.s. There would be no 'take' from the pots. This way, there may have been some shifting of money from one individual to another, but the 'men of the company' left with the same amount of money that they arrived with."

"As ABC Sports says 'the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat'. Of course, on V.E. Day, everyone was thrilled to end up victorious. To me, and this is very personal with me, the agony started later. As part of Third Army, we ended up south of Zwickau, Ger'y near the Czechoslovakian border.

I have no recollection of the dates, but we would be advised that we would have to move back/West a certain distance and the Russians would move in and take over. Later, by increments, we would make similar moves until we had reached the line that had been agreed upon which would become the border of what is now East Germany. To put it mildly, to give up territory we had fought for and won, to give up territory where American soldiers had been wounded and killed, was sheer agony to me. To this day I don't understand how we (Roosevelt/Potsdam/Yalta) could have been so politically naive."

"I'm not an expert on 'sights' but the men have commented on the accuracy of the M-18 sight. (Otis hitting the staff car at 2800 yds, etc.) I was not on site at the moments these events happened but I'm sure they are true because of the manner in which they came to my attention.

Many times, as in a river crossing, the M-18's were given the mission of occupying the high ground and to shoot into or over the river area at designated targets or targets of choice. Everyone knows the best observation is from the highest point. So on many occasions, the targets were castle type buildings and their high towers. The M18's would try to neutralize these locations. The gunners would

be making bets such as 'the next H.E. round would be the window that was second row down and third in from the left' - then firing and winning their bets by seeing the smoke of that round coming from the designated window."

"This paragraph is more of a hunch feeling than anything else. Around Sept./Oct. '44 it seemed to me that Third Army could have moved into Germany if our supplies had been sustained. It seemed there was very little defense along the German border but we came to a halt. (Much has been written about supplies, etc. going to Gen Montgomery at this time, etc. but we won't get into that) Again this is one of my personal recollections. There would be a presidential election in Nov. of '44. Roosevelt was reelected and we resumed the attack a day or so later and by then the Germans had time to reinforce their positions along their border and we got bloodied by hitting our head into a stone wall. I've often suspected that delay was as much political as logistical - less news of casualties, etc. in the weeks leading up to that election date. It always seemed to me that it was more than a coincidence that we were turned loose, Nov. 9th, right after that election had taken place."

"On Dec. 22, 1944, a number of Germans in American vehicles approached our positions on the Bastogne/Neufchateau highway. When it was determined they were Germans by their uniforms (and I'm sure they were not aware our T.D.s had pulled up in that position), our T.D.s and other weapons/personnel opened fire. All vehicles were demolished and I'm sure most all the personnel were killed. Later I moved down that road toward Bastogne. A German soldier was sitting up in the front seat of a halftrack as I recall. He must have been hit by an armor piercing shell from the side. It didn't knock him over but the front of his head was blown away in a semi-circle perhaps more clean and perfect than if it had been done with a surgical knife. From the side you could tell the path the shell had taken as it passed through his forehead"

"One night near Luneville, France, a German unit came through a field adjacent to some woods where we were located. They were firing burp guns. You could tell by the da-da-da-da-ch. The 'ch' being the sound of the gas port after the last round. Under the circumstances we couldn't crank up and move so the word was put out to button up, stay put and shoot at anything that moved. Laying there all night with a hand grenade in one hand and a gun in the other is not conducive to a good night's sleep. Come the very first glimpse of daylight, it was a very tense moment. But as it got brighter we could see they had returned to wherever they came from."

"Somewhere along my years of service, I coined a phrase. 'You don't know you've been in the Army until you've been in the Infantry'. During WW11, because of some of our attachments, I got into Div, and Corps Hqs. There the situation map showed Corps abreast, Div's abreast, Regt's abreast, etc. After WW11 I was relating some of my experiences to a friend of mine. He sort of grinned. I asked 'why the reaction?' He said he had been in the Infantry and was only comfortable when he knew where the man on his left was located and where the man on his right was located. Losing contact with either spelled trouble. And that's where the war was fought and won. All those 'three men' who made up the front line of all

those units that were abreast of each other."

"As most people know, service personnel had a practice of naming their vehicle; tanks, aircraft, T.D.'s, etc. In Co. A, I choose to name the vehicles I generally used. A jeep, an M-20 armored car, and a halftrack. As I have mentioned before, working independently so much, one had to establish a certain attitude so that the men could keep up their morale and function properly. To that end, the name I selected for those vehicles was 'Nothing's Impossible'. When things got extremely tough, this in part was the attitude that kept us going."

"In an earlier paragraph I indicated my displeasure at giving up territory to the Russians that we had won in combat. In fact, I have a displeasure that's broader in scope than that. As we approached the Czechoslovakia border, there was little or no German resistance. I believe we could have gone into Czechoslovakia and into Prague, its capital. (I strongly expect they would have been most glad to see us) As a matter of fact, we pulled up south of Zwickau around April 18, 1945, vicinity of Unterheinsdorf, and just sat there until V-E Day on May 9th. I'm sure other allied units also could have gone farther East. If we had, the problems of the last 44 years with the Soviet Union, East/West Berlin, East Germany, and what we now call Eastern Europe could have been avoided. However, I come back again to the agreements of Postdam and Yalta that prevented us from going farther East - beyond the agreed upon restraining line."

"We were rather selfish. We did not want to lose our men through the medical evacuation/rehabilitation/replacement system. Our men were selfish too. They did not want to leave the 602nd for medical reasons if it could be avoided.

To that end, our Bn. Surgeon formed - for lack of a better name - I'll call it a 'Bn. hospital'. Officially there was no such thing. Its purpose was to handle injuries and illnesses of a type that did not require evacuation to a Field Hospital but where these people would have gone to a Field Hospital if not held at the Bn. facility. This way, men when they recovered, simply went back to their respective companies.

I had two specific instances where I was held at this facility as follows.

On one of these, I developed an eye problem. We were on the move, there was enemy tank action, and around the middle of the day I could not keep my eyes open. I never figured out if it was all the dust kicked up by the vehicles, excessive use of field glasses, or just glare - or a combination of all three. It was as if I had become snowblind. I had my driver take me back to Bn. There they kept me in a dark room for two or three days with cold compresses on my eyes. When recovered, I went back to the company.

The other was during the Bulge. It was around midnight and I had to go to a Regtl C.P. I had the chills and while I had on adequate clothing, I was burning up and freezing at the same time. After taking care of my purpose of being there, I checked in with their Medics. They said 'I had a fever of around 102/103 as I recall, that I had pneumonia or was on the verge of getting it' and wanted to evacuate me to their Div. Medics. I declined. As in the case above, I had my driver take me back to my own Bn. Hq. After a stay of about three days, I was declared fit and returned to the company.

In this paragraph, I don't recall names and/or specifics but it seems I do recall incidents where we lost men through the medical evacuation/ replacement system who then ended up in other organizations. As soon as they could find out where the 602nd was, they left those organizations and showed up at our locations. They always knew they would be welcomed back. I guess you might say they were AWOL from the units they left but I seem to recall our Bn. just picked them up (I don't recall how the paperwork was handled - maybe our CO. contacted their prior C.O.), we blended them back into their unit, and I don't recall any administrative problems."

"Even though belonging to a Bn., each of the five companies had its own 'company fund'. While stateside, I seem to recall money would go into these funds from Post Exchange profits, etc. etc. (actually I have forgotten how it built up). But anyway, one of the ways allowed to spend this money was to have a 'company party'. Usually these started around 1300 hours on a Saturday. It was always my aim that Co. A would have better parties than any other company. ie. 128 men - get 128 chickens, etc.

In any case I felt the money was to be spent on the men so the account was always about zero by the time the next receipt of funds came in.

Now jump ahead. WW11 is over. The 602nd is designated 'Army of Occupation'; our points are frozen and we are still in Europe. My mind's fuzzy on this but at some point the points were unfrozen. While the 602nd as a unit was to remain, the high point men were to be transferred out and blended into another unit that in time would be shipped back to the States. I now found myself C.O. of Co. A of the xyz Bn. and as such I inherited the 'company fund'. Much to my amazement, that unit had over \$2,000.00 cash and some Government Bonds in its fund when it was shipped to Europe and during the war nothing had been spent out of it.

Again, my position was that the 'company fund' should be spent on the men. We took over the village beer-hall, there were always snacks, we used to send a 2½ ton truck somewhere to buy beer, etc. In other words, the men were living it up.

Much to my chagrin, I found out the Government Bonds couldn't be cashed in and that I would have to sign them over to the U.S. Treasury as, if, and when we got back to the States.

By the time we left for the Port of Embarkation, I had drawn down that account to 15¢.

While being processed at Camp Kilmer, N.J., someone from the Finance Dept. had to audit the Company Fund so I could turn it over to them. Whoever it was, saw how that +\$2,000.00 had become 15¢. He had to do as much paper work for the 15¢ as if it were the larger amount. As we were signing the final papers he said 'At least you could have bought yourself a cigar or something. Then it would have been zero.' I told him 'sorry, I don't smoke'. It broke him up.

He also agreed with me. That tying up the men's company fund money in Government Bonds had been a stupid thing to do. Somewhere, some men who had something coming to them, didn't get the benefit of it."

"After V.E. Day, designated Army of Occupation, and going to be there we knew not how long, I seem to recall it was suggested we try to

bolster the local economy. So we bought locally produced vegetables, etc. My guess is that was what did it. I came down with a bad case of diarrhea. It began to cycle. Not too bad for a few days and then get worse, etc. The Medics suggested I check in with an Army Hospital that I recall was not too far away. I told them my tale of woe. Their comment 'a classic description of amebic dysentery. We're going to give you the cure'. With that I was given a quart jar of sulfa drug pills. The instructions were to take 7 after every meal (21/day) for at least 7 days or longer depending on how many pills were in the jar. (They lasted about 8½ days) With that I was to drink - I forget how many gallons of water per day. Or, at least, all that I could drink in a day. I have to agree with them. They provided the cure. But it wasn't easy. To begin with, the pills were rather large. By the end of the day, pumping that 21st pill down got to be quite a chore."

"The men of Co. A , 602nd Tank Destroyer Bn., just had to be the most wonderful people in the world. There are many more superlatives that I could use but I'll settle on wonderful. One of the attributes had to be, under the most adverse conditions, their sense of humor. One incident that I recall -

It was Nov.'44, we were attached to a unit that had their C.P. in a town. Our C.P. was out of town about 600 yards in a field. It was wet and muddy. We were to lay wire from our location to theirs so as to have communications. Our Commo. Sgt., along with his Ass't, started out in a jeep. It got stuck in the mud. They finished the job with a hand reel.

The M-32 tank retriever was sent to pull the jeep out of the mud. It too got stuck. It then took another M-32 and two m-18's to free the M-32. A 2½ ton truck was then used successfully to free the jeep.

The First Sgt. then went to work and a few nights later, when we had moved to a village a little farther East, asked to get as many men as possible from the Co. Hq. assembled in our C.P. He had prepared the darndest assortment of decorations/awards and company citations that related to all that it took to lay just 600 yards of wire.

We all sat there in this little dimly lit house and the First Sgt. really had all the men. to use a phrase, rolling in the aisles. At our reunions, this is still a topic of conversation."

I will continue to try to get more "T.D. vs Enemy Tanks" stories for you. If successful, I'll forward them on to you.

Kindest regards,


Bert Oliver

Information copy: J. Coulston