

Apr. 14, 1988

Re: "Combat actions - U.S.T.D.'s vs enemy tanks"
This is a follow up of my letters dated 11-17-87,
1-18-88 and 2-19-88.

Bert Oliver,

My 2/19/88 letter ended with a story concerning the 'sense of humor' the men maintained under adverse conditions. Since then I've thought of another incident.

"Every outfit has their 'characters'. We had our share and I'm reminded of one in particular. For openers his nickname was 'Rubberdick' which was a take off of his regular name. In Sept., '44., in France, we had part of our 3rd platoon cutoff by a German attack. He was missing for a day when lo and behold he marches 15 prisoners into our position - along with a man from our Rcn. Co. and a man from a Cavalry unit (both unarmed).

He could speak German and when they captured him, he talked them into surrendering to him. As I recall he did this with no ammunition in his M-1 rifle. Whether he did it through force or persuasion I don't recall but he did receive a citation for his actions.

But, back to the story. The Co. Hq. was making a night movement and we reached the location we were moving to. We pulled off the road into a field. After being there about an hour the area started to be shelled. It was a high velocity gun. Instead of the sound of artillery, mortar or rockets, you could hear the gun being fired, then there was a 'zing' and 'bam'.

I hollered 'march order, move 200/300 yards in from the road'. In scurrying around, I heard a round coming in and hit the deck. When I got up, I couldn't move for a few seconds as I was standing in the smoke of that round - it had landed that close. Two of our mechanics had set up a pup tent. The next morning when they went to retrieve it, they found that it had been perforated with shell fragments. Meanwhile, our character, who had taken off his combat boots to get some sleep, put them back on to make his move. Come daylight, someone noticed something odd about his appearance. In the dark and confusion, he had put his combat boots on the wrong feet. The left foot almost pointed east while the right foot almost pointed west. Needless to say there was a lot of kidding about 'which way did they go?', 'which way are you heading today?', etc. The men never let him forget the incident by coming up with barbed statements and questions."

"I've written a few examples of the M-18 sight system and now this story comes to mind.

I forget a lot of the details, who, exact range, etc., but we had a M-18 in a position overlooking a large valley. At a considerable distance, a couple of Germans came out in the open. They appeared to be looking at a map. Soon they were joined by a couple more. A little later, a few more. When the group got to about 8, the T. D. commander figured it was time for action. One round of H.E. was fired

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which hit right in the middle of that cluster of men. A bullseye. There was no movement from any of them when the smoke cleared. What makes that incident stand out was the great distance and the accuracy of the shot."

Orville Grissom, RR 2, Box 173, Wanette, OK 74878.
(Orville was a gunner on a M-18 T.D., 1st platoon.)

"On this particular occasion we were working with an infantry unit. I could see a German tank at a great distance. It was shooting at the infantry and giving them a hard time. I didn't think I could knock it out because of prior experience of firing A.P. direct on at the front of tanks at long ranges. However, I figured with a hit I could run him off. I fired. The first round was H.E. and it exploded on the front of the tank. Sure enough, he moved away. I could get a second shot into the suspension system and successfully damaged the tank when a bogey wheel came off and it rolled off its track.

The M-18 had a good gun. We didn't get to inspect the damaged tank but when we moved up to the infantry position, one of the infantrymen hugged and kissed our T.D. I can remember it very clearly. It was so cold his lips were all cracked and bloody."

"On another occasion I can recall how good our gun was. Near a town we were watching, there was a graveyard with large trees in it and a large stone wall around it. Through the field glasses, at a long range, I could see some activity. But from the ground it was hard to see what was going on. Near my T.D. there was a large tree. I climbed way up on the back side so I could see them but hopefully they couldn't see me. There was a large group and they were setting up tripods and mortars. It seemed they were pointing them in our direction. Back in the T.D. I fired some H.E. rounds into the trees above them to get tree bursts and then the A.P. through the wall. Next day, the civilians of the town, told us the Germans suffered many casualties. I figure I got them just a minute or two before they were going to try to get us."

"One day we were being attacked across a field where the snow was very deep. Machine gun rounds were coming in and zinging off the T.D. First I knocked out their vehicles. They kept coming at us across the field. My T.D. was alongside a haystack that was covered with snow. Every time I fired, the blast would cause snow to fly and get on the front of the sight. Each time I fired, I had to scurry out to clean it off with toilet paper and scurry back in to get off the next round. Some of them went into a small building. I fired H.E. into the base of it and blew it all to pieces. Some continued attacking. I lowered the barrel and fired H.E. directly at them. In a little while there were no more Germans. Like in other actions, every round I fired hit what I aimed at. That sight was A-1."

"I feel there are several reasons why I got safely through the war and came back home. I have high praise for several people. However, I feel one of the main reasons was our "crew". We were together for a long time and trained as a team. Our driver was the best, our loader was the best, etc. Prior to combat we took a pledge to all come back and we worked at that 24 hours a day, month after month, until the war ended. We all looked after each other and it payed off."

This is now my fourth letter in this series of letters. It includes the latest material I have received.

I have a hunch it's the last I'll get for a while. Therefore I think it will be the last until perhaps the fall of the year.

We are (the 602nd Tank Destroyer Bn. Ass'n) having our next reunion Sept. 19, 20, 21, at the Riviera Hotel, Las Vegas. At that time I'll see if I can get some more of the men to write to me about their personal wartime experiences (TD vs enemy tanks).

Kindest personal regards,

Bert Oliver

Bert Oliver
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cc; Jack Coulston, 602 Historian.