

Aug. 6, 1987

On April 10, 1987, I forwarded to you a twelve page letter which was in response to your request dated Oct. 10, 1986. In that letter you requested my "views and experiences as a front line combat officer (that) would be of unique value in documenting T. D. experiences."

In formulating such a response, I guess the question always is: "How much detail to put in?" "How much detail to leave out?"

As I think back on that 4-10-87 response, I realize that as a narration some subjects are covered by only a sentence or two. If one is to consider such a response in a more "historical" sense, it has occurred to me that certain subjects should be further documented or elaborated upon.

It is my hope that the following additions to my 4-10-87 letter serve that purpose.

#### Battle of the Bulge

In my original letter, I mentioned the role of Co. A's 1st plat. ldr., Robert Whitman. Enclosed is a copy of the citation for a Silver Star awarded to Lt. Whitman concerning the action that took place Dec. 22, 1944.

#### Company Commander Responsibilities

In this section of my original I had said "In view of the losses inflicted on the enemy, Co. A, had in turn, exceptionally low losses."

Last year I came up with a project for myself to recap this subject.

I went through our Company and Battalion Histories on a day to day basis. I developed a tally sheet broken down into 23 categories. In this way I tallied what was in one but not the other. Also, it avoided duplications so no item would be counted twice.

I'm sure there are omissions. At Co. Hq. it was difficult to keep track of plat. actions on an hour by hour - day to day basis. It was also difficult to always keep Bn. informed.

I attempted to keep the recap as accurate as possible. Example: If the record said "8 to 12 prisoners were taken", that's in the recap. If no number, ie, "some prisoners were taken" was shown, this was not included in the recap.

See enclosure.

In addition to the specific items listed, we know we inflicted

greater losses on the enemy as indicated by these quotes from our Company History.

(Action - in support of units we were attached to - but not listed in "losses" or "specific infantry support quotes")

Sept. 14, 1944: "-----, The day was spent firing into enemy positions. ----"

Sept. 18: " --- Over the radio we heard the C.O. commend Cpl. Otis for good shooting. ---"

Sept. 19: "-----, We moved by forced march back through Mazic and Dunville to Vitromont and became immediately engaged with some tanks which had infiltrated into the Foret de Vitromont during the enemy counter attack on Luneville."

Sept. 21: "Luneville was definitely secured and our unit went northeast about noon to take part in the great tank battle about Burres & Reichicourt. ----"

Nov. 5: "It seems two guns of the 2nd plat. fired into Besange la Petite two days ago and did some good."

Nov. 14: (while attached to the 101st F. A. Bn.) "-----, The first and third plats. fired 68 rounds into the town (St. Medard) in five minutes. ----"

Dec. 2: (while attached to the 26th Inf. Div, 104th Inf. Regt) "-----, Third plat. moved to a firing position south of Sarre Union and supported the 3rd Bn. with direct fire into Sarre Union. About 100 rounds were expended. Effects are as yet unknown."

Dec. 9: (while attached to the 26th Inf. Div., 328th Inf. Regt.) "-----, The first and third plats. were quite busy in the vic'y of Wetrting & Achen. Most of the firing is at pillboxes."

Dec. 10: "-----, The 1st & 3rd plat's. were engaged in a tank battle in the vic'y of Woolfling."

Feb. 24, 1945: "-----, Early today the 2nd plat. went into a spearhead near Heilbach and took Upperhausen by nightfall after first shooting up the town. The 1st plat. went into action near Heilbach and after shooting up 4 towns took Berkoth after dark. The 2nd plat. ---- and fired 40 rounds into the town."

Feb. 25: Sgt. Orsak directed artillery fire on various targets. Haynes directed artillery fire on a long Kraut column south of that town.

Apr. 6. "-----, This town (Wutha) was hotly contested and the 1st plat. poured in some fire. ----."

Apr. 12. "-----, The 1st plat. fired on Kahla, then proceeded to enter it. ----."

Apr. 13. " ----, 1st plat. formed O.P.'s to observe east bank of Salle River where enemy were known to be dug in. Henshen fired 10 rounds of 76mm at dugouts & personnel.. No. of killed is unknown. He fired H.E. into a house where occupants of a jeep he had knocked out hid. No sign of life there after that. ----."

#### Combat Experiences

In my original letter I stated the following:

"It soon seemed apparent that we were to be a separate battalion in Third Army, becoming attached and detached to different units as many times as circumstances dictated."

"Another result of this constant attached and detached use was the great amount of time spent "on-the-line" in a continual combat role."

To further document these events, I have gone thru our Bn. & Co. histories "listing all attachments and detachments in chronological order."

See 6 page enclosure covering this.

#### Other Secondary Missions

In my 4/10/87 original letter I also titled a section "Training Weaknesses". Perhaps it should have been titled "Understandable Training Weaknesses". Right up to the time we landed in France, we had no reason to believe we would not be used in other than a basic Tank Destroyer role as outlined in the basic T. D. Manual. Except for Artillery, we had no training to the contrary. However, European Tank Warfare of the Germans did not include the massed tank attacks that had been typical in Africa so it is understandable how our tactical role was changed and how we were utilized. Our use as Artillery, "attached to" or "in support of" Cavalry or Armored units posed no problems. To overwork a phrase - we performed those roles "like a duck takes to water". However, I feel our role with Infantry requires additional clarification.

Two things: 1. As I said, they thought of us as another tank (which we were not). 2. Our pre-combat training had not included any direct T.D./ Inf. joint exercises.

I've been told some Inf. C.O.'s thought the T.D.'s were not aggressive enough which probably reflected some disappointment in our performance.

Not necessarily so when you keep in mind the two items listed above. In my original letter I said some of our work with the Inf. was almost a total loss. Two items come to mind: 1. I may be wrong, but I can't recall an Inf. unit we were attached to that made any attempt to establish radio communication with us. 2. On one occasion that I recall, we had a plat. attached to an Inf. unit. I went out to the plat. position. Seeing the plat. all by itself I asked the Plat. Sgt. "Where's the Inf.?" his reply. "I do not know. They just got up and disappeared."

I also said some of our work with Inf. was extremely successful. As examples, here are some quotations from our company history. Feb. 25, 1945. "\_\_\_\_\_". In the evening 2 destroyers carrying doughboys went into Rottersdorf and blocked the road to Phillipweiler."

Mar. 18. "The 3rd(platoon) with Infantry aboard were the first Americans to enter Gellweiler."

Mar. 26. The platoons began to move out at about 2 A.M. and took up positions overlooking the Rhine. The 89th (Div.) began to cross at 2 A.M. and during the morning some "Ducks" and auxiliary Navy boats were sunk by German artillery fire. Our heavy artillery failed to stop this fire with their salvos which were coming from or directed from an old castle so Menard's destroyer threw in about 25 rounds of A.P. and a few H.E.. No further annoyance from this source.-----."

Mar. 28. "In the afternoon our 1st & 3rd platoons moved out again in the direction of Presburg with the 1st in lead of the Inf.--"

Mar. 29. "-----Overwatched the town of Giesenheim while the Inf. took it." "----- The Inf. was held up by 20mm guns so Otis & Barclay put their destroyers out in front. -----."

Apr. 5. "----- The Inf. was pinned down by M.G.fire. The 2nd plat. destroyers finally ended the opposition by knocking out 5 M.G.s.. ----- The 1st overwatched the Inf. attack and both McCarthy and Henshen's destroyers knocked out M.G. personnel and enemy strong point."

Apr. 7. "The doughboys were pinned down and the T.D.s moved ahead of them. Otis using his 76mm & 50 cal. drew fire from the flank which Barclay silenced with his guns. The Inf. were again pinned down and Atkins moved in front spraying the woods with his 50 cal. M.G. Then the team moved down into Farnrode firing their 50's. They destroyed 2 A.T. guns and forced 11 Krauts to surrender. All opposition quit and the Inf. took many prisoners.-----"

Apr. 16. "----- The 1st plat. supported Inf. across the Weida River. -----."

Apr. 17. "----- 1st plat. supported Inf. in assault on town and fired 10 rounds of 76mm into enemy O.P.'s in a tower.----- At 1500 hours the city of Reichenbach surrendered. Infantry was shuttled into town on our vehicles.

#### Training Weaknesses

In my original letter I said: "I wasn't tuned to the need of recording special events and then acquiring special appropriate awards for exceptional dedication and courage."

All things are relative. Perhaps I might have said I was not tuned to the level I should have been.

Co. A was not without citation and award recipients. As of V.E. Day we had 130 men on our roster. Here is a breakdown of those 130 men.

Croix de Guerre/Etoile de Bronze	1
Silver Star	2
Bronze Star with Cluster	1
Bronze Star	11
Soldiers Medal	2
Purple Heart with Cluster	1
Purple Heart	13

Our company history records incidents where 3 men were wounded by enemy action but there is no record of Purple Hearts being awarded. They are not listed above.

Our company history also lists 23 men who were lost to us during combat. Any awards granted them would not show up in the above recap.

Killed in Action	3
Died (Injuries)	1
Wounds, illness or injury	17
Prisoner of War	2
(Survived. Now living in MO. & Fla)	

While there were 16 men who received major recognition, there should have been many more. That is my regret.

#### Motivation

In this section , in part I said, "-----when I was looking for help

and protection, I know I sure did a lot of praying." This was an understatement and upon reflection sounds rather selfish. In fact my prayers always included the men in the company, the company as a whole, and last but not least, my family and my wife and son back home.

#### 602nd Rcn. Co.

This was not mentioned in my original letter but I think mentioning the 602nd Rcn. Co. is in order. They were not immune from the attached and detached process. When the Bn. was not operating as a complete unit and the gun companies were scattered in 3 different directions, usually the Rcn. platoons were attached to the gun companies. I have no chart or statistics on it, but I'd guess the 1st plat. of Rcn. Co. spent more time attached to Co. A than anything else. So much so, we got to think of them very much as an integral part of Co.A.

#### Conclusion

Recently I have read some material on the role of T.D.'s in WW2 and some of them have been on the negative side based on their perception that T.D.s did not function as T.D.'s.

On the positive side, I think it is amazing that the T.D.s not only fulfilled their roles as T.D.'s but did so much more. If Co."A" of the 602nd T. D. Bn. and the 602nd T.D. Bn as a whole are indicative of other T.D. units, the total effect of all the T.D. units on the German war effort must have been devastating.

kindest regards,



Bert Oliver

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Ex - C.O., Co. "A"  
602nd Tank Destroyer Bn.

- Encl. No.1 Whitman's Citation. V111 Corps, 26 Feb.1945.
- Encl. No.2 Enemy losses due to Co. "A" combat actions.  
Co."A" losses due to enemy action.
- Encl. No.3 Listing of Co."A" Attachments & Detachments.