

During World War Two I was a gunner on a M18 Tank Destroyer. My unit was 3rd Platoon, Co. C, 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion. My rank was Corporal, Serial #31116666. At the particular time of this event C Co. was attached to the 10th Armored Division.

On December 16th 1944 we were moved back from the Front Lines, to an area near the Moselle River Front, for a much needed rest and maintenance period. We had hardly dismounted and unloaded before orders were issued to move out. We knew that something big was up because this was the first rest period we had been assigned in many weeks.

We moved in convoy, steadily, all the rest of that day and most of the night, stopping only for a few hours sleep somewhere in Luxemburg. The next day the 17th of December, we travelled constantly and arrived in Bastogne, Belgium late at night. At daybreak on the 18th, we moved out of Bastogne still unaware of our mission. At this time we overtook members of the 101st Airborne Division traveling in the same direction and on foot. This made an unusual column, as our Tank Destroyers were in the road with lines of foot soldiers on either side. It was obvious that tracks and equipment were needed fast and in large numbers somewhere.

We traveled, in this way, with quite a bit of exchange conversation between outfits for only a few miles to the town of Noville, Belgium. This was a small town of probably on to two thousand population. Our Tank Destroyers and the Tanks of the 10th Armored took up gun positions in and around the town. We could see that the 101st was sending out patrols.

It was still early in the day when we took up our positions and there was some activity from the enemy, in the form of artillery and mortar fire. However, it was minor compared to what came later. I remember of locating one enemy artillery piece by the puffs of smoke discharged when they fired. This we penetrated in and destroyed. On the afternoon of the 18th, two enemy Tiger Tanks penetrated the outskirts of town. Our Destroyer surprised these by flanking them and destroyed both. I think that the Infantry captured part of the Tank crew.

On the night of the 18th the enemy artillery let loose with the longest and most intense barrage of artillery fire that any of us had ever witnessed. Many of our personnel were wounded with shrapnel, including our driver, 1st David Wilson of Graham, N. C. The wounded were taken back to an Aid Station which had been set up in a private dwelling. NOW BELIEVE IT WAS A CAFE

On the morning of the 19th, which turned out to be very foggy with practically no visibility, it was evident that the town was almost completely destroyed by the artillery barrage which had lasted all through the night. This now had let up and we could hear the exhaust of many engines not far away. We knew that we were due for a massive armor attack but could see nothing due to the fog.

This attack came the next morning, after an uneasy night of listening to enemy tanks move in. If it had not been for a temporary break in the fog, I believe the tanks would have gone right around us and on into Bastogne. However, the fog lifted, for a time, and when it did we sighted enemy Tanks everywhere. I was particularly concerned with our own Sector where we had a column of about 10 Tigers headed straight for us. We opened fire on them and knocked 5 of them out before 1 of them located us and made a direct hit on our Destroyer. This killed our Assistant Driver, who was driving at the time. It also wounded me, as well as the Section Chief and my Assistant Gunner. The Destroyer also burst into flames and I received burns about the face and hands.

See attachment  
on 13 Nov 85  
C.N.R.

Other Destroyers, of our Co. and units of the 10th Armored, were all engaged in battle at this same time and although I had made my way to the Aid Station it seemed that the enemy must have dropped back to reorganize, as there was a let-up in the attack during which orders were received to fall back to Bastogne.

By this time I was unable to walk, due to wounds in my legs.

The more seriously wounded were loaded into ambulances but, with help, I was loaded on a ~~truck~~ ~~truck~~. We retreated, in column, for a time without interference from the enemy. Then the column stopped moving and sounds of battle could be heard ahead. At this time the driver of our Half Track, under orders from his Sergeant, broke ranks and headed cross country at full speed. I think several other vehicles joined us. I know that at least part of the column was taken prisoners as many years later I located my Section Chief in a U. A. Hospital. He was among the prisoners and died of T. B. Contracted in Prison Camp.

However, many of us reached Bastogne where the wounded were taken to a Catholic Church. I can remember only a few incidents in the Church, as I was under the influence of morphine administered by the Medics, most of the time. The Nuns came in and shaved and washed the wounded several times. Also on Christmas Day these same Nuns sang Carols.

Enemy planes bombed the town almost constantly. Although they did not make a direct hit, on the Church, they did hit close enough to blow out the windows. Many of the wounded were cut by flying glass. It was very cold after this happened.

I remember the day that our own Air Force got through. We could hear the fighters attacking enemy Bombers and it was evident that a major Air Battle was going on. Presently all was quiet and shortly after that medicine and supplies were dropped by parachute. These supplies were badly needed but I think most welcome of all were the parachutes themselves which were used to cover the wounded. We were all very cold by this time.

During this period we were kept informed of our condition by an officer who appeared each day to give us a report on what was going on. The rank or Unit of this officer I do not recall, but through him we knew of the seriousness of the situation at Bastogne.

In this Church the enemy wounded were also given refuge and care. These were brought in constantly until there were nearly as many German wounded as American. The Germans were placed at the far end of the building by themselves but several times a fight had to be stopped when an American crawled to this section and tried to carry out the mission he had started earlier.

The incident that I remember most clearly is when it was announced that General Patton's Troops had cleared a corridor to the town. It was stated that every wounded man would be given a shot of morphine before being loaded into the ambulances. Some of us had been refusing to take these shots in order to realize more clearly what was going on.

We were loaded into ambulances and taken to a Field Hospital somewhere in France, I believe. During this journey I could hear fighting on both sides of the road and, in thinking it over afterward, it is evident that our troops were fighting hard to hold an escape route for the wounded.

This is a brief account of my experiences during the "Battle of the Bulge". It is quite a coincidence that the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion and the 101st Airborne Division trained at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, at the same time. These two outfits were far from friendly. However, when we met in the "Bulge", we fought together.

Colby N. Ricker

## Alfred Soldier Decorated For Heroic Feat

**Cpl. Colby N. Ricker Awarded Bronze Star Medal For Distinguishing Himself As Tank Destroyer Gunner**

Cpl. Colby N. Ricker, 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion, has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal by Major General William H. H. Morris, Jr., in Belgium.

The citation reads as follows: Cpl. Colby N. Ricker, Field Artillery, Company C, Tank Destroyer Battalion, United States Army. For heroic achievement in connection with military operations against an enemy of the United States in Belgium on December 20, 1944.

"Cpl. Ricker distinguished himself as a tank destroyer gunner during an engagement with the enemy in the town of Noville, Belgium. When the enemy massed their tanks for an assault against the town, Cpl. Ricker without regard for his personal safety, skillfully manned his weapon from the exposed gun position, effectively opposing the oncoming tanks.

"His courageous efforts materially contributed to the destruction of five of the enemy armored vehicles before the destroyer itself was hit, causing wounds to the intrepid gunner. The exemplary courage and loyal devotion to duty displayed by Cpl. Ricker were inspiring to his comrades in arms and are in keeping with the high traditions of the military forces of the United States."

The 10th Armored Division's defense off Noville, five miles north of Bastogne, gained valuable time for the preparations of defenses which saved the vital Belgium road center.

Cpl. Ricker is the husband of Mrs. Natalie Ricker who lives in Alfred.

## Bastogne—Its Ordeal and Ordeal of Relief

### A Bit of Heaven in Hell

By Robert Richards

United Press Correspondent

BASTOGNE, Dec. 31—How the American 80th Division made a 36-hour dash against time and, fighting under orders to hold out to the last, plugged a gap in the American lines in Luxemburg was told today.

Resting at St. Avold after fighting for the Saar, the division was due to return to the Third Army front but, when the German offensive began, the men were loaded into open trucks in the freezing night air after an order came through from Lt. Gen. George S. Patton to rush north and form a defensive line north of Luxemburg City.

One regiment loaded at Bitche and raced north, where it seemed the Germans might break through into Luxemburg.

The regiment covered 150 miles over devious routes, with a biting wind blinding them and tearing at their faces. But 15 hours after the order was received they were in position.

Next morning, the division was ordered to attack, but this order was countermanded after the men had marched six miles in the snow.

They marched back again. The orders were changed again, and they had to retrace their steps.

After 18 miles of footslogging, the men attacked at 6 AM on Dec. 22. In the following 48 hours the division covered 14 miles, battling in rocky ravines, without sleep, exposed day and night, and with only cold K-rations to eat.

At one point a U.S. regiment came upon an unsuspecting German infantry division. What happened then was "pure butchery," said a regiment officer.

"We just stood at the road junction and emptied our magazines into the mass of struggling men and horses," he said.

"In the panic and chaos, we think that two-thirds of the entire division were wiped out."

By John Wilhelm

Reuter Correspondent

WITH THE BASTOGNE GARRISON, Dec. 31—They had a Christmas tree in Bastogne, in a wounded-filled church where French nuns sang the hymns of the birth of the Prince of Peace while German bombers rained high explosives on the town.

That was part of the story of the bearded, tired troops who turned Bastogne into a stumbling block in the enemy's proposed march to Sedan. Hurriedly assembled and cut off completely for five days, never once did they waver in their determination to hold Bastogne against the strongest attacks by panzers, infantry and planes. To a German surrender demand they said "Nuts" and fought on until the plains around the town were lit with the flames of burning enemy armor.

On the night of Dec. 26—one day after the black Christmas Day for the wounded in the chapel—Lt. Gen. George S. Patton sent a tank column roaring up from the south to reach the garrison which was still stalling off the foe after ten days of lopsided fighting.

During the days of terrifying shelling more and more wounded had collected in Bastogne's gray stone church. When Christmas Day came the chapel was packed, litter touching litter. French nuns brought in a Christmas tree.

Corporal Colby Nathan Ricker, of Alfred, Me., one of the wounded, told me: "I cannot say too much for the medics, who did not have much surgical equipment. I think a glider was loaded with medical supplies and sent up to us over the heads of the Germans."

"On Christmas Eve they were still shelling us. There was not much to eat, but nobody was hungry. Then the Catholic sisters from the French church came in and helped to wipe the muck and blood off the soldiers, and the next day—Christmas Day—they brought us a tree and sang some hymns."

"I remember listening to them sing 'Little Town of Bethlehem' and then the German bombers screamed over just 500ft. ahead and one wounded man started crying, and the bombs fell, breaking the windows in our church. Christ! it was cold after that."

HEADQUARTERS 10TH ARMORED DIVISION  
APO 260 U. S. ARMY

GENERAL ORDERS )  
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E X T R A C T

AWARD OF BRONZE STAR MEDAL

By direction of the President and under the provisions of Army Regulations 600-45, dated 22 September 1943, as amended, and Circular Number 6, Headquarters Third United States Army, dated 26 April 1944, a Bronze Star Medal is awarded to:

Corporal COLBY M RICKER, 31116666, Field Artillery, Company C, \*\*Tank Destroyer Battalion, United States Army. For heroic achievement in connection with military operations against an enemy of the United States in BELGIUM on 20 December 1944. Corporal RICKER distinguished himself as a tank destroyer gunner during an engagement with the enemy in the town of NOVILLE, BELGIUM. When the enemy massed their tanks for an assault against the town, Corporal RICKER, without regard for his personal safety, skillfully manned his weapon from the exposed gun position, effectively opposing the oncoming tanks. His courageous efforts materially contributed to the destruction of five of the enemy armored vehicles before the destroyer itself was hit, causing wounds to the intrepid gunner. The exemplary courage and loyal devotion to duty displayed by Corporal RICKER were inspiring to his comrades in arms and are in keeping with the high traditions of the military forces of the United States. Entered the military service from Maine.

By command of the DIVISION COMMANDER:

DISTRIBUTION:

3 copies to individual concerned

*C. N. Rickon*