

By Ivan H. Peterman  
 (Philadelphia Inquirer War Correspondent)  
 At the Siegfried Line, Germany, Sept 25

Down in the Christmas tree land of Luxembourg I found the rough-hewn tank destroyer men busily whittling away at the Siegfried Line with their high velocity guns.

It is a heavy chore, dangerous and rugged, and occasionally they must retire to recondition men and machines, for beating pillboxes into dust and churning up Hitler's prepared positions is not child's play, as was evident today on this tour of their field operations.

The road to Berlin through this corner of three countries is so picturesque, however, that before describing the muzzle-to-muzzle duels with enemy defenses it might be well to give a glimpse of the fighting terrain.

The Belgium-Luxembourg area known as the Helmedy sector once was German and still is, but it was given to Belgium in 1919, and finally Hitler seized it while "roadadjusting" his frontiers in 1940 and reincorporated it into the Reich. From what I saw and heard today, it is predominately German in language, habit, and tariff, but what entranced me was the beauty of the landscape.

Here are magnificent, handplanted and natural forests of fir, so heavy it is impossible to walk into them without being able to touch trees at arms length anywhere, while towering balsams actually form an umbrella for the soldiers pitching their pup tents.

It looked like Maine on a rainy day or New Brunswick's fall fairyland--the lush green valleys dotted with white-washed stone houses blending into woodlots and fields interlaced with groves and hedges and enlivened by herds of Holsteins grazing peacefully a few miles from the world's great battleground.

It seemed impossible that war could have rolled so often across this area, yet the names of the towns through which I passed--Liege, Spa, Helmedy, Steinbruct, and Winterspelt--are known to every military map and even now are front area spots on every general's wall.

Coming home the sun came out to make the area still more beautiful, and farmers picking apples, pigtailed freuleins with market baskets, knickered lurchers on bicycles, kids yelling for "chewing gum" and herdsmen with sheep and dogs tending their cattle formed a picture.

There are some discouraging spots, such as unthreshed grain left in the fields for lack of horses, gasoline or tractors, thanks to the Germans, and in some areas there aren't even any farmers, having been evacuated by the Nazis. I saw a peasant woman working in the field, not no men were visible.

The flooded meadow was marked by a bombed railway bridge, with the rails left hanging like a spider web over the water. At one place a small boy was doing the blowing, indicative of the war's inroads on manpower.

But in the villages there was more life and no damage, for the most part, and I will always remember the sparkle of the geranium boxes against the windows of the white-walled cottages.

Our guide, Captain Clarence Hockethorn, of Las Vegas, Nev., took us and, entering the fragrant forest, we found Captain W. W. Bodine, Jr., of County Line Road, Villanova, coordinator for the division. There also was Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Cole, a regular Army man, born in Missouri, who knows what M-10's have accomplished since their baptism at El Guetter.

For the M-10 is a tank destroyer. The war emblem is a tiger head crushing a tank within its jaws and the crews strongly resent confusion of their vehicles with tanks. Their hard-hitting three-inch naval gun was Uncle Sam's answer to the dreaded 88mm cannon, which in the first three years of the war turned the tide in favor of Germany.

Our three-inch gun is good for several thousand yards and in this operation the leads stand off more than a mile and knock the day-light out of the pillboxes.

"Sometimes the boys sneak in very close and shoot down the enemy's throats," Colonel Cole said. "One bunch got within a few yards of a pillbox, yelled 'surrender' and then put a shell into the porthole. There was no need for a second shot; everyone was killed."

M-10's carry a crew of five and are built upon a Sherman tank chassis with open ports and gun pits similar to those on naval vessels. They aren't as good as tanks against machine guns, but won't bite anything at long range, and they sure play hell with the Nazi Mark tanks.

This outfit came to France shortly after D-Day, and if you ask them they'll say that the hedgerows were worse than what they're fighting in now.

"Yes, this Maginot Line isn't so tough," said Corporal Joe Martin, of Larksville, Pa., whose rugged physique goes well inside this vehicle.

"You mean the Siegfried Line," Sergeant Ralph Raborg, of Richmond, Va., corrected, but Corporal Martin didn't notice the difference. Sergeant Raborg's TD "Pulverizer" helped rescue Corporal Martin and his mates from a sticky situation.

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recently and all the crews were very clumsy around their cheery fire.

Captain Charles M. Grimshaw of Shawnee, Okla., commands a company and travels with his men in a six-wheeler armored car, setting up a command post inside the first captured pillbox or other available space. He keeps contact via short wave radio and can tell how his boys are faring against the Siegfried stuff.

These pillboxes made of concrete and steel reinforcement, contain from seven to nineteen men but oftener than not the gun the man is sitting beside the structure and fires as from an ambush. Then the ID's let go and the Germans take cover inside the fort, but it yields to the armor piercing shells and high explosives.

Towed guns and tanks dug in by the Germans are the main obstacles, but the destroyer crews also have airbursts and machine gun fire from the side, for they, unlike regular tankers, can't button up and ride it through.

Sometimes there's no telling how the hits go, but Sergeant Luther Pruitt, of Tulsa, Okla., said his bunch--Corporal Clarence Baker, of Scranton, Pa., Sgt Taylor, of Phoenix Ariz., the driver; Joe Honig, of Baltimore, assistant driver, and Roy Kozler, of Buffalo, assistant loader--had a whack of 40 pillboxes and emplacements. They knocked out the last dozen.

They fire by direct sight and without need of mathematics and claim that at 1000 yards they are as accurate as a garand rifle. Colonel Cole thinks his outfit liquidated at least 50 pillboxes in the vicinity of Grosskampfenberg and Harspelt.

"I had a close escape, but it cost another poor guy his life," Sergeant Pruitt said, as we chatted on the top of his vehicle. "This lad asked to go with us on a mission and kept teasing for a chance to load the gun. But when I let him take a turn an enemy mortar hit a nearby tank and a fragment blew off the top of his head. I guess it was his turn to go and not mine."

He gave signal and presently the steel-tracked monster was lunging through the quiet fir forest toward repairs and a well earned rest for its crew...

#### TANK DESTROYERS SMASH 39-PILLBOXES

(From a New York Newspaper--By the United Press)

WITH AMERICAN TANK DESTROYERS ASSAULTING SIEGFRIED LINE, Sept 25--Twelve M-10 Tank Destroyers commanded by a short, soft-spoken Southerner smash 39 pillboxes in 24 hours, it was disclosed today.

Capt. Edwin H. Stewart of Jacksonville, Fla., led the company which put this considerable dent in the Siegfried Line in advance from northern Luxembourg.

Lt. Col. Glenn Cole, whose wife lives at Webster Grove, Mo., near St. Louis, reported that units of his command smashed more than 60 pillboxes in support of the infantry drive into the west wall just south of the point where the German, Belgian, and Luxembourg frontiers meet.

The M-10 tank destroyer, which is a three-inch naval rifle mounted on a Sherman tank chassis, proved particularly effective against the Siegfried pillboxes. The destroyers fire from distances anywhere from 2500 to 25 yards.

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