

May 2, 1985

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Please excuse the lateness of this reply to your letter of 01/28/85. I was reminded of my laxity by the arrival of the current T/D Newsletter #12 in today's post. Was duly impressed to learn that the old 635th T/D Bn had been honored with the French Croix de Guerre (Normandy Invasion - Omaha Beach assault - 06/06/44) and the Belgian Fourragere (Ardennes Offensive - 12/23 to 12/28/44). Award of the latter was no doubt influenced somewhat by the previously mentioned Xmas morning firefight in Humain, Belgium between the third platoon, "A" Company, and point elements of 2nd Panzer Division.

In answer to your question - yes, I was one of the group that participated in the fight that cold Xmas morning. A natural question follows ... how could two isolated and unsupported 76.2 mm towed guns adversely affect the progress of the rampaging 2nd Pz? The two-part answer is luck in timing and the correct decisions in the field by our platoon leader, Lt. John B. Thompson.

After knocking out the fuel-less Mark V Panther tank on the afternoon of Dec 24 two guns were deployed on the Eastern outskirts of the Belgian town of Humain in front of a group of buildings on the reverse slope of a small rise in the path of the advancing German column. Clearing skies had earlier brought out our fighter bombers forcing the Germans to move under cover of night. Our guards signaled the alarm when they heard the approaching Germans. We hurried to take up firing positions in the snow in full darkness and listened to the Germans starting and stopping engines and the creaking of tracks as the Mark V Panthers covered each other by "leapfrogging" up the opposite side of the rise.

The German tanks had reached the crest of the rise just as the first signs of false dawn appeared in the eastern sky. At the time we opened fire, the German tanks were faintly outlined against the lightening skies and we were sheltered in darkness, so we had every tactical advantage except superior firepower. But the most was made of what we did have. The buildings immediately to our rear were soon set ablaze by the German tank fire searching for our two guns which had been set up in the open on a lateral dirt road. Light from the fires was augmented by German flares and soon made our location untenable but by then we had scored heavily and we were able to withdraw with our wounded in three half tracks. Yes I was there but it always seemed to me that it was only as an awed spectator. In awe

of those heroes among us without whose actions the outcome would have been, for us, tragically different.

On the lighter side and toward the end of WWII when the Wehrmacht was in total disarray, as jeep driver for the Company Commander we answered a call from one of the platoons that had reached stalemate with a German m.g. emplacement. Hearing no small arms fire I unwittingly drove out from behind a building along which our people were crouching and on out into an open area which turned out to be directly in front of the bunker. Captain Williams leaped out, like fast, from behind the .30 cal. m.g. mounted on the engine cowl of the jeep and stood there in the field frantically waving his arms at the Germans we could see behind the m.g.42 in the bunker. Lady Luck was with us ... the Germans chose that particular time to surrender and they came out willingly. It was then that I realized how close the good captain and I had come to be-coming chopped liver. A squad sent out to flank the bunker came up after the excitement was over. Nobody ever questioned me about this stupid driving incident so the story went around the Company making the two of us look as if neither the captain nor I had any fear of German machine guns. Ha!

After the war was over the 635th took over guard duty at the Caserne Prisoner of War Encampment at Neu Ulm, Germany where thousands upon thousands of POWs and Displaced persons were processed for return to their homes. It was here too that numerous Wehrmacht general officers, SS and Nazi civilian leaders were screened out for special handling. After victory over Japan was achieved I was transferred to another outfit for transportation back to the States and unfortunately lost touch with the 635th T/D Bn. I will always be grateful to the Tank Destroyer Association for, after many years, through them contact was regained and last year a group of 44 of us 635ers reinvaded Normandy and more or less retraced our WWII route through Western Europe with side trips to Switzerland. Monsieur Christian CARDON who is the mayor of Trauville-sur-Mer, a resort town on the Normandy coast, held a "vin d'honneur organise" for the group of us in honor of our organization again passing through the Normandy area. My wife and I were delighted with this little courtesy but then I'm a sucker for that kind of stuff anyway.

Well you said in your letter that you'd be interested in my comments and now you've seen the tip of the iceberg.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harold Gandy". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed text "Best regards,".