

SUBJECT: TANK DESTROYER ASSOCIATION Date Sept 9 / 84

TO: _____

FROM: 'Bazooka Red' / a name, some may remember?

Hi Lonnie! Received Newsletter No. 11 yesterday and decided to spare a few hours for the purpose of typing a wee bit about the 636th TD Battalion's one and only Ranger Platoon. Of course we were not Rangers in the Darby's Rangers format, make-up and reputation but we did leave our mark on the battle maps and overlays of that day, although 36th Div Hq thought we were all "Guard House Bait" and stated this fact in so many printed words to Colonel VAN PYLAND, the 636th's CO during the initial commitment of the 636th TDs at Paestum during the Salerno landings forty years past. The Tank Destroyers were the best, the most effective close support self-propelled, armored vehicles ever to dog an infantryman's weary footsteps during the long cold, wet miserable months of fighting in Italy. Few Commanders, specifically the combat officers had the slightest notion how to employ these weird appearing tanks which were not tanks but they soon found out that old Van Pyland's words, "I want you to stick bayonets on them guns and ram them up the Krauts a--es!" were not taken idly by the line infantry officers at battalion level who found they suddenly had acquired their own 'private' armored Force. I had written to you about the transformation of the TD concept of a self sustaining integrated hard hitting unit designed for rapid deployment in desert warfare. So the 'idea fellows' in the Pentagon came up with a new concept within weeks after the allied (American) debacle at Kasserine Pass; trim the extras away from the Battalions and

assign a TD company of twelve 3" gun, M-10 motor carriage weapons to each of the line infantry Regiments, the 141st, 142d, and 143d. This gave to the Regimental commander a self-propelled artillery/anti-tank capability equivalent to a battalion of regular T/O artillery; supplementing both an offensive and defensive capability. No TD Bn operated along the lines of a printed and published modus operandi. Regimental commanders all had their own individual ideas as how to use these self propelled rapid fire guns which mounted their own anti-aircraft defense plus (in the 36th Div, 636th TD Bn) at least two Browning caliber 30 MGs, plus in our case, and more often than not, a 60mm Mortar affixed to the rear deck, plus any 'scrounged' weaponry fancied by individual crews. The hybrid 'Ranger Platoon' carved its bloody initials everywhere it turned up to accomplish the many 'odd ball' assignments given by all and sundry commanders from Battalion, Regimental, Divisional and Army level. I commanded the Ranger Platoon from the day it was born in Van Pyland's beetle browed skull to the day it died a rather painful death during the initial attempts to cross the Rapido river ~~during~~^{after} the battle of and for Cassino. During the short few months of its existence the thirty odd men who made up this multi-lingual Platoon of misfits garnered a total of 18 Silver Stars (some with clusters), 31 Purple Hearts of which three were my share, I recommended ^a CMH which was nixed by the man to whom it was to have been conferred after having been approved all the way to the top, 4 Citations from Division and Army and 1 French Croix de Guerre with Gold star. We started out as thirty odd men and finished with seven. Finis le Guerre! I couldn't begin to detail the individual exploits of these TDers but I'll tell you a story one the first heavy duty action, one which was not given due credit when such actions were written up in the 36th Division history. You will not dig up a history of the 636th TD Bn., because none was ever written. At war's end the TDs were dissolved and the men who manned the Tank Destroyers from the cheese-box M-3 Half Track through the M-10 motor carriage to the M-36 so-called Tiger tank killer, were returned to the Infantry Regiments from where they originated. The 636th TD Bn., was a unique fighting organization with an enviable reputation; beginning and ending in a blaze of glory which unfortunately has never been documented.