

Biography /

"of"

COMPANY "C" (Ceeco)

603RD TANK DESTROYER BN.,

U. S. ARMY.

ENGLAND.

FRANCE.

GERMANY.

" EASTWARD. "

with

COMPANY "C" - 603rd TANK DESTROYER BATTALION.

Activated December 15th, 1941.

Fort Lewis, Washington.
Fort Ord, California.
Camp Pickett, Virginia.
Camp Hood, Texas.
Camp Shelby, Mississippi.
Camp Maxey, Texas.
Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

H.M.S. Queen Mary.
Glasgow, Scotland.
Cannock, England.
Nancy, France.
Bastogne, Belgium.
Wilwerwiltz, Luxembourg.
Zeitz, Germany.

.....FOREWORD.....

Paens of praise have been written for Army, Corps and Division commanders. Congratulations are issued en masse to - Colonels, Majors, and Captains for their units fine showing ! But, what about the man behind the gun, the individual soldier? The man who died in Brittany, who froze his feet at Bastogne, or battered his way through the Siegfried line - not once, but twice ! The man who for days and nights went without sleep, guarded, drove, maintained his Tank Destroyer month after month through strenuous combat and disagreeable weather.

From sunny Old England to the black heart of Nazi Germany the trials and tribulations of this company are recounted herewith. The inspired and heroic actions of Company C will live forever in the memories of those who fought side by side.

This story is dedicated to those who gave little, to those who gave much and to those who gave all for their country in the expensive fight for freedom and an everlasting peace.

We, the members of C Company dedicate this book to the men, who more than life itself, loved their country.

Written by Sgt. Lawrence Miller
Printed by R. Jubelt, Zeitz Germany.

THE HONORED DEAD

Lt. Col. John G. Minniece, Jr.
James B. Cox.
Willard O. Kreidler.
Clark Stops.
Paul T. Wise.

John Chinn.

Samuel Aguirre.
John E. Jonson.
Zygmunt Kukulka.
Clyde Weis.
Reginald V. Woods.

Our story begins on a lovely Sunday morning in April of 1944 which incidentally happened to be Easter Sunday. That day - of the year when all people from border to border and coast to coast deck themselves out in all their finery to flaunt their natural American charm. But there is a pall in the air for nowhere on the continental shores of the United States is there a member of Company C, 603rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, Fifth Avenue, New York is alive with upper, middle and lower class gentry. A few blocks over on the waterfront HMS Queen Mary rides majestically at anchor. We only need to board this great ocean liner and descend the stairs until you can go no lower, then turning into the first door and gazing beyond the thousands of potatoes piled on the floor you will find the members of Ceeco laughingly engaged in peeling enough - potatoes for ten thousand men. Oblivious to the dismal surroundings they are planning their future, for who knows what is in store for them? For those not engaged in the menial task of "KP" there was an opportunity to say "Au 'voir" to the Lady of Bedloe's Island the next morning. The Queen Mary had put to sea with a hold full of America's finest.

Activated at Fort Lewis, Washington; trained at Fort Ord, California; Camp Pickett, Virginia; Camp Hood, Texas; Maneuvers, a rest at Camp Shelby, Mississippi; staged at Camp Maxey, Texas; fitted at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, Ceeco of the 603rd was well prepared for what was coming, and it was soon coming.

With the incessant roll of the Atlantic, the third day - found the men grumbling about being soldiers not sailors. Seasickness took a high toll of the men, by now expert KP's and joyously did they greet the green hinterlands of Scotland. A long walk, with duffle bags slung, brought them to the train that was to carry them to their new home for an indeterminate stay.

Cannock, England.

Cannock, England was the introduction to the Old World. Steeped in centuries of English custom and tradition, containing pubs instead of bars and using Sterling instead of the dollar, - Ceeco soon adapted itself to tea and bitters.

Home was the "Old Drill Hall" previously tenanted by King Arthur and his Knights, for it hadn't been cleaned since the good King departed. S/Sgt Schaefer, Sgt's Newman and Miller, T/4's Meyers and Eshelman, T/5's Hirt, Miner and Audette were - quartered on the second floor adjacent to the NCO's room. As is usual the second floor was always dirtier than the first. Customarily, Ceeco had settled down to living a normal existence when one bright and sunny (a very rare occasion in England) day they left their new home. With proper instructions about military security they wended their way through the picturesque country - side and three hours later were once again ensconced in a new home.

Years ago or perhaps centuries ago someone met with disfavor of the ruling potentate and as punishment the miscreant was ceded certain lands as his future domain. In May of 1944 Ceeco arrived to live on this land, known as Guiting Grange. In the center of this estate stood a castle with its normal complement of barns and outbuildings. Living in a castle is very undemocratic so Ceeco chose to abide in a series of Nissen huts where they could enjoy nature in the raw. A Nissen hut, in case you haven't been fortunate enough to own one, is a misshapen sardine can serving one important purpose. To make the occupants as uncomfortable as possible.

It was here at Guiting that Ceeco prepared for the forthcoming battle, daily pursuing their duties and nightly riding to Cheltenham or Windcombe for the diversion and entertainment coming to men who's future is as unstable as the Reichsmark.

"D" Day finds them working longer and harder for there are oil leaks to be mended, modifications to be added and guns to be tested. The tempo increases, the work is harder, the days are - longer, running around at night becomes passe.

The invasion of the continent has brought the war next door. One needs but to step over the line and the stakes are higher..... Very high...Life or Death !

Indoctrination once again, a review of censorship regulations, marking shipping numbers, destroying identification marks, all of which had been done so often was once again culminated. It was - then and only then that the S.S. Pearl Harbor received the personnel and equipment for the voyage over the English channel. Once again on a Sunday, but this time in July, was a memorable trip to begin. Memorable because of the abundance of "C" rations and the lack of anything else to eat. Memorable because the one day crossing took eight, from dock to dock. The graveyard of scuttled ships at the end of the line, mute testimony to brothers in arms that had preceded Ceeco.

After 27 years the sons of the fathers were back on French soil.

*** ST. GEORGE, Normandy, France. ***

As the turning wheels of Ceeco rolled through France the war was more apparent. Death's heads that warned of mines, shell craters and pill boxes, barbed wire mile after mile, the ex-city of Valognes, not a building upright, not a wall in one piece. The ravages of war had its sobering effect. The tension was growing !

The 29th of July, the day the company was committed to action. The bubble had burst, fighting Ceeco was on its way. Some to glory, some to death, but no matter what the fortunes held in store, the die was cast. They ventured forth, inexperienced and afraid, but determined, nevertheless.

The entry into Lessay was preceded by the pungent odor of decay. Dead horses, cows and Germans deteriorating in the - summer sun were evidence of Allied might.

Lessay, LaHaye du Puits, Coutances, ghost cities, deserted and foul smelling destroyed by the order of battle. The 30th of July, action at last, Brehal defended by mortars, artillery and frightened servitors of the German army. They were coming down the road, surrendering, but they weren't the blue-eyed, blond Aryans -

that Hitler had boasted of. Round, cherubic, slant eyed mongols, bastards of history, impressed into servitude by the conquering Hun. Hit and run fighters but deadly behind the gun, attested to by the first casualty of Ceeco, Pvt. William J. Large, wounded in action.

Down the length of the Normandy peninsula, under the watchful eyes of the Luftwaffe, into Avaranches rolled Ceeco, now under the guiding hand of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third United States Army.

***** Brest, Brittany *****

In Brittany the tempo increases, 30, 40, 50 miles a day, speed is essential, resistance is bypassed. Travelling fast the war is left behind. In place of death and destruction are the gay and laughing Bretons bearing their gifts of eggs, cider and flowers. Kisses for those lucky enough to halt, cheering for the rest. Tribute for men of daring, American Liberators, wined, dined and feted but lurking in the background was the ever persistent Hun.

The action for Ceeco was light, the bulk of the battle - being carried by Reconnaissance elements. Sporadic artillery, an occasional anti-tank gun, the first company vehicle burning by the roadside, its occupants unhurt. So it went, throughout Brittany, laughing, fighting to the front door of Brest.

The shadow of Death crosses Ceeco's trail. Genial, well-liked Cpl Paul T. Wise killed by an enemy machine gunner while protecting the rear of a withdrawing column.

The Brittany campaign was over, it would take time to get back in the war. The Third Army was on its way to the Moselle, but the end was not yet in sight.... they were waiting for Ceeco... Don't worry brother, they're coming !!!

***** NANCY, FRANCE. *****

Phase two begins a few miles above the port of L'Orient. In an open meadow the men of Ceeco are preparing to move again. After a two week period of rest, diversion and maintenance which washed away the signs of dirt and fatigue acquired on the way to Brest, they were off.

From L'Orient through Orleans, Angers, Troyes, Redon over the Moselle and into an assembly area. Back in the war again at Luneville getting acquainted with artillery, motars and the - tenacious enemy.

The next ten days were to take their toll of the enlisted personnel of Ceeco. For the enemy had consolidated his positions and had prepared to fight at the gateway to the Saar.

Armacourt where Pfc Sam Aguirre captured 41 prisoners with a carbine in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other. But unfortunately he didn't dispose of all the Germans for the next day an artillery shell came into his foxhole and snuffed out his life. Lanfroicourt where the enemy reached out for T/5 Clarence Hirt, Pfc Herman Hooks and Sgt Jake Weber.

Jeandelincourt on a foggy October morning a great tactical

victory, but an irreplaceable personal loss. Pvt Willard O. Kreittler killed by artillery. Pfc Edward Christopher, Sgt Ray Clark, Pvt Raymond Layden and Sgt Arlie McCracken wounded in action.

Ceeco had met the fighting Nazi and he had lived up to his reputation. An efficient killer, well schooled in the art of war, but he had not escaped unscathed, for strewn about the battleground were numerous dead and wounded awaiting evacuation. Nervous tension in Ceeco was displaced by efficiency, anger - and courage.

But for the present pursuit was impossible and once again the men were able to wash and shave. A few weeks of liberty in Nancy were the rewards for those who had fought. Indirect firing to harass and annoy those of the enemy who continued to fight.

Replacements, passes, reveille, close order drill and retreat parades to pass the idle hours. Futile in the eyes of all, but necessary to remind the men of the long and arduous struggle ahead.

***** SAAR BASIN, FRANCE. *****

The study of logistics is for experts but to the fighting man it means there is enough food, gasoline and ammunition on hand so that he may indulge in the pursuit of his accepted task. The air was growing cool, the heavens dispensing rain, the fields of France were turning to mud. The army, keeping pace with - nature, issued wool sweaters and overcoats, heavy socks and raincoats for the elements were no barrier to a war against despotism.

On November 8th Ceeco moved out with her parent 6th Armored Division to clear the Saar Basin. Crossing the Seille River - over the 80th Division's bridgehead on November 10th Ceeco was facing the five toughest days of combat in its short history. Capturing Vigny and Buchy placed the men on the banks of the Nied Francais river, so close to the enemy they were able to observe the bridge at Ancerville being blown. Fording the swollen river was impossible, a bridge crossing was necessary, one had to be found, that was the order of the day. At Sanry lay a vital span, intact, but covered by two feet of water. Ceeco knifed - across the river through Bazoncourt, Berlize and Vittoncourt - subjected to fire by every German weapon.

Once again the casualty list expanded, Sgt Clyde Weis killed when an anti-tank gun hit his TD, Sgt Harold Proudfoot while arranging an outpost for his TD was wounded in the chest by a machine pistol. Cpl Hilary Obholz, Pvt's Clayton Langland, and Ernest Kenyon, Cpl Stash Tytanic were all victims of German accuracy and precision. Days were growing shorter, nights longer, cold and dampness permeating the air, no rations, no mail, consistent enemy fire. Morale:- Low !!

November 16, 17, 18, 19th continually moving, fighting through Gros-Tenquin, Hellimer, Leyviller and St. Jean-Rohrbach. More - casualties, illnesses, evacuation to the rear, Captain John Savini seriously wounded by mortar fire, Cpl Ernest Hekkala, Pfc Walter Malone out of action by the now ever present artillery.

Whenever human nature is subjected to strife and turmoil there are those who rise above the masses to display an abnormal - amount of pre perseverance and gallantry. War distinguishes between those who have and those who have not.

At Puttelange, Cpl Clifford Jack stopped to aid two - stricken comrades, Sgt Postoak Baptiste and Pvt Clark Stops were removed from a burning TD by a man half their size. The fact that Pvt Stops subsequently died does not detract from the heroic effort. Medals are given for acts of courage but they tell not the story of what is accomplished by blood and guts.

In the same action Ceeco suffered the death of Pvt - Reginald Woods, piano playing, ever smiling Woods who brought cheer to all who listened. Irony is war; Promoted to Heaven and Cpl on the same day.

The enemy is driven closer to home, his fighting is more determined. Has not Hitler told him that a foreign army would not set foot on German soil?

But time and tide are strong and whenever the human body is worn down it must rest. So Ceeco is in for another interlude of peace and quiet, of letter writing and picture shows. At Altrippe, - France, tired men are restoring energy -- for the worst is yet to come !

***** HAPPY NEW YEAR *****

December at home brings thoughts of Christmas Holiday, - but to Ceeco it meant another milestone on the sands of time. It was consistently growing colder, snow was in the air, a foreboding of Winter war. Prestone in mechanical motors, hot coffee in the human motor, the fight against nature begins in earnest.

A road block at Cocheren, indoor billets, not much to do but stay out from under the artillery.

Christmas eve, events had taken a turn for the worse, 150 miles to the north, the defeated German had risen from the ground, - running rampant through the Ardennes, taking a high toll of the thinly held American lines.

Christmas day at Metz without the proverbial Turkey - dinner, the order to move, on the road again through France, Luxembourg and Belgium. A short halt at Stegen then on to Leglise, 40 miles - south of Bastogne.

New Years Eve without the cheers, laughter and singing. Auld Lang Syne imbedded in hearts covered with uncertainty, thoughts of home, of what lay behind and what lay ahead.

Snow was falling, ice covering the ground, vehicles and men moving up to check the German drive. Along the slippery highway Ceeco was treading its way, carefully.

New Years Eve on the Road to Bastogne.

Happy New Year !!!

----- BASTOGNE -----

Snow, ice, artillery, motars, tanks and cold creeping into the bones. Mix them all together and take a sip of the cocktail that Ceeco drank for the next 23 days.

January 1st; Sgt John Jonson killed in action, T/5 John Chinn killed in action. Cpl Frank Schaff, Pfc Ed Loftesness, T/5 Gervas Caster, Pfc Daniel Farina, Pvt Carl Dadman, wounded in action

January 2nd, Two miles gained.

January 3rd, Two miles lost.

January 4th, 5th, 6th, snow and ice, Bizory, Margaret and - Oubourcy, feet freezing, guns freezing, spirits freezing !

January 7th, 8th, 9th, Oubourcy, Margaret and Bizory, lines extended, three days lost. Tanks, guns and infantry standing toe to toe fighting for every inch of ground. Pvt Lawrence Sicking, - T/4 Cecil Thrall, Pfc Clarence Reinhardt, Pvt James Holland, wounded in action. Lucky or unlucky, getting back to a nice warm hospital bed while others fought on watching hands and feet turn purple with cold. Nights spent in the destroyers waiting for the enemy, fighting off the cold, fear, uncertainty, discomfort, hoping that tomorrow would bring relief or mail or chow or anything to detract from the misery of despair.

January 10th, 11th, 12th, fighting to retake the ground that was now as familiar as your own front porch.

January 13th, 14th, 15th, the end of the ninth day of the push. Net gain: four miles of bitterly contested wasteland, but the ball was rolling, picking up speed.

January 16th, 17, 18th, Michamps, Bourey, Hoffelt, the mighty German army in the Battle of the Bulge was defeated, withdrawing all along the line, but still claiming victims.

Sgt Royce Hall wounded in Luxembourg in pursuit of the enemy. Bastogne was left behind but its memory would be strongly imprinted in the minds of those who fought there for years to come.

Bastogne ---- "Freezing Hell ! "

***** GERMANY, THE LAST ROUND. *****

It took Ceeco 18 days to recuperate mentally and physically from the after effects of Bastogne. In picturesque, scenic - Luxembourg those who were looking forward to a post war vocation with the Dept of Sanitation were given an indoctrination course.

As all good things come to an end, the order to move was accepted as a matter of course. Crossing the Our River enmeshed the company in a network of pillboxes that compose the Siegfried Line.

A few days combat, a hurried withdrawal, making preparations for a secret move. Down through Luxembourg, back into France to - join Lt General Patch's 7th Army for the final offensive.

March 18th finds them fighting through Kaiserlautern on German soil. Across the Palatinate leading the 7th Army marched the members of Ceeco.

Thousands of allied prisoners of war being liberated - daily. Light skirmishing here and there, but West of the Rhine the German soldier proved to be of poor fighting heart, the change in opposition was apparent to all present there.

White flags flew from every home, frightened, suspicious people neither greeting nor condemning their conquerors, but - questioning the aloof American Army.

Advancing 83 miles in 36 hours through light fighting placed Ceeco on the banks of the Rhine.

A short three days later the much publicized last barrier was surmounted. Over a pontoon bridge the blue, smoke-covered Rhine was crossed plunging Ceeco deeper into Germany.

For the men of the company there was sadness, Lt Kent C.-Rogers, deeply respected and revered was seriously wounded by an enemy rifleman. Holder of the Bronze Star and two previous Purple Heart awards, Lt Rogers led his men in the full sense of the word. Eating, sleeping, fighting for them, his absence was a hard blow.

Frankfurt-Am-Main was an introduction to the deadly accuracy of the German dual-purpose Anti-Aircraft guns that were to prove so costly later on. Up until this time Ceeco had not encountered the world reknown Hitler Jugend, but at Homburg they claimed the life of Pvt Zygmunt Kukulka. The Hitler youth, propagandized as German boy scouts, averaged 16 years of age, thoroughly saturated with Nazi poison. Vicious little juvenile delinquents that killed men when they fought and cried when they were captured.

The younger generation of Germany brought up on fear, hate and suspicion...a credit to Adolph Hitler.

But not so for the older folks, concentration camps and crematories were unknown to them. Something perpetrated without their say-so, bestial brutality accomplished by the Nazis whom they scorn. Beautiful, scenic Germany and its people are not responsible for the last five years.

Ask any of them?

Through Eschwege, Schlotheim, Pegau-Eastward bound. Rumors about the Russians magnifying with every hour... they are 50 miles away, 40, 20...the war is almost over, spirits are soaring, the end is in view.

But at Groitzsch the German is unaware of his perilous position, he is fighting still. The writing on the wall reminds him of "Victory or Siberia". It is these fanatics, who believe they can halt the rolling wave of Allied might, that snuff out the life of Sgt James Cox, and seriously injure Sgt Hershel Tipton and T/5 - Millard Foster.

It is these men in their natty uniforms that have bred death, destruction, and misery along the length of Europe.

Ten times Ceeco has heard the sound of taps, played for one of its own. This story does not include the heroism and gallantry so often displayed on the field of battle, nor does it attempt to claim immortality for Tank Destroyers.

It is merely a chronicle of the insignificant role played by 150 men in their fight for freedom.

In conclusion the members wish to thank those services, - Army, Navy, and Air Corps who in any way made the taste of war easier to digest.

To all others they ask !

"Will the end justify the means?"

..... F I N I S

Included in Chronology:- November 11th, 1944, at Sanry-sur-Nied
--- Wounded in Action ---
Sgt Harold N. Proudfoot.
(Awarded the Purple Heart)