

THE 817TH T.D. BATTALION

V E + 25



"Tank Destroyers inflicted twice as many casualties on the Germans as the average line unit - at one-fifth the casualties. In Europe, 39 Battalions of TD's accounted for over 1300 tanks and self-propelled guns, 684 artillery pieces and antitank guns, 251 armored cars and light tanks, 668 pillboxes and took almost three divisions of German prisoners."

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"THE 817TH T.D. BATTALION - VE + 25"

Nothing that follows is to be considered classic prose; it is written in retrospect from only one man's point-of-view, and thus contains a mixture of truth and fantasy as stories often told become "facts" and the more unpleasant memories are omitted in favor of tales in a lighter vein - recalled to capture just a bit of the uniqueness, the esprit de corps, the greatness that was and is characteristic of the 817th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

The author of this "update" was one of six E.M. lucky enough to join the Eight-Bar-Seven at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, after the closing of the A.S.T.P. program at University of Cincinnati, and is one of a group of midwesterners (Indiana) to have served with this predominantly New York and Pennsylvania unit. It has been my good fortune to have served in the U.S. Army Reserve since WW II and to have commanded the 972d Engineer Battalion (Combat) at Fort Benjamin Harrison since 1 December 1968, so I am especially appreciative of the innovative spirit that carried the 817th through many tight situations and believe the best job in the Army is to be CO of a separate Battalion, and the best and most productive unit is the separate Battalion.

In the following passages the paragraphs in "quotations" are from a letter from Lieutenant Colonel William H. Bardes, CO, 817th T.D. Bn. dated 28 April, 1945, Halle, Salle, Germany. I have elected to intersperse my recollections along with his for continuity.

For a private or P.F.C., life at Camp Breckinridge was pleasant and interesting, especially in Co "C" under Captain McKenzie who was firm and fair and so we "College boys" were soon accepted as part of the team. The 817th had already been at Camp Hood, Texas, original home of the T.D.'s, threshed wheat near Valley City, in the Dakotas, been on Tennessee maneuvers and had a healthy competition going between companies and gun-crews within the unit and an acceptable degree of contempt for anyone else in the army, so unfortunate to not be in the Eight-Bar-Seven.

In the brown-shoe army there was a lot of K.P. and Guard Duty and on the latter I used to shoot for and periodically attain supernumerary or best uniform and weapon at guard mount because, as such, you didn't walk a post but manned Battalion Headquarters as CQ during the night. It was on such a night while I was on duty I took the message regarding our alert for overseas movement.

Whoever phoned gave the message "in the clear" and then became quite provoked at me for taking the message without warning him or her (I can't recall) that I was only "cleared for comic'books". Anyway, I dashed over to the BOQ and roused someone - I remember they seemed neither surprised or overly impressed, but I thought for a while I had "blown the war" on one phone call.

Before we left Breckenridge we had a terrific unit day picnic at Burdett Park in Evansville, Indiana, with its Swimming Pool filled with salt water. Thus our tradition of annual unit days and reunions was born and I've had the privilege of being involved in them at Evansville, Halle, Germany, Harrisburg, Pa., Rochester and Buffalo, New York, and dedicate this writing to the upcoming Reunion in St. Louis and to those in the future.

What marks a superior or even a "lucky" unit? The equipment is TOE like all other units of the same branch and configuration. The difference has to be the personnel - and here I can get into a dangerous area, for I was but a spear carrier and much of my knowledge of Bn Hq was second or third hand at best.

The Key man has to be Wm. H. Bardes, Battalion Commander. I was told he was a Brooklyn House detective at one time, but be that as it may, he had the quality of leadership to assemble and command a cross-section of G.I.'s of diverse backgrounds and ages into a highly respected professional unit in and out of combat. It was he who got us black scarfs or ascots to cut the dust and give us a little "flair", and we were proud to be known in the E.T.O. as "Bardes' Black Raiders".

(By now you may be wondering where LTC Bardes quotations may be found. Later...is my answer, as he began with our arrival on Utah Beach, and I'm not even out of the states yet.)

Others who stuck in my mind were Major Omenhiser the S-3, CPT (Now Col.) Hofmann reputed to be our only West Pointer, CPT McKenzie, CO of Charlie Company and the great guys of High-Up Charlie's Third Platoon like Sgt. Legg, Cpl. Gigi Alexander, Bill Henning, Cal Titus, Moon Hedricks, Halsey, Licht, Middlehauff, Dixie McLaurin, Willie Phillips, Altimore, Jearnigan, and all the rest. Before leaving Breckinridge, we were tested in night operations with our half-tracks and towed 3 inch guns. The firing went fine, but the convoy back to Post was something else using black-out lights and those little reflectors on the canvas over the end of the gun tube. For some reason Sgt. Willie Phillips crew stopped and Sgt. Legg's crew didn't, so their tube went through our windshield and only the machine gun mount saved me and some others from bad headaches or worse. There was much marking and remarking, and one man's clothing was stenciled "To accompany Troops", since he had the habit of wandering off unaccounted for. Finally, we made our trip to Camp Miles Standish, had leave nearby, and weren't supposed to write home about our pending movement overseas. The bets were still 50-50 on "This outfit will never go overseas." However, one morning there we were at Boston harbor boarding the U.S.S. Mount Vernon (G. Washington) for a quick unescorted trip to Scotland. Several things could be recalled about the trip, but these will have to suffice, if we are ever going to get this narration into Europe. I recall going way below deck for quarters, the 817th on lots of K.P. hence plenty to eat - unlike some units, and a guy on deck singing a dirty ditty about the Girl with the Tattoos. My arrival in Scotland was hardly auspicious. On the morning we were to disembark, I had made a pillow out of my trousers, and somebody took pants, wallet and all. While everyone else was getting ready to off-

load, I was up on deck demanding somebody find my pants. They were found, but the money was gone, so the first my folks knew I was in Europe was through a typical teen-agers letter saying - "send money". I enjoyed our trip through Scotland, England and into Wales by rail and we settled down near Chepstow (sp) in a great tent city to finalize our preparation for crossing the channel. As a towed T.D. outfit, we weren't first-wave material, but we were ready to move by August, 1944. While in the British Isles we ventured out a bit, but there wasn't much going on inside or outside the camp except preparation. We welded bed-roll racks on the rear of our half-tracks and then proceeded to cut up certain "surplus" tents to make canvas rolls for our blankets. I'm afraid many tents had six or seven new doors cut in them in the process, but the army hadn't begun to catch up with our minimum requirements in supply. News in Europe was guardedly encouraging as we convoyed to Portsmouth to board LST's for the crossing of the English Channel. It was wet and cold, of course, and again the survival instinct of the 817th prevailed as we helped ourselves to 4 buckle boots, compliments of the U.S. Navy. Again, I point out, that, this sort of planning ahead made us one of the few units to avoid heavy trench-foot casualties from 10-11 December on, in the snows and mud of the Hurtgen Forest-Roer River area. I remember being able to track my buddy Cal Titus in the snow because he had two "left" four-buckles. What traffic and confusion as we arrived on Utah Beach, August 25, 1944. This was "it".

Writing on 28 April, 1945, Col. Bardes wrote,

"During this week we have marked the passing of our ninth month overseas our eighth month on the continent, and our fifth in the spotlight of combat events in the European Theater of Operations.

When our LSTs opened wide their bows and let down their ramps on Utah Beach in Normandy on the morning of August 25th we little realized what was in store for us as we drove off the ships and onto the beach. But, we were determined to do our best, whatever might be our task, and to have the name of our battalion ranked with those of the best units on the continent. Events have proven that we did not aim too high.

Though attached to the Third Army, our first assignment was to the Advance Section of the Communications Zone, more familiarly known as ADSEC. We immediately made a long motor march, and this was to be the rule rather than the exception while with ADSEC, from the beach to the sector of France just north of the Loire River, where 20,000 Germans still held out. Our route took us thru famous, but battered, St. Lo, Carentan, Vire, south and east through France with "A" Company establishing headquarters at Gorren, "B" Company at Montsurs, "C" Company at Sable, and Headquarters Company and the Battalion Command Post at Mayenne. Each Company was assigned an area within the battalion sector and all men went about their tasks getting the feel of things and acquiring "knowhow".

Again my next "big moment" was inauspicious. We were using black-out lights and I was up in the Track turret trying to help the driver follow the vehicle ahead. Somewhere in the rubble of St. Lo we made a wrong turn and all the Third Army behind us followed our trail through a part of the town that had not been cleared of mines or debris. Finally a jutting cathedral wall loomed out of the darkness for the second time. I knew I had passed this way before and so took the other fork of the road this time. Soon - here came our irate Company Commander in an M-20 from the other direction and after a typical soldierly exchange of "chewing out and yessir" we were on our way.

"Our tasks were numerous and seemingly without limit. We did counter-intelligence (CIC) work; aided the CID (Criminal Investigation Division); established liaison with French and Belgian officials and members of the famous FFI and similar Belgian organizations; coneracted the newly flourishing black market; gathered information on V-1 and V-2 bombs; located vast stores of enemy equipment and ammunition - some of which we had the satisfaction of seeing fired back at him over the tree tops of the Hurtgen Forest; and collected some 44,000 jerricans, left carelessly by other troops along the highways of France and Belgium (How well we can now appreciate, with our Hellcats, the need for conservation and collection of these vital jerricans). All of these tasks were performed in addition to our primary mission, which was to safeguard and secure the lines of communications - involving, of course, train guarding, bridge guarding; patrolling; rounding up of PWs, snipers, and saboteurs; and reconnaissance for new routes."

I won't paraphrase Col. Bardes here except to say that many of us had become by nature and necessity adventuresome and scroungers, and so learned or perfected our French in the villages of France and Belgium. We shared Cafes and cellars with FFI and others and enjoyed the native life when our halts were long enough to permit. It was as train guards in ADSEC that we finally got warm coats or jackets with collars for the cold winter ahead, and invoking the statute of limitations we only took 1 per train guard from the trains we were guarding. We worked as part time interpreters, chased after downed V-1's and V-2's as well as disabled allied air crews.

"Our duties with ADSEC took us all over Northern France and most of Belgium, our units setting up, successively as follows: "A" Company at Gorrion, Rambouillet, Sezanne all in France, and Chimary, Belgium; "B" Company at Montsurs, Voves, Chateau Thierry, Revigny, all in France, and finally just west of Mons, Belgium; "C" Company at Sable, Chateaufneuf, Riquebourg, Le Cateau, all in France, and Seneffe, Belgium; the Battalion CP and Headquarters Company, together with the two Reconnaissance Platoons at Mayenne, Mereville, Missy sur Aisne, and Selles, all in France, and Presles, Belgium.

Our general route of advance took us from our initial position on the Normandy beaches south to the area around Mayenne, then east through Le Mans and Chartres. From here we went through Paris and north to Compiègne and Soissons. Further advances took us yet further north through Cambrai and Valenciennes and east into Belgium via Mons and Charleroi. Here our travels with ADSEC ended, for we moved on November 30, from the vicinity of Charleroi to our combat marshalling area at Schalkhoven, in the Flemish part of Belgium, just south of Maastricht, Holland."

In Belgium at La Louviere in the Charleroi area, we lived over Cafe Saaz and became true friends of the people in the area, as we patrolled and guarded the sector around the Albert Canal and beyond. I recall living briefly in beautiful chateaus and playing on some fine pianos during this period. Two personal recollections come to mind - the shock of learning that one of our guys had shot a pet swan on the lake of our chateau and my stage fright when I was asked to serve dinner or drinks at a formal function - I was nervous, (which was uncharacteristic) so much so that nobody ever asked me to do "orderly" work again. We had served ADSEC well adding a "Combat" flavor to operations which might have been done by others with less vigor - and surely with less sheer enthusiasm at the feeling of working as a team.

"Our association with ADSEC at an end, we had been enriched by a knowledge of the vast amount of work that is needed to maintain the battle units, and we had learned to better appreciate the problems of our armies supply personnel.

We left ADSEC with this tribute from the Commanding General:-
 "General Plank desires to commend you for the outstanding manner in which your organization has assisted Advance Section in successfully accomplishing its mission. You have represented a substantial contribution to the operations of the Allied Forces in the European Campaign". Now we were ready for the final test of all our long months of training and preparation in the United States and in the United Kingdom. We were ready, and determined, to make our Battalion motto - "Overpowering" - mean something to the enemy.

In the few days at Schalkhoven we refitted and made final efforts to get ourselves and our equipment into tip-top shape for our initial combat operation. When the order for movement into the Hurtgen Forest sector came on December 9th, we were ready. Our battalion moved out in a long, proud column, marching across the Albert Canal, down through Verviers and Eupen, across the dragon's teeth of the Siegfried Line, and into the Hurtgen Forest in the vicinity of Zweifall, Germany.

Our initial combat mission had us attached to the 8th Infantry Division, with the mission of covering all possible tank approaches along its front in the Vossenach-Germeter-Hurtgen-Bergstein-Kleinbau area between the Hurtgen Forest and the Roer River.

Under cover of darkness, and amidst heavy intermittent mortar and artillery fire, the Gun Companies moved into firing positions on the night of December 10-11. By morning all guns were well dug-in and prepared for a determined stand. During the ensuing days all positions were constantly under enemy observation and fire, and our own Reconnaissance platoons established Observation Posts to better the eyes of the Battalion."

How well do I remember moving into position under darkness and in a snow-storm December 10-11, 1944, in the Hurtgen Forest area. We forgot noise discipline from time to time in the frustration of avoiding getting stepped on or run-over, but basically we knew "over that away" was the enemy just as tense and just as disgusted as we at the prospect of spending more time on such ungodly terrain in foul weather. We found a cellar to "hole-up" in and spell the crews and then settled down to trying to keep warm and alive. It was quite a view of the battle area as we watched American Armor learn tactics the hard-way as tank after tank was knocked out to our front.

"When the German offensive in the Ardennes came we were just five miles north of the northern flank of the Bulge. Some changes in positions were necessary to meet changing conditions and on Christmas night "A" Company readjusted in the Vossenach-Germeter sector, "B" Company assumed responsibility for the Kleinhau sector in addition to Bergstein, and "C" Company moved north to the Gey-Strass area, while Reconnaissance established new OPs directly overlooking the now famous Roer River.

After sixty consecutive days in the lines, with no relief of units at all, the Battalion was finally relieved on February 10th and moved for a short, but welcome rest to Thimister, Belgium. This was not to last long, however, for on February 23rd, we again moved back into Germany."

Col. Bardes mentions Company "C" was in the Gey-Strass area, but we didn't know it as that. We were at so many yards down the road from a ruined church near Dead-Horse Cross-Roads and then we dug in our guns, dug and improved our fox-holes, built a log-cabin CP and carved out a cave for our M-20 crews with fields of fire toward the enemy. We could observe movement, they could see ours, and there was a daily enemy plane dubbed bed-check Charlie passing over our positions, but the ground patrols never bothered us nor we them for the most part. It was a time for writing home, getting no mail back, anxiety over the Bulge so close and yet not right in our area, a time for being cut off from Bn mail or chow and living as the farthest North unit on British supplies, a time for "werewolves" sp howling over the Radios at night calling for "Dixie, Dixie" and a time of shock and sorrow as we suffered our first casualties due to incoming rounds and due to vehicles hitting mines. The tendency to omit mine warfare became so pronounced that later on our mine wells were emptied and not restocked. It seems everyone had

some training on laying them - nobody properly documented their location and supervised their removal (It's still an Army shortcoming today). Those who have seen the movie "Battle of the Bulge" will agree on one thing, it failed to show all the snow and all the mud that dominated the area and influenced tactics and hence, the battle. The haunting sound of church bells from distant cities will be remembered by those who were still with us after the calm set in".

"This time we moved into the freshly taken and long battered Schmidt sector, directly overlooking the Roer River dams, and assumed an indirect fire mission, our first, but one that was accomplished in a superior manner. Here we fired 5920 rounds of 3" HE ammunition before we were again on the move.

On March 2nd we made a long awaited crossing of the Roer River and began our participation in the celebrated advance from the Roer to the world famous Rhine. Unorthodox but effective use of our towed guns by spirited crews here proved that we could use towed guns offensively. We ended our march to the Rhine at Bad Godesburg on March 11th, performing direct and indirect fire missions in this sector."

The indirect fire was good duty after the long cold winter and a few who found too much local booze were tossed in huge ammo pits to sleep it off while nearly 6000 rounds poured out of our 3 inch guns.

"Leaving Bad Godesburg on the morning of March 15th, we began our movement south to the Remagen bridgehead, where we, the first and only towed Tank Destroyer Battalion to enter the Remagen bridgehead, crossed the Rhine, seven days after seizure of the bridge, and moved directly into the III Corps sector in direct support of the entire Corps sector. We continued to support the bridgehead prior to the breakout, and it was during this period that we received word of our pending conversion to a self-propelled Battalion, armed with the M-18, "Hell cats."

Even while continuing with our towed guns in the line, we started conversion and in a 48-hour period the Battalion was changed to self-propelled and a Reconnaissance Company had been activated. Now we were ready for further, and even more aggressive action."

We knew a sense of being a part of history as we crossed the Rhine at Remagen and moved down the East valley and into the high ground to secure the area and prepared to convert from towed to self-propelled M-18's. In this area we learned that "Lootin was Verbotten" but still the search for souvenirs went on. Soon we had more such stuff than our new Hellcats could handle and the excess went over the side. I felt both joy at being selected and pain at seeing others transferred out as our new

reorganization or TOE called for fewer men in the crews. Some men were doomed to "repple-depots" and we never heard from them again. The transfer to M-18's was well-done and every man had some stick-time on the new destroyers before we took off toward the East.

"On March 26th we moved eastward, partially along the famed Autobahn to the Marburg sector. We were still attached to the III Corps at this time, but on the day that the First and Ninth Armies linked up at Lippstadt, closing the Ruhr pocket, we were placed in support of the 104th, or Timberwolf, Division, and we turned north. Immediately following an eighty mile blackout motor march-the first one as SPS-we entered the fluid lines on the Corps left flank to help stem a threatened breakthrough across the then thin lines. Successfully completing this mission - we renewed our advance with the Division to the North and then to the East."

News was hard to come by, and we only occasionally saw an old Stars and Stripes newspaper, at least this was the case in the Gun Companies. It was a time of rapid movement, refueling and feeding at rare stops, carrying and tacking up General Eisenhower's poster of surrender in four languages, and confronting the local Burgomeister to turn in all weapons and cameras to the American forces. Here we foolishly risked a lot for a prize pistol or dagger, but fortunately no major incidents occurred to my knowledge. In this crossing each vehicle had local wine, cognac, brandy, etc. on board which was infinitely better than treated or untreated water and when better stuff was found the inferior bottles went over the side.

"April 7th saw the beginning of the rapid dash from the area of Nieder Marsburg across the Weser and Leine Rivers east to the Saale, and finally to the Mulde River, stopping just short of the Elbe. We were making 25 to 40 miles a day and our headquarters and supply sections were working 24 hours a day to fill the seemingly limitless thirst of our Hellcats for gasoline. We saw the horrors of the German concentration camp at Nordhausen and we pushed on with renewed determination, by-passing the Harz Mountains, but again helping our Division with able flank protection by parts of our unit, while the remainder plunged further eastward.

It was at this time that our Reconnaissance Company as a unit received its baptism of fire and came through with renewed vigor and esprit de corps. As the Harz pocket was gradually cleaned up, all units rejoined the advance to the east. The Battalion PW total was greatly increased during this period-one day's total being 250 for Reconnaissance Company alone."

During operations in the Harz mountain pocket, I recall chasing a tiger tank up a winding mountain peak, he staying just ahead of us, we just out of range of him and losing him near the top where we found instead an imposing statue of Bismarck and a field hospital whose German Commander

became furious when our O.I.C. refused to accept his surrender and after determining that the pistol offered in surrender was "inferior" to our stock of Lugars and P-38's even refused this.

"All of our units pushed to the Saale River, and while the remainder continued to the Mulde River, our "A" Company paused to help clean up the city of Halle, German's 10th largest.

Our push brought to a voluntary halt we now await contact with our advancing Allies from the East - the victorious warriors of the Red Army. During this time we are refitting and preparing for further action, wherever it may come."

Col. Bardes fails to mention our deployment as Task Force Red, Blue, etc., in which individual Companies and Platoons were in direct support and carrying on board the men of the 104th Infantry (Timberwolves). Charlie Company also closed in on Halle, flushed out a nearby town, knocked out a German O.P. in a church tower and then Third Platoon tangled with several stubborn 88mm Gun Crews who tried to pick us off as we crossed open terrain. Again our Corporal Gunners fired quickly and accurately - just like they used to on the range. I remember our crew bailing out of our M-20 leaving it as a sitting duck as we hitched a ride on a bucking destroyer making a "strategic withdrawal". To the credit of Norval Hicks, he was all for charging forward down a ditch with his carbine. Titus and I with perhaps less heroic motive leaped off the destroyer and rescued the M-20 before it could be hit by an 88 and our souvenirs go up with it. (The vulnerability of the M-20 was well-known and the enemy knew we would have to stick to the cobble-stone road.) Back in the town after some moments of confusion, the T.D.'s and 104th had secured every intersection and the shells came raining in. Several of us were inside a tavern setting up a CP and we were showered with shrapnel and flying glass. It was more irritating than anything else and our instinct told us to go out and "charge" or Fire-at-will (Potatoe-Hill - private joke) or do something. Cpl. Keeman, Sgt. Knutson's gunner, got a puncture in the "rear area" and reported to the medics. Most of us just picked the stuff out of our clothes and hides, but we later learned that with the bandages came Purple Hearts which meant five more "points" later on and determined who would ship home early from Furth-Regensburg and who would stay behind. Moving into Halle we knocked out a fleeing German half-track, the last such action of the war for us. We charged on to Bitterfeld and then were ordered to halt. Our march to Berlin had been blunted by a political decision. Until then "Nothing in Hell Could Stop the Timberwolves" - or the 817th T.D.'s.

We moved back into Halle and set up in some large homes surrounding a school and park area. In Halle the 817th was the Military Government and again we were writing the book because the G-5 experts hadn't completed their manuals by then. We got along well with the German populace and the city was soon becoming normalized. The most memorable event of this period was our Unit Day celebration in the Sportsplatz.

If you've never seen Destroyers with repainted pet names on every tube, white-side walls and tri-color streamers on antennae, then you can't imagine the grandeur that was the Eight-Bar-Seven that day as we conducted a complete mechanized "pass-in-review" for Col. Bardes and General Terry Allen of the 104th Infantry Division. The latter spoke of the great mutual respect between the famous Timberwolves and our little T.D. Battalion. Ball games, beer busts and so on merge in the memory with the memorial services for those comrades killed in action. For us it was a historic day. Later on Halle was to be abandoned to its fate as part of the East zone.

"In all its operations the Battalion has displayed great versatility, tremendous energy, limitless initiative, and splendid teamwork. Whether the assignment be the static posts and roving patrols of ADSEC; the everready defense of the Roer sector in the rain and mud, and later ice and snow; or the offensive, first with towed guns, and then SPs; this Battalion has always done a gratifying job and made a splendid name for itself. Never has a sign of lack of courage been displayed, but rather, boldness and aggressiveness have always been the attitude of all members of this organization.

We have been fortunate in our small losses of personnel and our record of having never lost a primary weapon, but, this has been the result, not of fate, but of vigilance and never-ending striving for perfection on our part.

Wherever we go, whatever we do, you men of the 817th can rest assured that we shall all go together in continuance of our great team, and shall maintain our fine record. I feel sure that you, as well as I, are ready to say to anyone: "This unit is on call for any task that may be in store for it - and that task will be well done".

Col. Bardes concluded here, but our Army of Occupation mission lay ahead. (Our famous Seek, Strike, Destroy paraphrased as Seek, Sneak and Retreat was a bit of G.I. humor relating to our need for fire and movement tactics to overcome our lack of armor plate and take advantage of our extreme mobility.) The day we learned we were to turn in our destroyers was a sad blow to our pride. These sleek Destroyers had served us well.

Writing in Armor magazine, Roger Beaumont is quoted in Army Times (March 31, 1971) as follows: (The quotation on the front cover is also from the article by Roger Beaumont)

"The long-dead Tank Destroyer Corps comes back to life momentarily in ARMOR, with writer Roger Beaumont hinting that the suicide corps of World War II received a bum deal from an Army board which put it out to pasture.

"Thus a successful service branch and its dearly bought experience was consigned to oblivion, remembered only

by veterans and insignia collectors," he says in the Armor Association journal.

Debate on armor roles continues much the same as it did in War II and earlier. "The question still remains," he says, "Is speed really a compensation for protection? And if so, how much? Do modern antitank missiles and ammunition make hull strength obsolete? Are units using thin-hulled vehicles really armor - or should their training emphasize the passive gadfly approach of European scout car tactics?"

Whatever the case the T.D.'s were an elite outfit who were good - and knew they were good, and even today, as I wear the T.D. patch on the right shoulder of my uniform, it is a rare school, or conference that some senior member doesn't come up and say what T.D. outfit were you in?

Rumor had us going to the Pacific and we did move to Camp Lucky Strike near Cherbourg, but later were ordered to the Munich-Regensburg Area for occupation duty - some of it involving guarding relief trains from Switzerland into Czechoslovakia and Austria. It was a good period for those with a sense of history as trips to the Riviera, Switzerland, Denmark, Paris and London were available for the taking. It was also a time for reflection on wondering what you had done or not done to deserve to be so lucky, to remember civilian friends in Belgium and France, to remember patrols thru neat orderly woods with Halsey and the crew in the M-20, to remember the agony of Nordhausen, to remember living with and eating with German families (but not fraternizing, of course), polishing your boots on emboidered towels and getting caught and "told off" by the Hausfrau, a time for realizing that as each truck pulled out with your friends, Dixie, Frankie, etc., you faked the gaiety knowing you'd probably never meet again - and except for a stalwart few who have kept our reunions going in Buffalo, Rochester, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis this would have been so.

Later our turn came to leave the E.T.O. and we passed through Bremerhaven and came home with the 722d Railway Operating Bn on a Victory Ship, to Fort Dix and in my case Camp Atterbury, Indiana. By March of 1946, I was back in Purdue as part of the masses under the G.I. Bill.

It was the end of an era - it had started with basic training and I said not irreverantly "In the Beginning there was Henning at Benning" and there were times this infantry basic pulled us out of a tough situation. It ended as all wars should, if wars must be, in Victory and rebuilding of the good life back home. The 817th T.D. Bn didn't do the job alone, but make no mistake, out of such dedicated units, General Eisenhower was able to mold and win his "Crusade in Europe".

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