

Wells Maine,
June 7, 1986

Received your letter of May 7, and was glad to hear that you were able to use some of the material I sent in my last correspondence.

I will try to reconstruct the events of Dec 20th as best I can, beginning with the night of the 19th.

This night was a continuation of heavy shelling from mortar and artillery. By this time, the town was nearly 75% demolished. The Church at the cross roads seemed to take the worst beating of all. Several of our Co "C" men were wounded, including the driver of our destroyer. These men, I believe, were evacuated that night. Also one of the crew chiefs of another Co "C" destroyer was wounded. I had the opportunity of replacing him which would have meant a promotion, however, I opted to stay at my own job.

The fog was heavy during the entire night, and we could hear the engines and tracks of the enemy tanks moving in on our left flank. It was obvious from these sounds, that, the build up of enemy armor was tremendous.

The heavy shelling continued through the night and, all indications pointed to one "hell of an attack" come day light. I don't believe one of us slept that night.

During the night we had been in a slightly defiled position on the southern edge of the town. Early on the morning of the 20th our destroyer was moved to a position on the high ground on the south eastern edge of town, overlooking a wide expanse of field land which was on a gradual slope toward town.

We had lost radio contact with the other three destroyers, and I do not know where they were positioned.

The fog was so dense that we could not see more than a few yards away. We could still hear the enemy tanks not very far away, and, I saw several bazooka teams pass our destroyer on their way to engage them. I remember thinking at the time "Those guys have got plenty of guts" It is my belief that these bazooka men were successful in destroying some of the enemy tanks as, we saw several flashes of flame through the fog, which had to be burning tanks. This also gave us some idea as to the location of the enemy. The heavy shelling continued through the morning and early forenoon.

Suddenly (I think around 10:30 AM) the fog lifted. We could see enemy tanks everywhere in the sector that our destroyer covered. We immediately started firing on them. I think the closest of the tanks were at about 300 yds range. Luckily my first round fired was a hit. With the scope established it was simply a matter of transfer from one target to another. My assistant gunner (Pvt. Ellie McMorris from South Carolina) deserves a lot of credit in this action. He had that gun loaded and ready to fire by the time it was back in firing position. McMorris and I had trained in our positions since long before going overseas.

I don't know how many rounds we fired, but it seems that nearly every ~~one~~ that found its mark. It was evident when a good hit was made, for the crews could be seen boiling out. They were dressed in white and I could hear the 50 Cal. machine gun, mounted on the turret and manned by Sgt. Richard B. Lester, firing continuously at the German soldiers as they dismounted. I believe that the enemy tanks were mostly Panthers but am not sure of this.

Our destroyer was officially credited with destroying five of the enemy vehicles (tanks) before being hit ourselves. McMorris and myself

were both awarded the Bronze Star for this action. I presume that Sgt Beatty, the Destroyer Commander, received a Citation of some sort, but, never knew for sure.

I do not know what made the hit on our destroyer, but, think it may have been a tank firing H. E. or possibly a mortar. At any rate, our destroyer burst into flame and there was an explosion. McManus and my self both received Burns and shrapnel wounds. My wounds were mostly in the legs, and, I burned my hand and wrist badly, as, I believe I grasped the 50 cal. Barrel to help myself out of the destroyer.

Apparently the shell that hit us exploded in the driver's compartment as, this part of the destroyer was a blazing inferno, and there was no chance of helping the assistant driver (John Pendziwaty from Conn.) out even if we had been able to.

Events at this period are quite vague. I think I crawled on hands and knees (being unable to walk) to the aid station shortly after this the town was evacuated and the wounded taken to Bastogne. This is a story in itself which I will not repeat unless you think it would be of some value to you. I might add that David Wilson and Sgt Beatty were taken P.O.W., but McManus and my self both reached Bastogne and evacuated after the siege.

It have failed to mention that after the fog lifted that morning it was evident that every thing in Morillo that would shoot went into action all at once. It have never heard such a barrage before or since. There was a house on my left flank and a 10th armored tank the other side of the house. I could hear the tank firing between our own shots. I think it was a draw between us as to who got in the most shots.

On our visit to Morillo in October 1984 we located a woman who lived in the house. She told us through an interpreter, that she was 18 yrs old at the time, and her family retreated to a prepared dugout to the rear during the battle. Also she said that there were 9 shell holes in the house after the battle. It would seem that perhaps these shells were meant for ourselves and the 10th armored tank, but, were a little high.

This is briefly what I recall of the events of the 30th of Dec. If my recollections of the evacuation of Morillo and siege of Bastogne would be of any interest please let me know. This would not include much of the fighting, as, I was out of it then. I am contacting some of the other 3rd platoon men regarding sending you their info. However I doubt if you get much more of their files to not write very much.

It is sure that some of these men
could give you a lot of information
different than mine, as they were
in other parts of the tower, and
some of them continued fighting to
the end.

If it were possible to attend the
699th reunion, I am sure it would
be well worth it to you. These fellows
will relate experiences face to face, that
they don't seem to want to write about.

The next reunion is to be held
in Nashville Tenn. Sept 18, 1970.

Hoping that you can read this
and that it will be of some help.

Sincerely
Colby M. Pieper

P.S.

I have not received a T.D.A. newsletter
since May 1964. Has this been
discontinued? I hope not
C.M.P.