

July 4, 1979

Here is another installment on happenings concerning the 776 TD Battalion.

This is the account of a rumor that came true. During war time the rumor mill is always active. The surprising thing is that the men would believe many of them. I guess it was because they wanted to believe them. Some outfits were transferred to India. When the men heard of that, there was soon a rumor that our outfit would be transferred to India. This was ridiculous. What would a Tank Destroyer Battalion do in India?

A favorite rumor was that our battalion would be sent back to the US to use ~~for~~ training troops for other TD battalions. The fellows really got excited over this one. I can't remember how many times that I told them that these rumors weren't true. They always asked me because I worked at Battalion Headquarters, the administrative headquarters, not the CP.

We were in a town in the Alsace area of eastern France. The truck driver for the Personnel Section truck came ~~to~~ our quarters. He was excited over a rumor that he had just heard. Some of our men had been told by the people of the town that something big was going to happen.

The people in Alsace mostly spoke German. They were divided between German sympathizers and French sympathizers. Some of our men spoke German as they were of German ancestry, and these men talked quite a bit with these people.

These people had heard that something was going to happen, but they did not ~~just~~ know what. They said that it would be something good, and some even thought that the war was going to end. Furthermore they had the date. About a week later on the exact date these people gave, the German attack through the Ardenne started.

The truck driver who brought this rumor to our section was Chester H. Howlett from Mount Pleasant, Utah. That was his address when entering the army.

This happened while we were moving south through Germany. It was late March or early April. Headquarters Company was bivouacked across a little valley or draw in a woods along the slope, ~~from~~ ^{across} the main road. Company Maintenance had their pyramidal tent up and a fire going in their stove. The stove pipe reached just above the trees. Bright sparks were issuing from this pipe when a sniper put a bullet through the stove pipe. This was at night. The next morning an ordnance outfit stopped on the road across the draw from us and fired a volley of rifle fire up the opposite slope. A boy belonging to the Hitler youth organization shot at the ordnance outfit. He was wounded slightly. Fortunately, the bullet hit his belt buckle, and only made a flesh wound.

Meantime some of the men had been talking to some German residents near there. They were told that there were two of these Hitler youths in the area, and the ordnance company had only caught one of them.

We ~~were~~ were bivouacked near the edge of a German town. A bunch of us got together, and went into this town looking for the second Hitler youth. A little Tech Sergeant from Battalion Supply headed the group.

He was one of the men who spoke German. We apparently made quite an impression on the Germans. One of the men was an Indian from upstate New York. He was a rugged tough looking character, and he had picked up a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) at a replacement depot after being let out of a army hospital. He was one of the Headquarters Company mechanics.

I covered the Tech Sargeant while he interviewed the Germans. It was easy to see that the Germans had the jitters. Having lived with the Gestapo, they hardly knew what to expect. I received quite a thrill from this experience. Under such circumstances one feels alive all over.

The results from this interview were negative. I expect the other Hitler youth believed that it would be healthier somewhere else. On the way back to our camping place, one of the men and I found some odd looking small buildings, and decided to check them out. He opened the door of one of them, and zing something something struck him, but it wasn't a sniper. It was a honey bee. The beekeeper had put his beehives inside of these small houses to give them winter protection, and so ended the sniper hunt. Later in Austria after the war was over, Red, the Headquarters Company Maintenance Sargeant, caught one of these Hitler youths stealing rations. He ducked the boy in an ice cold creek running from glaciers a short distance up the mountains. He slipped, and fell into the creek on top of the boy. Earlier in Rome two gangs of boys were throwing rocks at each other. Red took charge of them, and had them playing a ball game with each other using rocks and boards as bats.

Two of the most thrilling sights of the war: A field in Tunisia with many thousands of German prisoners waiting for trucks to remove them to the prison camps, and near the end of the war in Germany when hundreds of German soldiers threw away their guns, walked back through the American Army without being herderd along with American soldiers. Some of our men went out, and broke up the German rifles.

We had a Lieutenant in our Battalion once we reached Germany, he would pick up anything that wasn't tied down. The other officers nicknamed him Loot. He had seen quite a bit of action with a firing company, and was given charge of Battalion Maintenance. When the French First Armored Division broke ~~thru~~ through the German Army and raced to Strassbourg, the Germans left a good many trucks behind. This Lieutenant had several trucks in the Battalion Maintenance Section loaded with repair parts. Nearly every man in his section was driving one of these trucks. The Seventh Army crossed the Rhine at Worms on a pontoon bridge. This crossing took several hours longer than scheduled. General Hatch was very unhappy about this. An investigation revealed that his Army had a large number of these captured vehicles. He ordered these vehicles to be turned in immediately, so Battalion Maintenance lost most of its trucks.

I may write you one more letter.

Sincerely yours

Willard Tetter