

3rd Platoon B Co 71st TD Bn.

To begin, we must go back to Greenock, Scotland, where we loaded our vehicles on LST type ships. These were English ships and were over loaded by American Army demands. The vehicles were very tight. The ship we were on was a converted oil tanker with the bow cut off and a large door ramp put on.

The English army showed us how to water proof our vehicles, and instructed us on landing operations. You must remember in 1942 the US Army had little experience at anything. The water proofing was good, but the only bad thing was the grease paper and grease used to cover the carburetor. In many cases caught fire. This happened to our truck on the landing. This was corrected in later operations.

One big foul up was all drivers were taken away for special instructions and were put on another ship. The 3rd Platoon of B Co was to make the landing along with a light tank Company, and support units, in many cases with drivers who had little or no

✓ training in driving half track or what ever.

We were at sea 21 days without coming in sight of land at any time. I feel it was one of the best trips I had on any troop ship. We were overcrowded, food was good, US rations, two meals a day and there was good weather all the way.

Preparing for H hour on D day the Engineers had to attach 50 feet of pontoon at the end of the ships ramps.

Our task force, under the command of 1st Lt Col John K Waters, was to land at a place called Saint Lau, not far to the east, as I remember, from Arzew beach. Our force, from the 1st Armored Reg't, of about 20 light M3 (old model) tanks, half tracks and support units and to include the 3rd Platoon of "B" Co 701st TPs. The mission was to take over the Tafaraoui Air drome and to block out French reinforcements to Oran. The airport was to have been captured by Col Raffe Paratroops what happened to them is another story.

Coming back to the landing, after many delays our ship moved to the shore. Our new drivers had their task before them and managed to do very well. They came down that

3/ steep ramp on to the pontoon bridge
extension and into the water with
no mishap. A very lucky thing for
us. It was day light coming into land
The French were firing their 75's
at us. I don't think they had any
hits. Our half track caught fire
at the carburetor as soon as we
hit the beach. Our Gen. Commander
Rex Meredith managed to get the
fire out. We then joined the task
force who was removing the water
proofing and unload the B baggage

All was made ready our force
moved out in a flying column,
The lead elements push its way through
and around any of the light defenses
it ran into.

Tofaroui airdrome was a
wide open area. The aircraft as I
remembered was bombers, that was
well spaced out. The hangars and
buildings were on the far end of the
field

The tanks formed a line and jumped
off to the attack. Our TDs took supporting
positions. Our orders were not fire unless
fired upon. The tanks ran into some
machine guns and were quickly over-
run. The Airdrome was ours.

4 Our platoon moved on to the airfield. We were bumper to bumper. (A costly mistake.) Then was air support, American flown Spitfires with American markings on the wings. They landed and took off from the airfield.

There was another airfield maybe ten miles away. We were not aware of La Senia airport and they had fighters and bombers. A French bomber with four fighters came in low over our platoon. We tract with our 50 Cal MG. Aware of the order not to fire unless fired upon. The bomber opened its bomb bay doors and was directly over head. Two bombs came down. Our security half track was jerked up and turned 180 degrees and was totaled. Three men were hurt. Only one came back to us many weeks later. We learned something and moved our vehicles far apart.

There were dog fights with the fighters. American and French. I seen one Spitfire go down. When it was over there were no French fighters.

We received some artillery and sniper fire on the field. By night fall it stopped.

3/ Our platoon stayed in blocking position all that night and into the next day. Sometime in the morning the alarm was given tanks were attacking. I think it was the Spitfires that spotted them. (On the briefing on board ship we were told the French had 30 tanks in the area)

We were led to a place near Sainte Barbe St Lucian (spelling not correct). The TDs were guided behind a small hill, that overlooked another hill with a two story building on it. Maybe 200-300 yds away. The tanks from the 1st AR passed us by rapid water.

Our platoon leader, Lt Robert J Whitsit told our gun commander to put a round in the upper right window of the house. There was someone observing from that window. The round of 145 went through.

It was about then the French tanks appeared coming around both sides of the house. Again the hill they came. At least five were under tow with long cables. Our tanks came in from the right firing. The TDs opened fire. I was a loader so I didn't get to view too much. I do remember one tank fired at us and the round went over. I got a quick

6/ look at it. It was behind some willows
like trees. I load a round of shot. We
got a hit. It went through the front hull.
It fired at us again. I load a HE. The
tank was blown apart and start burning.
By that time, our light tanks were all
over the area firing. All four tanks
were destroyed. I seen marks on our
tanks when they had received hits.
That's about all they were marks. I don't
know of any losses on our side. I
know we destroyed one tank. The
other TD claimed 2-3. The light
tanks may have claimed all
for themselves. A good honest
guess I would say the TD got
six tanks.

After Cranfill, our battalion
camped near St Barbe. A group
of us from the Platoon, I included,
walked to the site of the tank battle.
The bodies had already been recovered and
some tanks removed. The French soldiers
blow three men died in each tank.
There was no one got out. These tanks
were old models, Renault type, with
the large spade on the back. The
hull was all riveted. It had a
cannon about 40mm short barrel.

After the tank battle, we moved
through a village where we were

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fired on by rifle and machine gun at a very close range. No one was hurt and no damage done.

The next morning we were told we would be going to Oran. A flying column was lead by Col Waters in a half track with a large American flag on its antenna. Our tracks moved wide open. The road near the La Senia Airport covered with French artillery fire that we had to drive through. The destroyer in front of us was hit at the gas tank and set on fire. Five men were killed. The driver escaped. He had arm and shoulder injury. This was the first time we seen death among us we were shaken. We just went on around them and continued to Oran.

Some miles farther on, the French turned their heavy coastal gun on us. The column stopped and deployed. We were ordered to go back ~~(to go back)~~. On the way back, the 50 Cal I was holding was hit by a tank shell ~~(that I was holding)~~. It knocked me down and the gun was spinning on its post.

6. When we were reassembled, we were told we were going back and that French artillery was stopped. However, there would be heavy small arms fire. Just keep going all the way. We were well peppered with small arms fire. Our ^{left} tanks were marked all over with hits.

In Oran, people were in the streets clapping. After defeating the French forces. The people were welcoming us with open arms. Then there was the sound of a siren. What it meant at the time we were not sure. What it did mean. It was all over. Oran was ours.

When we were equipped with M-10s in N. Africa, we had large numbers painted on both sides of the turrets. I do recall the 3rd Platoon "BC" guns were marked 61-62-63-64. In the Italian operation we had to replace guns. The replacements were not marked.

The call signs on radio was by 501. The telephone switch board in Italy always answered Baker HAVOC. Hope that is some help.

I read the story of Major Elmans story. (Thank you very much for sending it) I could make some remarks and corrections, but basically I can say it is correct.

A point of interest! Our first big problem in Tunisia was supply. For some time we had to depend on the French Army to supply us. They had very little. Our M3 trucks had French 75s. So it was reasonable to assume the ammo was the same. We quickly learn it was a low velocity. Results were almost costly to us. When "BC" attacked Faid Pass. Our gun sights were useless because the French rounds would land about half

3/ way to the target. We had to consume what
little of the American Ammo we had left.
The French Army ration cans of sardines,
five gal. cans of wine and a large stock of
bread. We used US Air Force 100 octane gas.

There was a plan to attack Sfax
on the coast. It would have chopped
up the German supply line. It would
have been a great operation. It had
to be scrapped because of the Ammo
supply.

I wish you lived nearer to me
there's a lot of stories I would tell.
When I get some more information,
I will send it to you

There's a publication named the
Herold's Trumpet operated by
Edwin W. Hundertmark

853

James A. Sawicki who has a
good deal of information available to
him. on Army units in WWII

If there are any questions, please
write.

Sincerely

Jack Cumanick

Jack Cummings

Aug. 30, 1965

I finally got my story together. Please excuse the poor spelling and the shaky handwriting. I do hope I will be of some help to you. I tried to be as accurate as I can. I'm lucky to be able to remember names and places. Still there will be some who will disagree with me.

About how many tanks were destroyed by the 701st TDs, I ~~don't~~^{don't} know if anyone was able to keep score. I wish I could be of more help.

I'm enclosing a copy of a write up that was in the Stars and Stripes - Dated Jan 31, 1945. It may be of some use to you.

About the markings on the vehicles, the 701st had temper markings in Africa. I remember some but I will write to our former Motor Sgt. for help. If you like you can write for any information.

Wale Kerscher

Task Force Commander

Lt Col John K Waters 1st A.R.

Son in law to George S Patton

Taken prisoner by the Germans

near Sicily - low - Tid.

Retired from US Army four star
General.

Maybe still living a good
source of information.

Platoon leader 3rd Platoon B Co.

Lt. Robert J. Whitsett.

Promoted to Captain for action
at Cron.

Took over Company Commander B Co.

Promoted to Major in Italy.

Moved to Battalion staff.

Later to 5th Army.

May be retired Army.

May not be living.

Platoon Sgt. 3rd Plat.

SP Sgt William Blumkrush,

Silver Star Italy.

Retired Army.

May not be living.

Sgt Robinson #1 TK Dis.

~~#7~~ Killed in action Cron.

Sgt Rex ~~Went~~ Meredith #2 TD

Retired Army.

May be living.

Sgt Archer Cox #3 TK Dis.

Still living.

Sgt Arlow C. Lindblom #4 TK Dis.

Still living.

but in good
families?

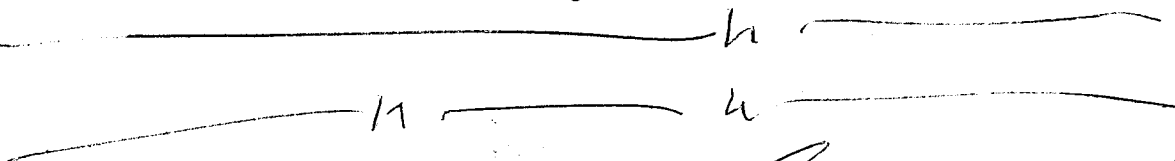
Security Section

Sgt William E. Ray.
Still leaving.

Anti Aircraft Section

Sgt Andrew J. Paul.

Assigned unit crest 701
Leaving?



The last Company Commander B Co
took command from Major
Whitsett. May be a good source of
information in the last days of war.
B Co was very active.

Quentin L. Cult.

Court.
6013

Phone

