



703rd Road Block



Vol. II No. 4 703rd Tank Destroyer Battalion Association Newsletter 12/1991

A CHRISTMAS TO RELIVE

Summary of Operations--24 Dec 44- 1st Pl. "B" K.O.'d 2 Mk V's. 3rd Pl. "B", a Mk V and Mk IV. Hq. Kitchen-Driver, Matusavige, shot down an FW 190 on his own near EUPEN.-- At 1730, Bn. ordered to move, join XVIIIth Airborne, "B" to stay with 82nd AB and "C" with 1st Inf, 26th Inf. Regt. 1730 hrs.

25 Dec 44- Bn. arrived WERBOMONT 1700. Bn. less "C" Co. attached to 82nd AB, 3 plts. "B", 1 "A", each to a regt. 2 Plts. "A" Co. in division reserve.

Third Platoon, "A" Co.

24 Dec 44

It was late afternoon and not yet dark. We arrived at a small clearing surrounded by trees. It had been snowing for some time and every thing was covered making camouflage unnecessary. Mother Nature was doing a good job. There was no wind. The snow flakes were large and falling gently to the ground. Only the whisper of the slightly turning flakes and muted voices of the men eased through the silence. In the center of the clearing was a small stone cottage. The residents had left to spend the night in shelters below. The living room became the billet for the men not on guard. The living room was complete with a Christmas tree. 'Twas a still night of remembering Christmas eves past.

Christmas day dawned quietly, cloudy, no wind, and not snowing,--peacefully. The residents returned and asked permission to use their kitchen to cook breakfast. A little later a German dispute, loud and fast,

developed in the kitchen. When I entered the room I learned that the small girl, by then in tears, was not being allowed to "go to mass" by her grandparents and mother! After a few words, to my surprise, her folks allowed the child to guide me to the church so I, too, could "go to mass"! I told the little girl that she didn't have to, but she took me

by the hand, for she had no enemies. I, too, forgot that. I was thinking of the twin boys I had left behind. The Christmas mass was read in Latin, the sermon given in German, the theme in any language was, Peace on earth, good will toward man."

On the way back to the cottage the girl was jumping with joy, kicking snow, throwing snowballs,--even at me. I threw some back. This continued until we were near our goal. Near there she again took my hand and became very quiet. At the clearing we found the tanks already in column in the road and the jeep waiting for me. The orders had come. I left the girl at her door and got into the jeep,--not a word was spoken. I turned to say, "Goodbye", but, like her, all I could do was wave. Her wave, the sparkle in her eyes, and her smile had Christmas written all over her. A Christmas I cannot forget.

John J. Balmes (A)

Your association leaders wish you the very best for the holiday season, and that the whole of the New Year finds that health and good fortune are in abundance for you and your loved ones.

CALENDAR DISCIPLINE

The "703rd" reunion is slated for May 21-23, 1992, in Pennsylvania. Please mark your calendars. When you get the details you and your loved one will be ready to go! May it be in the best of health!

SCHUTT'S CORNER

Please send Bob Schutt the annual dues of \$10.00 for 1992. Again, please, we need you to volunteer \$10.00 more that will enable our association to publish and mail the 703rd Road Block so as to encourage membership, participation, and bring you pleasure. It'll even help you write a "yarn" for all of us!

The Flag Means Being Mature

"But I, for one, see something else
Each time our flag goes by.

Normandy Northern France The Rhineland The Ardennes Central Europe

I "see" the graves of soldiers past,
Who wept, and fought, and died.

I hear the echoes from the past,
I see the brave men fall.
I read the names in Washington
Engraved upon the wall." L. Sage

Patriotism can be expressed by each of us, seen, heard, or felt within. The flag has been for me--thrilling, and a spur to work to help keep my country and community doing their best for themselves so they can be doing their best for everyone. In a way the flag is a reminder to be a mature person. It tells us age will never stop a good person from, "pitchin' in!" Editor

"Steps of houses they're building today,
Are so high they take your breath away.
The streets are steeper than years ago.
That explains why my walking is so slow,
But I'm keeping up, if it's hip or new.
Don't say I can't dance the boogaloo.
I'm in the running in this I'm secure.
I'm not really old-I'm only mature."

Grateful to Fred Krupnow (Hq) for poems.

TAPS

Ray Creviston (A)
1414 McLean Ave.

Tomah, Wisconsin 54660

Ray checked out 10/8/91. He had cardiac problems for some time, and "the pump gave out"! All of us who knew Ray wish to express our sorrow to Bernice and the family. We recall Ray, moderate in height, blond, blue-eyed, and, particularly, his rolling gait. His voice always matched his pleasant conversation. Again, unless one might be socially involved with a comrade or unless we were in the same platoon, - we saw little of each other, especially in combat. Too, our attention was turned towards home. Ray was the kind of fellow with whom you wish you could have shared more time.

Your editor recalls a scene in barracks when someone laughingly asked me to go over near Ray's bunk and pointed to a picture of a cow pinned behind it. If others preferred a picture of a movie starlet, not Ray! He looked to his home, a way of looking at what was meaningful to his life.

The "703rd" was a better outfit because he was with us.

THE GALLANT TWENTY SIX !

There were 26 of our "Road Blockers" at the St. Louis reunion, a fine delegation.

Headquarters Company

Wilbur Showalter Merle Goodrich
Paul Clark Bob Green
Phil Hallabrin Fred Hunt
Fred Krupnow

Reconnaissance Company

Everett Stiles Stan Malinowski

Company "A"

Ed McIntyre George Toma
Ted Michalowski Jim Santino
Bob Schutt Victor Borek
Elmer Langbecker Rocco Mantro
Matt Luczinski Frank Miller
Len Straub

Company "B"

John Czajkowski Jim Roberts
I. B. Wagonseller (C,Hq.)

Company "C"

"Hap" Paulson Bob Downey
"Hank" Gosch (B)

HANG IN "FELLER"!

Just before the St. Louis reunion of the division, we learned that Charles Hirt Jr., (143rd Sig.) the president of the Third Armored Division Association, faced surgery in St. Louis for cancer after chemotherapy and radium treatments plus added complications.

After the reunion, Len Straub's note complimented "Chic" Hirt. "Chic" made it to the reunion in St. Louis. He and his committee organized and led a well-planned program. Let's root and pray for him.

1315 Lanvale Drive
Webster Groves, MO 63119

MEET MARGE AND FRANK MILLER (A) !

Frank writes and visits very many of our members, but so many still don't know him. Below are excerpts from a recent letter. They are great friends for all of us! Enjoy 'em!

%The Bug House%

27 Oct 91

Hi Nate, Florence et ménage,

Guess it's about time I scrawled a few ill chosen words--probably misspelled. Have

you heard anything good on -----? I will write to him-should have already.---too many problems right here. I sure hope he is making it! Nothing worse than something inoperable. I know. --therefore we vegetate till those problems get fractious enough to show the problem-then the "Doc" may take a crack at rectifying the culprit. Meanwhile I'm not worth ten cents in a declining market. Have to look at the things I cannot do and live with them, which I will--never gave up on anything and do not intend to now.

I hope no one wants to go the Atlantic City. That place is only safe in platoon strength with loaded sidearms-or a bus that takes you to a casino -and home, no one wanders around that place on foot.----

Marge and I wish you and Florence had been with us in St. Louis. I spent a lot of time in a prone position, but as the gang met in my room, I didn't miss much. We drove out, four days each way-couldn't fly since I couldn't walk and haul luggage.

The girls all claim the reunion is flat without Marge there- and I really believe that--she is my spark plug too.

----and the Goddamn John got leaking under the seal when I went to the hospital. Finally got enough courage to tackle it-2 1/2 days to do what should have been done in 3 hours!

The furnace-G.E.-was obsoleted in 1948 and no parts made since '54, but it was the best G.E. ever built and one goes to extremes to dig up a part from any junkpile to keep it running. So far I've been lucky. Cost of replacement scares me to the "n"th degree!

Well the Braves didn't make the win-but I'm going to hit the hay at 1 A.M. Good night. God Bless us every one.

Love, Frank, Marge, +Diabolo III
Which animal is telling me--let's get on the ball-it was time long ago.

Just What We Need !

John F. Cailloute (B)
43 4th Street
Meriden, Connecticut 06450

Along with his check, John sent a couple of snapshots and offered more. He'd like to know the whereabouts of Jack Crenan and "Sgt." Dennison. Is he recalling desert "bud-dies"? Great hearing from him.



Chow Line at Camp Hood, Texas. That's Doherty behind Gri (A)

COBRA

The Normandy Breakthrough
July 27-July 28, 1944

The Third Armored Division moved into the breakthrough early on July 27th. "A" Co., the 703rd with Task Force "X"(CCA) under Brewster of the 32nd Armored Regt., moved south to Canisy. Hickey in command of CCA was to stay out of the hedgerows, to drive past opposition leaving pockets of resistance for the infantry, swing west through Cerisy La Salle, and pin fleeing German units to be pressed East from the Coutances area. But the defenses, anti-tank fire from a railroad embankment, poor roads to circumvent it,-- CCA's three task forces were stymied. Cerisy La Salle had to be taken to keep high ground from Germans who could then hold the Third Armored from pinning back the escape route. Watson and Hickey decided to bypass Cerisy La Salle and drive to Montpichon, one task force to take high ground outside Cerisy La Salle, a third task force to head for Coutances.

July 28th was filled with disappointment, few gains. German forces, though hit by sixteen of our tactical fighter bombers, set effective defenses. Outside of Canisy, "A" Co. moved into action. Barbalinardo's and Gann's destroyer took a long time in knocking out a towed .88 that the Germans blew themselves, its mover, and a personnel carrier. Later the whole platoon was together. Gann and Barbalinardo's crews had stopped a German counterattack when light tanks and the 36th Infantry pulled back. A German antitank shell

had sailed high over Feeney's destroyer. The platoon held the road close to nightfall. Then using a Red Cross guise, the Germans conned Henderson, the platoon leader, who held fire. From their position the Germans attacked, forced the destroyers into the hedges from where their .50 cal. machine guns were not that effective and destroyer security was sure they were in for it. But the attack halted, and in the waning daylight P-47's strafed the hedges 50 yards ahead repeatedly. Our light tanks counterattacked. Infantry came alongside the destroyers and a further withdrawal of 150 yards was necessary due to night blindness.

Under cover of darkness the Germans pulled out. After noon of the 29th the task forces moved out preceded by a fine curtain of artillery fire. The platoon moved through the deserted town as Feeney blew up an abandoned German tank. The column hit the gas pedal for a good distance westward with ease till nightfall.

At one time they moved at night. The security men crouched on the deck of the destroyers looking for trouble from the trees and hedges, and the constantly feared "crazy" Heinle who could raise hell with a Panzerfaust (bazooka) and some grenades, but he had skipped with his mates.

Later the platoon griped. Though Barbalinardo and Gann's crews had been recommended for Bronze Stars for holding the fort at Cerisy La Salle, the complaint was that, twice, division infantry had pulled out on us. Any time trouble loomed we were called up front and the "doughfeet" were heard to say, "Those T.D.'s saved our butts!" Someone did snarl at the gripers, that it had been Capt. Cole who had called for direct bombing and strafing just in front of the first platoon hedge rows that really helped make the difference.

During July 29, "A" Co. was credited with mopping up a Mk. V, 2 .88's, one of their movers, and helping stop an enemy infantry counterattack.

"B" Co. had remained in reserve on the 27th and later moved with a task force closer to the developing action. "C" Co. had moved out with CCB.

But the goal of Bradley to trap large numbers of the enemy had failed.

Editor

In Front Of The Elsenborn Ridge

The Ardennes Campaign, "The Bulge", began for our battalion when it was transferred into the Vth Corps and attached to the 1st Infantry Division on 12/17/44. At the assembly area on the northern side of the German advance where the defensive effort would be to keep the German drive confined to limited avenues, the elements of the 703rd were divided among the regiments of "The Big Red One". The 2nd plat. of "A" Co. went with an infantry task force to evacuate a "gutty" G.I. nurse and her field hospital. The rest of "A" Co. was with the 16th Inf. (See, "Why Me?" Road Block, I, 1, 3/1990, pp.4-5), "C" Co. with the 26th Inf., "B" Co. with division reserve, and a platoon from "Recon" with each company.

Within a few hours "A" Co.'s 1st Plat. lost Barbalinardo and Olson to enemy bombing--"B" Co. was on the move to join the 82nd Airborne and "C" Co. was so seriously engaged that a platoon of "A" Co. was readied to go in its support.

The elements of "C" Co. had taken defensive positions near the Bütgenbach villages. After midnight of 12/20/44, a German attack was stymied though getting to infantry foxholes. The Germans suffered heavy losses. "--tank destroyers knocked out two of them,-- and the rest fell back. A few hours later, shortly before daylight--the Germans tried again with eight Panthers in the lead. A shell from some source knocked out the C.O.'s Panther, setting it on fire and three more fell victim to artillery fire."

"It was the T.D. with Reid and Glod that created the havoc with the German advance.-- The original battle started when Reid, hearing the Germans advance, got to his gun sights and noticed a spark along the path heading toward him. He fired at the spot and scored a hit. From the glow of the burning tank he saw the other vehicles. His firing continued until there were no more in his sights. Then he asked Glod to load H.E. shells so that he could fire more effectively against infantry vehicles. That was when Glod was hurt. The recoil of the gun broke his hip. Reid had to alternate between loading and firing until there were no more targets. --The two German tanks that reached Bütgenbach were knocked out by Austin's platoon.

I was about three miles away from Reid's tank, with no means of transportation. I had

taken the position that appeared to be the one that the Germans would attack. I never did get the story of what happened until the platoon was reattached to the 3rd Armored. --However Gosch was with Austin's platoon at Bütgenbach, and he came down the next day to survey the carnage there. He must have known that Glod had been evacuated. Also, he should have given us credit for the vehicles destroyed. The tanks that should have given our destroyers' support were left unmanned as their crews bailed out and ran. The Colonel from the 1st Infantry came down to accuse us of cowardice because his infantrymen had seen the tanks abandoned. But when he saw all the empty shell casings and the damage that we had done, he not only apologized, but he also sent Gosch a letter of commendation--which, incidentally, Gosch has told me about, but which I have never seen!" Paulson

Who Had What, M-10's or M-36's!

In the Summary of Operations of our battalion, 12/18/44, the day it assembled at SOURBRODT ready for attachment with the "Big Red One", it states that the battalion had 28 M-36's that were operational, 12 in "A", 5 in "B", and 11 in "C" Cos. Your editor wrote Paulson concerning this because he had indicated that he hadn't seen one in his company. The battalion report said there were 11 M-36's in "C" Co. Let "Hap" tell you about it!

"In the battle for Hastenrath, Ramsdan's T.D. took a hit on the top of the gun shield. It didn't penetrate, but it welded the shield to the turret so that it could not be elevated or depressed. In order to change the range we were forced to put a tree trunk in front of the tracks. We would then drive up that tree trunk until we got the elevation that the gun required. That vehicle was an M-10!--I have read your reports, and Col. Showalter's letter about our having M-36's before "The Bulge". However, I can remember a road block in "The Bulge", where a German half-track came down the road while we were dragging a log through the snow. The gunner couldn't elevate the gun enough to fire, so

he fired at the enemy with the 50 cal. M.G. on the turret! ----It is going to take a lot to convince me that I had any of the new ".90's" until after the drive toward Vaux. The tank that Pulizzi was riding, was the same that got hit. It still had the steel plate reinforcement on the front, covered with sandbags and logs. The ".88" went through all of them, through the fighting compartment, through the motor block and out the back. That left me with two operational vehicles, and then I got replacements."

[Every item in the Road Block finds your editor "going fishing"! Do the items remind you of your experiences? Please let us know what you recall.]

"ICE CREAM ANYONE ?"

Freddie Hunt's tale was amusing, when he told about Bang's Disease. I, too, went for Ice Cream in Liege, -how he stirred up memories. We were sitting around in Germany when the talk turned to Liege and its Glace. Bugganer and I convinced Capt. Gosch that it was a short trip to that place. So early next morning, "Mac", "Buggy" and I, went into Liege in my Jeep, To get enough ice cream for the evening meal, a promise we found hard to keep. "Off Limits" signs were all about. Where to get the ice cream was anyone's guess! But fortunately we stumbled upon a huge U.S. Air Force mess. For a few "Heinie" souvenirs the Mess Sgt. told us where they made Glace, But warning of the M.P. swarm in town, we would surely be caught in that place. He provided us a place to clean up and gave us polish for our shoes, We soon acquired the "rear echelon" look, with everything but the "dress blues"! Then to the confectioner three of us sped, and quickly we struck up a deal. The large order would take three hours, and thus we had to cool our heels.

Where to hide till the Ice Cream was made.
 I thought of "The Purloined Letter,
 If there is something you wanted to hide,
 the more obvious it was, the better!
 So we went right down to the towns big square
 a park that was ringed on four sides,
 By headquarters of Corps, Air Force and Army.
 They had all of the buildings occupied,
 The M.P.'s at each corner directed traffic,
 this was where we chose to hide.
 We saw a small bar in the middle of this,
 But when we walked in, just hardly inside,
 A band played, "The Star Spangled Banner"
 so we snapped to attention and gave a right
 handed salute, in a true military manner.
 Why we weren't caught then, I'll never know,
 but as soon as the anthem was o'er
 We went to the rear of that Belgian bar,
 and looked for a quick exit door!
 Then the people came back to our table,
 in what seemed an unending line,
 To just shake our hands, or pat our backs,
 and each brought us a glass of wine.
 "Parlez Anglais?" we would ask each one,
 at last one said he could.
 We asked the way out the back door,
 and he grinned and said that he would.
 We chatted awhile with all the patrons, but
 the wine was now taking its toll.
 We had to get out, get some fresh air, so I
 told our new friend, "Let us roll!"
 He winked and smiled and said "Follow me."
 and out the back door we did go.
 We reeled and we tottered as we followed our
 friend to the door of an ancient chateau.
 He took us inside, and to my surprise,
 it was a house of sexual pleasure.
 And "Buggy" grinned "Just what did you ask?
 as an interpreter you are a treasure!"
 It's only fairy tales that have happy endings
 before we could fall from God's grace,
 The luck of this Irishman quickly ran out--
 the M.P.'s raided the place.
 The Provost Marshall, a 6 foot major, I'd say,
 had hardly opened his trap
 When "Buggy" hollered, "Don't take any "S--t,
 Hit that rear echelon, Hap!"
 I sobered enough to explain why we came,
 and why we were forced to stay in the town.
 The major relented and told an M.P.
 to escort us all out of town.
 Not without the Ice Cream, I quickly replied,
 "I'll take no ifs nor ands and butts!"
 So the M.P. took us to the Ice Cream store,
 and watched while I black-marketed butts.

They wanted so badly to get us out of town,
 they never warned us of Bang's disease!!!

"OTTO"

Arthur F. Parnell (A)

Those of us who wanted to know more
 about the men with whom we were to share army
 life, their background and behaviour, found
 "Otto" a striking, unusual comrade. He was
 tall, lightly freckled, pale in complexion,
 and his body moved as if he was consistently
 tired. He selected what he wanted to know of
 what was our diet of training, and with dis-
 dain for some of the people who chose to hand
 us what he rejected. What was striking was



Parnell (A) ???

that "Otto" demonstrated his defiance with a
 clarity that kept him out of trouble, and won
 observers admiration. In one instance he did
 not respond when the company was assembled,
 and appeared to have gone too far. His cool
 explanation cleared the air.

"Otto" was part of the poker scene. He
 had the "deadpan" for it. He'd "fake 'em
 out!" Often he was the loser.

He felt that ordinary human behavior had
 little virtue. It might have grown out of his
 experiences of employment in a bureaucracy
 pre-war. It might have been his religious
 views which prompted him to prove he was not
 corrupted by the army environment. His col-
 leagues quickly rated him as a leader because
 he demonstrated, mildly, behaviour they
 appreciated. His superiors saw his potential.

In combat he occasionally acted daringly

in dangerous situations as if he was leaving his safety to a higher being. He did not demand his men act similarly, and was concerned with destroying the enemy and securing his crew. Here seemed a man in defiance of what he took to be pettiness, and in combat, justifying his actions by proving he could carry his load. He was successful enough to find himself in O.C.S., and back with his company. He handled his contact with his comrades well, maintaining the respect he held previously. "Otto"? A character! Editor

GOT THE JOB DONE! RETIRED!

"The tank destroyer was created for the primary mission of destroying hostile armor. Its initial superiority for this mission lay in its superior gun power. With the development of more adequate tank cannon and due to the offensive nature of operations, the need for this special-mission type of unit has ceased. During operations tank destroyers were required to assume tank missions for which they were not equipped or trained adequately, and to perform secondary missions as roving batteries, direct fire assault gun action and augmentation of the fire of armored units. The tank destroyer mission as originally conceived has been superseded by the requirements for a killer tank. Tank destroyers should be replaced by a tank which can equal or outgun enemy tanks and which has sufficient armor to protect itself and its crew from normal anti-tank and tank weapons." First United States Army, Report of Operations, 2/23-5/45 (3 vols. Wash.; Gov't. Printing Office, 1946), I, 93.

WHAT THE HELL!

THEY WERE ONLY PRACTICING!

"Since December (1943), the [British] troops had been training intensively for their roles in the invasion. In April there were full scale rehearsals, including assaults--on the Devon coast--where the beaches resembled those of the Calvados. Exercise TIGER, the rehearsal of Force "U" that was to land at UTAH, produced a tragedy when nine German E-Boats out of Cherbourg, motor torpedo boats displacing about 100 tons and armed with two torpedo tubes and two light guns each, got in among the landing craft in Lyme Bay and sank two LST's while

damaging another. Five other LST's and two British destroyers engaged the E-Boats, but the Germans escaped, and the action cost the Allies about 700 lives."

Weigley, Russell F., Eisenhower's Lieutenants, Bloomington: Indiana U. Pr., 1981 p. 71.

AMERICANS IN NORMANDY

(See 703rd Road Block, 11,3, 9/91, 11-12)
Now A British View

"Some senior Americans regretted that their army had failed to adopt Montgomery's



"A" Co.

Adolph Hohenberger-Frank Cox-John Keough Jr. -
John Doherty- Paul K. Clark- Leo Wittler-
Rosviel Reiling

policy before D-Day, of leavening untried divisions with key officers and NCO's who possessed battle experience at battalion level and below. There had also been a failure to make the men of the First Army familiar with their leaders.--A few divisional commanders became widely known and respected by their men. But the roll call of senior American officers found wanting and sacked in Normandy was astonishing:-----

If Bradley's personal modesty was one of his most engaging characteristics, it contributed to the impersonality of his army. Whatever men thought of Patton-and many scorned him- all of them knew who he was. Most took a pride, then and later, in serving with Patton's army. As Montgomery understood so well, the cult of personality can be immediately valuable in war. The lack of it

within the American army in Normandy- the difficulty for most infantry replacements identifying with a man, a unit, anything human beyond their own squad save the vast juggernaut of tanks and guns with which they rolled-contributed significantly to the difficulties of the American army. Where the German army did its utmost to maintain men in regional formations, the Americans pursued a deliberate policy of dividing men of the same town or state- a legacy of the First War, when the pain of a local unit's destruction was thought to have borne too heavily upon individual communities. But even industrialized war on a vast scale needs its focus of identity, its charismatic leaders. These were instinctive human necessities that America's commanders seemed slow to understand."

Hastings, Max, Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1984, 247-248.

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