

Dallas, Oregon 97338  
May 22, 1979

I saw your request for help in writing a book about Tank Destroyer Battalions in World War II. I was Personnel Clerk for Reconnaissance Company of 776 Tank Destroyer Battalion from about the first of December 1942 to August 1945 when the high point men were transferred to other outfits and 776 became an occupation battalion in Germany. After training in the Clerks Battery at Camp Roberts I joined the 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion in September 1942.

I believe that I can furnish you some interesting incidents that occurred during my time with 776.

To understand The 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion one must consider our former commanding officer, J. P. Barney Jr., Lieutenant Colonel permanent rank. He was a classmate of General Patton at West Point. From what I heard they were in quite a few escapades together. Colonel Barney was an excellent soldier in spite of his peculiarities, and because of him 776 was a top battalion.

You mentioned the 899th Td Battalion. They went overseas at or near the same time that we in 776 did. They were in Fort Dix when we were there in December and January 1942-43. I do not know when they went into action, but when they did they ran into serious trouble. I do not know the details, but I understood that they did not use proper reconnaissance, and were caught in the open by the Germans. They were said to have suffered heavy casualties.

The 899th was what one would call a hard luck battalion. There officers went in for heavy drilling. In the quiet of the evening when we were through with our duties we could hear the 899th drilling in the distance even though it was dusk. 776 practiced very little formal drilling, but rather worked on the other phases of military training such as use of weapons and care of equipment.

Colonel Barney was offered a place on the training staff of Camp Hood, but he elected to take his Battalion overseas instead. He helped compose tank destroyer tactics which were to seek, hide, and destroy. 776 was well trained in these tactics. Colonel Barney was a tough old soldier, but he was good to his men. He gave furloughs to the men who had been in 776 the longest before we left Hood for Dix. 899 did not issue furloughs to their men, and it was said that a number of their men took AWOL furloughs. They returned after these furloughs.

I could write a good many things, but I will await your reply before sending more information.

Sincerely yours

*Willard Totten*