



612th Tank Destroyer Battalion Association Newsletter June 2003

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Remembering

By Frances C. Hayes



For
some
time
now I
have
realized

that someone had to write
Chapter #50 of the 612th story.

When you think about it, you realize that this chapter is probably the most important one of the series, because who knows it may be the last. I hope this is not the final chapter, but we are really getting close.

When you realize that you are rolling up the lives of a lot of fine people into a capsule, that covers half a lifetime, I do not feel mentally, physically or emotionally qualified to do an adequate job of putting it all on paper. After all, you are dealing with the hopes, lives and aspirations of a lot of fine and dedicated people and to do anything less than top of the line would not be proper or acceptable.

As I have said this is not a job that I look forward to doing, but since no one else seems inclined to take the job and knowing what it means to so many people who are still here and to the loving memory of many who have gone on before us. I feel a great desire to take it on and give it our best shot.

Our reunions have always meant a great deal to us and we have always made much of them. We have not all been able to attend reunions for various reasons and that makes me sad because they mean so much to our men. Although some have not been able to be there physically, they have attended in spirit, and




enjoyed the accounts of what happened. We were extremely fortunate to have had Jack to give us such a factual account of what took place that you felt like you were there and in the middle of things. "God bless you Jack, you are still our 'jewel' and your work goes on."

Little did we realize when we met in Louisville in 1954 that it was the first of a great line of Reunions and that after 50 years we would still be going strong. It is the loyalty and dedication of so many people that has made this possible. The remarkable thing is that even though some can never attend, their loyalty and support has always been there for us. This is what it's all about and is the real reason we are still hanging

in there. We have discussed trying to get a memento of some kind for each member or surviving spouse. You realize our limited income makes it impossible to do something big, but we have been able to get a keepsake that we plan to mail with this 50th Anniversary Newsletter.

Do you know this little cutie?



See page 6 for the answer.

Although it isn't much we hope it will mean a lot to you, and that the thoughts and prayers that go with it will be something very special to you. We sincerely hope and pray that each time you put it in your hand that you think

of all the fine times we have had together and the very rare privileges of having known and associated with you, even on a limited basis. It is not always the monetary value of an object that makes up its worth, but what it means to someone.

I am sure that every "G.I." was very proud of his outfit and what it was all about. The 612th was no exception and like any army outfit it had its pride and traditions. As you very well know our American Army was founded on the principles of pride in our great country and loyalty to it and what it stood for. All through our life as a great land these have been the principles upon which we have operated and the 612th was no different. Sometimes you were not at all happy with the way things were done but if you took the full trip when the going got really tough and it was a case of life and death it became crystal clear to you why we had to go through all of these seemingly silly and useless things. In tough times they were the way of surviving or not.

One of my young friends once said to me, "I don't see why you are so hung up on going to reunions with people you have seen very little and have no personal contact with. I just don't get it." My reply to him was, "my friend all I can tell you is that when you live together and die together there is something intrinsic you can't put your finger on." He did not understand what I was talking about and no matter how hard he tried, he would never understand unless he was there and saw it first hand. As we go through life these are experiences we have and as the years pass by they become more understandable and also valuable to us.

As I said before all outfits have their pride and spirit of competition which are necessary if we are to succeed in any endeavor.

When I joined the 612th as a green recruit, fresh out of civilian life I certainly had no idea what to expect, but it did not take long for me to know this was something very different from anything I had ever experienced before. From the first I felt that the 612th was something special. Not just your ordinary group of men.

We were very lucky to be led by Col Willis

Hedden, an old regular army Calvary officer, experienced, dedicated and qualified for what he was about to take on, the molding of a group of raw recruits into a proud and experienced fighting force. It was his vision to make us into something very special and he could accept nothing but the best, not only from the new recruits, but from his officers as well. On account of his age he was not able to stay in command but he was there long enough to instill his principles and ideas into making the 612th the top of the line. To do this he had a fine group of dedicated and well-trained officers and men to carry the work forward when he left us. All through our training and into our combat role in the real thing, everyone carried forward the principles he had instilled so deeply in us.

Our record in combat was an exemplary one. From the time we went overseas until the end of the war we were at the center of things. We conducted ourselves with honor and bravery at all times. The citations and commendations received from ours and foreign governments are ample proof of what we accomplished and we own a proud and enviable record. A record we can stand on and be proud of.

Certainly those of us who are left and the memory of those who have gone are justly proud of what we accomplished for ourselves and our country in its time of need.

Thanks to everyone and God Bless you all.

Francis C. Hayes



50th
Reunion

As we mentioned in our last newsletter this year we will be celebrating our 50th Reunion. It will be held in Tarpon Springs, FL at the Holiday Inn. 38724 Hwy 19 North from **July 30th through August 3rd, 2003.**

We have had the reunion here before and the accommodations are excellent. We have a spacious and convenient Hospitality Room, restaurant and pool.

The room rate is \$64.00 plus tax. This is for a room with two (2) double beds or King size. You may call toll free at 1-800-465-4329 for your reservations. Be sure when you make your reservation to mention 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion Reunion in order to get the special rate. The cut off date for reservations is July 14.

We look forward to seeing you **July 30th through August 3rd, 2003** for our 50th. Let's make it a real whopper.

Don't forget that the cut-off date for reservations at this terrific price is July 14th. Rates will go up sharply after July 14th.



“Tele-Talk”
with Francis C. Hayes

I have continued calling people and in this newsletter will include some of the news about our friends that will be of interest to all of you.

- **Elmer Haynes** and his two daughters will be in Tarpon Springs for the reunion.
- **AZ Lauderdale** and son will also be attending the Tarpon Springs reunion.
- I had a real good talk with **Hartwin J. Magnuson**. He has arthritis very bad and cannot get around real good. Because of his health he won't be able to attend the reunion but wants to say hello to all his 612th buddies.
- **Foy Peavy's** wife is in a nursing home but he has arranged to come to Tarpon Springs himself and we look forward to seeing him.
- **Herman McCollum** is doing fine but cannot get to the reunion. He was glad to get a call.
- **Earl Sain** is doing fine. He, his wife Glyn and sister-in-law Dorothy will be coming to the reunion.

- I spoke to **Bill Leininger's** wife Elnora. They are OK but cannot attend this year's reunion. We will sure miss them.
- **Richard Leininger** and family are also not able to attend this year's reunion.
- **Dominic Iannotti** was glad to hear form us but cannot be at the reunion. He appreciated the call.
- Tried to call **Bill Lamb** but got his machine. Will try again.
- **Carol Filippini** is fine. She and her daughter will be coming to Tarpon Springs.
- Finally talked with **Mrs. Isabel Kemp**. We had a real nice visit on the phone. She is sorry that she won't be able to attend the Tarpon Springs reunion. We will miss you and you will be in our thoughts. Please note on your roster that Isabel's area code is changed. Her number is 770-995-5249.
- **Geneva Smith**, our "Moon Pie Lady", hopes to come but we are sorry to report that her home was severely damaged by a recent tornado.
- Had a nice letter from **Dean Uhles** of Castalian Springs, TN. Dean wants to come to Tarpon Springs so bad but has not found anyone to come with her and help drive. Maybe someone in the area can contact her at 615-374-3709 and work out travel arrangements.

In Memory

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of one of our 612th brothers. Leonard Brown Sr., passed away on March 27th of this year. We received a lovely letter from his son Leonard that we have included in this newsletter. We would like to extend our sincere condolences to the Brown Family.

Also please remember in your prayers Jewel and Ouida Raulins. Ouida's son Jerry Smith passed away in May after a very long illness.

We ask that you also keep in your thoughts and prayers our members and their families who may be experiencing illness or other difficulties.

Thank You

Tena would like to thank all those folks who have sent in dues and more since the May newsletter. Special thanks to:

Hazel Scott
Dean Ousley
Thelma Slayton
Doris Kelley
Leonard N. Brown Jr.
Mike and Helen Papendick
Amelia Harding
Clara Harding
Imogene Williams
Edna Showalter
Irene and Hartwick Magnuson
Herman McCollum

Tena has talked to Hazel, Edna and Thelma. They are all doing well but they cannot make the Tarpon Springs Reunion. We will all miss seeing these fine ladies in Tarpon but we know they will be with us in spirit.

Looking for Information

We have received several requests for information through our website. We are printing these request in the newsletter in hopes that someone may be able to provide the necessary information for these folks.

I am doing research on the 612th tank destroyer battalion and the 2nd infantry division for a military modeling diorama I'm making. I'm trying to find out detailed information about what units were involved in the breaching of the Siegfried line in the battles of Oct.-Dec. 1944 in the area around St. Vith, Belgium. I am also trying to confirm the use of M-18 Hellcats by these units at that time. Thanks for any help you might be able to provide.

Jim Guld
jamesguld@cybermesa.com

Fort Hood Museum

Ceilia Stratton of the Fort Hood Museum is looking for any information on the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion for addition to their archives. She asks that 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion Association members search their memorabilia for any kind of publication that may have info on our unit. This could be a history of the unit, a Thanksgiving or Christmas menu that includes a roster, a unit newspaper (that was usually mimeographed during WWII)--anything like that. For their archives, they do NOT need to have the originals of these if the veteran wants to hold onto it. A good quality Xerox copy works equally well for their archives.

This is a great opportunity to preserve our history. If you have any 612th history please contact Ceilia at:

Ceilia Stratton
4ID Museum
Bldg 418
P. O. Box 5917
Fort Hood, TX
254-287-8811

Do You Remember Joseph Wukas?

My father, Joseph Wukas, who died in March 1994, was a member of the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion. I believe he joined the unit in March 1945 and served in Czechoslovakia outside of Pilsen until July 1945 when he was transferred to the 35th Infantry Division for the invasion of Japan. I think he was in 'C' Company. I am curious to know if anyone has any memory of him. If you knew my father please contact me at:

Mark Wukas
385 Winnetka Avenue
Winnetka, IL 60093
847-784-6538
wukasm@newtrier.k12.il.us

Dear Susie . . .

I received a very interesting letter from Imogene Williams that I would like to share with you. It reads:

Dear Susie,

I enjoyed your newsletter and I'm sending you the name of Wofford Battles of Colgate, OK., to add to your roster of 612th TDB members.

My husband, James T. Williams, passed away in March 2000, but he talked about one of his best buddies many times. He told the story of how Battles spotted 3 (and I'm not sure about the number) German soldiers in a church bell tower raining bullets down on our soldiers. He single handedly wiped them all out, saving the lives of many of his comrades.

On our trip back to OK., from the reunion in Austin, Texas in 1986, James wanted to go to Colgate, OK., and look up his buddy, Battles. He inquired of someone in town about how to find Battles. He was told to go to a café where the wife was the proprietor and where the daughter worked. They told the story that Wofford made one trip to Oklahoma City after he returned from the war. He complained of traffic and swore he would never again leave Colgate and to that day, he had kept his promise.

His wife told us how to get out to his ranch where he was working. We went out there where he and James visited. He is a very interesting character! I'm enclosing pictures that I took of them that day. Surely some of the other men remember him.

We were unable to attend many reunions but enjoyed the ones that we did attend.

Congratulations to Jewel Raulins on his attendance to all 50 reunions.

Yours truly,

Imogene Williams

We will have Imogenes letter at the reunion along with the photos of James Williams and Wofford Battles.

Thank you Imogene for sharing this story and the photos with us!

THANK YOU 612th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION ASSOCIATION

We recently received this letter. It exemplifies the great people of the 612th and how much the association means to them.

Dear Mr. Hayes,

I have had a hard time making myself sit down to write this letter informing you and the 612th of the death of my father Leonard N. Brown. He passed away March 27, 2003 from a combination of advanced heart disease, blood clot and pneumonia. He was 87 years old.

These last few years have not been easy for him. He last attended a reunion in Tarpon Springs 1998 and he was as happy then as I have ever seen him. He was beginning to have trouble with his balance then and I knew it would not be too long before he would be confined to a wheelchair. I will always be glad that I could bring him to that meeting along with his wife. I have briefly attended a reunion before when it was in Atlanta but dad attended many over the years and always looked forward to them immensely.

I was able to keep him and my mom in an assisted living facility near me in Atlanta until this past year when it became apparent he needed the higher level of care of a nursing home.

Just last summer he and I watched a Battle of the Bulge tape and tears rolled down his cheeks from the memories both pleasant and painful. He was always very proud of his World War II service although he did not speak to me often of any specifics. Only after I grew out of my self indulgent youth and with much prodding did he relate his memories to me. There is so much more I would like to know and understand about his day-to-day life then with his buddies while fighting for the U.S.A.

To that end, if you could pass this notice of his passing along I thank you. Anyone that knew my dad and would like to relate any experiences they had together please feel free to write or call.

Len-Brown
1883 Ninth Street
Chamblee, GA 30341
770-455-0027h
404-841-9989w
e-mail- lannelson@-earthlink.net

I have some photos he brought back from the war I would be happy to share. I can copy them easily and mail or e-mail. Some of them are humorous and others are, of course, not.

I have come to realize in these last few years how true the phrase "The Greatest Generation" is. My dad grew up dirt poor in north Georgia and survived the Depression and World War II. He along with many others in this county went through a time and had difficulties I cannot begin to understand. He never complained and was blessed with a long relatively healthy life and 61 years of marriage to his wife Clara.

Thank you for keeping the 612 reunion going and to that end I am enclosing a check to help with some of the dues over the past few years we have missed.

Thanks again.
Len Brown

50th REUNION KEEPSAKE

Included with this newsletter is a 50th Reunion key ring. We will have additional key rings available at the reunion for \$2 ea.

Who is that little cutie?

He is Jackson Eugene Thetford and he just happens to be the pride and joy of his Great-Grandmother Tena Phillips. Jackson's equally proud mom and dad are Travis and Sara Thetford.

Address Up-Date

Francis Hayes has asked that mail be sent to his home instead of his post office box. His address is:

Francis C. Hayes
504 Evergreen Ave.
Brewton, AL 36427

Flower Fund Raffle

The flower fund was started by Dean Uhles at a Nashville reunion and continues to grow each year. It is one of the highlights of our Saturday night banquet. Please be sure and bring a gift to raffle off.

We look forward to
seeing you in
Tarpon Springs.

*Please drive safely
and
God Bless.*

