/(Letter to my Tank gunner's Mother. She is 94 now. He will forever be 20.

02/05/94

Dear Leora:

Enclosed is a copy of an article in Newsweek. It is our Combat Command, and we were the lead Tank, commanded by platoon leader, Donald Martin, Montpelier, Vt. The mine fields described were Teller Mines laid across the road. We went around them. We entered the town of Kirchellan, moving at about 5 miles an hour. Martin did this in order to draw fire and protect the rest of his platoon. An 88 AT gun hit us through the white star on the turret, instantly killing Cpl. Willie Glenn Beckner & Pvt. Willard Bean. Martin was severely wounded, he managed to get out of the vehicle before falling helpless in the middle of the road. My ass't driver, Don Elshire and I came out, just ahead of the flames. The escape hatch was still wired shut. The Tank was brand new and had been issued to us a week before. We thought we had covered all the bases.(SURE WE DID). We were caught in a cross fire from at least two enemy machine guns and small arms fire. We were crouched beside the Tank when the AT gun fired again. There were two stunned Infantrymen still lying on the back deck. The Armor piercing shell cut them in half. Two other Infantrymen from the 58th managed to get off the tank just in time. One of them, I believe his name was Myers, and I ran out picked up Martin and ran full tilt for a Brick house about 30 yards from the now exploding tank, flames were shooting sky high through the hatches. The brick house can be seen on page 172, upper photo. in, **IN TORNADO'S WAKE.** The picture is mislabled. The officer is not observing a burning Observation post. The smoke you see rising is from our burning Tank. Four of us managed to reach the house carrying the wounded officer. (Officer Hell!! He was our buddy, Don even shared his liquor ration with his crew.) I believe the other boy from the 58th was named Bushay. We had stumbled into the neighborhood Air Raid Shelter. It was loaded with German Civilians. They were two levels down, so we stayed in the regular basement. I picked a snappy looking blond girl and got her to look after Martin's wounds. She did a great job. I stayed in touch with Don until his death at age 66, he jokingly told me years later,"She gave me those come hith but I couldn't come hither." He was so weak that when it came time to relieve himself he couldn't lift his arms. I found a quart bottle, I held the darn thing in the bottle and had the German girl shine the flashlight on it. He never forgave me for that, but it made him so mad

think it kept him alive. He kept murmuring, "I'm going to get you for this." The girl was pretty good, she only giggled a little.

We could see the boots of the German soldiers, through the small basement windows as they tried to check out the burning Tank. Tanks behind us had laid down a cover of smoke, so they didn't see us enter the building. We stayed in there for about 10 hours before the boys retook the town. When we came out Capt. Peterson was in the lead vehicle, "My God I thought you were dead," says he. It was now dark. We grabbed the Medics and took them to Martin. They tore out the banisters on the staircase to get him out. They told me that they didn't think he would make it. He rejoined us in Pilson 3 months later.

One of the 58th boys killed was named Hardenburgh. You'll find many of the names above in the back of **Tornados Wake,** under Deaths or medals. You can find a brief paragraph on page 142 describing the action. Major Artman was our Task Force commander. I have both written and spoken with him many times. I actually sent him a copy of his orders for the Silver Star. His orders were printed on the page behind mine. He said he had lost his in all his travels as a career officer. It's been a year now. Hope he's OK.

The night before the Rhine crossing, they gave the outfit a couple of Kegs of beer. Martin had just got his liquor ration, so we had one heck of a party. The thing that stands out vividly in my mind, was Willy playing the piano. He was pretty fair at it. There were about 20 some odd of us in the living room of that German house we had confiscated and all were singing the words to the songs we knew. The main pieces he played several times over that evening have haunted me through the years. Even today when I hear either one of them, a tear or two is apt to form. You must remember that this gathering of young warriors was to be the last time the entire platoon, which had trained together for so long, were to be together. Therefore it was entirely fitting that this was a happy and joyous occasion. We had had our baptism of fire and then some, but fortunately we had had no real casualties, so we knew what the Morrow held. This night however, all was forgotten save comradeship, singing, the telling of many somewhat raunchy jokes, and lies about our, in reality non existent previous sex lives. It would be nice to write that, **THE WINE FLOWED FREELY,** but in truth we had no wine, only Bourbon, Scotch and lots of beer. **The stories and lies and the taste of cheap booze are long forgotten, but the two melodies linger and every note is imprinted on the dark confines of the mind.**

Neither Willy nor I were drinkers, but this was a special occasion. We

that our Tank was to lead the entire Division into battle against the 12th German Panzer (Tank) Division. Willy and I shared a bedroom in the back of the house and when the evening was over we somehow managed to find it. Yup, we paid for our sins the following morning. The house was in the German town of Rhineburgh. We had been there for several weeks and life was slow and easy. We drew a brand new Tank for the Rhine crossing and spent most of our time cleaning the Cosmoline and grease used in shipping vehicles overseas. Willie"s friend "Nig" was with his platoon which was several blocks away from us. We spent a lot of time playing cards and listening to a radio Willie and I had liberated. We had a lot of friends around because we had the only radio in the 2nd Platoon. Restricted to the area was the name of the game, because we had spent two days training with a Marine Engineering unit on Treadway (Bailey Bridge) crossing. We knew this was the way we would cross the mighty Rhine, but we didn't know when, so we were not allowed to leave the area. When the booze showed up, we were told we would be able to rest up the next day and at nightfall we would move out and cross the Rhine about 2 in the morning.

The final days, leading up to what would be the end of the world for some of the men of the 2nd and a short dose of hell for others, were fairly slow and easy going. The day before the party, Glen had obtained some paint from Ordinance and painted the name of the Tank, **ALBERTA 11** on the side, slightly forward of the name, he painted a tall slim, beautiful dark haired girl. She was well proportioned and very properly clad in a bathing suit. People who were familiar with Willie (Glenn), were I am sure, aware of his talents with artistry. In our room I had watched him make etchings of people and Aircraft. Some things I remember as if they were an hour ago, others I remember as I read my old letters home. My Mother had saved all of my letters. These few days were but the beginning of the Tale, but I will end here until someone asks for more.

The two lovely, hauntingly beautiful melodies, especially when connected with young soldiers, were LILI MARLENE, it is German in origin and speaks of Lili of the Lamplite who waits for her Soldier Boy who will not return, the other melody was I'M MAKING BELIEVE, to this you could make believe any thing you wished, all of which were unavailable.

On the McClellan Gate at Arlington National Cemetary, not too far from Wilson Way where Willie's marker sits on a beautiful green hillside, in the shade of many beautiful old Oaks, the following is inscribed.

REST ON EMBALMED AND SAINTED DEAD.