

Our treasured Veterans

Story by Pfc. Shauna McRoberts, 1st Armored Division PAO

Recently, I attended the 1st Armored Division Association conference in Milwaukee, Wis. I had the opportunity to talk to veterans of 1AD, the majority of whom fought in Italy and Africa during World War II. As a younger soldier, my experience with WW II consisted of what I had read in my history books in high school. Yet there I was, listening to the accounts of men that had lived through things later generations can only hear or see secondhand.

I heard stories of companies being overrun by General Rommel's tanks in North Africa, stories of men living underground for months at Anzio, Italy, waiting to break out and stories about the liberation of Rome. I heard stories about the war ending and the chance to return home. I heard these stories from the men that lived them. Men that served in WWII not for glory or recognition, but because they knew it was their duty. Men that thought they were enlisting for a year, but ended up entangled in a war that dragged on for years. Men that watched their friends and comrades die before their lives had really begun.

These men, these ex-soldiers, gather together every year to remember. They remember the suffering and the pain, the sense of loss, the desperate hopes to return home, the bonds they forged with the men they fought with. They honor the friends they lost during the war, and the friends they continue to lose as each year passes. They lament the falling numbers of the association and the absence of new members.

The association welcomed me. They let me into their lives and shared their tales. I attended their tours around Milwaukee, their luncheons and their banquets. I also attended their memorial service. Each year the association holds this service and the names of members or associates that have died in the last year are read aloud. As I listened to the list of names, I felt grief wash over me. At the conclusion of the service, Taps was played and without warning, I felt the tears start to spill out of my eyes. Though I didn't know one person on that list, I felt connected to these men and their sorrow over friends lost. The camaraderie between the members touched me deeply. Though their lives have branched in hundreds of different directions, they are still strongly united through their 1AD experiences. That is their bond that even death can't break.

After the conference I returned to Germany, my unit and my daily duties. Yet, doing the things I had done since I joined the Army, I now do them a little differently. I do them with a renewed sense of pride. I do them knowing that I belong to the same unit and the same Army that those men did. I wear the same uniform and the same 1AD patch that many before me wore in battle, fighting for the country they loved. I won't take for granted that I am privileged to serve in the greatest army in the world. I ask you all to do the same.

I also ask you to listen. Open your ears and your hearts. The elderly especially are filled with a wealth of knowledge that only their years could provide. These people have lived history. What a privilege it is to hear it! The Depression, Pearl Harbor, the Cold War, the Summer of Love, Vietnam, the fall of the Berlin Wall. I learned so much from so many during my time at the conference. I won't ever forget Jacob, Steven, Vicente, Harold, Nick, Ernest, George or any of the numerous others I had the chance to talk to. I

remember their eyes and their hands and the simple way they had of describing things I could never imagine living through. These men changed me. I invite you to let someone do the same for you. It could open a new world for you.

Ready First takes on OPFOR

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To an inexperienced civilian it may have looked like an empty field. Even with the wide M1A1 Abrams tank tracks crisscrossing through the deep mud, it was hard to spot the tanks hidden in the tree line or lurking behind hills or burms. “Ready First” soldiers from 1st Armored Division’s 1st Brigade waited, anticipating their chance to prove themselves worthy opponents of the Combat Maneuvering Training Center’s OPFOR.

“For me, destroying OPFOR is the most satisfying aspect of coming out here,” said Capt. Benjamin F. Cureton, commander of Company B, 1st Battalion, 37th Armored Regiment.

Cureton, as company commander, leads his troops in accomplishing what he considers main goals at CMTTC: properly developing the engagement area, practicing good casualty evacuation, and perfecting indirect and direct fire planning.

Before the battle begins, soldiers and vehicles are loaded down with the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System, or MILES gear. The gear signals loudly when a soldier or tank is hit by a laser from the enemy, and therefore eliminated from the battle.

Then the fight against OPFOR begins. Soldiers are given the opportunity to practice both their defensive and offensive fighting skills in Situational Training Exercises, or STX lanes, which are training scenarios focused on soldiers being able to employ their technical and tactical skills on the battlefield.

After receiving word of an imminent attack, soldiers reacted swiftly by setting up a hasty defense.

“A hasty defense is a quick reaction to an oncoming force where you must secure an area,” said Sgt. Guarionex Amador, a tank gunner with Company B, 1-37. “It’s a lot different than the deliberate defense where you have up to 72 hours to prepare a defense.”

When put on the offensive side of it, soldiers had a different goal. They worked hard on developing their indirect and direct firing skills to destroy the enemy.

“I want everyone out here to get an understanding of how to properly develop an engagement area, whether we’re on the defense or the offense,” said Cureton.

In addition to sharpening their combat skills, getting comfortable with their fellow crewmembers was just as valuable to soldiers.

“The best thing I can get out of training here is the quality time I spend with my soldiers,” said Sgt. Shawn T. Eaton, an armored crewmember with Company B, 1-37. “In combat, taking care of your soldiers is what really matters. Without them, I’m as good as dead.”

“The most I have to gain being out here is learning about my crewmembers on the battlefield,” agreed Pvt. Christopher L. Leedom, a tank driver with Company B, 1-37.

Tank crewmembers weren’t the only soldiers waging war against OPFOR.

Company B, 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment also attacked with their Bradley fighting vehicles and dismount troops.

“We’re out here to gain confidence and concentrate on working together,” said Capt. Gusieppie W. Morgan, an operations officer with 1-36. “But we’re also evaluating the companies to identify strengths and weaknesses so we can better utilize them for task force operations.”

1st Brigade was joined by several support elements that aided in their conflict with enemy forces. Air defense artillery, medics and petroleum fuel specialists were there to assist the combat elements in their fight for victory.

An air defense artillery soldier’s job is to dismount the Bradleys, run out with the Stinger missiles and fire. This provides defense for the ground troops against aerial attack.

“I’m getting training that I can use in real-life situations,” said Pvt. Michael R. Shumaker, a Bradley Linebacker crewmember with Company A, 1-4 Air Defense Artillery. “I don’t think anything can totally prepare you for war, this helps a lot.”

Medics also do whatever they can to be supportive in the attack mission, though their main job is casualty evacuation. Medics zip around in their M113 Armored Personnel Carrier, clearly marked with a red cross mounted on a white square. During and after the battle the medics make themselves available to transport casualties out of the battle, provide first aid, and return them back to the fight.

“The faster we get people out, the faster we can get them fixed up and back in the fight,” said Sgt. Ottis J. Jenkins, a medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 37th Armored Regiment. “This is the only time we get to practice our medical skills in a hands-on combat environment and we really need this to increase our situational awareness on the battlefield.”

1st Brigade’s “Ready First” soldiers spent about four weeks at CMTC battling OPFOR. Though time away from family and friends isn’t easy, soldiers recognized the importance of the exercise.

“I miss my family, but this is good training,” said Morgan. “It’s worth it because we’ll be ready if we deploy.”

NFL Commissioner visits 1AD

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Sunny skies greeted National Football League Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and Pittsburgh Steelers running back Jerome Bettis when they arrived at Wiesbaden Army Air Field April 25. Soldiers from the 1st Armored Division gathered on the parade field to hear Tagliabue speak about the NFL’s gift of football equipment to the Army and the Air Force in Europe. The NFL donated 1405 footballs, 8825 pairs of flags, and 5224 cones that will benefit unit-level football teams, youth services, and Department of Defense schools.

After giving short speeches in Wiesbaden, Bettis and Tagliabue flew to Baumholder, Germany where 1st Armored Division’s 2nd Brigade Headquarters is

located. There they were shown demonstrations on the M109A6 Paladin, the M981 Fire Support Vehicle and the M1A1 Abrams tank, and then were allowed to climb aboard for a closer view. Following this, Tagliabue and Bettis signed autographs and chatted with soldiers.

“I was hoping to let the troops know that we all care and that we’re thinking about them,” said Bettis. “They’re all so courageous and the best way to tell them that was to do it in person.”

“We want them to know that the United States and the rest of Europe is with them,” added Tagliabue.

Tagliabue and Bettis were joined by Tennessee Titans running back Eddie George April 26. The Commissioner and players were kept busy the next three days meeting soldiers. They visited Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Ramstein Air Force Base, and Hanau Military Community. Tagliabue was interviewed at the Armed Forces Network in Frankfurt and spoke at the German-American Chamber of Commerce Dinner. In honor of “Armed Forces Weekend” Bettis and George participated in pregame ceremonies at the Frankfurt Galaxy-Scottish Claymores football game at Frankfurt’s Waldstation. Tagliabue, Bettis, and George returned to the United States on April 28.