

War mechanic recalls tanks as "nothing but a death trap"

Continued from pg. 3

them to the front of the good ones (tanks) to give more protection. The theory was that with the old tracks being tack-welded on, the 88 round would hit it and be deflected off as the welds let go.

"Whether it ever really worked or not, I don't know, but that was the first job we had," said Vidler.

Both men agreed that they were happier to be working on tanks instead of fighting in them. Often the 88 round would enter the tank, and once inside, would explode the tank's own ammunition, which was carried inside the tank with the crew.

"We had an English Churchill (tank) come back once," said Vidler. "Someone had goofed and they forgot to take the bodies of the crew out before sending it back to us. It was one helluva mess in there."

"I wouldn't get in one of those damn tin cans (tanks) for anything," added Apted, "They were nothing but a damn death trap."

In late June, they moved the workshop to La Delivrand, France, as the warships in the Channel fired overhead, bombarding the enemy. They stayed there until July 23, 1944, then moved to La Folie, France until August 21, and then to St. Sylvain (August 21-September 2), and later to St. Andre, France, until November 14.

All the time the R.C.E.M.E.s were trying to keep the equipment running, they were under constant threat of air attacks, or even artillery attacks. The enemy naturally wanted to slow down their maintenance and repair efforts, so they became

targets themselves.

For a time, Vidler, along with five others and a sergeant, was temporarily assigned to haul gasoline to keep the Allied war machine fuelled up and advancing on the German army.

"I covered 4,000 miles hauling gas all over France," said Vidler. "We hauled gas from Dieppe to Bayeaux— gawd, I was all over the place."

By October, Vidler was called back in from gasoline duties to work on artillery in Antwerp, Belgium.

"I was qualified to work on artillery, so I was back in the shop," said Vidler.

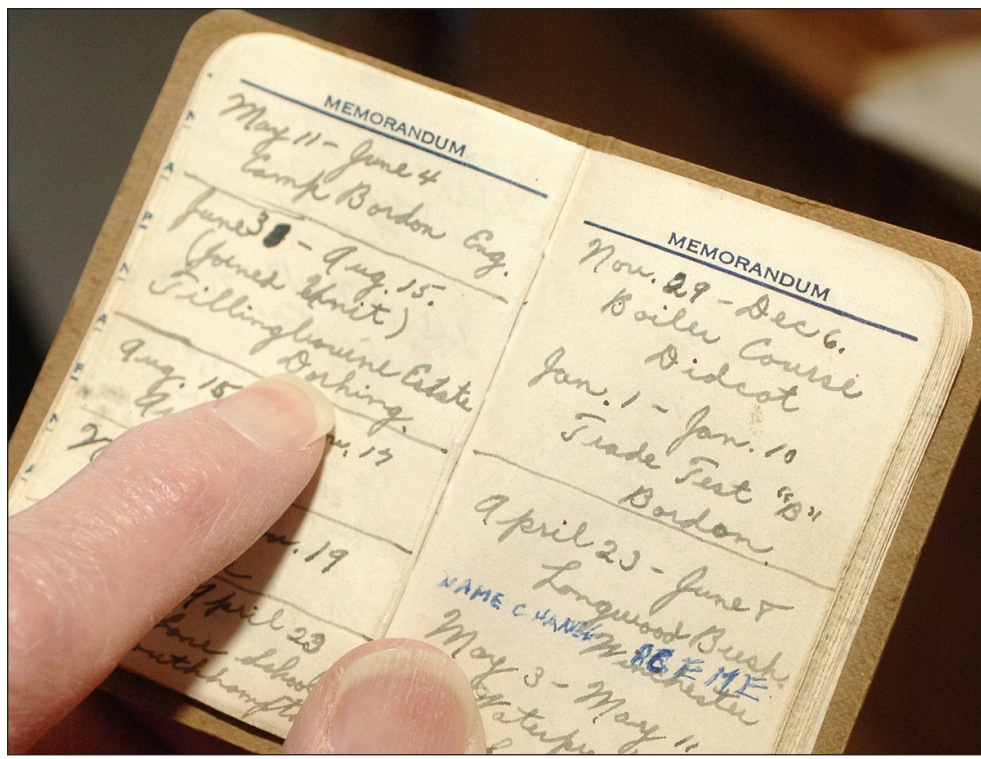
"There were lots of doodle-bugs (V1 buzz-bombs) in Antwerp," said Apted, "They (the Germans) were trying their best to knock out the seaport at Antwerp, so we were a target."

"In Antwerp, at night they'd be coming in, one a minute. So long as you could hear them (buzz bombs) go overhead, you were okay," said Vidler, "But when the motor cut out, you had to look for a place to hide."

Apted said some of the Spitfire fighter pilots would come down from up above on the buzz bombs, and touch the bomb's wing with the wing on the Spitfire, knocking it off course, and diverting it back to Germany.

"One night we heard one go over that had been diverted back to Germany," grinned Apted, "You should have seen those buggers out there trying like hell to shoot that bomb down before it ran out of gas over Germany."

"The newer V2 rockets were way more threatening," said Apted, "They were rocket



Jack Vidler checks dates in his illegal diary that he hid on his person for the duration of the war, chronicling the events that took place during his time overseas.

Photo by Ted Brown

powered and flew a way up in the atmosphere. All you could see was a little streak of light going across the sky when they went over, and you could hardly hear them."

Vidler said the V2s were more also more destructive, knocking out an entire city block with one hit, compared to the V1 which might destroy a couple of houses.

"They (the Germans) wanted to wipe out the whole of Antwerp," said Vidler, "That was the main port for the Allies to bring in supplies— it was an important seaport. They (the Germans) had been kicked out of Antwerp so fast that they hadn't had a chance to destroy the seaport, leaving it vir-

tually intact for the Allies to come in and take over. They wanted it blown up so the Allies couldn't use it."

By late November 1944, the R.C.E.M.E. had moved into Grave, Holland, and later to Geffen, Holland, until January 24, 1945, then to Veghel.

"We almost froze to death in Veghel, (Holland) through the months of January to March," said Vidler, "It was so cold there."

"We slept in a fertilizer plant in our trucks at times, just to keep warm," added Apted.

See FRIENDS, pg. 5

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