

THE TANKERS

Tankers were what the foot Marines called the Marines who rode around in their Sherman tanks creating giant dust clouds that the Marines following had to walk through. In fact our exact words were, *“Those God-damned tankers and their fucking dust!”*

I didn't really know Paul K. Kuhlman during the war. I met former Corporal Paul. K. Kuhlman and his wife Ruth at the 1989 Iwo Jima Veterans' Reunion in Mobile, Alabama. We became friends riding the shuttle back and forth from the Days Inn where we were all staying to the Mobile Hilton where all of the actives were centered.

Paul was a charter member of Company B, 3rd Tank Battalion, attached to the 3rd Division. He joined the outfit when it was being formed at New River, North Carolina in early 1942. Paul took part in all of it's campaigns: Bouganville, Guam, and Iwo Jima.

The 3rd Tank Battalion was in floating reserve at Iwo Jima and wasn't called in until D+3. The defenders still had control of the northern end of Motoyama, Number One Airfield. Japanese artillery and mortars were firmly entrenched in the high ground at the end of the runway. This was a job for the Sherman tanks and their Marine crews.

In the battle that ensued for control of Motoyama Number One Airfield, Paul's 3rd Tank Battalion lost twelve Sherman tanks, one of

which was Paul's. A near hit by a Japanese mortar knocked his tank out of commission. Paul felt something warm running down his leg. He was reluctant to look, expecting the worst. Corporal Kuhlman was relieved to find that it was nothing more than hot oil from a broken oil line spraying on his leg. He had a minor wound to his hand that didn't take him out of the action.

It's a good thing that the tank drivers didn't have to pay for their tank or Paul would still owe Uncle Same a lot of money. Near the end at Iwo Jima Paul had his second tank shot out from under him. Seems that the Japs commandeered an abandoned Sherman Tank from C Company, 3rd Tank Battalion and turned it against the Marines. Two direct hits spelled doom for Corporal Kuhlman and his crew.

The tank's gunner, Corporal M. Bertoil from Brewster, New York lost his life. The assistant tank driver, Private First Class Robert Logsdon from Cleveland, Ohio had shrapnel in his backside. The assistant driver was only worried about how he would tell people back home the location of his wound! Paul's next assignment was at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland doing guard duty. Later he trained Royal Marines on tank tactics.

Corporal Paul K. Kuhlman is entitled to wear the Purple Heart Presidential Citation, the Asiatic Pacific medal with three stars, American Theater Medal, the Victory Medal and the Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal. In the years that Paul has been going to the 3rd Division Marine reunions he has met seven men from the 1st Platoon

and has talked to two others on the telephone. In 1981, the first year he went to San Diego, California and saw no one. The following year he went to Atlanta, Georgia and saw no one. The third year he met 2 other B Company Marines in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and it has been growing ever since. In 1988 there were 63 men from B Company at the Reunion in Tampa, Florida. There were 32 men from B in Chicago, Illinois in 1989.