

The Short Patrol Where I Lost My Hearing

It was a short patrol - as Patrols Go. Less than a day, but calculated to pin down just where the Chinese were on those hill masses north of Hill 578, which we would have to tackle sooner or later.

I was given a section of 2 M4 Sherman Tanks from the 70th Tank Battalion to accompany me, to help develop where the enemy was. One thing I could use them for, was to suppress long range machine gun fire from the higher hills. I was getting accustomed to being shot at from a distance in ways we could not effectively counter - unless we directly attacked their positions. Using the 76mm Tank Cannon might do the trick.

So we clanked along on the lower ground past the main hill mass until we turned the corner and started moving east toward an extension of the hills to the north.

Suddenly we started getting machine gun fire from the low ridge in front of us. I could tell from the crack-thump sounds the machine gun was pretty far away - perhaps 500 yards. I could not see their position! We were exposed, pretty much in the open. We had to silence that thing before we got casualties!

And just then the lead tank pulled up a few yards, its front toward the same hill that the fire was coming from, but it closed all its hatches! I couldn't talk to it on my radio

because the Tankers were on different - from our Infantry - frequencies!

So I ran around the back of the tank where the external phone was supposed to be. It was gone! The only thing in the telephone box were two wires that had been attached to a phone. I'll bet - and I saw this before - some Infantry Grunt had run up to the back of the tank when its motor was running, tried to talk to the men inside just as they decided to move! And that caused the phone to be yanked loose as the grunt was probably turned away from the roaring sound of the engines, never saw the movement of the tank - and the phone was yanked out. Damn..

Tankers are in Tanks so they are not exposed to small arms fire. But it doesn't help when they can't see or hear where the enemy shooting at them are, so they can shoot back!

I could hear the machine gun bullets plink off the tank hull during every other burst of fire. Another reason the tankers would not open the hatch! I stood where I could brace my binoculars and looked to where the fire was coming from. I saw some smoke after a burst - so I had the machine gun's location pinpointed. Sooner or later I would get a man wounded even though all of them were flat on the ground and in depressions in the ground.

We had to kill that weapon!

So I ran around in front of the tank where the driver and gunner could see me through their periscopes, my back to the machine gun and pointed at the area where the machine gun was located. The gunner rotated his canon in that general direction, but not, as I estimate where it was pointed, not close enough. So then I used hand signals, winding my arms to get him to wind the canon. Finally it was as close as I could tell, and then pointed at his periscope and banged my fists, which meant 'fire.'

The damned gunner and driver NODDED their periscopes with a 'Yes' motion. Before I could get away from the side of the canon, they fired..

The flash deflector sent the shock waves sideways right onto my right ear. It blew out my ear drum, and I have been deaf in that ear ever since!

I've never forgiven tankers for 'nodding' their periscopes instead of cracking open their hatches. And cursed tank designers for not installing external telephones that can't be yanked out of the tank frame. And I cursed the Army for not getting tankers and the Infantry overlapping radio frequencies!

The one round that was fired seemed to silence, or scare the Chinese machine gun crew. So we patrolled on and returned to report what we had seen. My head ringing for

days.

Footnote: I did not seek, nor get, a 3d Purple Heart for my damaged hearing, even though it was caused by 'friendly fire' - which qualified for one for it occurred during combat operations. But decades later my family, noting my declining hearing abilities insisted that I apply, under Veteran's Administration rules for a 'Disability' benefit. Before the bureaucracy, and tests, were done, I was ruled that I had 70% hearing loss. So in 2015 I began to be paid \$3,253 a month for my Veterans Disability, and was provided a modern-technology hearing aid.