

A War Day, By Henry "Hank" Bennett

Written by D.L. Whitnack

August, 2006

It was early morning, and after the horrors of the beach in Normandy, any morning you woke up is a good morning. The Germans may have been beaten there, but it was no picnic, in fact it was as close to hell as Hank ever wanted to be. How can you explain the pure barbarity of that landing to someone who has never been there? You just can't, and that's mostly because you don't want to think about it yourself.

Hank, a young man from Canada, is a gunner on an armored reconnaissance car that is part of the 17th Hussars, and they are being sent into France to liberate the towns and cities from the Nazis. There are three armored cars in Hank's patrol and he always rode in the first one, which is the sergeant's car. The best part of this duty is that when they rode into a liberated town square, and all of these French towns had town squares, the French girls would come over and climb onto the cars to kiss them. But, when they entered Grethville this morning, it was different, it was too quiet.

Sarg sent the other two cars to scout around while Hank's car held the square and the road leading into it. Sarg and the driver left the car to see if they could scrounge up some supplies with Sarg saying to Hank as he left, " watch the road; don't let anything enter the square".

Hank could see a fair distance up the road from where his armored car sat, and nothing was moving in the early morning light. For twenty long, nervous minutes he sat watching the road, checking his guns, waiting for something, or someone to show up.

Hank's gaze caught something on the road's far off horizon, where it rounded a corner. He wasn't sure if it was the morning light playing tricks on his eyes, or if there really was movement on road, but something strange was happening. It looked like there was a hedge-row moving towards him. As the hedge-row got closer, Hank could see that what he had thought were moving trees and bushes were actually German vehicles that were camouflaged with bits of trees and bushes to protect them from being seen by allied aircraft.

Hank waited until the lead vehicle, he doesn't know what it is because it is covered with so much brush, is eighty feet from his position. Then he opens up with his 37mm gun right into the front of it, and stops the German vehicle dead in its tracks. Hank could now see that it is a truck, and he fires his Besa gun, which fires 27 rounds per minute, into its cab. Soldiers start pouring out of the back of the truck, all armed with machine guns, and he then turns his Besa gun on them dropping quite a few of the soldiers.

While all of this action is happening up front, the rest of the column of vehicles has backed up behind the burning truck, and Hank cannot see the end of it as it rounds the far off corner.

An officer materializes out of the smoke from the burning truck holding up a white flag, and surrenders the column to Hank. Sarg and the driver, alerted by the firing guns, came rushing back to the armored car. Suddenly a car full of officers comes careening out of column of vehicles and heads across the

square. Sarg yells at them to stop, but they keep on going and Hank is ordered to stop them. By the time Hank gets the turret turned around to shoot at them the car is nearly across the square. Hank fires at the tires of the car with the Besa and hits the front tire, sending the car spinning and careening out of control. The car mounts a set of stairs on a five story building and climbs the wall until it's standing on its tail with its front end pointing to the roof as if escape lay that way. Slowly the car tilted over backwards until it crashed on top of the officers. Shocked, Hank looks on and figures they must all be dead, or at least very badly hurt.

As the dust settles, children come running out of their hiding spots, yelling and cheering. Then the adults come out of theirs. Hank sees a young girl of 10 or 11 with a cast on her leg and asks her to help him take down the Nazi flag flying in the square. He hoists her up, on his shoulders and she pulls the flag down. Hank unhooks the flag and throws it down onto the ground. The town's people come rushing forward and start stomping on the Nazi flag, and then they set fire to it, burning the hated symbol to ashes. As the flag burns, Sarg orders the German soldiers to lay their guns on the ground in a row and then tells his driver to drive his car over them, disabling the guns.

More allied soldiers enter the square and take over guarding the prisoners, and Hank's car is ordered to another position in town. As they set themselves up at that position, a German 88mm that is hidden across the street opens up on them. The shell whistles overhead hitting the wall behind them with a deafening roar. The blast from the 88's muzzle shows Hank where the gun is hidden behind the plank walls of the building across the street. He can see the gun crew scrambling trying to reload the 88, and knowing that the German gun crew would not overshoot a second time; Hank opens up on the crew with his Besa gun, killing them all. This ends the hostilities that day in this small town in France and Hank's patrol moves on to another town and another action.