

# Story of the Proud American Barrel

By Bill Van Eck

How we fought to get proud AMERICAN back home to Fort Sill OK. "proud AMERICAN" 175 mm Gun Barrel at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Aberdeen, Maryland Years ago, my brother in law, who is a World War 2 history buff from Alexandria, Virginia, and I went to visit the Armor, Artillery Museum at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Aberdeen, Maryland.

We studied all of the Japanese, German Tanks and Artillery pieces of World War 2 and took quite a few pictures. I remember we even met a Japanese man, who worked for a Japanese model company, who was also taking pictures.

During our tour, I noticed a large artillery barrel rack that was loaded with artillery and tank barrels. There were American, German and Japanese barrels. They were all just rusting away in the hot Maryland sun. What caught my eye was an extra-large barrel lying on the bottom of the pile and covered partially in mud. I walked over to study the stencil writing at the end of the dirty barrel. I was able to make out quite a bit of stenciling on the barrel along with a few different painted name titles on each side. Some faint titles that I could make out were "ALL AMERICAN" and "proud AMERICAN". I mentioned to my brother in law that I believed the barrel was once 2/32- A Battery's "proud AMERICAN" barrel and one of Proud American Battalion's first 12 gun barrels to go to Vietnam in 1965.

I never forgot the sight of the gun barrel sitting on the bottom of the giant gun rack. A few years later, a few other Proud Americans e-mailed Ralph Jones with the barrel's serial number. Ralph checked it out and the barrel was in fact "proud AMERICAN". I got in contact with B Battery's John Conway. We soon made a date to meet at Aberdeen and talk to Dr. William Atwater, the Museum Director (a wounded US Marine who fought in the Vietnam War and can also be seen on the History Channel).

John Conway and I told Dr. Atwater about the "proud AMERICAN" barrel. We proceeded to tell him that we were not happy with the "proud AMERICAN" sitting on the ground in the mud! When asked what his plans were for the barrel? His answer was, he couldn't do anything. The museum did not have the funds or chassis to mount it. We told him first and foremost that he needed to get the barrel off the ground! His answer was, "It's staying where it is!" I then told him that we were going to fight this and get it taken away from Aberdeen and send it back to Fort Sill. Atwater's reply was, "Over my DEAD BODY!"

Ralph Jones was able to find out who was in charge of the entire Military Museum System, his name was Brig. Gen. Brown. A few other Proud Americans and I started a petition to rescue the barrel. Every parade and Veterans meetings (American Legion, VFW VVA, DAV and Navy League, just to name a few), we showed up with our handy clipboards and holding the petition with a picture of the barrel.

Finally, after some time, our work paid off. Our "proud

AMERICAN" barrel was released by Brig. Gen. Brown, weighing in at 11,000 pounds and 37 feet long. The next problem we encountered was the Army wouldn't transfer it to Fort Sill. The proud Americans began passing around their hats, collecting money and raising enough funds to ship our barrel to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

John Conway and I went to Aberdeen to pay our respects to the barrel the day it was lifted and driven to its new home. We gave the truck driver a Proud American hat and golf shirt. We were LUCKY to have a truck driver, who knew something about Rigging. The Army supplied a giant forklift, civilian driver, but not enough power to pick up the massive barrel. Big gun barrels are extremely heavy on the breech block side and can't be balanced. The truck driver saw the Army needed help and ran to his giant tool bag and came back with straps and chains rigging a somewhat balance strong enough to pick up "proud AMERICAN" and center it on the flatbed. The driver tied down the barrel with straps and chains. All I could think was, "THANK GOD, the truck driver was a Rigger!" or the barrel may still be sitting there.

From Aberdeen, the driver went to Western Maryland to pick-up a school bus that was also going to Fort Sill. This entire process took place about a month before our Fort Sill Reunion. Fort Sill did wonders getting a gun chassis, mounting the barrel and finally painting the barrel- all within 3 weeks. The US ARMY provided a flatbed for the 175mm and pulled the gun in their Veteran Day Parade. The Proud Americans marched first and were preceded by the first gun.

Frank Andrews told us a story about his brother, Richard "Louie" Andrews. In Vietnam, the "proud AMERICAN" barrel was replaced by "ANGEL". The barrel blew up and killed 3 A-Battery Proud Americans. Rich Andrews witnessed and tried to help the "ANGEL" gun crew. Rich was one of OUR PROUD AMERICAN HEROES who recently passed away, but will remain in our hearts forever. The "proud AMERICAN" barrel was sent back to stateside after the "ANGEL" incident to study the metal composites of gun barrels.

Bill Van Eck- Proud American Association