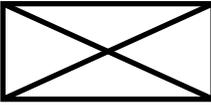




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AT  290
MESSAGE CENTER



WINTER EDITION

DECEMBER 2001

WHY A DECEMBER ISSUE?

Your Editor and Publisher/Treasurer decided to throw caution to the winds and deviate from our past conservative publishing policy long enough to produce a third issue for this year. You are the beneficiaries of the decision. We hope you'll judge its features adequate to justify the effort. But if they're not, it's going to be up to you to provide future inputs to make next year's issues more interesting. Some of our readers are already doing this, but many of you are not. You should.

MORE ABOUT JOHN ("JOHNNIE") BENFIELD

You'll recall that our September 2001 issue contained new information regarding John Benfield, a sergeant in the 4th Platoon who, on or about March 11, 1945 succeeded Ruby Daniels as the Mines Platoon Sergeant. No one seemed to know his whereabouts after the Company dispersed in late June 1945. After that issue published, further information about John came to us from his daughter, Vicki (Benfield) Harter. At our urging, she had sought further information, specifically the text of the citation associated with the Bronze Star John had been awarded. She subsequently found the text of that citation buried in family papers. Regrettably, she didn't identify the newspaper that carried the story, but she quoted the following from it for our benefit:

"Mrs. John F. Benfield, 25 Withva [sic, a street name?], Tuesday received word from the war department that her husband had been awarded bronze star medal for gallantry in action. Benfield is in an anti-tank company and is now in Germany. He fought in France and Germany throughout most of the campaign.

"Benfield's mother resides in Yakima and he has a six-months old daughter whom he has never seen. The citation from the war department follows:

'Technical Sergeant Johnnie F. Benfield, anti-tank company 290th infantry, for heroic achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy on January 17, 1945 in Belgium. A mine squad was clearing a road leading into Burtonville when they were suddenly subjected to a hail of machine gun fire from a concealed position. Company K advanced to within a short distance of the beleaguered squad and gave them overhead fire in an effort to allow them to withdraw from this area. Sergeant Benfield and another then pushed forward to these men and succeeded in leading them to adequate cover. Then these two heroic men worked their way forward under fire to retrieve one of the men who had received a serious head wound and lay unconscious in the middle of the road and evacuated him safely to the rear. Throughout the night these gallant men stayed with this attacking company, working tirelessly and guided litter teams to the wounded and assisted in the evacuation.' "

A couple of comments seem to be appropriate here. The story has been reproduced here just as Vicki Harter sent it to us. In that transmittal, she commented that it wasn't clear to her why so many proper names included in the story lacked capitalization. It seems strange to us too, but the poor grammar doesn't detract from its legitimacy, and we are grateful for it.

Also, we have been advised by John Harter, Vicki's son, who upon interviewing an "eye-ball" witness who was a participant in the rescue, identified the squad member Benfield was attempting to rescue as Francis T. DeVault, our third KIA (after Sieg and Hulsey). The witness Harter interviewed was none other than John Pildner, also a member of the Fourth Platoon, who corroborated the time and place of the event and went on to add some further detail regarding it. John (Pildner) told Harter (quoted here third-hand from an e-mail sent to me, RC, repeated by John Harter): The Mine Platoon was clearing mines along a road and were searching for them in pairs, one man holding the mine detector, and the other a rifle. They [probably Pildner, DeVault, and other members of Benfield's squad] saw a German soldier come out from between a couple of houses and fire a pistol into the air, an act followed by the sounds of engines roaring to life. The next thing they knew, they were face down in a ditch along the roadside in ten to twelve inches of snow, held down by enemy fire but trying

to work back toward safety by crawling along the ditch. Pildner said he was basically right next to DeVault when he was killed instantly by a piece of shrapnel passing through his helmet and into his head. The exact nature of events after that, [such] as where everybody was at any given moment, are about impossible for anyone to remember [now] or probably even the next day, according to Pildner. Harter commented that Pildner's account closely supported the citation's reference to a "severe head wound" and that the dates [17 Jan 1945] also matched up. It seems likely that John Pildner was the other member of the squad - - the one who helped Benfield extricate DeVault from the line of fire.

As a serendipity, maybe we can prevail upon Lynetta to get husband John to relate what he remembers from other experiences...describe Remembrances that perhaps he alone can now provide regarding events that occurred during those 4 stressful months of 1944-45. We know that back in June 1990 he obligingly sent Rudy Gillen a biographical sketch of himself, but he neglected to provide any remembrances of those months in combat (including the account of DeVault's death) that have become so urgently important for us to get written down before they're lost forever. Therefore, here's a note just for John Pildner: Look at it this way, John, it's a way for you to get your memories in print for your descendants to read, without the appearance of immodesty or having to write them yourself! ...And I [RC] will help in any way I can, to ghost-write or edit them to your satisfaction. The same offer applies to *all* of our readership...So *do it* before senility makes me unable to keep my promise.

THE WANDERING "IKE" JACKET

Claudia Lauland, the wife of Cary Lauland, John Lauland's second of three sons, has written to share with us the following surprising incident involving her father-in-law's legacy. John, her father-in-law, died in Louisiana about five years ago. Her description of an unusual circumstance is paraphrased below, given mostly in Claudia's own words, but paraphrased where necessary for continuity and brevity. We thank her for her contribution to our newsletter.

"My husband and I live in Marrero, Louisiana, a small community of approximately 3500 residents. I want to share with you a few lines to describe an unusual circumstance that occurred in connection with a recent veteran's celebration held here. First, let me say that although all of the veterans of our area were honored, this celebration was put together in honor of my father (3rd Army, 288th FAOB) and in memory of my father-in-law, John Lauland of the 75th Inf. Division's 290th AntiTank Company..

"On Wednesday, November 7, 2001, we held a banquet in our town for all veterans of all services. About 580 attended. During the program, I spoke of the 75th 's combat record, which many of your members had helped me compile. I also shared with them the following story, which I would like now to share with you:

"In preparation for the 3-day celebration to be held in Lafitte, Louisiana, my husband and I bought some WW2 items, sight unseen, from sellers on the Internet's e-bay site. We had planned to display them at the banquet, so as to represent Veterans of all war and peace-time eras. (Korea, Viet Nam, and Desert Storm items had been readily available.)

"With the purchase of several WW2 'Ike' jackets, we felt prepared to represent our WW2 Vets. Well, one of the jackets had been in our possession for over six weeks, and as I got it ready to be cleaned for display, I noticed that it was stamped with a service number that began with 386, and I knew that John Lauland's service number also began with the same numbers. After a more thorough examination, I found that this particular jacket was in fact John's, and that it was his service number stamped inside. I had purchased the jacket (through e-bay) from a gentleman in Minnesota, who had purchased it at a flea market near his home. I can't describe how shocked and ecstatic I was at this remarkable coincidence!

"Our celebration on November 9 included a candle service and was followed by a Veteran's Parade on November 10. The 75th was suitably remembered. Please let me say to all Veterans: We appreciate your service to our country and the freedom that has been provided to us by our Veterans. May God bless them all!"

Editorial note to Bill Sheridan: Don't give up....your overcoat may turn up yet.

MORE ABOUT THE BRIDGE MYSTERY

Bill Sheridan thought you might be interested in a sequel to the story he wrote for the September 2001 issue -- The one entitled "A Mystery at the Bridge":

Bill wrote: "Talk about a coincidence! On June 11th I was on an AMTRAC train from Washington DC, following a visit with my brother in Silver Springs, Maryland. It turned out that my seat companion had been visiting a son in Virginia, a U.S. Naval officer recently stationed in Germany. My travel companion also said that he himself had been a WW2 German soldier drafted in January 1945 at the age of 16 from his father's farm in Silesia (now a part of Poland). He had been captured by men of Patton's army in April.

"It seems that Patton decided to move many of his POWs westward, apparently so that he would not have to turn them over to the Russians. They were placed on flat bed trailers such as I described in my original story, and moved far into the American Zone of Germany. The man sharing this information with me made just such a trip on just such a trailer as I described and may even have been on one of the trailers that passed our check point and excited our curiosity. At the time, I had wondered why the U.S. Army would be moving POWs around in such large numbers when at the same time others were simply being discharged elsewhere.

The ex-German soldier He has lived in this country for almost forty years and currently resides near Princeton, New Jersey.

BITS AND PIECES

A past member of I (item) Company's 4th (Weapons) Platoon, Don Kennedy has written some previously unpublished supporting intelligence regarding La Roumiere and the contribution made to that battle by parachute infantry. Following are some excerpts, starting with the afternoon of December 25th. They have been extracted from what Don sent me and described by him as his recollections of the closing phase of that action. I believe that his story adds credibility to the presence of the 517th being present and active (though the encounter Don describes occurred on the northeast face of the hill, where we know I Company to have been, rather than on the northeast face with F Company.

"I Company was on the right flank and shortly after crossing the plain area, we came to the Ourthe River, which has a narrow wooden bridge over it, but the first section of the bridge had been destroyed.

"There was ice from the edge of the river out to where a makeshift ladder had been placed, making the bridge accessible for crossing. All of the preceding platoons of our company had [already] crossed the river at some place and were lost to sight up the hill [La Roumiere] on the other side of the river. We went across the ice, climbed the ladder and moved along the bridge and onto the dirt road that curved back and forth up the hill.

"Ahead we could hear the firing of many weapons, some chattering of machine guns, and shells exploding on the hill above...."

"Our forward man called back to us and gave us the distance and area to fire at, and we began firing, going further out and to the left and right as he advised. We continued firing as fast as we could for what seemed a long time, but probably wasn't, and then were told to cease. "

"We dug foxholes after being told we would stay where we were for the night. After finishing a very difficult job digging in the half-frozen dirt, we were standing in our holes when a Lieutenant whom we had never seen before, approached us and said, 'I need three volunteers' as he pointed to me and the two guys beside me. 'Follow me,' he ordered. I cannot now remember why, but I have always felt that this Lieutenant was a Paratroop officer who had served in Africa. If so, he had to have been from the 517th Paratroop Regiment about which I have since read, supposedly assisted us in clearing the way for the trapped men [of Task Force Hogan], although I do not recall ever seeing anyone else from that unit, if indeed he was a part of it. Perhaps he had said something to us as we walked off with him, but if he did so, I do not recall it. I did know that he was not one of our officers, but being a Lieutenant and obviously American, we followed him toward the house where our Executive Officer [Lt Loesch ?] had set up company headquarters...."

"The Paratroop Lieutenant gathered two German prisoners being guarded by a company headquarters' guy, and off we went down the hill, back towards the bridge. On the way, he told us we were to pick up some land mines and plant them in the road coming into the area above and on the left side as you face the top of the hill.

When we reached the bridge, he stopped on it, above where the water ran down the river between the ice, pulled out his 45 automatic, pointed it at the first prisoner and spoke to him in German. The Lieutenant said to us that he had told the German to jump or he would shoot him and toss him over. The man did not jump and the Lieutenant shot him several times and did indeed push him off the bridge. The second German was then spoken to and he jumped off the bridge. Without another word, we followed the Lieutenant to the ladder and down to the ice below and [then] onto the shore. The prisoner who jumped could not have lived in that ice-cold river with such freezing air around us. I said to myself, 'Geez, if that's the way the good guys take care of prisoners, what the hell will the Nazis do?'

[Ed note: This next paragraph has been edited for brevity and grammar, and is not quoted precisely as Don wrote it.] We walked a little way toward some buildings where, at the order of the Lieutenant, we stayed while he entered the one nearest us. He came out after a short time and led us to yet another building. Then he showed us a two wheeled farmer's wagon with a flat bed enclosed on all sides and having a bar across its front with which it could be guided. He told us, 'Take three boxes of these mines to your Company Headquarters and advise the Exec you have arrived with the mines.'

"The wooden mine boxes were about a foot wide and three feet long and each contained three land mines. We carried them out, put them onto the wagon, and hauled it on the [river] ice, down to the ladder. The Lieutenant took off in the other direction and I never saw him again. We unloaded the wagon, finally got it up on the bridge, and then reloaded the mine boxes into it to cross the bridge.

"We started up the hill on the meandering road, when suddenly artillery shells began exploding, bracketing the road up ahead. We stopped, scared silly, and someone said, 'Good God, if one of those hits this wagon, no one will find anything of us.' Another guy said, 'Maybe we should just leave these damn things and take off.' I said, 'Then what will we do? Where will we go? And once we are caught, it's the firing squad for desertion.' A lot of mumbling [followed], while shells continued to explode, some seeming [to come] nearer, so we decided it was death any which way, and we might just as well try to do what we were sent out to do. We dropped to the ground several times as shells exploded nearby, as we proceeded slowly and anxiously up the winding road, suffering no physical injuries. We finally reached Headquarters where the Exec told us to take the mines up to the dirt road coming into this area from the left.

"He sent us with an NCO to point out where we were to bury the mines and to supervise us. As we were doing this, two riflemen came up [and] said they were to be guards at the minefield to warn any of our own men or vehicles away and helped us complete the burying of the mines...

"When finished, we brought the wagon back to Headquarters and returned to our foxholes."

"The next morning someone told us that the loudest explosion [of the many] we heard the night before was an American ambulance blown up by the mines we had placed, because the driver had not heard the guards yelling at him!"

75th DIVISION BATTLE DEATHS

Uncertainty and various sources of misleading information prompted me (RC) to undertake the compilation of our division's battle deaths and when they occurred, from as many sources as I could tap. I began early this year and used the following references to produce a tabulation of date-oriented KIAs for the major organizations within the division. A copy is included on the last page of this issue for your information.

1. George Tachuk (taken from the Valley Forge Memorial plaques);
2. The Appendices of Paul Cunningham's "Freezing in Hell";
3. The AGO's 30 September 1947 report of the 75th's Battle Deaths;
4. The American Battle Monuments Commision's grave listings for American cemeteries on the European continent;
5. Various Morning and After Action Reports, provided by Paul Ellis (K-290) and Gilbert Nelson (L-290);
6. Individual recollections by 75th Association members; and lastly but not least,
7. An ex-member of the 87th Infantry Division, Paul E. Nessman (F Company, 347th IR, now of Chicago), now a dedicated independent researcher of Infantry KIAs.

AT-290 KIA/WIA AND TAPS

KIA

Francis T. DeVault	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	17 Jan '45 near Burtonville, Be.
William P. Hulsey	3rd Plt 2nd Sqd	after 25 Dec '44, near Soy, Be.
Wilbur A. Isaacs	1st Plt Sergeant	date unknown, in Korea
Carl Sieg	1st Plt 1st Sqd	25 Dec '44 friendly fire, Ny, Be.
Lino Silvani	2nd Plt	Aug '44 (M Co, 39th Inf) Ste Lo, Fr.

WIA (probably did not return to AT-290 by war's end)

Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	details unknown
(?) Holtzhauser	unk Plt unk Sqd	Shrapnel in thigh or arm (at Rhine?)
Fred Marsh	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Easter 1945 - Land mine
Alexander Moir	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Shrapnel, left arm - evac
Bud(?) Scheidt	3rd Plt jeep driver	Shrapnel, arm, land mine Colmar Fr.
Niklos Uremovich	1st Plt 1st Sqd	25 Dec '44 Friendly fire
Donald Yack	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	Feb. '45 at Colmar, Fr.

Post-War Deceased

John F. Benfield	4th Plt Sergeant	17 Apr 1988 - Seattle WA
Lennie Dale Bell	Hdq Plt Mail clrk	2 Nov 1994 - Lebanon, KS
Bill(y) B. Black	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	18 Jun 1998 in WV, of an aneurism
Charles Blake	3rd Plt Ldr	1995 (reported BB Jan 96)
Robert C. Coldwell	3rd Plt	1986
Paul W. Costinett	AT CO, pre-Europe	1987 Los Angeles, CA
Woodrow W. Fisher	AT Exec Officer	1960
Lawrence R. Gillen	AT CO in Europe	22 Sep 2000: Maryland-heart failure
Lawrence H. Groover	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	Oct 1984 - Smyrna, GA
William F. Groves	S/Sgt Hdq Supply	1999 - Muncie, IN
Charles Grose	AT Recon Officer	unknown
Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	unknown
John Heiterer	AT Company Clerk	12 Jul 1994
Justice Horton	3rd Plt driver	1995
Frank T. Kysar	4th Plt	1992
John D. Lauland, Jr.	3rd Plt 3rd Sqd	abt 1996 in Louisiana(?)
Joe Lassiter	unknown	1977
Michael Malinak	1st Plt 1st Sqd	unknown
Fred Marsh	1st Plt 1st Sqd	1967
Alexander Moir	1st Plt 1st Sqd	1 Oct 1984-Cleveland, OH
Edward K. Norfleet	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	13 Aug 1989-Venita, OK
Orland H. Parsons	Hdq Plt 1st Sgt	12 Oct 1997-Cincinnati, OH
Lee A. Premazzi	Hdq Plt driver	6 Jan 1997-Portland, OR
Ben G. Premo	4th Plt 1st Sqd	unknown
Dalton D. Raze	1st Plt Leader	28 Dec 1997-Springfield, VA
William J. Rogers	1st Plt driver	3 June 1999-Springfield, IL - heart
Carol C. Smith	S/Sgt to 2nd Lt	1960
Edward S. Stewart	Hdq Plt Comm Sgt	1991
Willard S. Strawn	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	circa 1988
James B. Vosters	4th Plt Leader	3 Feb 1997-Miami FL
John P. Webster	Hq Plt Sgt/2nd Lt	1970

