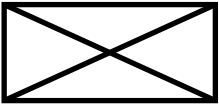




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MESSAGE CENTER



FALL EDITION

SEPTEMBER 2001

A Letter from the Publisher/Treasurer

In the Fall of 1999, the Message Center newsletter was put on a subscription basis because of the escalating costs of postage and mailing supplies. At the time, we estimated that the break-even rate for a two-year subscription of four issues would be \$5. Normally, now would be the time when we would seek renewal of those subscriptions. However, due to the generosity of many readers, our treasury has remained solvent so that present subscriptions can and will be extended through at least the next year with no additional payment necessary. Our circulation policy will continue unchanged: Namely, that a veteran's widow will receive complimentary copies, though many have kindly elected to pay for their subscriptions anyway. The suggested rate for new subscribers (veterans, surviving descendants, and friends) will continue to be \$5 and should be made payable and directed to Publisher **Robert M. Smith at his (new) home address, 7061 Old Kings Road South - Apt 30, Jacksonville FL 32217-2910**. Finally, in grateful remembrance of our founding publisher, the late Rudy Gillen, complimentary copies of the Message Center will continue to be sent to his surviving daughter.

We've Finally Found John Benfield

Many of you know that before his death, the late Billy Black searched long and hard, trying unsuccessfully to find his old friend, Technical Sergeant John Benfield. Well, John's grandson finally found *us* via a 75th-oriented web page administered by Jay Puckett (the son of a former member of F-290 with whom both Rob Smith and I, RC, have long corresponded regarding La Roumiere). Benfield's grandson is John Harter, 30 years old and a career member of the Coast Guard, stationed in Tampa, Florida. John Benfield died 17 April 1988 in Seattle, Washington, so our efforts in 1996 came too late. You can write John Harter at the address given for him on our Address List.

An Autobiography of George Randall Johns, 1st Platoon

The autobiography to follow is that of George R. Johns, written by him 4 August 1996 at my (RC's) request. It hasn't been published until now, because George clearly advised me that he preferred anonymity. He declined a Message Center newsletter subscription (I'd sampled him with the July 1996 issue), and said he was not willing to continue an informal association with either AT Company survivors or with the 75th Association itself. However, he did mention some brief, but nonetheless fond memories of camaraderie he recalled in the 1st Platoon with Virgil Gase and Michael Malinak. Back in 1996, I chose to honor his request to be "left alone" and thus, did not publicize the autobiography he had sent to me. Maybe I should have. But since then, I've concluded that past members of the 1st Platoon might feel differently and want to learn more about what happened to George after the AT Company broke up at Camp St. Louis in June 1945. You're at liberty to contact him, but at some risk to your personal psyche in consideration of his present-day, self-described "loner" personality.

"After completing basic training at Camp Fannin, Texas [George Johns] was assigned to the 75th at Breckinridge for AIT in April '44. Was assigned to 289th, "G" Company. Shortly after D-Day a group of us was sent to Ft. Dix for shipment overseas as replacements.

"At Fort Dix all personnel younger than 19 were sent to the 89th Div at Camp Butner, NC to ship overseas with them, or until reaching our 19th birthday, whichever came first. The 75th Div received orders first so we went back to the 75th Sep '44. At that time I was assigned to "B" Co., 290th and shipped overseas with them.

"A few days before shipping to France I was transferred to AT Co. 290 and assigned to First squad, First Platoon as a gun crewman on a gun I had never fired. Actually, think I was meant for assignment to the Mine Platoon, based on my civilian experience with explosives and training during Basic as a Pioneer. Didn't argue, though. Michael Malinak and I were the bazooka team, which I did know something about. We spent the war in the same foxholes, when we dug them.

"My memories of WWII are much the same as Gase's -- Bombed by a P38 on Christmas Day '44, mortar attack on New Year's Eve '45 (just a few rounds), and running over a mine on Easter Sunday '45. We were sweating out Memorial Day when the war ended.

"Pulled a lot of guard with Virgil [Gase] immediately following the end of the war and corresponded for a few years after the war. Malinak went home shortly after we arrived at Camp St Louis and is now deceased, according to your [the M/C's] list. We never wrote and other than Virgil, [I] didn't really remember the names of the rest of the squad.

"I didn't have enough points to rotate when we finished our work at Camp St Louis, so I got to spend the winter in the Grave Registration trying to identify unknowns buried in France at St. Andre, Evereux., etc.

"Received my discharge on 1 April '46 at Jefferson Barracks, MO, but it didn't take - - Reenlisted in the Air Corps on 28 Jun '46."

George retired as a MSG [Master Sergeant] E8, U.S. Army after 24½ years of active duty, which included 22 domestic and foreign assignments, the latter of which included tours in Korea, Japan, Laos, and Vietnam. He described his present location at Portland, Oregon as "...midway between a military hospital on one hill and the military cemetery on another...Will probably ride it out here." Like most of us, his parents were both deceased. He didn't mention a wife or descendants of his own, but he apparently had eight surviving siblings at the time. His address in 1996 remains on our Address List but may no longer be valid.

A MYSTERY AT THE BRIDGE by William J. Sheridan

Unlike a movie plot, in real life we witness incidents, can vividly recall their details, but can never know what came before or after such incidents. So it was at a check point in Meschede, Germany in mid-April of 1945, when German resistance in the Ruhr Valley had collapsed and the occupation of Germany began. Our post was at a Bailey Bridge spanning the Ruhr river at the edge of town. Our orders were essentially to preserve order and monitor the constant stream of vehicles and foot traffic crossing the bridge. Our back-up was a pair of 75th Division medics armed with M1 Flit Guns. Their mission was to delouse any pedestrian who appeared to need that service. It appeared to us that many of them did.

German civilians made up the bulk of those walking. They had probably fled their homes as the fighting approached and were now trudging homeward with their few possessions stuffed into bulging suit cases and bundles. With them, were newly released POWs who were also trekking homeward carrying their heavy backpacks. Well represented in the crowd were the displaced persons (DP's) with whom we later became well acquainted at Camp Hohenlimburg. And without much doubt, German soldiers were also amongst these civilians. Despite their newly acquired civilian clothing, their youth, their fitness, and the evidence of recent outdoor living betrayed them -- as did their lack of civilian ID. But they were waved across the bridge with the rest because we had no POW compound in which to detain them.

Our medics were less than enthusiastic about their task but they became energized upon the approach of a pretty fräulein. When that happened, they would spring into action with a top-to-bottom Flit Gun barrage aimed at the clothing of the unfortunate girl. They probably earned this diversion from their otherwise odious duty. Who knows, they may actually have killed some lice.

Endless streams of vehicles raising clouds of dust shouldered their way through the pedestrians. Non-US Army vehicles were flagged down and their occupants scrutinized before being waved across the bridge. Many of the vehicles were tiny German cars with huge tanks on their roofs to carry some kind of ersatz fuel. Also in the traffic stream were convoys of Army trucks hauling flat bed trailers, upon all four sides of which had been erected wooden railings. Standing, and packed cheek to jowl within the railings, were masses of dust-covered POWs. They swayed in unison with each curve in the road. One trailer was filled with female soldiers.

It was in the early afternoon of our first day at the bridge [about April 21] that a large, four-door convertible touring car bore down upon us and came to a stop. At the wheel was an impressive looking officer wearing the uniform of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Beside him was a skinny young man dressed in khakis with a French Cross of Lorraine patch on his left shoulder. The driver explained he was on some air force mission, and judging from the number of stripes on his shoulder boards, must have held some impressive rank. Coming to a snappy salute, we waved them on across the bridge.

Not ten minutes later, a large four-door British staff car squealed to a stop at our checkpoint. "Had we seen a large., four-door convertible with two men....etc., etc.?" the occupants asked. The driver explained that the two men they sought had actually stopped for lunch at their Allied headquarters in a nearby town. It was only after these strangers had departed that the resident officers compared their individual impressions of these erstwhile guests. Summed up, they led to a great deal of suspicion that the visitors had been English-speaking Germans, rather than the Allies they were taken to be. Advised that the pair they sought had passed by not fifteen minutes earlier, the occupants of the staff car hastily sped off, resuming their pursuit.

There you have it...Who were these two men? Where were they headed? Did they make it? Do we care? Both the beginning and end of this saga were lost in the fog of war....or was it in the dust?

If any of you reading this can round out the story, you now have the middle of the plot...Or was it just the beginning? Contributions could appear in the next issue of the Message Center newsletter.

75th KIA/DOW Casualties

Finding conflicting data regarding the "who and when" of casualties experienced by the 75th over its 129 days of combat duty, I (RC) began six months or so ago to assemble all of that information I could find from all sources available. I wanted to know which units of the 75th suffered the highest KIA/DOW numbers and particularly, *when* those casualties occurred. I had been inspired to do this mostly because of the severe baptism experienced by the entire 290th during its first commitment to battle at Christmas time, 1944. The resulting total covering 129 days, was 938, 902 of which I was able to connect with fair accuracy to the dates when death occurred. The 290th's totaled 345, the 289th's 280, and the 291st's 266. Other units in the division accounted for 47. Details of the breakdown by unit, month, and day can now be seen at a website on the internet of which Jay Puckett (son of a member of F-290) is the author and Webmaster. Its address is <<http://www.members.tripod.com/hldnoqtr/75thdivisiondad.html>> where it appears in its entirety as the last page of "75th Division Statistics". Jay installed it there with my agreement on about 6 July 2001. Also at that site is the text and maps from our September 2000 issue's feature article, "Chronicle: The Battle in Belgium for Hill La Roumiere".

The Truth About the Conflict Between Eisenhower and Montgomery in 1944-45

Following are excerpts scanned from the book Battle, The Story of the Bulge, by John Toland, Random House, New York, 1959; also from the book A Time for Trumpets, by Charles B. MacDonald, William Morrow & Co., NY, 1985. The excerpts themselves demonstrate the gamesmanship and hypocrisy characterizing the campaign by British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery to subvert the authority of the Allied Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, aiming to become the deputized commander of *all* Allied field forces in Europe. Having never demonstrated tactical brilliance (ref: his ill-fated "Operation Market-Garden" 17-24 Sep 1944) his transparent objective in the Ardennes must have been to try once again to clothe himself in the otherwise unearned personal glory and notoriety he apparently needed to support a colossal ego.

15 Dec 1944

Even the British ridiculed fear of any enemy attack. That very afternoon [15 December] **Montgomery** had stated flatly that the Germans "*cannot stage major offensive operations.*" In fact, things were so dull that he asked Eisenhower if he had any objection to his going off to England the next week. [*Remember this statement and request for leave, as you read the hindsight assertions Montgomery made to the British press later on 8 January 1945...Ed.*]

19 Dec 1944

Despite reservations expressed by General Omar Bradley, Eisenhower takes the advice of Maj. General Walter Bedell Smith and decides to *temporarily* turn over to Montgomery's control, both the U.S. 1st and 9th Armies. The move was made logical and necessary by the Bulge's severing of normal communications between them and their parent, U.S. 12th Army Group Headquarters at Luxembourg City, but would leave Bradley with Patton's 3rd Army for the south. Eisenhower telephoned Montgomery the evening of the 19th and tells him of the decision and that he is to assume command of the northern half of the Bulge battlefield, the southern half to remain under Bradley.

28 Dec 1944

Eisenhower traveled by train to Hasselt, Belgium to meet Montgomery. There he found him to have remained steadfast in his belief that the Germans had one more full-blooded attack left in them...He intended to allow it to run its course before launching his own attack [that would employ American troops such as 1st Army, still under his control]. Before Eisenhower departed, Montgomery raised the issue that had so long complicated Allied command relationships: When the Allied armies renewed the drive into Germany, Montgomery insisted that he be designated overall ground commander and in particular, that he have command over Bradley's U.S. 12th Army Group. As Eisenhower left, Montgomery thought he had won his point...He so reported to Field Marshal Brooke; but Brooke thought otherwise. "It looks to me," Brooke confided in his diary, "as if Monty, with his usual lack of tact, has been rubbing into Ike the results of [his] not having listened to Monty's advice!"

29 Dec 1944

Montgomery.....sent him [Eisenhower] a letter suggesting that the Allied forces in the Ardennes offensive be placed under the control of one commander. The key to future success, according to Montgomery, lay in the assignment of all available offensive power to the north for a single powerful advance to the Ruhr. He even had the audacity to write Eisenhower's directive for him, that would say: "From now onwards full operational direction, control and co-ordination....is vested in the C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, subject to such instructions as may be issued by the Supreme Commander from time to time." He went on to say that he considered it essential that "*all* available offensive power" be assigned to a northern thrust and that "one man" should direct and control that thrust, without which, he concluded, "I am

certain that . . . we shall fail again."

Probably not just by coincidence at the time, the voice of the British press had become strident, maintaining that Montgomery "had saved the Americans from the consequence of their follies and that he would rightly go on to lead all the Allies to victory." Picked up in the U.S., that report prompted a response sent to Eisenhower from Washington DC the next day by General George Catlett Marshall, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.

30 Dec 1944

In Versailles during the afternoon, Eisenhower wrote Montgomery a letter specifically addressing Montgomery's proposal of 29 December. In it he said he was willing to leave one U.S. Army [the Ninth] under the British 21st Army Group on the basis of military necessity and as a token of his confidence in the British commander. But in the matter of command, he could "go no further". He added that he was disturbed by Montgomery's constant predictions of failure unless his plans were followed in their entirety.

Eisenhower ended the letter declaring he would deplore "the development of such an unbridgeable gulf of convictions between us that we would have to present our differences to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The confusion and debate that would follow would certainly damage the good will and devotion to a common cause that have made this Allied Force unique in history." That statement formally reflected the position he would take in a personal confrontation with de Guingand and Tedder the next day.

30 Dec 1944

In Versailles that night, Eisenhower reread the cablegram he had received earlier in the day from his good friend, and commander, George Marshall. In it, Marshall had said:

"They may or may not have brought to your attention articles in certain London papers proposing a British deputy commander for all your ground forces and implying that you have undertaken too much of a task yourself.

"My feeling is this: under no circumstances make any concessions of any kind whatsoever. You not only have our complete confidence but there would be a terrific resentment in this country following such action. I am not assuming that you had in mind such a concession. I just wish you to be certain of our attitude on this side. You are doing a fine job and go on and give them hell."

The deep resentment generated by the reports and editorials in the British press prompted desperate efforts by Maj. General Francis de Guingand (Montgomery's chief of staff but also a liaison with the Americans, who trusted him) to try and arbitrate the issue. He flew to Paris in the early afternoon of the 30th where he learned from American Major General Walter Bedell Smith that his efforts might have come too late. He and Smith met with Eisenhower where Ike told them that he was "tired of the whole business" and had concluded that it had become a matter to be decided by the Combined Chiefs, stating explicitly that they would have to choose between him and Montgomery. Should the Combined Chiefs decide in favor of Eisenhower, Montgomery would be replaced by the British commander in Italy, Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander. Given, that with 42 American divisions on the Continent against 19 from Britain and the Commonwealth countries, there seemed little doubt as to what the Combined Chiefs would decide: It would surely be Montgomery who would have to go. But wanting to avoid a showdown in any case, de Guingand insisted that Montgomery had no inkling of the resentment his letter had fostered. He was convinced that once Montgomery understood, he would back down and cooperate. Thus, he implored that a message to George Marshall be withheld for 24 hours to give him a chance to consult with Montgomery. At first, neither Eisenhower nor British Air Marshal Tedder would agree to such a delay. Only when Bedell Smith took de Guingand's side did Eisenhower relent. Guingand then sent Montgomery a message that he would be flying back to meet him the next day on an "important matter".

31 Dec 1944

De Guingand arrived at Zondhoven at 4:30 P.M. and met with Montgomery to apprise him of the tumultuous situation he had created with his letter of the 29th to Eisenhower and the latter's reaction to it on the 30th. Completely deflated, Montgomery agreed to back down from his position and with few changes, agreed to the text of a message de Guingand had drafted to be sent to Eisenhower: One in which he (Montgomery) apologized for his behavior, and concluded with "Whatever your decision may be you can rely on me one hundred per cent to make it work and I know Brad will do the same. Very distressed that my letter may have upset you and I would ask you to tear it up. Your very devoted subordinate Monty." The apology was accepted by Eisenhower but subsequent events would show that the irrepressible Montgomery would continue his disruptive gamesmanship during the following early days of January, as he continued virtually undeterred to seek the appointment as SHAEF Deputy Commander he so coveted.

6 Jan 1945 (cont.)

Eisenhower's troubles this day were many and varied. But his most aggravating problem was the rising insistence of the British Chiefs of Staff and Montgomery that he appoint a deputy—someone like Montgomery—to command all the Allied field forces.

By now there was a near break between SHAEF and Montgomery's 21st Army Group. In spite of his conciliatory letter of December 31, Montgomery now apparently wanted a showdown. He could have it. The matter would have to go to Churchill and Roosevelt. They could decide between Montgomery and him. But one would have to go.

General de Guingand, Montgomery's chief of staff, had shuttled between SHAEF and the 21st Army Group the past

week, carrying messages, listening to both sides. Taken aside by Bedell Smith, he was warned that Eisenhower had reached the end of his patience.

De Guingand passed on this information. The Field Marshal was amazed. *The Americans just didn't understand him.* His campaign for one field commander wasn't for personal advancement. Hadn't he stated many times he would be willing to serve under Bradley if that capable man were chosen? The Americans couldn't understand that he was motivated not only by the need to win victories but to win them with the minimum loss of life. And it was for this reason that he had refused to start his attack until all was ready.

Montgomery wrote a brief but friendly message to Eisenhower. The Supreme Commander's authority would be accepted at once, without argument. As far as he was concerned, the matter—just as disagreeable to him as to the Americans—was dropped.

But on that day, January 6, the London papers revealed for the first time that Montgomery had taken charge of the northern half of the Battle of the Bulge.

The *Mail* headlined:

MONTGOMERY: FULL STORY OF BREACH BATTLE
British Halted Drive to the Meuse Line.

That paper editorialized, "This is the crucial part of the Western Front since General Rundstedt started to push, and the knowledge that Marshal Montgomery is now in full control there will be received with relief in this country."

7 Jan 1945

The next day, Montgomery invited all correspondents attached to his 21st Army Group to Zonhoven, Holland, for a press conference. As they settled in their seats in an icy hall, Montgomery entered briskly. He wore the maroon beret of the British airborne forces, a paratrooper blouse belted over his gray sweater and farm corduroy slacks. He was in such high spirits he relaxed his most inexorable rule. He invited the surprised reporters to light up.

Then, brimming with enthusiasm and good will, he told of the deep wedge the Germans had driven into the American lines.

"As soon as I saw what was happening I took certain steps myself to ensure that if the Germans got to the Meuse they would certainly not get over the river. I carried out certain movements so as to provide balanced dispositions to meet the threatened danger these were, at the time, merely precautions. That is, I was thinking ahead.

"Then the situation began to deteriorate. But the whole Allied team rallied to meet the danger: national considerations were thrown overboard; General Eisenhower placed me in command of the whole northern front.

"I employed the whole available power of the British Group of Armies; this power was brought into play very gradually and in such a way that it would not interfere with American lines of communication. Finally it was put into battle with a bang and today British divisions are fighting hard on the right flank of the First U.S. Army.

"You thus have the picture of British troops fighting on both sides of American forces who have suffered a hard blow. This is a fine Allied picture. The battle has been most interesting; I think possibly one of the most interesting and tricky battles I have handled, with great issues at stake."

Much of this was patently untrue, some completely false. However, he cleverly continued his analysis with high tribute to American commanders. And the U.S. soldier, he said, was "a brave fighting man, steady under fire, and with the tenacity in battle which stamps the first class soldier.... I never want to fight alongside better soldiers." These men, he thought, should get the basic credit for stopping Rundstedt. Then he turned to a new subject, harmony.

"I want to put in a strong plea for Allied solidarity at this vital stage of the war.... Nothing must be done by anyone that tends to break down the team spirit of our Allied team. . . . I am absolutely devoted to Ike. We are the greatest of friends. It grieves me when I see uncomplimentary articles about him in the British press. When Rundstedt put in his hard blow and parted the American Army, it was automatic that the battled area must be untidy. Therefore, the first thing I did when I was brought in and told to take over was to busy myself in getting the battle area tidy—getting it sorted out. I got reserves into the right places and got balanced—and you know what happened. I reorganized the American and British armies. . .

"It (Collins' VII Corps) took a knock. I said, 'Dear me, this can't go on. It's being swallowed up in battle.'

"I set to work and managed to form the corps again. Once more pressure was such that it began to disappear in a defensive battle. I said, 'Come, come,' and formed again....

"You must have a well balanced, tidy show when you are mixed up in a dog fight. You can't do it nohow—I do not think that word is English—you can't win the big victory without a tidy show."

Although Montgomery pleaded for solidarity, the conference had the opposite effect. Most American correspondents

were irritated at what they considered a patronizing tone in the speech. Even some British correspondents misinterpreted Montgomery's delighted, almost impish manner.

8 Jan 1945

Repercussions were immediate. The more outspoken American correspondents were soon wiring home indignant stories.

Hugh Shuck of the New York *Daily News* finished his cable, TO BORROW EXPRESSION OF AMERICAN GENERAL TONY MCAULIFFE, "NUTS TO YOU, MONTY."

8 Jan 1945 (cont.)

In New York that morning papers were headlining the Montgomery press conference. As expected, anti-British papers were indignant. But the *Times* commented editorially, "No handsomer tribute was ever paid to the American soldier than that of Field Marshal Montgomery in the midst of battle."

This calm reasoning was not felt in Luxembourg City. Third Army and 12th Army Group men were angry. They had just heard a B.B.C. broadcaster giving Montgomery credit for saving the Americans from disaster:

"It is the most brilliant and difficult task he [Montgomery] has yet managed. He found no defense lines, the Americans somewhat bewildered, few reserves on hand and supply lines cut. . . The battle of the Ardennes can now be practically written off, thanks to Montgomery."

This broadcast, and Montgomery's failure to tell newsmen that the split in command was only temporary, brought a wrathful delegation into Bradley's office: Major Hansen, Bradley's aide; Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Ingersoll, editor-on-leave of the New York paper *PM*; and Major Harry Munson, General Allen's aide.

"You've got to get something on record that tells the whole story of this change-over in command," Hansen indignantly told Bradley. "Until you do the American people will have nothing to go by except Montgomery's statement which certainly leaves a questionable inference on the capabilities of the U.S. command."

Bradley was as angry as his staff. Earlier that day he had personally complained to Eisenhower of the distortion of fact in certain British papers. The London *Mail* that morning had headlined its story on the Bulge:

MONTGOMERY FORESAW ATTACK
ACTED "ON OWN" TO SAVE DAY

Then it went on to say, "Apparently the situation was so desperate that Field Marshal Montgomery, using his own initiative, threw in all his weight and authority and asserted his leadership which was accepted by those around him."

9 Jan 1945

In Luxembourg City, Bradley was holding his press conference. First he explained why he and Eisenhower had thinned out the lines in the Ardennes. It had been, he said, "a calculated risk."

Then he explained with some heat why Montgomery had been given half of the battlefield:

"The German attack cut both our direct telephone communications to the First Army and the direct roads over which personal contact was normally maintained. The weather prevented the making of frequent personal contacts with First Army by plane. It was therefore decided that the 21st Army Group should assume *temporary* command of all Allied forces north of the salient. This was a *temporary* measure only and when the lines are rejoined. 12th Army Group will resume command of all American troops in this area."

11 Jan 1945

The Allied military picture that day of January 11 was good.

But the Bradley-Montgomery situation had reached a dangerous stage. The London *Mail* was irritated by Bradley's remarks. In an editorial titled, "A Slur on Monty," It criticized Bradley for stating that Montgomery's assignment was temporary, and that American troops would soon revert to 12th Army Group. The plea to make Montgomery commander of all ground forces was renewed.

"Montgomery is good enough to be given the position of responsibility in an emergency, but when the danger is over and the ravages of the enemy made good his services are no longer required except in a comparatively subordinate capacity.

"Must he again be pushed back into the semi-obscurity which was his lot in the weeks before the Ardennes link was snapped by the enemy?"

At the same time Brendan Bracken, chief of British press affairs, was vehemently denying that the broadcasts heard by Bradley and thousands of GIs sharply criticizing American handling of the Battle of the Bulge were of British origin. The Germans had obviously cut in on the BBC. Home Service Program. [Such a divisive ploy was apparently not ascribed to the Germans by anyone except Bracken, a public relations man with good reason to creatively shift the blame for such a gaffe...Ed.]

"I need hardly tell you," Bracken told Eisenhower, "that the B.B.C. would never broadcast anything which would

be offensive to American troops or to the Commander-in-Chief.”

These were difficult days for Eisenhower. The Bradley-Montgomery imbroglio was causing him more distress and worry than any other similar problem in the whole war.

Bradley went to Versailles and told Eisenhower, “You must know, after what happened I cannot serve under Montgomery. If he is put in command of all ground forces you must send me home. For if Montgomery goes over me, I will have lost the confidence of my command.” Eisenhower replied, “I thought you were the one person I could count on for doing anything I asked you to.” Bradley responded, “You can, Ike. I’ve enjoyed every bit of service with you. But this is one thing I cannot take.” He didn’t add that Patton had already told him, “If you quit, Brad, then I’ll be quitting with you.”

12 Jan 1945

On that day [12 January] Bradley was somewhat surprised to be handed a letter from Montgomery. He was even more surprised when he read:

" My dear Brad,

It does seem as if the battle of the 'salient' will shortly be drawing to a close, and when it is all clean and tidy I imagine that your armies will be returning to your operational command.

I would like to say two things:

First: What a great honour it has been for me to command such fine troops.

Second: How well they have done.

"It has been a great pleasure to work with Hodges and Simpson: Both have done very well.

"And the Corps Commanders In the First Army (Gerow, Collins, Ridgway) have been quite magnificent; it must be most exceptional to find such a good lot of Corps Commanders gathered together in one Army.

"All of us in the northern side of the salient would like to say how much we have admired the operations that have been conducted on the southern side; if you had not held on firmly to Bastogne the whole situation might have become very awkward.

"My kind regard to you and to George Patton.

Yrs. very sincerely,
B. L. Montgomery"

Bradley put down the letter. It was obviously an effort to forget the past. As far as Bradley was concerned the past was also forgotten.

Four decades later, Charles B. MacDonald wrote on p. 598 of his book, A Time for Trumpets: "That crisis between Eisenhower and Montgomery was as close as Adolf Hitler came to precipitating a break in the Western alliance, and it was nowhere near a break. However heated and serious, it remained merely another difference of opinion between field commanders, a controversy in large measure generated by a mercurial press always ready to champion dissension and preach disaster. (Not just the British press; for the American press was complaining vehemently that Montgomery had committed no British troops to help in the Ardennes.)"

About LTC Ronald M. Gleszer, formerly CO, 3rd Bn. 290th

Some of you will recall that the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Bn 290th, LTC Gleszer, lost contact with his battalion late on the 24th of December 1944. His executive officer, Major John Baskin, allegedly took over command in his absence and probably remained so (reporting to Duffner) during most if not all of the battle for La Roumiere. Thanks to Al Roxburgh, CN-289, and Paul Ellis, K-290, I was able to study the first published version of a Gleszer memoir. It was entitled Gleszer, The Career of a Military Man, as told to his life-long friend, Millie Joplin. I had hoped that by reading it, I could derive from his recollections some fresh insights into the battle itself. I was sadly disappointed in that respect because, regrettably, Gleszer recalled little if any first-hand information concerning La Roumiere and was equally vague regarding details of his own alleged leadership there.

The part of the book dealing with October 1944 through January 1945 turned out to be little more than self-aggrandizement accompanied by paranoid condemnation of his superior, Carl Duffner. He also chose to describe his immediate subordinate and other associates as incompetent or disloyal, and outrageously claimed credit for leading his battalion to eventual victory at La Roumiere while he was actually either absent, or otherwise out of control (allegedly, asleep). His account also attempts to imply that he was still with, and leading the 3rd Battalion at Colmar, at a time *after* he had been relieved of command (which had occurred sometime before 15 January 1945). An account by former Lt. Arthur Hawkins, I-290, has stated that Gleszer was definitely *not* with the battalion on February 1st as it arrived at the "Colmar Pocket" in Alsace-Lorraine, France. The book never explains the circumstances surrounding his departure from the 75th Division in 1945. But despite this strange behavior as a Lieutenant Colonel, Gleszer became a full Colonel by 1955, a Brigadier General in 1966, and a Major General in November 1967. He died 25 August 2000.

I had intended to paraphrase the more outrageous parts of his book...Particularly those dealing with the La Roumiere episode and accompany them with a rare photograph of Messrs. Duffner, Gleszer, and Baskin (Gleszer's Executive Officer). The photo had been taken in December 1944 and retained for more than 50 years by Bill Nichols. Regrettably, though it had become only temporarily lost, it needed some retouching to brighten the subjects' images and didn't arrive in time for me to accomplish that chore. I hope to finish the project in time for possible inclusion in the Spring 2002 issue.

NOTE:

This page has been deliberately left mostly blank and should remind all of you that the Message Center continues to have space for, and needs your contributions in the form of remembrances, so as to remain viable...Things that

you're willing to share with others for future issues. Please do your part to help maintain the M/C by telling us about yourselves, your experiences, or even what you'd like us to explore in future articles...Things that will be of interest or edifying to you and your peers. You might even want to look at what we've printed in the past to see what might be appropriate for the future....Thanks, RC.

The Message Center Staff:
"RC" (Ray) Smith, Editor
"RM" (Rob) Smith, Publisher/Treasurer

AT-290 KIA/WIA and Taps

Francis T. DeVault KIA
4th Plt 2nd Sqd Near Burtonville, Belgium

William P. Hulsey	3rd Plt 2nd Sqd	Near Soy, Belgium aft 25 Dec '44
Wilbur A. Isaacs	1st Plt Sergeant	In Korea
Carl Sieg	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Friendly fire Xmas Ny, Belgium
Lino Silvani	2nd Plt	M Co, 39th Inf Aug '44 Ste Lo, France

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 drvr	Shrapnel, arm, land mine Colmar cmpgn
Niklos Uremovich	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Friendly fire, Xmas '44
Donald Yack	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	Colmar - Feb. '45

Post-War Deceased

Johnnie 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 Cmndng Officer	22 Sep 2000: Maryland-heart failure
Lawrence H. Groover	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	Oct 1984 - Smyrna, GA
William F. Groves	Hdq Plt Supply	1999 - Muncie, IN
Charles Grose	AT Recon Officer	
Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	
John Heiterer	AT Company Clerk	12 Jul 1994
Justice Horton	3rd Plt driver	1995
Frank T. Kysar	4th Plt	1992
John D. Lauand, Jr.	3rd Plt 3rd Sqd	abt 1996 in Louisiana(?)
Joe Lassiter	unknown	1977
Michael Malinak	1st Plt 1st Sqd	
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	
Dalton D. Raze	1st Plt Ldr	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 Ldr	3 Feb 1997-Miami FL
John P. Webster	Hq Plt Sgt-2nd Lt	1970