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### The Kansas City Reunion (August 20-24)

A substantial portion of this M/C will be dedicated to the recent reunion of the 75th Association...It was a unique one for me (RC), not just because it was my first, but also because it helped to tie up some loose ends from years ago that needed closure. At the reunion, my focus became totally directed toward the "history sessions" that had been suggested as a unique addition to the Association's program by its hosts, our Bill Black and John Pildner. Altogether, the sessions took about 6½ hours to complete and were split between Thursday and Friday. Video tapes documenting them, made by cameraman Bob McElroy, together with printed scripts will be made available to you at cost, perhaps for \$40 or less\*\*\*. John Pildner promises to have availability and price announced in a forthcoming issue of *The Bulgebusters*. Meanwhile, I want to try and describe for you the essence of what I personally found in them to be so memorable.

The speakers (there were nine representing all three infantry regiments plus the 897th FA Battalion) worked from notes they had compiled over many years of determined effort. Time during which they painstakingly, often painfully, extracted from their diaries and fading memories, what they remembered about late December 1944. For most, these deliberate recollections began in 1990, when Al Roxburgh (CN-289) began to solicit prime historical accounts as rebuttal material for submission to a variety of WW2 archival repositories. During that year, Al himself had become frustrated with the vagaries and outright fabrications published until then about the Battle of the Bulge. The best of these were as one would have expected them to be: Informed accounts of the battle written by professional army historians. But many of the others comprised accounts of episodes that were literally fiction: Stories sprinkled with unsubstantiated "facts", purportedly related to events with which the author had neither firsthand nor even accurate second-hand informed knowledge...Stories fabricated to create fleshed out "good reads", rather than best effort, accurate accounts of an historic battle. NONE gave credit to the 75th for its sacrifices and accomplishments, completely overlooking or assigning credit to others for key actions that had halted and contained the German advance in the critical north shoulder of the bulge.

The history of the 75th was never properly published. What was written was never disseminated outside the 75th. On the other hand, well organized, regular army units having high visibility at the command level and with well organized PR sections managed to develop and publish post-war accounts of their own battle histories. A few examples of such units are the 2nd and 3rd Armored and the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. They were/are, colorful, long-standing army units. Little known, largely unaccounted for but nonetheless active, National Guard units like the 75th, failed to do this and no one took notice of what they had done.

An exception, of course, was the overrun 106th whose disastrous combat history became better known and documented than the 75th's...perhaps because of their disaster.

In 1990, then, a frustrated and angered Al Roxburgh began his crusade to straighten out history and make known the 75th's role, at least in the Ardennes action during December 24-29, 1944. In doing so, he became our de facto historian, albeit an unwilling one.

The history sessions he produced and chaired at KC became a forum to air the true details of three major actions in which the 75th was involved during its first desperate days following commitment to battle in the Ardennes: These have been named The Sadzot Gap, La Roumiere, and Grand Halleux. They comprise some of the best documented and verified recollections or remembrances gathered by Al Roxburgh over the previous seven years for inclusion in his Archival "PKG".

Thus, several key issues emerged at KC, producing pride and relieving a sort of uninformed embarrassment I had felt with respect to the 75th's performance. The term "embarrassment" is used advisedly here, and I feel compelled to explain it. It was borne of ignorance many of us in AT experienced, but were unable to correct on our own. I think most of us would agree that through no choice of our own, AT was mostly out of the main stream of December 24-29, 1944 events. We had little or no firsthand knowledge of what had been happening in Belgium since December 16, 1944...And speaking for myself, I certainly knew a lot less about the events of December 24-29 than did the members of the rifle and weapons companies, who quickly found themselves directly involved...And even *they* knew precious little then. The tactically *defensive* deployment of AT-290 during the period in question worked to reduce our understanding of what was happening. As a consequence, neither then nor until 1990 did I begin to comprehend what the rest of the 75th Division had faced -- and accomplished -- in the Ardennes. And even today, it's a waste of time to try and find out by reading books on the subject.

For me, the most memorable parts of the KC history sessions were these:

(1) The ill-prepared 75th was literally thrown in to close a breach of the Allied line, and managed to save the northern shoulder of that breach (the Bulge), holding it against any further enlargement by superior, seasoned and ferociously attacking enemy forces. Spread out as they were along a 35 mile stretch from Celles (the westernmost Nazi penetration) to N15 (the north-south road, which at Christmas time, separated the Allied VIIth Corps from the XVIIIth), combat teams made up from unseasoned, "green" troops of the 75th Division were the Allied forces that stood between the fanatically attacking elite German 12th and 2nd SS Panzer Divisions and their objectives, Liege...and ultimately, the port of Antwerp.

(2) Beginning December 24, the combat role and credits earned by the 289CT (Combat Team) and similarly those of the 290CT became obscured within the chain of command that wended upwards through the 3rd AD's CCA and CCR Combat Commands, ending with the 3rd Armored's CO. A General officer, Doyle A. Hickey, commanded CCA, interposed over the 289th's Colonel Douglas B. Smith. The CCR's commander was Colonel Robert L. Howze (doubling as the 3rd AD's 36th AIR CO), interposed over the 290th's CO,

Col. Carl F. Duffner. Both Hickey and Howze reported to the CO of the 3rd Armored Division's, Major General Maurice Rose.

In a 517th "Chronicle", a self-serving narrative history of that independent Parachute Infantry Regiment, the claim was made that during the night of Dec. 25-26, Col Howze had placed [the 517th's CO] Lt. Col Boyle "in command of all troops on the objective [La Roumiere Ol Fagne], including two battalions of the 290th Infantry". The claim is clearly flawed by the fact that by the 26th, La Roumiere's heights had been attacked three times on the 24th and 25th and finally secured by dusk on the 25th by the 290th's 2nd and 3rd Bns. They hardly needed "rescue" or "personal orientation" allegedly [and patronizingly] administered by LTC Boyle and his staff. In fact, Boyle and the elements of the 517th's Cos. A and C under his command, were late arrivals...And the 290th's own historical accounts at regimental, battalion and company levels, make no mention of such a "rescue", relief, or the delivery of an instructional tutorial on defence. But since no pains had been taken to publish the 75th's history in order to claim its achievements for its own, such claims could be (and obviously were) made without fear of contradiction.

One explanation or rationale offered for such an outrageous claim is that LTC Boyle may have outranked the 290th's officers on the hill at the time, and by employing the Army's hierarchal rules, could have claimed command responsibility for La Roumiere's capture, even though he was absent at the time it was secured.

(3) Highly plausible explanations were offered by Al Roxburgh, supported by Paul Ellis (K-290), for two circumstances relating to the battle for La Roumiere: The total *absence of artillery* preparation for December 24th's 2330 hrs attack, and the *urgency* for the attack itself, one originally scheduled for 1800 hrs despite the tired, foodless, and cold condition of CCR's infantry. Protests that the two-hour troop movement time allocated for the 1800 hrs attack was a physical impossibility had earned a respite until 2330. According to Paul Ellis (K-290), somehow the word of the delay didn't get passed along to the artillery, and being unaware of it, they didn't reschedule a preparatory bombardment for the later attack.

The justification for *urgency* (sister 289CT's attack further east wasn't scheduled and didn't take place until 0800 hrs Christmas morning) probably lay with the plight of Task Force Hogan. TF Hogan consisted of 400 men, including Company A of 3rd Armored's 83rd Armored Reconnaissance Bn, who had become surrounded by three Panzer Divisions and trapped about 10 miles southeast of the Hotton-Soy road at Marcouray. General Rose would have been strongly motivated to find a way to provide an escape route for this substantial body of his men. I.e., to find a door through which they could return to their own lines. Hardly by coincidence, the 290th opened that door by taking the commanding heights of La Roumiere on Christmas Day. Supporting this scenario is the fact that shortly after noon on Christmas, TF Hogan's men were ordered by Rose to destroy their weapons and vehicles and walk out under cover of darkness that (Christmas) night. They did so, and in groups of 20 made good an escape that continued into the early morning hours of the 26th. They walked out through the lines of Rose's 290CT.

(4) Company C of the 289th was not only deserted by both their Commanding and Executive Officers, but as well by their 1st Sergeant and one other commissioned officer (described with restraint as having been "with the kitchen")...all of whom have remained discretely nameless. C Company, as well as adjacent A and B companies of the 289th faced unbelievable odds at the "Sadzot Gap" from December 26th through the 28th, as they successfully defended that surrounded critical sector below Sadzot against the determined, suicidal attacks of literally hundreds of 2nd SS Panzer "Das Reich" troops. Had they failed to do so, the defenseless gun crews of the 897th FA Bn. would have been quickly overrun. But by their own accounts, the lives of the artillerymen and of T/Sgt Joe McClure's 3rd Platoon (C-289) were saved on the 28th by the exquisitely accurate and disciplined fire control practiced by the 897th, when barrages were called in by McClure to within 50 yards of his dug-in platoon, breaking up and destroying wave upon wave of attacking Germans during the night.

The 897th's records show that they fired 4700 rounds from their dozen, 105mm howitzers during 3 hours of that night. That's a bombardment during which each gun accurately fired an average of 2 rounds a minute; some crews achieving a rate of "six in the air" at once. Phenomenal...And an example of the close artillery support of which not all of the infantrymen benefiting from it may have been fully aware. Thus, without having intended to do so, 1st Bn 289, specifically C Company, became the live bait for a trap sprung and closed by the artillery. Following German withdrawal, enemy body counts made by the Belgians found 500 dead in front of C Company and in the forest from which they (2nd SS Panzer troops) had attacked.

(5) There is now credible evidence to believe that the enemy's fanaticism was not wholly the result of a homeland defense syndrome, Teutonic heritage, doctrine, or even superior training. Information has surfaced revealing that a drug known nowadays as "meth" (e.g., methamphetamine) or "speed", was being synthesized by the Germans and regularly fed to Nazi troops during preparation for major actions. It had the effect making them feel invincible, aggressive, even vicious for up to 72 hours after its administration, though it was then followed by depression prevailing over a like period. Some historians believe that use of such narcotics explain the capability of German troops to maintain their continuous attacks without benefit of sleep, such as those 1st Bn 289 experienced December 26-28 at the Sadzot Gap.

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Ray Smith and Rudy Gillen

\*\*\*Tom Leamon (A-289) has asked us to announce that video tapes of the history sessions, recorded on two VHS cartridges, together with scripts of all the presentations (estimated to be about 6½ hours worth) will indeed be made available. Cost of the tapes will be \$39.95 including shipping and handling. Orders can be placed using your personal check, VISA, or Master Card by mail or (in the case of credit card orders) by phone. Mail orders to All-Video Services, 2950 E Main Street, Columbus, OH 43209. Phone orders to 1-800-267-8106, Ext 3970.....the Editor.