

J. David Bailey

422 INF/F

December 13, 2010

Area native leads Veterans of Battle of the Bulge

BLUEFIELD — By mid-December of 1944, the Allies were making great progress in their efforts to push the German army back to Berlin, and bring the Nazi reign of terror to a close. As Christmas 1944 neared, many of the battle-hardened Allied soldiers who carried the invasion of Europe on their soldiers resting after months of hedge row fighting through France. Many forward units in the Ardennes were made up of young soldiers like Pfc. J. David Bailey, a Bluefield native who had been in the U.S. Army for more than two years, but arrived in his first combat zone on Dec. 13, 1944.



"I was not a kid," Bailey, 89, said during a telephone interview from his Alexandria, Va., home. "I was 20 years old and a senior at West Virginia University with only one semester left to go when the war started. I dropped out in 1942, and joined the Army before June. I was afraid that if I had waited until after June, I would have been classified as a 4-F'er, and they wouldn't have let me in."

Bailey's first two years in the military weren't the same as most G.I.s. Because of Bailey's college education and the military's concern that fighting a global war with fronts in Europe, Africa and the Pacific would drain the pool of available leaders, the Army placed him in the Army Specialized Training Program and sent him for advanced training at Calmest University where he studied engineering and other schools that trained him to be a leader.

Entry standards for the program were high — requiring a 120 or above IQ — and students were required to carry 25 credit hours per quarter in engineering, science, medicine, languages and other fields. In late 1943, the Army realized that it needed replacements more desperately than it needed officer candidates, and started sending soldiers in the (ASTP) program to replace the depleted ranks of combat units.

"On Dec. 3, 1944, I landed at Le Havre, France, and started moving in the direction of the Ardennes Forest," Bailey said. "It took some time to get moved into my new unit, the **422nd Infantry Regiment of the 106th Division**," he said. "I was only there for three days before the Germans launched their counter-offensive. It was the greatest intelligence victory for the Germans during World War II. We were outnumbered 5 to 1. My regiment surrendered after the fourth day. I was only one of 212 soldiers out of 5,000 that wasn't killed, wounded or captured," Bailey said.

"I had something happen to me that was very fortunate," he said. "Once you get separated from your unit, the Army tells you to keep looking for your own unit. If you go to a center, they'll stick you with any unit, and that could mean trouble. I kept walking around until I walked into a small town. The buzz bombs were coming in and I went up to a house and asked if I could stay in the basement. A 16-year-old Belgium girl — Adelle —

let me stay there. The bombs were going to Amsterdam, but they weren't very accurate. A couple years ago when I was over there, a Finnish documentary crew filmed me and Adelle.

"I wasn't a hero," Bailey said. "I stayed alive." He served in four military campaigns in the European Theater including the Ardennes offensive. He received the Army Certificate of Appreciation, the Combat Infantry Badge of Honor, two Bronze Stars and other citations. He has been active in the Disabled Veterans of America, and earlier this year, he was elected national president of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

"We meet each year," he said. "I just joined the association to go with them to the 60th anniversary. I've helped out upgrading the web site. I was honored to be elected president at our meeting this year at Fort Jackson. The irony of the thing was that, the last time I was at Fort Jackson, I was a private. There I was, sitting at the podium with all those important people. That was where I took my basic training."

In addition to surviving the Battle of the Bulge, Bailey has traveled around the world and has been in all 24 time zones and traveled to all seven continents. He is a direct descendant of Richard Bailey, one of the first settlers of Bluefield. His father, coal industry pioneer R. Lake Bailey, died when he was young, and Bailey was raised by his Uncle E.L. Bailey, a self-made millionaire who established Bailey Lumber Company.

Bailey himself has also experienced great success in business. He served 16 years as president of the John B. Goff Land Company with coal and natural gas properties in Kentucky. He is still vice president of Goff Land Co., and has held management positions with U.S. Steel in Pittsburgh, Pa., Consolidated Natural Gas Corp., Tiffany & Company and Edison Electric Institute.

Source: *Bluefield Daily Telegraph, West Virginia.* <http://bdtonline.com>

***A Soldier and a Perfect Stranger
And a Day in History Will live Forever!
December 16, 1944.***

It was on December 1944 that my regiment of the 106th Infantry Division was plundered in the Battle of the Bulge. As one of the few survivors of 5,000 men of the 422nd Infantry Regiment, I had lost directions as I wandered into a small Belgium village called Anthisnes (Providence of Liege.)

Being homeless, without rations and needing shelter, it was only natural to seek help in this remote European village in friendly territory. I knocked on the closest entry I could find. On that December morning during the Christmas season, a young nineteen year old Belgium girl named Adele Orban opened her door and heart to me. Indeed, I truly believe that in this life someone guides and watches over us, and their protective spirit is "always" present.

Yes, it was my guardian angel who had pre-arranged this unusual encounter between David and Adele. We both came from two separate worlds; however, we did indeed share a mutual concern—The Ravages of War! Our friendship had lasted over a half a century and with such a strong bond we consider ourselves now to be more like brother and sister.

As a young soldier I had the memorable experience of participating in the most decisive battle on the western front during World War II. Also, I was able to share that reality with my new Belgium friends, recently liberated from German hands by our own Army. It was a remarkable experience that happened during my lifetime and a reminder that indeed—truth sometimes can be stranger than fiction!

The Battle of the Bulge lasted longer than any battle in our nation's history with the largest number of casualties. The official historian of the U.S. Army, Charles MacDonald, stated that it was the greatest battle in American history.

American's World War II generation did save the world, not for glory, not for honor, and not for lasting tribute. For my buddies that did not return they deserve our blessings.

Source: Bulge Bugle November 2005

<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/710-a-soldier-and-a-perfect-stranger.html>

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