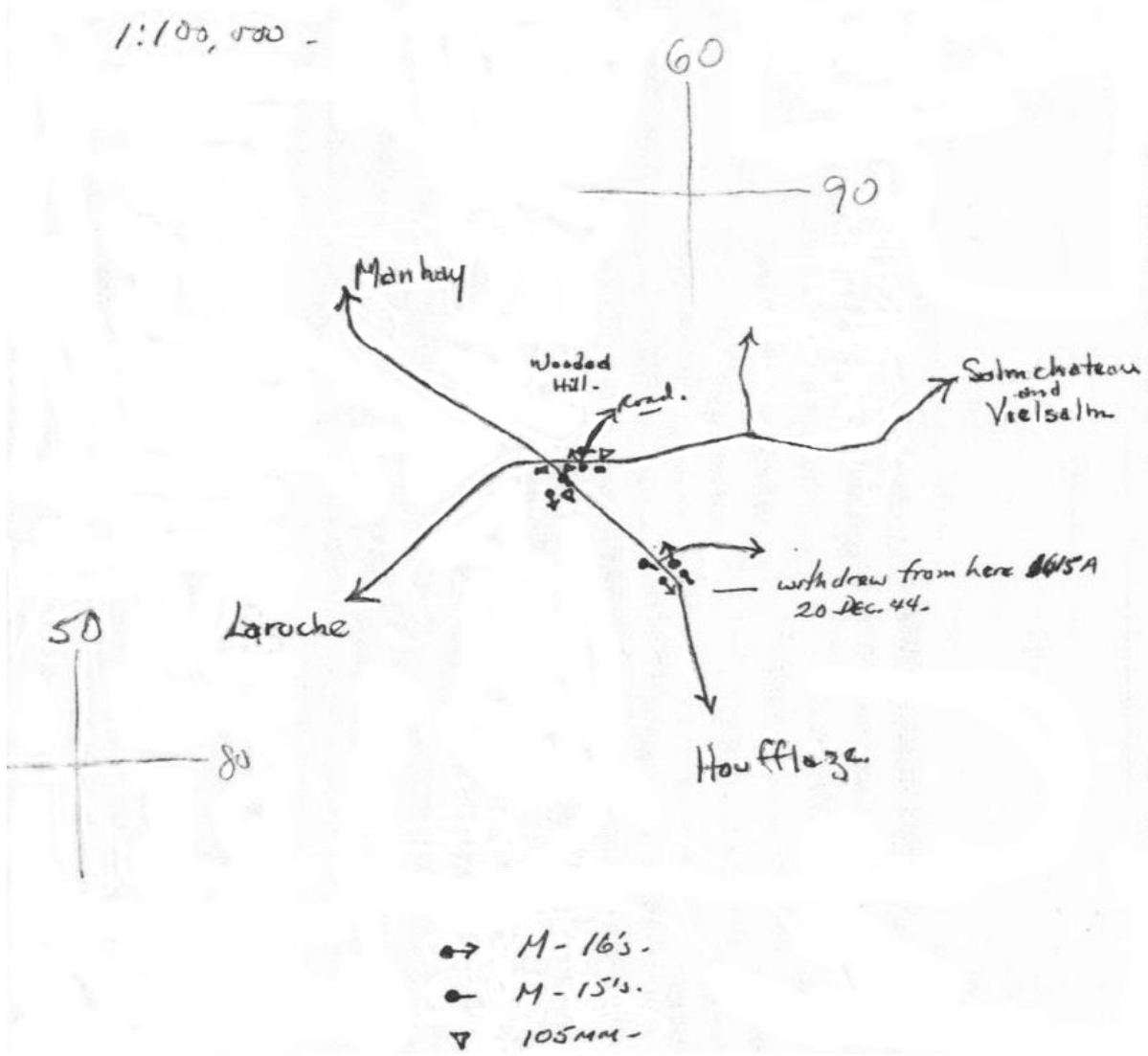


Combat Interview: December 20-23, 1944  
Combat Interview: Historical Section, 7th Armored Division  
Sergeant Rhinold R. Mruzinsky (Silver Star)  
and T/5 Bernard J. Connolly, (Bronze Star)  
Battery "D", 203rd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion  
January 02, 1945

**20 December:**

At about 0100 hour, 20 December, "D" Battery, 203rd AAA Battalion was given the mission of establishing a road block at the road junction of N28 and N15, about 4 miles south of Manhay. The first road block was set up about a mile south of the road junction, on route N15. By 0400 hours, four half-tracks (two M-15's and two M-16's) were in position. (see overlay)



The day was misty with visibility limited to about 1000 yards. At 1000 hours, a peep with men from the road block picked up a PW in a civilian car about 5 miles down N15 from the road block. At 1600 hours, the men on the block heard firing believed to be from a 20mm from a patrol or column of undetermined strength coming up the road. One M-16 was hit in the turret but not damaged and no one was hurt. Sergeant Mruzinsky decided upon a withdrawal to the road junction to a more favorable position, and while the two rear half-tracks covered the road with fire, the first two pulled back up the road and were followed by the other two. The M-16 covering fired 4,000 rounds of 50 cal. and the M-15 fired 10 rounds of HE. Here at the road junction, they set up their half-tracks in the positions shown on the overlay. Also at the junction were three 1-5's from the 3rd Armored Division, about 60 infantrymen, stragglers from the 106th Infantry Division, 20 truck's drivers fighting as doughboys. Later during the three day stand other units joined the group at the crossroads. These were 3rd Armored cars from the 87th Cavalry, a small company (80) from the 82nd Airborne Division and 7 Medium tanks from the 3rd Armored Division.

## **21 December**

At the crossroads, a Captain Brown, Forward Artillery officer from the **106th Division** was organizing the defenses. He set up the defenses and worked out a scheme of firing for each gun where by the guns would alternate fire to save ammunition. The guns on N15 South of the crossroads were setup with one M-16 and a 105mm on the right of the road facing south. One M-15 was on the road with an M-8 mounted 75mm howitzer just to his left. The M-16 fired during the night to draw the enemy while the other guns remained silent. The noise of vehicles could be heard during the night to the south. At about 0500 hours, a bicycle patrol was heard coming up the road, laughing and talking. They appeared to be headed for the gun that had been firing during the night. In the darkness and fog they approached to within 20 yards of the position of the M-15 when they opened fire. There was a horrible scream. "*Give it to them again*" ordered the Captain (Brown) and they fired another burst. After this one there was silence. When it became light, about 10 German enlisted men and two officers were found dead and four lay wounded. During the morning, other Germans (about 15) came in and surrendered. Included among these were two medics with Red Cross brassards, armed with burp guns.

At about 1000 hours, Sergeant Mruzinsky took his track about 300 yards down the road to reconnoiter and saw nothing. In the meantime, a man in front of the house on the corner used as a Command Post was killed by a sniper from the woods to the NE of the road junction. The woods in that direction were sprayed from the H/T. Mruzinsky took his track down N28 to the East to look for an outpost that had been placed there the night before. They went down spraying the roads on both sides – then stopped and called. There was no sign of the outpost so they went back. On the morning of the 21st, the H/T in the middle of the road facing south was moved to the right of the road. That afternoon motor and 88 plus small arms and machine guns fire was received, but it was too foggy for it to be accurate. That day a 2nd Lieutenant with an M-8 tried to get through N28 toward Vielsalm for help but was knocked out. A little after 1600 hours two medium tanks (3rd Armored Division) arrived and the two tanks, and two M-16 H/T's sprayed both sides of the road down N28 toward Vielsalm for about 1/2 a mile. One M-15 from junction sprayed the wooded hillside southeast of junction to stop small arms fire from that location. After this – at about 1630 hours, things quieted down.

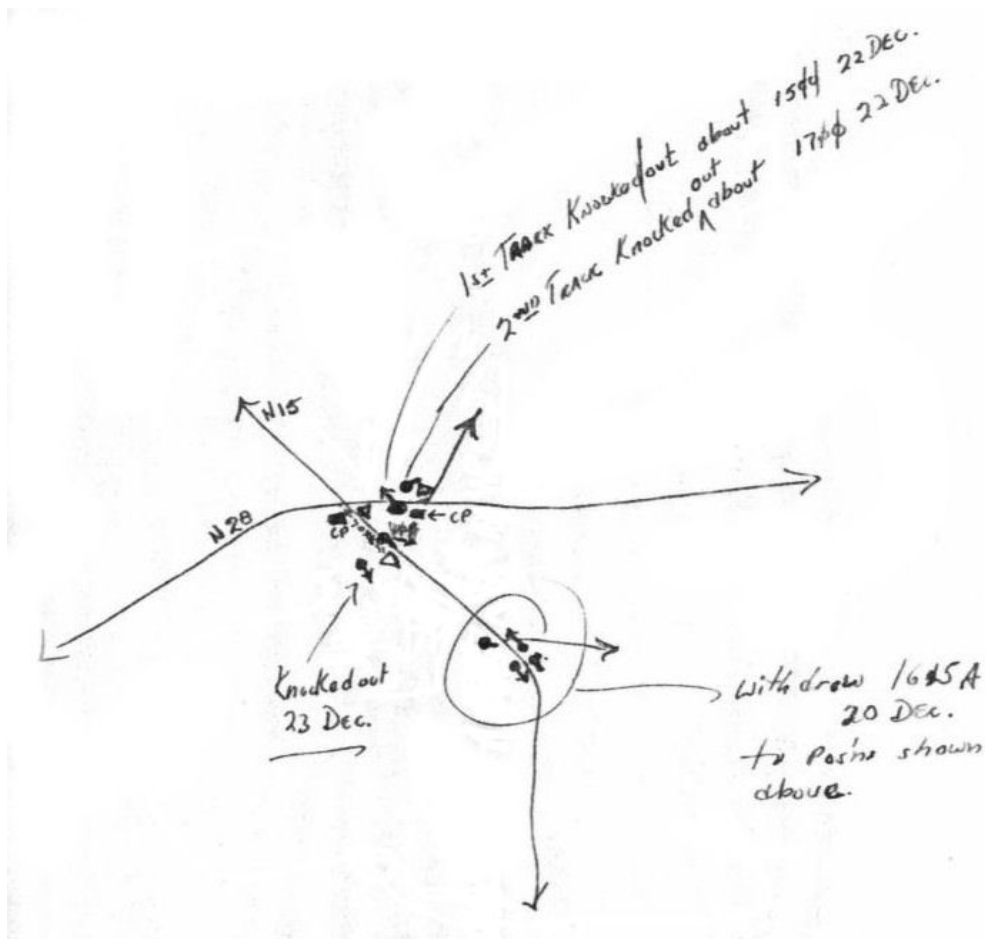
## **22 December:**

The night of 21-22 was quiet except for small arms fire. At about 0600 hours another M-16 from the **203rd AAA Battalion** arrived with ammo, rations and water. About noon, a company of Infantry from the 82nd Airborne arrived from the northeast. They had been pinned down by the fire from the crossroads the night before. At about 1500 hours, the fog lifted and artillery and mortar fire became accurate. One of the first shells knocked out one M-16 at 1500 hours and another M-15 was knocked out at 1700 hours. There was constant mortar fire during the afternoon that an artillery officer believed to be from American 81mm. Shells dropped in until about 2300 hours.

## **23 December:**

The night of Dec 22-23 was clear. Two Junker 52's were seen flying over the positions and red flares were seen to the northeast. Noises of tanks, horse drawn vehicles could be heard to the southeast. An Infantry patrol captured two prisoners and one German Captain and the information was given that twenty SS men plus ten in reserve were to attack the next morning.

On the 23rd December the mortar and small arms fire continued. With snow on the ground, the men made excellent targets. The Commanding Officer from the 82nd was short of ammo. All men from the gun crews that were manning the guns were placed as infantry out posted to the northeast. At about 1300 hours, 7 medium tanks arrived from down N15 and took up positions around the crossroads. It was quiet until 1500 hours. Then a heavy barrage began that lasted about 1/2 hour. The 2 M-16's answered the fire to the west and southwest. Most of the mortar fire came from the south. Another barrage started at about 1630 hours and lasted until 1700 hours when an attack by infantry and tanks was launched. In one particular spot, T/5 Hesse Cook saw three large tanks, a tractor drawn 88mm and about 50 men.



Most of the men drew back to the house at the crossroads which was hit and the hay mound the adjoining stable caught fire at 1700 hours. At 1730 hours, Captain Hucksell (106th Division) said to wave a white flag to surrender and a white shirt on a rifle was waved but was shot off. They tried again with a white blanket but it only drew fire.

They saw that it would be impossible to surrender and there was only the alternative to stay there and burn or try to get out and chance getting shot. The Captain (Brown) said – Every man for himself – Get out as best you can or get burned. The entire house was covered by small arms fire. Some of the men got out by letting the cattle out of the burning stable and running between them. Cook was hiding surrounded by Germans all wearing American overcoats. He escaped by standing up with them after a burst of mortar fire, and walking away.

Of the 29 men from the 203rd AAA Battalion, 11 returned, one is known dead, 4 are in hospital and 13 are missing in action.

Source: N.A.R.A. Received from Mark Ellis, September 2007  
<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/627-battle-at-baraque-de-fraiture-combat-interview.html>  
 Henri REGISTER, webmaster

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