

DAYTON DAILY NEWS 1-B



Cemetery Near Bastogne for Men Who Died During Battle of Bulge

The Battle of the Bulge began 25 years ago this week. It brought 60,000 American casualties. The first American unit hit, and wiped out, was the 106th Infantry Division. Hugh Mulligan has found people who remember.



Henry Lejoly Points to Where 125 Americans Died

Bulge Was My Lai in Reverse

By HUGH A. MULLIGAN

MALMEDY, Belgium — In the frosty moonlight the wounded soldier dragged himself three miles to the hill to the Malmédy farmhouse, leaving a trail of blood in the snowy forests of the Ardennes.

He said it had long had happened . . . He was bleeding terribly from the foot . . .

Maria Martin, seated with her husband and her two sisters in the kitchen of her stone farmhouse, relives that night 25 years ago as if it were yesterday.

THE SISTERS, Ida and Bertha, all talking at once, remembered the questions that raced through their minds as they beheld the wild-eyed, blood-spattered young man on their doorstep. He was tall and handsome and wearing an American uniform, but he spoke some French and some German.

Was he a German?

Were the Germans coming back to Malmédy? There was a great battle going on all over the forest — you could see the sky on fire between the tall fir trees — and there were rumors that German soldiers, wearing American uniforms, had been parachuted behind the lines.

"He said his name was Larry, Lt. Larry, an American officer," Ida Martin recalled anxiously, "and he was the only survivor of a terrible thing. But we didn't know. We were afraid."

THE MARTIN sisters didn't know it then but the wounded American they sheltered and fed that night and led over the mountains to the last U.S. ambulance leaving the German onslaught was one of the few survivors of an incident known ever since as the Malmédy massacre.

The massacre actually took place at Bagniez, a tiny crossroads settlement ten miles southeast of Malmédy, where two main roads out of Germany turn south to the key rail center of St. Vith.

Henry Lejoly, an eyewitness to the slaughter on that snowy Sunday, still lives in the farmhouse across the road from the Café Bodarwe and almost next door to the handsome monument that Belgians built to the American victims.

"It was gray and chilly, the first snow of the season was falling, just like today," Lejoly said in German, peering out the window of the rebuilt Bodarwe Café at the parking lot where it all took place.

THE MILITARY facts are simple. A mighty German army, 22 divisions, a quarter of a million men in 1,000 tanks and trucks, was sweeping out of the Schnee Eifel, the pine-covered mountains just a few miles to the east, in the greatest counteroffensive of the war. Blasted out of its bunkers in the old Siegfried Line, the green, raw U.S. 106th Division was in disorganized retreat toward its headquarters at St. Vith.

Obscure at the size of the German juggernaut, the combat command reserve of the U.S. 7th Armored division was passing south through the lonely road junction on its way to St. Vith to help out the decimated 106th.

Into the middle of all this happened a battery of the 280th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, one of those obscure, unattached army units that seem to belong to no one and that only by the worst of luck find their way to the front.

THREE DRIVERS from the little canon of Jews and trucks had entered the Café Bodarwe to ask directions of the proprietor,

Mrs. Bodarwe. Her sympathies definitely were pro-Belgian, even though the whole German-speaking area had been a part of Germany until the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Henry Lejoly, who still considered himself a German, saw the expression of surprise on the face of the Jews when one of their trucks outside suddenly burst into flames.

The lead tanks of Kampfgruppe Peiper, spearhead of the 5th Panzer Army, had just topped the rise east of the crossroads and were making the left turn toward St. Vith when they spotted the American column. Obersturmbannführer—SS Lt. Col.—Jochen Peiper, the 29-year-old tank man whose command was in some doubt in crossing the Meuse, raced forward to his recently captured American Jeep and stopped the first. He had heard from prisoners that there was an important American headquarters just a few miles farther south, and he didn't want them alerted.

Clad to see the Germans back, Lejoly waved a friendly greeting as the stern trooper saluted and his advance party disappeared down the road. Mrs. Bodarwe remained silent. Both saw the prisoners, hands up, herded into the parking lot beside the café.

There were about 125 of them, raw, unblond troops huddled on their first day in combat, most of them truck drivers and mechanics from the artillery observation unit, a few facing the heavy that had hit the 106th Division.

THEY CHATTERED and swished in the open field, wondering what would become of them. It was 2 p.m. on a snowy Sunday.

As the main body of Kampfgruppe Peiper rounded the bend, a half-track stopped a man in the rear stood up and fired a pistol into the group of prisoners. One man fell.

"Stand fast," cried an officer, a doctor, in his fellow prisoners. The men huddled together. Then a second shot rang out from an armored car, the next vehicle in line. Another American toppled.

Either from base savagery or under the impression that a freight had broken out, tanks opened up with machine guns. Lejoly watched as the armored group of prisoners was mowed down.

A few of the wounded tried to crawl away, toward the dense forests at the end of the field. The guards dispatched them with pistol shots to the head. The doctor, his shoulder shot away, rose to his feet and dazedly began dressing the more serious wounds of the men next in line. He pined for him flesh and then killed them both.

WHEN THE machine guns stopped, Lejoly stole across the road to his car. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Germans setting fire to the café of his friend—Mrs. Bodarwe. She was never seen again.

All day long, the columns of Kampfgruppe Peiper rumbled past the burning café. Occasionally, a young storm trooper in a passing truck fired his rifle into the tangle of bodies.

Somewhere 2nd Lt. Virgil Lary and a few others managed to hop through it all badly wounded, he washed until dark and dragged himself through the fog that covered the snowy fields to the Martin farm.

The four sisters and their aging father washed and bandaged his bloody feet and insisted he take some good Ardennes soup.

"We thought he was going to die," says Maria Martin, pointing to the chair he sat in beside the iron kitchen stove.

After midnight, Martha Martin, who is married now, and a friend, Martha Marx, fashioned a crutch and between them practically carried the big soldier over the mountain. They found a some of wild confusion; streets cluttered with Jews and sick. The Americans were pulling out. Fast. They managed to get him on the last ambulance out of Malmédy.

NOW, 25 YEARS later, there is a handsome monument to the Americans who died that day at the crossroads.

Now, 25 years later, American troops are accused of a massacre in the village of My Lai in far off Vietnam.

"It cannot be so," the sisters say. "The Americans are kind. They would not do such a thing."

But Henry Lejoly, carrying water to 15 cows, is not surprised.

"I'm not kidding," he says warily. "I know about the meat, just the most terrible, ja?"

Alas, the war. Lejoly spent three months in prison for his German sympathies.

"MY NEIGHBORS" though I was a spy," he laughs through gums that have no teeth. "But all is forgiven now, and what is not forgiven is forgotten. We have peace but we have no peace."

In the rebuilt Café Bodarwe, Louis Bodarwe sells picnics of the monument to the massacre and asks all Americans, mostly ex-GIs, who happen by if they have a clue, a word, anything of what happened to his mother, Mrs. Bodarwe. Like many of his Belgian

neighbors, Louis was impressed into the German army and was on the Russian front.

For years Louis and his family were paid \$50 a year by a local committee to raise and lower the American flag each day over the monument. The money ran out in 1954, the committee died or moved away, and the flag is locked up in the Town Hall.

Three miles south in the chateau behind the Hotel du Moulin, 80-year-old Frau Hulstine Rupp closes her eyes and puts her hands to her ears to close out any mention of possible atrocities in Vietnam.

"I CANNOT TELL" you the things I have seen in this world, the terrible things," she says, almost in a moan.

Kampfgruppe Peiper passed this way, too, on the road down from Malmédy. For a time a lone American Sherman tank, parked next to the hotel, one of its tracks off for repairs, picked off the German tanks and armored cars with devastating accuracy. Then an SS sargeant in on the Sherman and the slaughter was on.

So long ago. And now on her piano in Frau Rupp's cory parlor rests a photograph of Capt. Green, with the inscription: "To my very good friend, Monsieur Peter Rupp and family who helped to save the lives of myself and fellow Americans held prisoner from the Germans at Hotel du Moulin, Lijpsville, Dec. 17-20, 1941."

And beside it, a framed letter from Dwight D. Eisenhower, commanding general, beginning: "The President of the U.S.A. has directed me to express to Peter Rupp the gratitude and appreciation . . ."

RUPP HAS BEEN dead eight years, and the hotel sold to new owners.

Occasionally there is a food package from Young Green, and an American tourist, an ex-GI, drops by the white-faced inn with its handsome wood-carved balconies. It looks pretty much as it did when a lone Sherman tank in the parking lot held off an army.

"The Americans are so kind so nice all ways," sighs Frau Rupp. "Which is why I give them all good things to eat behind the German back. My friend, the Swiss count in Coligny, he said them to me."

She eyes Rupp and forgets what happened in the celebrated Rupp wine cellar when the Americans missed the town a month later and used the hotel as a headquarters.

"Fifty four thousand bottles of the best wine and cognac. We didn't find a one. All GI-stolen."

Marie Claire Bodarwe Walks Past Monument at Site of Massacre

'War is war. Whoever shoots the most, gets the most medals, ja?'

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