



Gen. Anthony McAuliffe: Fame rests on a single-word reply

'The Bulge'

'Screaming Eagle' veterans return to Bastogne 40 years later

By HUGH A. MULLIGAN
The Associated Press

BASTOGNE, Belgium — They got off a tour bus in Place McAuliffe and posed for pictures beside the bust of the American general who said "Nuts" to a German invitation to surrender and ruined Adolf Hitler's Christmas 40 years ago.

Veterans of the 101st Airborne Division, they were graying, balding, mostly fit, but a few wheezing or fitted out with pacemakers. The "Battered Bastards of the Bastion at Bastogne," as they called themselves, had lived to tell about being the "hole in the doughnut" when Bastogne was encircled by elite Panzer divisions.

They visited the "Nuts Museum" across from the Sherman tanks that seem to decorate every town square in Belgium and Luxembourg.

The "Screaming Eagles," as the division emblem on their caps and the side of the bus proudly identified them, were escorted around town by a convoy of vintage American jeeps lovingly restored and driven by young Belgians wearing authentic GI uniforms, a fantasy game of dress-up that has become even more popular than dude ranches in Belgium.

Some remembered that four decades ago, crouched in the snow by the railroad tracks, they

Editor's note: At 5:30 a.m. on Dec. 16, precisely 40 years ago, Hitler's final furious offensive began. It roared through the snowy forests of Belgium and Luxembourg and left 80,000 Americans dead, wounded or captured. The first unit hit and virtually wiped out in the so-called Battle of the Bulge was the 106th Division. An AP reporter who joined the outfit as a rifleman replacement after the battle links up with thousands of veterans searching for the snows of yesterday.

were shooting at Germans dressed as GIs who tried to break into town in a column of captured Sherman tanks, playing a winner-take-all game of make-believe to deliver Bastogne to the Fuhrer as a Christmas present.

Now, laughing at the obstinate courage that upset the timetable of three Panzer armies racing to cross the Meuse River and reach the port of Antwerp before fuel and ammo ran out, they hunted up their old foxhole locations on the outskirts of town, recalling how each man was issued a block of TNT to blast those foxholes in the frozen ground of Europe's coldest winter in 25 years.

Solemn faced, some in tears, they filed silently through the star-shaped Memorial to the Battle

of the Bulge, which draws 1,500,000 tourists a year. At the nearby historical center they relived World War II's greatest pitched battle in films, slideshows and a wax museum featuring Gen. Dwight Eisenhower in his jeep and George Patton with his pearl-handled pistols.

With wives and grown-up kids in tow, the returning veterans bought postcards and Belgian lace in the shops around the square, where its namesake, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, borrowed tablecloths and bedsheets from the merchants to camouflage his guns and troops.

But in the 40th anniversary year, the Bulge survivors were unable to go down into the dank coal cellar beneath the administration building of the former German barracks, where on Dec. 22, 1944, a sergeant typed McAuliffe's reply to the surrender ultimatum:

*"To the German Commander,
"NUTS
"The American Commander."*

Now home base for a Belgian artillery unit, the barracks was closed to visitors during the summer after a nocturnal raiding party, believed to be a terrorist group, made off with

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