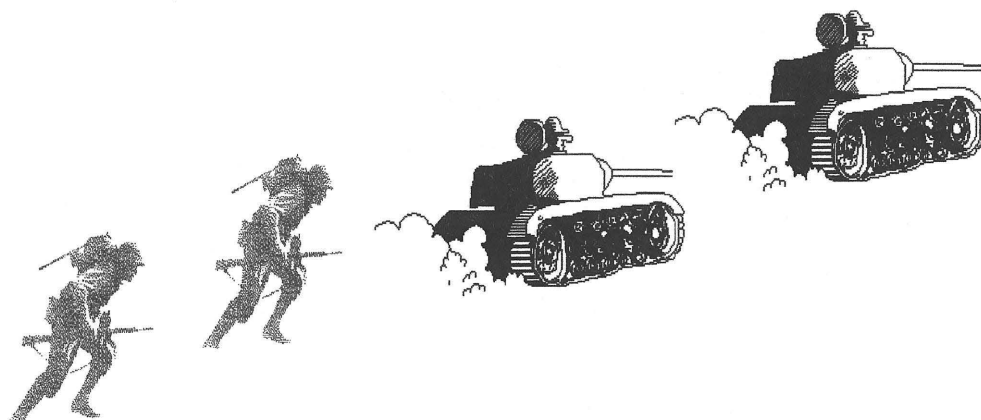
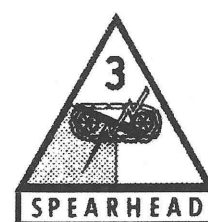
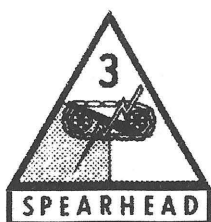


The Last Push



*England, France, Belgium,
Holland, Germany*

*September 16, 1992
to
October 3, 1992*



Preface

Do you remember the guy that pestered everyone by shoving that little mini tape recorder in front of you. I believe he was called "Bashful Bill". He kept telling you that he was going to write a story about our "Last Push", and that he was taping the events so he wouldn't forget. He also promised to send a copy of the story. I'm sure you thought "yeah! yeah! I've heard that story before."

Well, it's finished. Lale and I are pleased to send you this copy.

We wanted to write this to thank all you wonderful people for helping us enjoy this fantastic trip. As a group, the rejuvenated Spearheaders were something to behold. They were a congenial, happy, and contented lot who were always ready to help someone out. Smiles - we had many. Laughs - quite a few. Highlights - well, there were many. Disappointments - maybe a few, such as Nordhausen. The words heard so often were: Amazing, Wow! I don't believe this! Fantastic!! Mind Boggling!! Overwhelmed!! Merci Beau Coup!! Dank!! How did John O'Brien pull this off? and on and on.

Many thanks to the following who contributed to this story:

- **George and Irene Edmondson** for sending a box of pictures and all their negatives plus slides, and to their niece for translating the articles from Fourmies and Avesnes.
- **Janice Fox** for sending many pictures. (The Edmondsons and Janice knew we had lost our camera in England.)
- **John and Dorothy Henry** and **John and Marcella Vondra** for sending pictures. The Vondras also sent a summary of our trip which was used for our Service Company 33rd Armored Newsletter as well as at the end of this story.
- **Lyle and Mildred Pfeifer** and **Bill and Sarah Heinz** for the surprise video tapes. We have used their tapes to review and refresh our memories as we were writing this.
- **Jo Ann Loerakker-Frank** for sending pictures.
- **John O'Brien** for sending the newspaper article from the *Stars and Stripes*.
- **Bill and Sarah Heinz** for sending the two articles on Fourmies and Avesnes.
- **Joseph Pothén**, Malmedy, Belgium, for sending pictures of the Battle of the Bulge tour.
- **Gunter von der Weiden**, our Stolberg/Breinig tour guide, for sending the newspaper article on Stolberg plus some excellent black and white pictures.
- **Ilse Edse**, our neighbor and former German professor at The Ohio State University, for translating the Stolberg newspaper article.

And to everyone else for giving us the incentive to complete this story, we say thank you.

Affectionately,
Bill and Lale Ruth

September 16, 1992

We started the trip we spent a year planning.

At our motel in New York, we met several people who were also making the trip: **James and Berta Cronen, Clem Elisondo, John and Dorothy Henry, Lynn and Ruth Larsen, Bill and Phyllis Wall, Gene and Ruphelle Turcotte.** We finally all boarded the shuttle for John F. Kennedy International Airport/British Airways Terminal. Since we were early we were able to go through customs and get assigned seats very easily with no hold up. About 4:00 p.m. we all moved to the area where the entire tour group was to meet. Many introductions were made.

We were very anxious about five people who were going to make the flight. They had been delayed in Cincinnati (they met us the next day in England).

Those that we worried about were **Lyle and Mildred Pfeifer, George and Irene Edmondson, and Earl Riley.** We also had the opportunity to meet John O'Brien's charming wife, Mary and son, Dennis.

Everyone agreed that the British Airways knows how to pamper travelers. They certainly take care of all the creature comforts - juice, chicken dinner, snacks, blanket, pillow, socks, toothbrush, toothpaste, eye shade, headset for music or voice for video, and then we had a continental breakfast. A great flight.

September 17, 1992

Again there was no trouble checking through customs. The only hitch was a wait for our tour buses. Everyone was tired and had jet lag. We drove to the Potters Heron Hotel which is a beautiful country inn. General Eisenhower used this inn to plan "D Day." Half of the group stayed at Eastleigh and the other half stayed nearby. Most of us took a tour of the countryside. We visited Stonehenge, an old Druid ruin dating back 3,500 years. We then went to Salisbury, and New Forest, down the seacoast and then back to the motel for a welcome dinner. This welcome dinner helped us to get to know each other.



Potters Heron Hotel where we stayed overnight in England.



Stonehenge

September 18, 1992

The "lost five", **George and Irene Edmonson, Earl Riley, Lyle and Mildred Pfeifer**, arrived during the night and were ready to go. We toured 3rd Armored encampment areas, Stockton, Yeovil, Codford St. Mary -- Sutton Veny, Warminster, and many others.

At a very small pub in Codford St. Mary, a lady by the name of Mrs. Katherine Lock remembered how the men at Warminster used to visit her pub. She, her daughter, and Mr. Martin Lock, her son, were waiting on the highway for us to stop. We enjoyed the visit.

All the men stationed here were getting excited. We stopped at Hayes House, which was headquarters for some men. We stopped at Yeovil for lunch and continued through this area until we were at Portsmouth. After dinner we boarded the ship to cross the channel. The boat was very crowded.

September 19, 1992

We arrived in Ouistreham, France at approximately 6:30 a.m. Once in France we met the tour buses that would be with us the rest of the trip. The drivers were excellent, John Paul Weber and Greg Gessert. So we went off to tour Normandy, Omaha Beach, Pointe du Hoc, Isigny, Grandcamp, Carentan, and St. Mere Eglise.

September 20, 1992

Our group continued along the French coastal area visiting St. Lo, Marigny, Coutances, Mortain, Pre-en-Pail, Falais, and many more.

After visiting these areas you can better understand why the Hedgerows mountain or hill areas, were so important to the Americans getting a foothold on the continent.

September 21, 1992

On to Lisieux, Tivoli, Courville, and Chartres. Everyone is on a first name basis and all have settled themselves onto favorite bus and into favorite seats. The men are able to use the bus microphone to tell of their experiences as we pass through these battle areas.

Many thanks to John O'Brien for adding the visit to St. Therese's Basilica to our agenda. This visit, coupled with the visit to the Chartres Cathedral, was most interesting and impressive.

September 22, 1992

We departed in the early morning and drove through such towns as St. Cheron, Ablis, Dourdan, Arapajon, and Corbeil. We crossed the Seine River south of Paris and proceeded through Melun, Fontenay Tresigny, Rozay-en-Brie, Coudremers, La Ferte, Chateau Thierry of World War I fame, Rocourt, Quichy, and Soissons. During the day, many of the men would grab the "mike" as they recalled these towns and the many incidents that occurred as the Germans were being flushed out of these towns and chased back to the German border.

Warminster Barracks, where some of the men were stationed in England.



*That's Bill Ruth's
head emerging
from the pill box.
Photo by
George Edmondson.*



*Members of our group
inspecting a pill box.*

*After 48 years
the bomb crater
is still a grim
reminder of the
Normandy Invasion.*



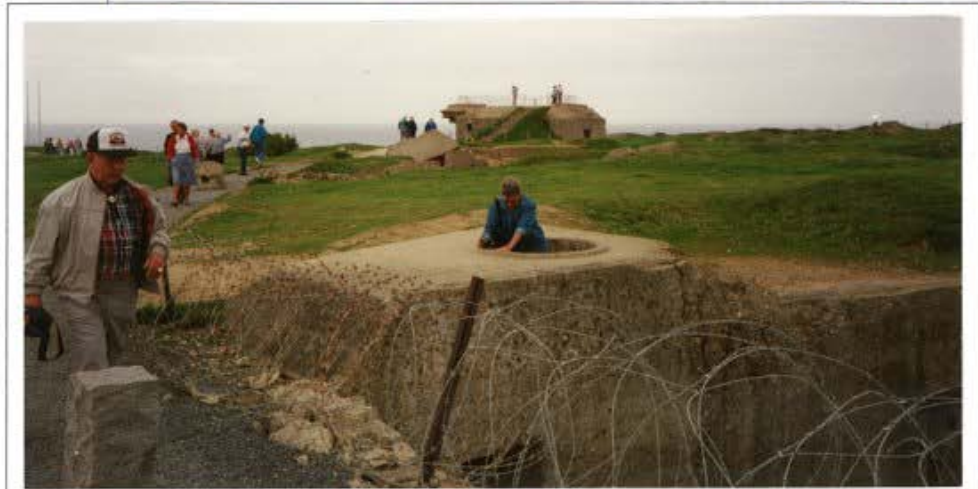


*The Normandy Museum.
John O'Brien talking to
Earl Riley.
Ernie & Irene Menchinger.*

*A demolished pill box.
Note the shell crater.*



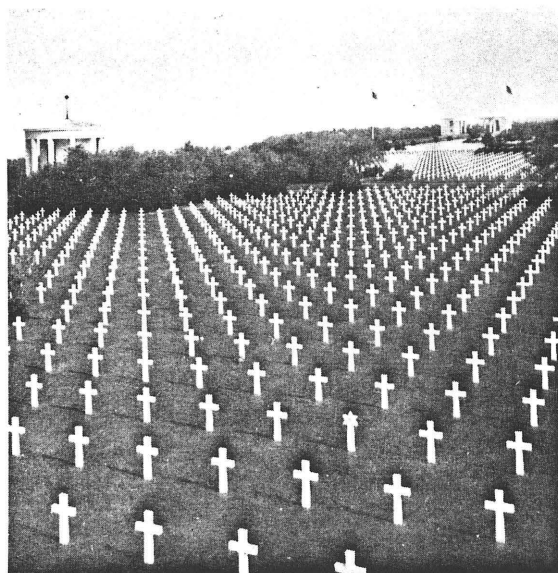
*Some of our members
exploring a pill box.
Jim Cronen.
Phyllis Wall popping
out of the pill box.*



Following is the description of the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial as provided by the American Battle Monuments Commission:

THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) is an independent agency of the Executive Branch created by act of Congress in 1923. It is responsible for commemorating the services of American forces where they have served since April 6, 1917 through the erection of suitable memorial shrines and for designing, constructing, operating and maintaining permanent American military burial grounds in foreign countries. ABMC is responsible for 8 World War I cemeteries and 11 monuments and 14 World War II cemeteries and 5 monuments worldwide.



THE NORMANDY AMERICAN CEMETERY AND MEMORIAL

The location of the Normandy American Cemetery was chosen because of its historical position on the top of a cliff overlooking Omaha Beach which was the scene of the greatest amphibious troop landing in history. The principal units that made the assault landings at Omaha Beach and Utah Beach were the U.S. 1st, 29th and 4th Divisions.

Use of this site was granted in perpetuity by the French Government in gratitude of their liberation in W.W.II. Construction of the Cemetery and Memorial was completed in 1956 and dedicated on 19 July of the same year. Maintenance and operation of the Cemetery is the responsibility of the American Battle Monuments Commission.

BURIALS

There are 9,386 American War Dead buried in the Normandy American Cemetery, of which 307 are "Unknowns" whose headstones bear the simple inscription "HERE RESTS IN HONORED GLORY A COMRADE IN ARMS KNOWN BUT TO GOD". On the wall of the Garden of the Missing are inscribed the name, rank, organization and State of 1,557 of our missing whose remains were not identified or who were buried at sea. The service men and women interred in the Cemetery came from all fifty States and the District of Columbia. A small number also came from England, Scotland, and Canada.

John Vondra mentioned the receptions we attended. We were honored by townspeople at Fourmies, Avesnes, and Maubeuge, France; Melempre, Belgium. There was also a memorial service at Houffalize, Belgium, a reception at Stolberg, Germany, and the great day spent with the "Iron Dukes," the 67th Armor Brigade of the 1st Armored Division.

Our two tour buses were met on the outskirts of Fourmies, France by a group of French World War II veterans and other townspeople. The contingent was led into town by a World War II Jeep. We were led to the main part of town where we were met by the mayor and about 200 townspeople. We were escorted to Council Chambers where we were given a beautiful bronze medallion.

The front shows the 3rd Armored insignia with the words "Thank You Again," and the date September 22, 1992. The back of the medal has a jeep with waving G.I.s (1944 vintage) and the date of the liberation, September 2, 1944. The

medallion is 2 1/2 inches in diameter and weighs about 6 ounces. We were served wine and toasted for quite a while. (We never saw so much wine.)

Then we were escorted to their convention center, where upon entering, we were greeted by a band playing Dixieland music, *When the Saints Come Marching In*.

After this astounding surprise and we regained our senses, we realized we were looking at a food serving line manned by about 20 chefs in their white uniforms and hats. Yes, we were given a royal banquet. The party broke up about midnight. The words that keep coming to us are fantastic, unbelievable, amazing, WOW, I don't believe this. The out-

pouring of friendship, thanks, and appreciation was genuine.

We left Fourmies knowing that the people of Fourmies who lived under Nazi occupation for four years will never forget that we Americans (and in this particular instance - the 3rd Armored Division) lifted the yoke of Nazism from their town. **We will never forget this day.**

Bill Heinz sent the newspaper article, page 8, after we arrived home. The English translation is shown.

On pages 11 and 12 the pictures were taken the day of Liberation in September 1944. They speak for themselves.



September 1992

The City of Fourmies ♦ Under the Star Spangled Banner.

The liberators of the 3rd Armored Division have returned. This remembrance of another American visit was shared by employees, workers from Medronic, and official dignitaries.

It wasn't the "Shermans" which recently came down the highway September 22, but two busses preceded by an authentic military vehicle like those which the Fourmisiennne had seen on that September 2, 1944.

Thus symbolically we received the veterans of the Third Armored Division whose elements liberated Fourmisiennne area from Nazi occupation; who are retracing after 48 years their path of victory from Normandy to the heart of the country whence come the barbarians.

La Fayette We Are Here!

The reception which awaited the liberators at the town hall was the height of the event. The president of the Fourmies-Fridley Association, Mr. Marceau Batteaux, presented medallions to the American visitors who were accompanied by their wives.

The mayor of Fourmies, Mr. Pecheux, who himself participated in the Liberation as a member of the resistance told in his own words, of several episodes on that unforgettable day.

Notably he told of the welcome of an American officer into the Municipal Theatre which had been transformed into the town hall by the mayor who had been appointed by the Vichy government. They, the liberators who had taken it over several hours before despite the objections and fears of political and religious opinions, formed a committee of Liberation. We issued a proclamation and asked the American Officer to sign it on that day of joy.

Meeting in 1994

After having emphasized again how much France was grateful toward the American, English, and Soviets, Mr. Pecheux proposed a toast to liberty and democracy and welcomed our friends to return for a larger celebration in 1994.



John Danay, our past 3rd Armored Division President, presenting a plaque to Fourmies Mayor Pecheux.

Recollections,
FOURMIES, 2nd. September 1944
France

The night before had been long, fraught with uncertain tension; one listened for the slightest movement, became excited at the least news. One could sense in the warm breeze of late summer the promising breath of rediscovered freedom.

Then came the morning, pale like any other September morning, when one could see raised upon the nearby factory the three colours of the suddenly-restored flag.

After the last reports of a retreating enemy tank came several more harsh and disturbing bursts, followed almost immediately by the rumbling of the Shermans' tracks.

So it was really true, at last they had arrived... a great cry welcomed them, powerful and unanimous, repeating continuously "LONG LIVE AMERICA!" in echoing reply to "Lafayette, here we are!"

Marceau BATTEUX



SEPTEMBER 2nd 1986

FOURMIES

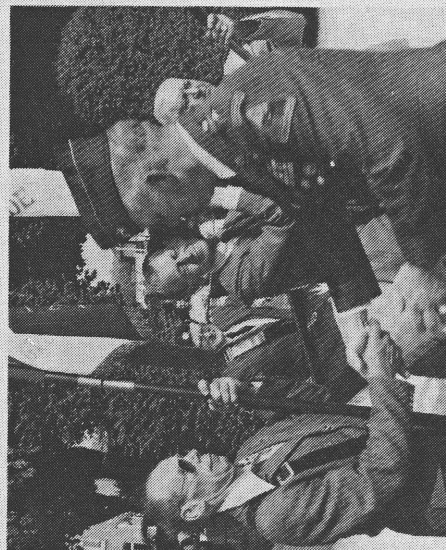
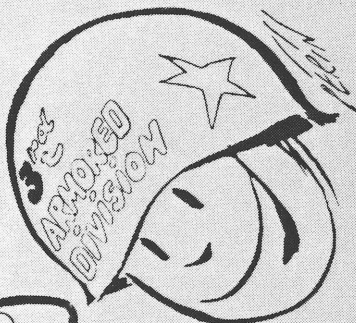
STILL REMEMBERS

AND THROUGH THE
PERSONS OF
KEN ARMSTRONG
AND

CHUCK MILLER
HONORED AND
THANKED THE
WHOLE OF THE
3rd ARMORED
DIVISION



FOURMIES
1986
SEPTEMBER



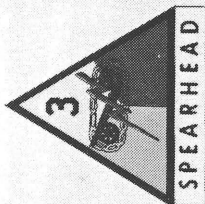
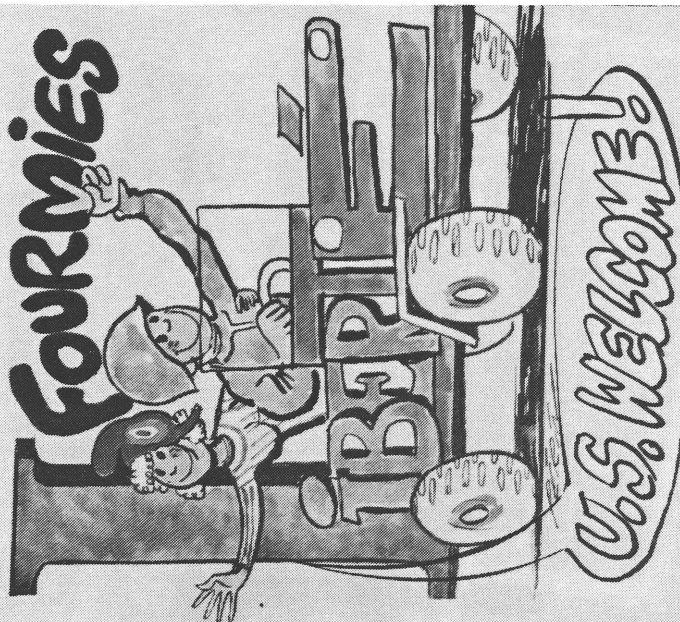
M. G. GRIFFIN congratulate veterans
of FRENCH RESISTANCE

Imprime en France - Brissart, Hen.

SEPTEMBER
2nd

1944

THE THIRD
ARMORED DIVISION
FREED THE CITY OF
FOURMIES



September 23, 1992

The following morning we were received by the City of Avesnes. The mayor and other dignitaries had a heartwarming welcoming ceremony as the bells of St. Nicolas chimed to welcome us.

We were overwhelmed by the sight of many of the store windows which were decorated to welcome us. They had the American flag, our Capitol, the Statue of Liberty, Devil's Tower in Wyoming, a Connestoga wagon, Indians, etc., etc. The following article, sent by Bill Heinz, tells the rest of the story.

Des Américains en visite dans l'Avesnois...



(Ph. "La Voie")

C'est au son du carillon de la collégiale Saint-Nicolas qu'une délégation américaine, forte de soixante-dix personnes, a été accueillie récemment par

M. Paul Curtelin, maire d'Avesnes. Composée, en majeure partie, de vétérans de la deuxième division blindée U.S., celle-là même qui a libéré

notre région en 1944, la délégation était dans l'Avesnois sur l'invitation de M. Marceau Batteux, président de l'association Fourmies-Fridley. Ce court

séjour au chef-lieu d'arrondissement a permis à ces visiteurs d'Outre-Atlantique de visiter le centre ville et la collégiale.

(Translation)

SOME AMERICANS VISIT AVESNES

It was with the sound of St. Nicolas Church bells that an American Delegation, seventy persons strong, were recently received by Mr. Paul Curtelin, Mayor of Avesnes. The delegation, composed for the most part by veterans of the Third U.S. Armored Division, which liberated our region in 1944, was in Avesnes on the invitation of Mr. Marceau Batteux, president of the Fourmies-Ridley Association. During the short visit to our town square the visitors from the other side of the Atlantic were able to visit our town hall and our church.



Sample of a window display in Avesnes, France.

Later in the day we were once again greeted by the citizens and veterans of the Free French Army in Maubeuge, France. It was a very emotional experience as we were greeted by a group of veterans and townspeople at City Hall.

After a brief ceremony we all marched to the Memorial Park where there is a monument commemorating the liberation of their town by the Third Armored Division. There was a brief ceremony and the laying of a wreath on the memorial.



*Left to right:
John Henry,
Bill Ruth,
George Edmondson,
and David Hedrick.*

On September 23 we arrived in Liege about 6:00 p.m. We met with members of C.R.I.B.A. (Centre of Researcher Information of the Battle of the Ardennes). Lale and I had corresponded with one of their officers last winter asking if he could personally take us to Tohogne and Bois et Borsu. We had met Henri Rogister (one of their leaders) at our Reno reunion. We were aware of C.R.I.B.A.'s activities in perpetuating and continually researching events that happened 48 years ago.

Henri could not take us because he was planning to be in the United States attending our Omaha reunion. He was our Service Company guest one day at our Hospitality Room. He then was to go to Washington State and visit with other friends of the Third Armored.

Henri did not let us down. When we arrived in Liege, there were people waiting to meet us to arrange the activities. Mr. Joseph Pothen, Malmedy, was our tour guide. I was anxious to go to Bois et Borsu and Tohogne, Belgium, where I spent some time in December 1944 and January 1945. We promised **John Barclay** we would personally deliver a picture to Laura Lardot. Laura and John have been in touch since the Reno reunion when John met Henri Rogister.



The excited Laura Lardot meeting Bill.

We located Laura and this is her reaction. She was so excited when she learned who we were and saw the Third Armored insignia on my cap. She rambled on for five minutes. I asked our guide, "What's she saying?" He laughed, "She's repeating herself over and over. *'I don't believe it, I don't believe it. You all ate in my house when it was so cold. You made a lot of mud. John Barclay kept apologizing about the troops making such a mess. I kept saying don't worry, you are all protecting me'.*"

Please note this picture was taken upon our arrival. We caught her unprepared. She was excited. Notice that I have Barclay's picture in my left hand. It is a picture of the whole kitchen crew. She asked us to identify each one and wanted to know who is still living. Then as we identified each member she would tell us of incidents she remembered such as **Ray Valliere** being able to speak French, **Tommie Vaughn** being the mild mannered gentleman; and **John Barclay** being a good sergeant.



You will note in this picture that Laura is wearing a Third Armored hat. She was not aware that Lale had taken the first picture. When we asked to have a picture taken with her she fussed and said, "Let me go in and comb my hair." I then took my Third Armored cap and put it on her. I said, "This will cover your hair." You will note that she is holding the picture we brought. (Of course the two posing with Laura are Bill and Lale.)

What a thrilling and heartwarming meeting. She did not want us to leave. We let her keep the cap.

Tohogne

September 24, 1992

Our next stop was Tohogne. I was so anxious to visit the Dumont family. **Carl Kieffer, Tex Bolt, and Paul Lubke** will remember this family that housed us between Christmas and New Year's. The elderly lady didn't like to hear the sound of our outgoing artillery and was terribly afraid the Germans would get her son who was transmitting messages to the English and

Americans from his set in the attic. She walked around all day praying the rosary. The son, Lucien, had a sister who had two darling little girls about 3 and 5 years old. They would be in their early 50's now. Lucien was an artist and he gave me one of his paintings which I mailed home to Lale. I have had this picture in my living room all these years. I took a picture of it and brought it with the intention of giving it to these two little girls. What a disappointment. I expected the

lady and her son and daughter to be dead, but when I learned that these two girls were also dead I felt very bad.

Our guide was able to drive us around the town and we met some very lovely people, who upon learning who we were, couldn't do enough for us. I wanted to linger in Tohogne but our guide insisted we be in Malempre by 11:00 a.m. "They are having a ceremony," he said. "We don't want to miss it."



Lale and I were so grateful that he kept us on schedule. We met our tour buses right outside of this little town and what followed was another emotional experience.

*Here we are at the monument.
Note the American and Belgian flags.*

There, waiting for us, were the townspeople. There were some dignitaries, many old people our age, who remembered that the Third Armored liberated their town, and many young children. There was a very lovely, emotional ceremony, at the monument in the town square. The church bells were ringing and they played the *Star Spangled Banner* on tape. As we recovered from this touching gesture we chimed in and sang also. A moment we will all remember.

*The Mayor of Malempre
presenting the flag to
John Danay, our past
president. A member of
CRIBA looks on.*





The monument showing every unit that participated in liberating the area. Note the flowers.

After the ceremony we were treated to peach champagne at their little town hall. There were many, many pictures of the fighting and other mementos on display. They then gave each of us a bottle to take with us. Later that night Lale and I, along with **George and Irene Edmondson**, had a party of our own with the champagne we had received.

After this event we went to Baraque de Fraiture where we had lunch at the famous restaurant that was occupied by the Americans, the Germans, then the Americans.

The story is vividly told in *A Time for Trumpets* by Charles B. MacDonald. This book was given to me by my children last Christmas. I read the book and plan to review it again this coming Christmas season. I reflect on this event that left a profound memory in our lives.

We then went to Houffalize, where there was another ceremony. We were all given this card.



Our visit to Malmedy was another experience. To refresh your memory (without going into too much detail) when the Germans started the counter-offensive they were a group of crazed fanatics who committed one of the most heinous crimes inflicted on American troops during the course of the war in Europe. On December 17, 1944, they overran a column of field artillery, and shot 86 of them as they were taken prisoner.



Lale and Bill Ruth are personally
Looking at the Malmedy monument
With the 86 names



*The picture shows our
group inspecting the
walled monument
where all 86 names are
posted.*

Our visit to Bastogne was marked by a tour of the memorial built by the Belgian people. This memorial is in the shape of a star. It is very inspiring and impressive. The picture below shows only part of the monument. Every state of the union is listed as well as every unit that fought in the Battle of the Bulge.



Eddie Monfort, Lale and Bill Ruth.



We stayed in Tohogne December 26-29, then went to Bois et Borsu until January 4, then back to Tohogne until January 16, then back to Bois et Borsu until February 6, 1944, when we left to return to Busbach, Germany. The reason for this was to avoid giving the Germans and their artillery a fix on our supplies. We were to keep moving to keep them guessing.



This was our Command Post in January 1945, 48 years ago.

As many of you know, I kept a diary during the war. Following is an excerpt of what I wrote about these towns and the Belgian people.

"They were so glad to see us. They adopted us. They knew our patch; they knew who the 3rd Armored was. They worried about us. They knew some of our units took a shellacking. They knew about Hogan's 400 Bastogne, Malmedy, Houffalize, and others. They were

saddened that we suffered heavy casualties. They were so grateful to realize that we Americans, not once, but twice drove the Germans from their country and towns. They overwhelmed us with kindness. Yes, this was quite an eye-opening and sobering experience."



Same building 48 years later. That's Lale and me standing beside the old Command Post. Note there is very little change.

September 25, 1992

We visited the American Cemetery in Margraten, Holland, where General Rose and many of the 3rd Armored Division heroes are buried, including our Service Company buddies, **John Bajula** and **Floyd Good**. There was a brief memorial service conducted by one of our own group, **Walter Stitt** (33rd Armored), a Lutheran minister from South Bend, Indiana.

It was quite an emotional ride as we crossed the German border with the same anticipation we had in 1944. Most of us never realized Aachen was such a beautiful city with its tree-lined streets and well kept houses and beautiful flower gardens. We ate lunch at the Square of Charlemagne's beautiful cathedral.

Gunter von der Weiden was to take us on a most unforgettable day. Gunter, our tour guide, spoke very good English. He grew up in Busbach and was a ten year old boy when we were there. He remembers fondly the visits he used to make to his grandmother's in Breinig. We were taken to Brand, Kornelimünster, Dorff, Breinig, Busbach, and Stolberg. We were welcomed by the mayor in city chambers and given five bottles of mineral water and beer. We drank this as the mayor gave his talk. Then **John Danay**, our past president of the 3rd Armored Division Association gave his acceptance speech.

Both our tour guide and the mayor told us of the appreciation of the people in the area for treating the residents so decently during the war. The Nazis had told them we would murder them, etc. They thanked us for sharing our food, medicine, and clothing which they needed desperately.

It came across loud and clear that they hoped the war would soon end once we crossed the

Siegfried line. They told us how bitterly disappointed they were when the Von Rundstedt counter-attack began on December 16, 1944.

We were then given a tour of Stolberg. The factories and tall smoke stacks are still there.

The following newspaper article tells of our visit and shows the mayor and our past president shaking hands.

Stolberg

Nr. 227 · Samstag, 26. September 1992



Freude über herzlichen Empfang

80 amerikanische Kriegsveteranen waren zu Besuch in Stolberg. Sie wurden von Bürgermeister Wolfgang Hennig empfangen. Vor genau 48 Jahren waren sie schon einmal in Stolberg. Damals jedoch nicht als Touristen, son-

dern als Soldaten, ausgesandt, Europa vom Nazi-Terror zu befreien. Viele von ihnen haben bittere Erinnerungen an diese Zeit und waren erfreut, daß ihnen ein „so herzlicher Empfang“ bereitet wurde. Foto: F. Dohmen

Oh, you couldn't translate the German? Well, here is the English translation:

GREAT JOY FOR HEARTFELT RECEPTION

80 American war veterans came to Stolberg for a visit. They were received by Mayor Wolfgang Henning. 48 years ago they were in Stolberg, not as tourists, but as soldiers. They were sent to free Europe from Nazi terror. Many of them have bitter memories of the war and they are pleased that they were received in such a friendly manner.



Our group in front of the city hall.

After we left city hall we were taken to a U.N. Army compound and were served an excellent meal of weiner schnitzels, real french fries, by German Soldiers.

We then continued our tour through Eschweiler, Duren, Golzheim, Blatzheim, Kerpen, Bergheim, and on to Cologne (Köln).

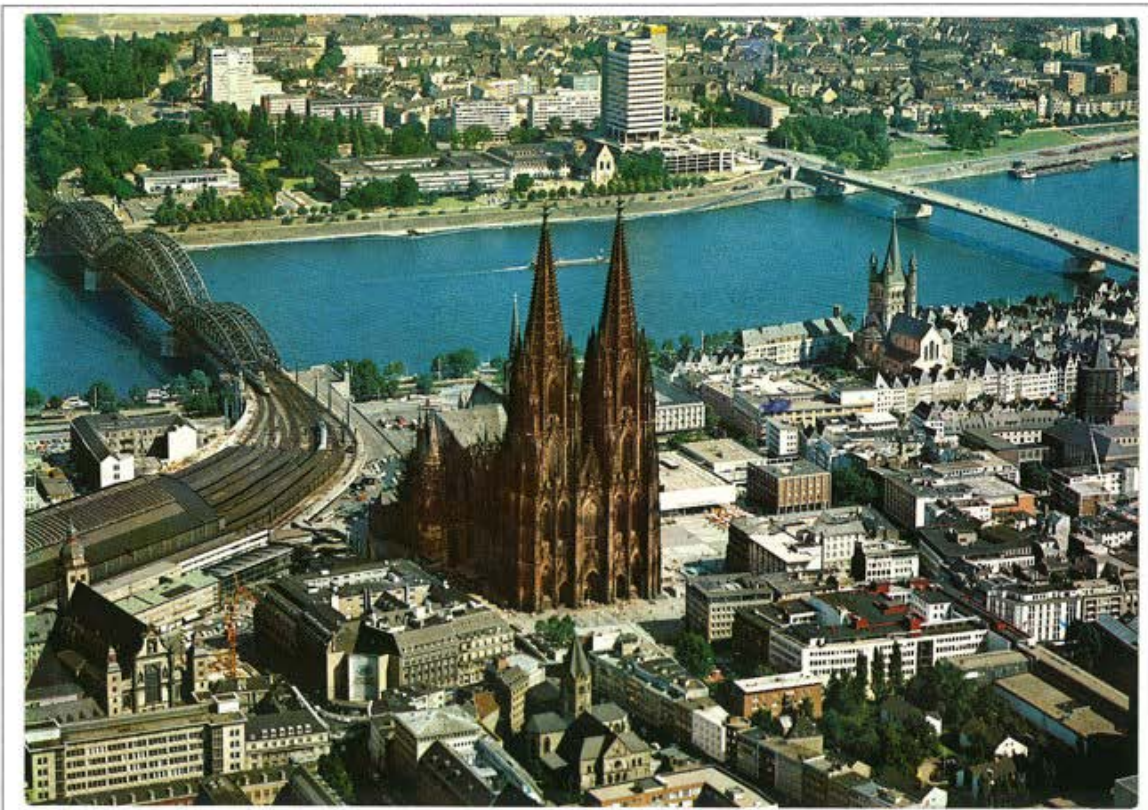
September 26, 1992

You Service Company members would be amazed to see Cologne today. We remember it as a dead city when the 3rd Armored took it along with the 104th Timberwolf Infantry Division. Köln was nothing but rubble. Devastation, not only from the Third Armored battle, but from the bombing raids by the American and British Air Forces. We remember the knocked out tanks near the Cologne Cathedral. We were also impressed to see that this beautiful cathedral was one of the few buildings still standing.

We remember seeing the Hohenzollern Bridge lying submerged in the Rhine River. We remember the hundreds of freight cars and oil tankers resting in silence on the bombed out sidings. The twisted rails that looked like pretzels and the many bomb craters.

Our hotels were a stone's throw from the Cathedral and the railyards and river. As we walked around I remember **Bill Wall**, San Jose, California, saying, "I wonder who won the war."

Cologne is a beautiful restored city. The Cathedral is beautiful inside and stands awesome outside. The Cathedral square is interesting as we witnessed all kinds of weirdos demonstrating, having drug parties, sleeping and camping on the square. A contrast of those who want to enter the cathedral for prayer and those outside engaging in above mentioned activities. We enjoyed our night cruise down the Rhine.



We got to know our guide, Gunter von der Weiden, on our Friday tour, George Edmondson and I told Gunter we would dearly love to take our wives to Breinig on Saturday, since we had the day to ourselves in Cologne. Gunter was very willing to meet us at the Cathedral Square on Saturday morning. Gunter lives in Busbach which is about an hour's drive (both ways). He even borrowed his son's car so that our wives could come too. His was too small, as most European cars are. Gasoline is \$4.00 per gallon.

Why visit Breinig? Well, we Service Company members spent 90 days here, September 19 until December 19, 1944. Why this much time? Well *Spearhead in the West* best describes why. I quote from page 99:

"Battered and finally at a standstill, the Third Armored Division had wound up one of the amazing armored force operations in the history of warfare. Eighteen days from the Seine River to the Siegfried Line; and now in a last climatic surge of strength, the Division had smashed through that legendary West Wall into the confines of greater Germany. They, like an athlete who has breached the tape of victory and stands exhausted, the Spearhead paused, vehicles were demanding maintenance, men

were haggard with fatigue. There were scarcely 100 tanks of the original 400 left in proper operating condition. Supplies had begun to lag. Much of this supply was still funneling through the floating piers in Normandy. Now the entire First Army had reached Germany's borders but the Third Armored and First Infantry Divisions were out on the point of a salient and it was impossible for them to advance further until their flanks were secure. Therefore, the battle of attrition, which was hoped to be of short duration, began." Thus, our 90 day stay in Breinig.

This was definitely the longest we stayed at any one location during the war. Consequently, it has left some memories.

We had no problem finding our old command post. We knew it was right off the main road leading to Kornelimunster on the western edge of Breinig. George and I immediately recognized the old apple orchard where many of our Service Company were bivouacked. The apple orchard has not changed in these 48 years. The trees are still there (maybe some replanted). The old barn that received an artillery hit that killed several of our men (Joe Kne and Fred Robinson) is still there, but has been converted into a home. Cows are still in the orchard as one of the following pictures will show.

We recognized where our field kitchen and supply trucks had been located.

The row of houses that many of us were billeted in are still there, with slight revisions here and there. The command post is the same.

George and I later got our wives reaction as they stood back and watched us in our excitement. Here is what they saw:

"Our trip with Bill and George to Breinig was like watching two teenagers on a "high", jumping up and down in their excitement when they each spotted the house they lived in during the war. They jumped out of the car before it stopped. They were so excited that they both kept talking so fast they stumbled over their words. "We found it -- we found it!! I don't believe this! It hasn't changed. This happened here (pointing to a spot). Do you remember this or that?" and on and on they went. Irene and I just stood back and watched them enjoy. They were on an emotional high. One of the changes that Bill and George noted was that there is no mud. The street is now paved. There are sidewalks and curbs."



The command post where headquarters was housed. Captain Woods, Tex Bolt, Carl Kieffer, Paul Lubke and others lived here.

The Edmondsons and Ruths along with our tour guide.



Another shot of the command post.



This is the way it looked in Fall 1944. Note in both pictures the different brick between windows of the first and second floors.



Here it is, George.

↓ *The orchard where the supply trucks and field kitchen were located.
The trees above my head is where Barclay's kitchen was located.*



This reminds me of the time an artillery shell came in and killed a cow. We had fresh meat for several meals.



George and Irene standing in front of the house that Edmondson, Ernie Lam, and Rod Brower lived in.

St. Barbara's Catholic Church. Because we were here for 90 days, many people trusted us and we were able to attend their services. Our guide, George & Irene, Bill & Lale.



A note from Bill Ruth's Diary:

October 30, 1944:

Go to church regularly. As I look around I see women, old men, and children praying the Rosary. I'm sure they are praying to same God I am. Are they praying for the same things my Mom and Dad and I are praying for? Are they praying for their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers safe return as I am? Are they praying for the war to end soon? From the fervant and sombre expressions I am sure that they are.



*The Edmondsons and Ruths standing amidst the dragon teeth.
Note the smoke stacks of Stolberg in the background.*



Gunter, our guide, treated us to a trip to the Busbach area where remnants of the Dragon Teeth can still be found. He also took us to his home where his daughter prepared a lunch for us. Gunter's home was also occupied by Americans during the war.

When **Lale and Irene** described the home to the ladies on our tour, **Marcella Vondra** suggested that she write the description for everyone to enjoy. Following is Lale's description of Gunter's home:

While visiting Breinig, Bill, George, Irene and I visited the home of our tour guide, Gunter von der Weiden. It was very interesting. This is the home in which he grew up.

Gunter told us that during World War II a tank retriever was in his backyard. He told many stories about this time of his life. Gunter was 10-years-old in 1944.

The house is typical of the people of his area. Each room can be closed off to conserve heat. Each room has its own heating stove. Outside the entry door is a metal grill work with an open area. This is so you can clean the sides of your shoes before entering. This helps keep the house clean.

The kitchen is small, with a small refrigerator similar to those found in motel rooms, about 3 foot by 2 1/2 foot by 2 1/2 foot. There is a small apartment type stove. Hot water is heated separately in a 5-gallon tank above the sink. A pantry holding supplies and cooking equipment was a very small narrow open closet.

Since Gunter's children are young adults he told us of adding a guest bathroom, a guest living room and two bedrooms.

His daughter prepared a very nice lunch that was served on a lovely porch overlooking a pleasant garden. We were grateful to his son for the loan of his car so that the four of us and Gunter could make the trip from Köln to Breinig. Gunter is doing a great deal of research on the Battle of Stolberg and the vicinity.

It is very interesting that the German and Belgian houses have roll down metal window covers on the outside of the windows. This allows you to keep the window open during a rain or snow. This also acts as a shade if too much heat or cold. The controls for these shades are on the inside of the house.

In England, France, Belgium, and Germany, windows and doors do not have screens. I asked the German interpreter and he didn't know what I meant. Europeans do not use air conditioners in their homes. We found very few in the hotels that we stayed in. Can you imagine going to bed on a first floor of a motel having to open a window for air and not having a screen in it? Would you be willing to do that in this country today?

We have mentioned Gunter quite a bit. As mentioned earlier Gunter was a 10-year-old boy in 1944. He remembers the Americans living in his home and the tank retriever in his backyard. He remembers how the American soldiers gave his family parts of their K-rations, 10 in 1 and chocolate candy. His car has a Third Armored sticker

on the window. He has an original *Spearhead in the West* book. He is writing a book on the war as it relates to the people in his immediate area, Stolberg, Musbach, Busbach, Breinig, etc. He has great respect for the American, both the 1944-45 soldier and today's American.

He personally escorted Charles B. MacDonald, who wrote *A Time for Trumpets*, the untold story of the Battle of the Bulge, while MacDonald was writing his book. He accompanied MacDonald during the interview of hundreds of German soldiers. These stories are related in his book. Mr. MacDonald comments about Gunter on page 627 of his book. He acknowledges Gunter von der Weiden for finding materials in German veterans publications and locating veterans for interviews and the mammoth job of translation. He also acknowledges Heino Brandt (Heino was on our other tour bus and translated the mayor of Stolberg's speech. Heino also was with us this Saturday.)

Gunter really endeared himself to the **Ruths and Edmondsons** for his unselfish efforts in making Saturday, September 26, 1992, a most memorable day. He would not accept any money, not even for gas.

We received a letter from Gunter recently. It follows, unedited.

Günter von der Weiden
Obersteinstr. 38
D-W-5190 Stolberg
Fed. Rep. of Germany

16th Nov 1992

Mr. William B. Ruth
306 Pinney Drive
Worthington, Ohio 43085
U.S.A.

Dear William,.

Thank you very much indeed for your really heart-warming letter of 18th October, which I have read with great pleasure. Thank you also for enclosing the page copies of your detailed war diary, revealing so many interesting facts and matters of human interest, reflections, and observations which had raised your inner concern, so much alike to what our civil people felt. Throughout that time, our minds were focused on one aim, to survive that terrible war, and the thoughts and prayers of many people took their way to friends and family members somewhere on the frontline. Seen in that light, there was much more of common feelings than of separation, and that at a time when we were officially considered "enemies". It has to be said, however, that at any time none of either side was isolated in an atmosphere of hostility, but rather saw one another as human beings, in a way linked together by one and the same fate. There was much of mutual sympathy, and silent friendship was no rarity, not least due to the understanding, helpfulness, and generosity shown by you as soldiers. You have mentioned that many a German housewife had taken care of your laundry, and I recall that my mother, too, and another lady that lived in our house had done so in exchange of badly needed tinned food from your supplies. There were also cases of alcoholic beverages (wine and the like) being bartered, and one could certainly tell many a nice story from that turbulent period.

Dear William, I have noted with great pleasure that you enjoyed your stay over here, and that 26th September was a wonderful day for you, just as it was for *me and* us! I should say, it was one of the nicest days in my life, with an atmosphere of harmony, mutual understanding, and friendship. You were such open-minded, interesting, and genial guests that contact was established in no time, and so time just flew on that day of sunshine and brightness.

2/...

-2-

I deeply regret that my wife was unable to join us, but better luck may come next time in just about two years, and you will, at any time, be most welcome at our home. Summarising our encounter, my deepest impression was your spontaneous and appropriate prayer of thanksgiving which you said outside on the terrace. It came from heart, and it went to heart - unforgettable to me. -

Something which I am sorry about, is my somewhat deficient command of your language, and thus I just talked along to the best of knowledge, and I must ask you to accept my apologies for any of my mistakes, including the taped "interview". I recall one example where I confused "at last" with "at least", and that was in connection with an elderly lady in the northern part of Stolberg on the first day of the November Offensive. Walking through a cloud of dust after a wall in her basement was penetrated, she addressed the first supposed "GI" entering the place with "Oh, Monsieur, there you are at last!" This was by no means the only incident of that kind, and when we meet again, I shall certainly tell you some of these, also in respect of Breinig where I often went to see my granny at her home near the station and the saw mill. Much is really worth delivering to the younger generation, seeing that, in a great number of cases, humanity and helpfulness were the real winners throughout that terrible time.

I shall carefully peruse and study your most interesting diary during the Christmas holidays, because at present there is excessive work pressing on my time. This, in fact, is the first diary I have from an American soldier that had been billeted in my home region, including a short stay at Büsbach. I have collected about 30 diaries compiled by local civilians around 1944/45, and I also have copies of letters written and sent home by three German soldiers from the Stolberg combat area. Still existing, those letters must today be regarded as highly interesting and descriptive documents. I have a question to you, dear William: In what service company had you been employed as a radio operator during the time under review - was that with the 32nd or the 33rd Armd. Regt.?

I enclose, for you and for the Edmondsons as well, a few photographs taken during your visit, and we shall certainly keep in touch, you good people.

Best wishes to you, Mrs. Ruth, George Edmondson and his wife, and thank you so much for your visit which came to me like a beautiful gift.

Your friend

Günter

*Ps. Could you, please,
provide the addresses of Mr. Heinz
and Mr. Scott of
your group?
Thank you!*

John Vondra mentioned our Saturday Evening sunset cruise on the Rhine and the spectacular view of Cologne under spectacular lighting conditions.

Sunday morning we began our bus trip to Coblenz where we boarded our ship. En route we went through Bonn, the Capital of West Germany, Bad Godesberg and stopped to view the remnants and site of the Remagen Bridge. We all remember this important event for I'm sure it shortened the war and saved a lot of lives. We were able to thank the 9th Armored Division for this.



The ship that passed us is identical to the one we were on.



The old Pillars of the Remagen Bridge. These are on the east coast of the Rhine.



This five and one-half hour trip was both educational and inspiring. These pictures show the beauty and uniqueness of the quaint wine growing towns in all their splendor.

The vineyards are planted on what looks like 45 degree slopes.

Notice the neat white houses along the one or two streets running parallel with the Rhine River.

The church is always the focal point in each town.





One of the many castles to be found along the Rhine River.



Lale writes the following about this trip:

When we reached Koblenz, we were running late and had to walk or rush about three blocks to board the boat. Three of our group missed the boat and thanks to Dennis O'Brien, he was able to arrange for our tour buses to drive south to one of the next towns and there they caught up with us. The buses then went on their way to Rudesheim where they would pick us up as we disembarked.

Lale notes that we had to pay 20 phennings to use the toilet facilities. Lale writes in her diary:

We see many barges laden with coal, oil, and other commerce. It's obvious that the ships captain uses his boat as his home for they have their cars, clothes lines and giant play pens for kids. The barges have flags of many countries.

Many, many grapes and vineyards on very steep hillsides. Some covered to keep birds and insects away. Rows upon rows of grape vines in line both vertically and horizontally in checkerboard fashion. Very interesting. Also many old, old castles on the Rhine. There are many tour boats, sport boats and canoes on the river.

We passed the famous Loreley Rock. This rock is for the romantic lovers and the verse and song by Silcher in 1832 is played by the steamer musicians on every passage. The verse starts out "I know not what it means." It is 132 meters high and 90 meters wide. At low water one can see the dangerous reefs, the Seven Virgins, who, according to legend, were petrified on account of their hard hearts.

The following description was taken from the beautiful folding map of the river that many of us bought.

Well justifies its qualification as one of the world's most attractive rivers. It is not only its length and width which distinguishes the Rhine from so many other great rivers out the important role it played and still plays in the history of the Occident. The banks of the Rhine constitute the cradle of the European culture. The Rhine is symbol and reality, one and the same time.

The cathedrals on its banks, the ancient cities, and castles still bear witness to a great and glorious history. Mother Nature presents the onlooker with scenes from a two thousand year history as if they were pages in a gigantic picture book. The land on both banks of the Rhine extending through the basins of numerous tributaries and mountain regions and into the green Northern plain is the heart of Europe. It is here that antiquity and Christianity, philosophy and art have flourished, since the days of the Romans.

Loreley Rock.





Our morning at the motor pool.

We were reunited with our tour busses at Rudesheim where we headed to spend the night at Frankfurt.

On Monday morning, September 28, we left the hotel and headed to Friedberg, the home of the Third Armored Division from 1955 until this past January when it was deactivated.

We were the guests of the 67th Armored Iron Dukes, of the 1st Armored Division (Old Ironsides). The 67th Armored has some former Third Armored men and between these former Spearheaders and the members of the 67th Armored, they really rolled out the red carpet.

We were met by the battalion commander, LTC. Ted Kostich, and several of his officers, Major Hraska and Sgt. Major Steve Morgan. We were given a tour of the base, had a briefing and slide presentation on today's state of the art equipment, were

given a tour of the motor pool where the soldiers were manning their vehicles and were prepared to show us anything we wanted to know and answer any questions. Many of the vehicles were in Desert Storm.

Irene Edmondson, Bill and Lale Ruth. These tanks are really something.





The World War II field kitchen. Notice the 3rd Armored 83 Recon insignia.

The Simulation Center Briefing (SIMNET) and Fire Trainer (UCOFT) demonstration was an eye-opener. Because of the scarcity of land and high price the United States government has to pay Germany for its use, they train the crews with computer simulators. After all, most of these young soldiers grew up playing with these computer games. We old-timers concluded that this was very effective.

We were driven out to the practice field where we talked with the young crews who were prepared to take us for a ride in their new tanks. The young pups had as much fun talking to us as we did talking to them.

We were treated to a field lunch (World War II style). As the picture shows, the kitchen is World War II vintage. Thanks to the German civilians who prepared and served the food.

There is a group of Germans and 1st Armored soldiers whose hobby is locating and restoring World War II vehicles. They had them all lined up and invited us to drive any of them that we may have driven during World War II. **Bill Heinz** jumped into his World War II tank and took it for a drive demonstrating that after 48 years he still had the instincts to know where the controls were. Bill said, "It's like learning to ride a bike - once you master the skill, you'll never forget."

Well, then **Jo Ann Loerakker-Frank** got into the act and took a half-track for a spin. "Where in the hell did you learn to drive that?", I asked. "Oh," she said, "I drive tractors on my farm, I ride horses, and furthermore my uncle, **Ray Dunnington**, drove a half-track during World War II, so why shouldn't I?"

Well Jo Ann wasn't going to show us old geezers up, so one by one, we jumped on the next available vehicle. The young soldiers stood back and were delighted and amused. One said, "You guys remind me of a bunch of little kids under the Christmas tree with your new toys." Yes, the jeeps, trucks, half-tracks and tanks all got a work out.



Lale and Bill Ruth

Bill Ruth & Janice Fox



*JoAnn Frank,
Bill Ruth
& Janice Fox*



Lale Ruth riding in and dismounting from a supply vehicle that was in Desert Storm.

Lale and I lost our camera in England. These photos are courtesy of George Edmondson and Janice Fox.



Jo Ann Frank, Bill Ruth & Janice Fox.



Bill Ruth, Irene and George Edmondson, Lale Ruth, Earle Riley, enjoying their ride in a half-track.



Left to right: Aurio Pierro, John Danay (behind Aurio), Lyle Pfeifer, Gene Turcotte, John O'Brien, Bill Ruth, Lt. Colburn, George Edmondson, Greg Gessert (our bus driver) Major Hraska, Leland Cook.

After a wild, wonderful happy day we were literally dragged out of the area to meet our next part of the schedule which consisted of a cocktail hour and dinner at the Canopy Club. The officers and enlisted men along with their charming wives treated us in a manner that we wanted to stay another two days. I believe they would have entertained us another two days. But you know our task master John, "Hey, we gotta go."

We had Dave Melancon from the *Stars and Stripes* following us around all day. I got to know him well. Following is a letter we sent him which I believe is a good way to conclude this most memorable visit to the 67th Armored (Iron Dukes) in Friedberg.

October 22, 1992

Mr. Dave Melancon
The Stars and Stripes
 Unit 29480
 APO AE 09211
 D-6100 Darmstadt 11
 Germany

Dear Dave,

My wife and I would like to use *The Stars and Stripes* to thank the members of 2-67 Armor (The Iron Dukes) for the great welcome they gave us members of the Third Armored Division Association. It was a fun-packed, interesting, educational, and emotional day for all the members.

Fun-packed, for us 70 year olds who acted like a bunch of kids at Christmas playing with our World War II toys. Educational, because we learned through the briefings of LTC Ted Kostich and CSM Stephen Morgan, the Simulation Center briefing (SIMNET) and the tour through the motor pool, the state of the art in modern armor. We all concluded that the World War II vehicles that helped win the war 48 years ago are mere antiques when it comes to today's technologies.

It was most interesting to talk to and observe today's soldiers. There is no doubt in our minds that they are an earnest and dedicated professional group of young people who are career oriented, battle tested, and battle ready. We are very proud of them.

The cocktail hour and dinner at the Canopy Club was a fitting climax to a perfect day. To all of you, we say thank you, thank you, thank you.

A special thanks goes out to the food service crew who prepared and served our meal, even though it was supposed to be their day off.

An additional note of appreciation to the two officers who signed all the travel checks at the base bank. Your men were our problem solvers.

Lastly, thank you to the two wives of the officers who came to our bus as we were departing and said, "Thanks for your efforts in World War II, you preserved our freedoms." I was the lucky guy who got those two kisses.

Affectionately,

William B. and Eulalia Ruth
 306 Pinney Drive
 Worthington, Ohio 43085
 USA

Veterans follow their WWII tracks

By DAVE MELANCON
Staff writer

FRIEDBERG, Germany — The last time Aurio Pierro commanded an M24 Chaffee light tank, he and the 3rd Armored Division were battling German armor. Nearly 50 years later, he was riding in a Chaffee owned by a military history club with German members.

Pierro, who had two tanks shot out from under him and earned the Silver Star for gallantry, discovered the differences between his World War II-vintage tank and today's Abrams during a daylong visit last week with the 2nd Bn, 67th Armored Regiment. The stop was part of a longer tour of Europe.

Seventy-nine veterans, wives, widows of veterans and family members, most associated with the 3rd Armored Division Association, retraced the Spearhead Division's World War II footsteps, beginning in small towns in England where its members trained, then proceeding through France, Belgium and Germany.

"One-shot kills (by U.S. tanks) were unheard of" during World War II, Pierro said after climbing down from one of the battalion's M1 Abrams. "We were out-gunned. . . . The (German) Panther tanks had tremendous firepower and were thick-skinned. Our tanks were no match for the German tanks."

The only advantages the U.S. tankers had during the war were maneuverability and luck, he said.

With the Abrams, modern U.S. tankers have more firepower and technology at their disposal, he said.

While at Ray Barracks, the veterans, most of whom were former tank crewmen, learned about modern armor and the crews who use it. The battalion's officers and non-commissioned officers were quizzed about the unit and the daily lives of soldiers, including questions about taps, which is the formal lights-out bugle call for military members; reveille, which is the formal wake-up bugle call; and police call, which is a general cleaning up of the barracks or post area.

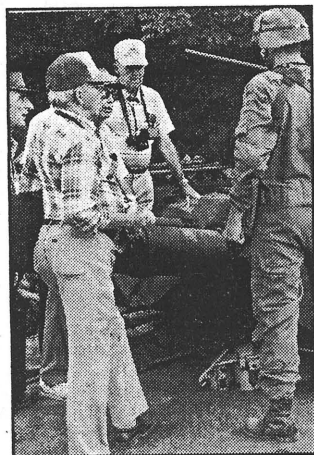
Former Sherman tank driver John Henry was impressed with the Abrams' speed and maneuverability but said the room inside the M1 was smaller than he expected.

"There's not much more room in there than I had in my Sherman," he said after a spin around the display area. "I'd be willing to drive one (the Abrams) in a New York minute."

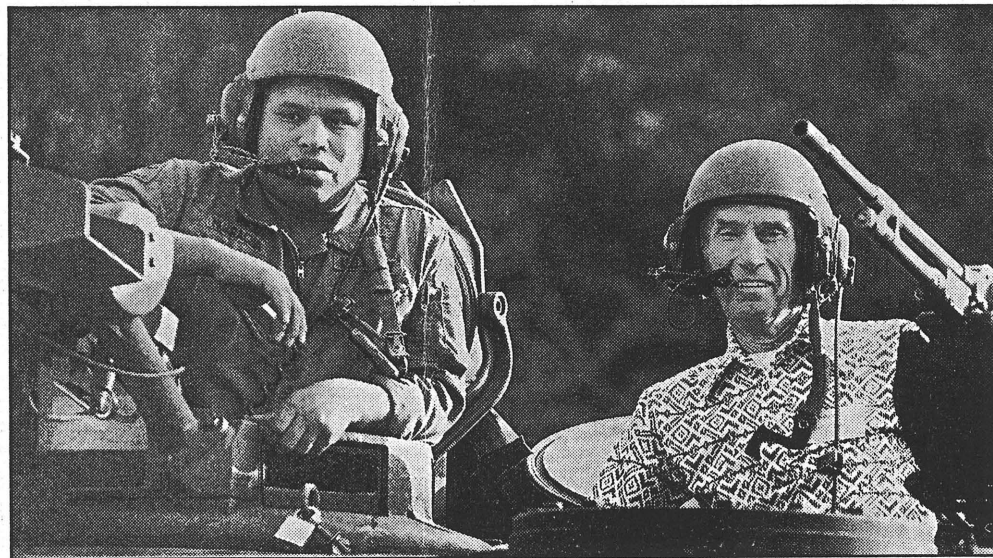
Although the Spearhead Division inactivated Feb. 15, many of the 2nd Bn soldiers served with the 3rd Armored Division during last year's Persian Gulf War.

"There's a spirit within 3rd Armored Division," Pierro said.

AT A GLANCE



Veterans visit a modern-day armored unit in Germany as they retrace their World War II footsteps. See story on Page 10.



S&S: Dave Melancon

Sgt. Lupe Huaracha of the 2nd Bn, 67th Armored Regiment, gives WWII tanker Robert Robertson a ride in an M1 Abrams.

"They talk like they have it, too."

Swapping World War II and Persian Gulf War stories was among the highlights of the veterans' day, along with riding in vintage vehicles provided by the Spearhead Military Vehicle Collectors Club and in the battalion's M1s.

"They are excited as children at Christmastime," said Irene Edmondson, whose husband served in the division during World War II.

Although they were having fun at Ray Barracks, the veterans were visiting Europe to remember, Walter Coons said.

"This has been a very emotional time for most of us to see the places where we lost our friends or to see the places we were shot ourselves," he said.

The visit was a mixture of joy and sorrow for the former tankers.

"It's sad when you think about your friends," he said. "But we were happy to see how the countries rebuilt

themselves. When we went through the first time, we did not have time to look at the beauty."

The veterans were treated like royalty by residents of the towns the 3rd Armored Division liberated, he said. And many old friendships were rekindled with people in France and Belgium.

William Ruth was able to show his wife, Lale, three places where he was almost killed by artillery fire, several old bivouac sites and a home in Belgium where he and his crew stayed until the Battle of the Bulge.

"I was able to go on to Omaha Beach (in France) and visit the grave of a boyhood friend who was killed at St. Lo," he said. "I never thought I would see the day when I would do this. It was amazing."

"A happy trip, yes, but emotional."

The veterans were not the only ones enjoying the day. "This is my first display for veterans," said Pfc. Morris Williams. "It's fun to see their faces. It looks like they're having fun. I'm getting as much joy out of this as they are."

September 28, 1992

As we stood in front of the Hotel Novotel in Frankfurt waiting to board our buses our thoughts and discussion centered on the previous day. At this point, many thought it to be a highlight of our trip. In reviewing quotes of our tape, I heard the following comments like "Wow!!", and "What a day." There was excitement as the women said we 70-year-old men reminded them of a bunch of excited boys at Christmas playing with their toys. In fact, everyone was excited because each of us men had the opportunity to drive our World War II vintage vehicle. Many of the men took their wives with them on their brief tour. Many watched **Bill Heinz** as he set the example and was one of the first to start things off. He masterfully handled his tank not showing any rustiness in the lapse of 48 years. We watched **Jo Ann Frank** show us how to drive a half-track, the vehicle her uncle Ray Dunnington was associated with. She handled it like a trooper.

Irene Edmondson also qualified as she and George drove in a truck similar to his in World War II. At one stage he had Irene sit on the fender with her arms behind her head as if she were being taken prisoner of war.

September 29, 1992

This is now Tuesday, the 14th day, as we head north to Marburg. We will be driving on the German Autobahn heading toward such towns as Limburg, Rennerod, Herborn, Gladenbach, and then Marburg. We made the 70-mile trip to Marburg with much more ease than we did in 1945.

It is beginning to rain. The thought occurs to some of us on the bus that it is a blessing it didn't rain yesterday. We would not have been able to go out in the field and we would have never have realized what we were missing. We all agreed that if it rains, today is the day for it because we will be driving a total of 206 miles. We will be kept dry in our bus.

As we drove north, we marveled at the country of the Ruhr valley and the beautiful landscape as we passed small villages nestled in the foothills of the mountain ranges. We wondered where in the heck do these people work?

We got a kick out of the **Fuerstenbergs**, as they had their picture taken by a road sign pointing to Furstenburg.

Along the way, near Limburg, we saw two herds of white tail deer. Limburg is the town where the cheese got it's name.

We had the experience of seeing our first stripped auto this day. There were several versions about how this happens. We saw about six other stripped vehicles in the course of the trip. One version is that it was just ripped off (New York City style). The other version is that because of the high cost of junking a car in Germany, people park their old junker on the highway, take their license plate, and scratch off their serial number and let the vultures pick it clean. This brought out a story which **Bill Heinz** claims happened in New York City. It goes like this:

A man was driving in New York City. He had a flat tire. As he opened his trunk to get the tire iron a car drove up, two guys jumped out and said, "That's OK - you get the tires - we'll take the battery." (Oh the value of that little recorder I had. I captured all sorts of trivia.)

We saw a group of soldiers in the Rennerod area. They were performing some kind of field exercises.

As we headed to Marburg many of us reminisced about our long 70-mile trip back on March 29, 1945.

We talked about encountering many freed slave laborers. They were French, Belgian, Polish, and Russian. We reminisced how happy they were as they waved to us.

As we approached Marburg we talked about what we remembered back in 1945. We knew that Marburg was a one-time rabid center for Nazism. We remembered the thousands and thousands of German prisoners waiting to give up. We were going so fast we just waved them toward the rear as we took their guns, hoping that some other group would herd them up.

John O'Brien told us of an interesting incident when they were taking hundreds of prisoners. One German soldier began to cry and John asked why he was crying. The soldier said "I'm home on leave to see my mother". John said, "OK, give me your gun. After you have your visit, then you can give yourself up".

Our stop at Marburg was a pleasant one. The Heinz', Edmondsons, and Ruths sat around the beautiful fountain eating lunch, watching the happy school kids playing

around the fountain. We concluded that they didn't give a darn whether we were World War II veterans or just a bunch of senior citizens.

We have since learned that Marburg is a university town. We are noticing the beautiful flower boxes in the towns. The Germans in this area seem to take great pride in their homes and gardens. They sure like ivy and geraniums. We saw a lot of elderberries today. The trees, for the most part, are similar to ours.

This day also reminded us of the barnyards connected to houses in the towns we went through. We saw a lot of this 48 years ago. We also decided that a real estate agent would starve in Germany. There are no houses for sale. When they do get a listing the smaller houses start at \$200,000 plus.

After leaving Marburg we headed toward Paderborn, passing through Gottingen, Münchhausen (remember Baron Münchhausen of "*Were You There Charlie?*"), Frankenberg, Korbach, Brilon, Bredelar, Scherfede, and Lichtenau. These towns were very interesting and beautiful little villages. Looks like we are in ski country.

As we approached Paderborn we talked about the fierce fight the Germans gave us. It had been the Fort Knox of Germany. The Germans tossed all their soldiers from the armored school. We entered Paderborn on Easter Sunday. We found Paderborn a mass of ruins in 1945. This area is where General Rose was killed. There is no evidence of the scars of war but you can tell the difference in buildings. The newer ones replace all the rubble we remember.



September 30, 1992

On Wednesday, our 15th day, we were preparing to spend what was probably the most interesting, educational, and sombre day of our trip. It was a day that would take us across the border of what was East Germany on our visit to the Nordhausen concentration camp.

We crossed the west to east border at 11:30 a.m. with the zig zagging fence that was constructed. (Boy that put a lot of people to work when they built that fence.)

Typical remarks heard on my tape:

Unbelievable.

Difference of night and day.

They haven't repaved the streets since World War II. Many cobblestone streets are dirty.

How drab the building are. They haven't had any paint in years.

The buildings need lots of repairs.

Many houses are abandoned.

The houses don't have any flowers.

No flowers in window boxes as in West Germany.

The fields are unkempt. We didn't see any cattle, not even dogs or cats.

There is less traffic - people can't afford cars.

In Nordhausen, we saw a lot of street sales, most manned by foreigners. We thought they were Indian and Turkish.

Clothing people wearing is old and worn out.

Car dealerships beginning to show up. No time to build buildings. They are operating out of tents or sheds.

We see community gardens where they are many people living in small 8 x 10 sheds. At first we thought they were tool sheds. But then we saw people living in them using their furniture.

We went through Bad Driburg, Brakel, Godelheim, Beverungen, Uslar, Hardeggen, Northeim, Gieboldehausen, Herzberg, Gunzerode and on to Nordhausen.

It is rather ironic as we head toward Nordhausen to view the concentration camp, that the headline today in the newspaper is about Bonn calling off V-2 celebration because the people protesting said the V-2 and its project killed so many slave laborers and prisoners of war. The headline article went on to say that it was to celebrate the aerospace program and "Hitler's Wonder Weapon".

Nordhausen trolley cars.



Will we ever forget Nordhausen? Some on our tour felt it was the low point of our trip. Why? Because of the nature of the camp, the cruelty, the atrocities that were reviewed. This we wanted to forget.

You may recall that one of the last communiques we had from **John O'Brien** prior to our departure was a request of anyone who had any early contact with the Nordhausen concentration camp. About five of us responded. We were to be interviewed by a German television station. Why? We thought it was to verify what we had seen on our initial contact that black day on April 11, 1945. But after being interviewed by the crew the evening before, it became apparent that they weren't interested in verifying what many in today's international society are trying to say never happened. We weren't sure what they were after but it became clear in the afternoon. They were trying to make us admit that the space age should be credited to the Germans, not NASA or the Americans. This was because of evidence in the tunnel where the factory was located. Those of us who were trapped lost several hours, but gained an unusual experience.

As we arrived in Nordhausen we picked up our interpreter and tour guide. We were given a brief tour of Nordhausen. When we arrived at the concentration camp the television crew photographed us as we walked toward the entrance. **Clem** and **Aurio** were both asked to relate feelings about entering the camp in April 1945 and again this day of our visit.

We saw the building where their museum is housed. They have only begun on this project since the unification of East and West Germany. They are asking everyone to submit anything or information that may help to enhance the museum.

We saw the gas chamber, crematorium, ovens, and what was left of the barracks foundations and concrete floors. We viewed the monument they have erected.

What we were looking at in this elaborate setup was merely the barracks for housing the slave laborers. The men were marched to and from the factory tunnel.

Following is a brief description of the tunnel:

Dora was a factory in itself. It consisted of two parallel tunnels driven into the side of a hill for a distance of two miles. The tunnels were built in the late 1800s. The tunnels were formed by digging for limestone. So they were already there waiting for Hitler to decide to build his V2 factory safe from bombing raids. Here the slave laborers turned out the V1 and V2 weapons.

There were side entrances to these tunnels. Some of the entrances were closed, shut during the war by allied bombing. The tunnels are now being used by many corporations for storage of materials that need to be stored in cool places. There was a lot of beer in the tunnels.

We left Nordhausen and headed toward Leipzig. We passed through Sangerhausen and Berga. Berga is the town where **George Edmondson** and I were when we received the good news that the war was

over. This is the general area where most of us were when the war ended on May 8, 1945. So when I am asked where were you and what were you doing when the European war ended, I

say I was on guard duty in Berga, Germany, when my 1st Sergeant came to tell me the good news. "Hey, George Herman (that's what the guys called me), the war's over."

Berga street scene. Where are the people? Where are the cars?



Berga, Germany. Where George Edmondson and Bill Ruth were when the war ended on May 8, 1945.



As we continued our trip toward Leipzig the shabby, drab, desolate towns and landscape persist. Houses are in need of repair and paint, streets are in disrepair, churches are without crosses and all look dilapidated. There are fewer cars and traffic. People walk around listless and there are few smiles. There are no cattle and very few dogs and cats. Once we saw a large grove of fruit trees which seemed out of character.

As we discussed what we were seeing on the tour bus, we began to ask questions, maybe make a few assumptions. I believe **Jim Cronen** said it best: "If you don't own something, why take care of it?" The workings of Communism! **Jim and Berta** (his German bride) lived in West Germany after World War II. They owned their own home. They lived through the early days after the war. Jim stayed on with the army of occupation. Jim said that when the Americans turned things over to the Russians after World War II they took everything to Russia. They stripped East Germany and took title to all their land and homes. It just broke the people's will. When the Americans took over their sector of Germany they not only gave everything back to the West Germans, they physically and financially assisted the West Germans.

There was a bright side of this day. We saw a successful operation of electric trolley cars in Nordhausen and Leipzig. Also, we observed large trucks hauling sugar beets and coal.

Bill Ruth kept promulgating the idea that if parents and high school kids can raise \$60,000 to \$100,000 for their high school bands to go to a major bowl game on New Year's Day just to perform for five minutes between halves, why not raise the money for a ten-day tour of East and West Germany. Give the kids one-half or a full credit and call this a "study of capitalism and communism". So how about it **Grant**? Take this proposal to your high school principal there in Tifton, Georgia. Propose this idea to him, or your history teacher, or your school board. Develop this as a model to be used throughout the United States. (Lale says I'm pontificating.) Put Tifton on the map.

As we neared Leipzig at dusk we noticed a large settlement. It was dark but there were no street lights. The houses were dark also. We would see an occasional light in a room. What an eerie feeling. We were surprised to pass one bedroom that was well lit and observed a woman standing in the window - nude.

We were beginning to write off our forthcoming evening, as we worried about our hotel. As we approached our hotel we noticed that within a block or two of the hotel, the square was all lit up. This part of Leipzig was alive. The following comments of **George Edmondson** were captured on tape:

"After a long ride through drab, seedy, and rough streets, and impoverished country we finally enter Leipzig, East Germany. Oh my gosh, the parking lot is full. There is no place to park our buses in these narrow streets. Are we going to be told there is no more room at the inn? Are we going to have to carry our luggage a mile and a half or two?"

"At any rate", George continues, "we pulled around the corner and Greg and John Paul parked the buses. We were told the luggage would be taken to the lobby and perhaps to our rooms."

"As we entered the Astoria Hotel we could see right away that it has been an elegant establishment and still is far superior to anything we had seen so far on this trip."

George continues, "So we went to our rooms and we entered the door to our room, looked around, walked in, and lo and behold - there on the television screen it said, 'Welcome George and Irene Edmondson'. Oh my God, we've got the president's suite. I just can't wait until I tell Bill and Lale - 'Wait until you see our room'. The first people I saw were **Jim and Berta Cronen**. I found out that they thought they had the president's suite. When Jim and Berta saw our room they said, 'Oh my gosh, you must have the suite that belonged to the communist big wigs'.

Then George found the Ruth's room. **Bill and Lale** thought they had the president's suite. It was far superior to anything they had on this trip.

Lale wrote in her diary that in our bathroom there were two white bath robes, two sets of slippers, two oranges, a combination of television and stereo and the television screen said, "Welcome Bill and Lale Ruth." She says that this is of the Grand Hotel style.

The key to our room was a big knob, like a door knob. It had three keys. One for the room, one for the liquor cabinet, and one for the wall safe. The hallways were wide. There were crystal chandeliers in the lobby and in each hall.

What is so unusual about this? It came totally unexpected. It just didn't fit in with the rest of the day's experiences. But, I'm sure we all agreed that it was a great treat. **John O'Brien**, how did you swing this deal? We all agreed that the evening meal and morning breakfast were superb.

The one bright spot in Leipzig. This is their busy town square with trolley cars. We sure could use these in many of our towns.



October 1, 1992

We begin the last day of our push. We will drive via Delitzsch, Jessnitz, Raguhn, then west to Thurland and Quellendorf and on to Dessau. Dessau is the farthest advance the 3rd Armored made during the war. On April 23, 1945 we received orders to pull back. We were told to pull back to rest and tune up our equipment in preparation for the final assault on Berlin. This never happened, thank God. The war ended.

The tour today was emotional to many of us. Back on April 23, 1945 we were pulling out of our bivouac area amidst a barrage of incoming artillery and mortar fire. In our minds there was always the horrible fear of death during these last days of the war. Yes, Dessau, a town many of us will never forget.

The day started hazy, but cleared later on. As we pulled out we realized even in daylight the place was still shabby and dirty.

We had an interesting stop at Raguhn. It was here that under the leadership of General Mark Clark the Americans met the Russians on the bridge and turned over the Eastern Territory of Germany to the Russians.

We stopped at a restaurant for a pit stop. While we were there we all bought a snack and became aware that the towns-

people were very curious about our group.

Berta Cronen was able to communicate with a gentleman who told her that we were right at the bridge where the Russians and Americans met. He expressed surprise that we were coming through Raguhn because we were the first Americans to pass through since the re-unification of Germany. We were also led to believe that we were the first Americans that the town has seen since World War II. The people seemed happy to see us and went out of their way to make contact.

The restaurant we were in had very high ceilings and a plank floor. **Berta** enjoyed these natives. She said they had a different dialect and talked fast.

Aurio Pierro told us his experience at Raguhn back in 1945. He was with Loveladys Task Force and their mission was to take the town at the crossroads that we were near. He told of his column being held back by an anti-tank gun or tank. Three of their tanks were knocked out. Lovelady asked Aurio if he knew where the firing was coming from. He wasn't sure. There was a tank that came into Aurio's view. He thought he had knocked it out. Before his crew could relax their tank was immobilized by a German bazooka. They were able to get the guy and, lo and behold, a large group paraded

out and surrendered. After this objective Aurio's crew headed out to Thurland. Aurio was later able to identify the buildings where his crew encountered gunfire.

Some of Loveladys Task Force were captured at Thurland. Later on Aurio's crew came upon these former prisoners of several hours. They were so happy to see Aurio's crew. It was in this location that **John Danay** was taken prisoner.

After leaving Raguhn we witnessed another impossible feat by Greg and John Paul, our bus drivers. Do you remember how they got us through that very low and narrow underpass? Most of us didn't think we would make it through. We saw many scrapes, grooves, and nicks left behind by other vehicles that weren't as lucky.

We listened to **John Danay** as he recounted his experience of being taken prisoner during the last days prior to leaving the Dessau area. I'm trying to figure out if he was one of the prisoners Aurio talked about?

My diary says: "At 2:00 a.m. on April 16, 1945 we were alerted to small arms fire, what seemed to be a few hundred yards away. What happened, the Germans made a counter-attack and re-took the town down the road from us. Three G.I.s who escaped came running toward us to tell us the Germans were heading our way. We stood in

readiness manning our guns. They never showed up. The next day our tanks and infantry recaptured the town, including 100 of our own men that were captured the night before."

John relates that a machine gun bullet whizzed right over his shoulder. He feels lucky to be with us. **John Vondra, George Edmondson, John Danay** and I compared notes and we all feel this was the same incident, since we were all in the 33rd.

On this trip **George Edmondson** was able to identify an area where he had been bivouacked. We had an eerie feeling as we identified the area we were in when instructed to pull out under an artillery bombardment (we related this earlier). George and John remember this. We didn't realize that Dessau was such a pretty town.

Elmer Ekman, 83 Recon, told about breathing a sigh of relief as he left Dessau. He said, "You know we all knew the war was nearly over." He was one of two men left from his 3rd platoon in D Company and boy, "I've come this far and I, like many others, didn't want to get hit on the last days."

A typical highway in East Germany. This is near Dessau.

Clem Elisondo told about his last experience as he came near the outskirts of Dessau in April 1945 "the last of any danger I was in."

"We buttoned up for the night and in the wee hours of the morning we began to get a little artillery fire. The house I was in was a pretty nice little brick house. The rest of my crew found a place to sleep in the basement. I chose to sleep in the kitchen and as I recall it was a little dinky thing. I put my bedroll under the kitchen table and another fellow came in (a radio man named Stone). He found us and was looking for a place to sleep. He opened a door which I thought was a pantry but this door had a bunk bed in it and as you opened the door the bed came down. So this guy unrolled his bed roll and went to bed.

About daylight artillery started coming in and three rounds seemed pretty close. I don't know if I was too confident or too tired or whatever, but I just stayed in my sack not looking for cover.

A few minutes after a couple rounds came in the door opened and my tank driver came in. I

asked, what are you doing here. He said 'Jeez, don't you hear that artillery?' I said sure I hear it. How can I help it? I asked why don't you stay in the basement? My driver said, 'I think they are coming in on the other side.' I said, No, no, they are coming right behind us here.

The driver said, 'No, I'm going to lay right down beside you here'. About 10 or 15 minutes later a runner came and called for me and said to get some one on the radio. I looked for my radio operator and couldn't find him. So I went out in the tank and put the radio on and in 5 minutes had checked in and a shell landed awful close. I saw one of my men standing at the door of the house and realized the house was hit because the guy in the doorway was covered with plaster. I jumped out of the tank, remembering that no one knew about the guy sleeping in the pantry.

We found this part of the house demolished and heard a lot of groaning. I and my crew picked up the rubble that was on top of him and found that he had no visible injury signs. I said to end the war on this laughable incident is the way to go."



I asked Lale and the other ladies to give us an overall impression of the area that we had been traveling through these past few days. These comments summarize the group's impressions of East Germany:

People look sad. There is an absence of farm animals, even dogs, chickens, and cats. The farm land is all weedy except for cash crops of sugar beets. There are no hay crops, nothing. East Germany is very depressing. The streets are

dirty and need repair. A lot of buildings need a lot of repair and paint. Older buildings stand in shambles. They stopped short 45 years ago and haven't progressed at all. Suburbs are poorly lit at night. Just the main square in cities are lit at night (Leipzig as an example). The side roads off main highways are not paved, they are dusty dirt roads. The cobblestone roads in the town are very narrow. Sometimes our buses had to stop and let oncoming traffic pass. People don't even smile. Their clothing is very drab and shoddy. We are getting the feel of what the

people of East Germany went through.

As we head northeast toward Berlin we begin to notice improvements in the landscape. We are beginning to see more color, more flowers, and the land is being cared for better. We even passed a place selling swimming pools. We have just passed a church sitting there in ruins, near Duben.

Dessau street scene. Note the absence of people and cars.



We saw many scenes like this in East Germany where they are beginning to repair their towns.

At Coswig we approached the Autobahn.

We were grateful for the opportunity to take some detours, get off the main highways and have a chance to see some of these towns off the beaten trail. As we approach Coswig we find people staring at our two buses as if they have never seen anything like this before.

After the detour at Coswig we now are entering the Autobahn at Koselitz and find we are 66 miles from Berlin. We enjoyed watching a crew repair a septic tank at a rest stop. The foreman got mad at me as I talked to his crew. I was holding them up. **Adam Eisenhower** came by and I asked him to find out what they were doing. He verified that it was the septic system serving the restaurant. The foreman then chased Ike off.

Greg informs us that we are the first Americans the natives have seen since 1945. This is hard to believe. We encountered a collector of marks at this rest stop. You have to pay to use the facilities. They have people sitting at a table collecting money to use the bathroom. Ike got a kick out of listening to the crew questioning why I was so nosey. "Why is he asking all those questions?" The crew asked Ike, "Do you think he has all the answers?"

Dennis has just informed us that we have traveled 3,200 kilometers since we arrived at Normandy. That, according to Lale, equates to 2,000 miles. This doesn't count the channel crossing, our bus tour in England or our flight across the Atlantic.

We just crossed the old East/West Germany border as the old guard house stands idle. Greg says it used to take two hours for each tour bus to pass through the checkpoints. The Russians enjoyed toying around with the tourists. They would have all the people out of the bus and make them open their suitcases. They checked everything, even under the bus.

As we passed the border we saw crews working, still tearing down the wall that meandered along the border. **Janice Fox** pointed out that we hadn't seen any other tour bus all day. We are beginning to see a traffic jam as we near Berlin.

As we approach Berlin we see a hustling and bustling of people and cars. We run into a good old American type traffic jam. Young people are congregating in a festive mood. The sidewalks are crowded. We pass the Cadillac embedded in concrete at a 45 degree angle. We find this part of Berlin to be very beautiful with tree-lined streets. This town is alive and it's only 4:00 on a Thursday afternoon.

We have just completed our final push. We arrived at the Best Western Hotel President in Berlin at 6:00 p.m. Not far from us stands the old church that was bombed and destroyed. It has been kept this way as a grim reminder of the war. There are many new buildings which emerged from the rubble of World War II.



October 2, 1992

Friday morning many of us took off on our own. We bumped into each other as we strolled the streets and everyone kept saying to go to the KaDeWe Department Store. It was most unusual. The vast array of consumer goods was mind boggling. Most unusual was the fish market found on the 6th floor. We found the goods to be very expensive.

We Americans, so used to shopping in the suburban shopping centers where we have the convenience of parking, couldn't figure out how the crowds that we saw on a Friday could drive downtown, fight the traffic, pay their parking and then go to the 6th floor to buy fish, or bakery items. It was most unusual. We later found that this was the largest department store on the continent. **George Edmondson** and I couldn't get over how "chic" the women dressed to go shopping. The salespeople were well dressed also. Yes, people in Berlin dress to shop. We learned that KaDeWe means "Kurfhaus De West," or "The Department Store of the West."

As we walked along the streets of Berlin we mused as we saw all races, colors, and nationalities and suggested that Hitler would have a fit if he saw all this co-mingling with the super race he had tried to develop. We listened to Chinese speaking German to a group of Africans. **George, Irene, Lale and I** thought this was funny.

We stopped and studied the plaque and monument to the victims of all the concentration camps. It said, "*Let us not forget.*"

We are still impressed with the stylish dress the German ladies wear on the street.

We can't figure out how these people can afford to live. We studied a window where they had electric ranges. They were priced in the neighborhood of \$2,500 to \$3,000, not Deutsch marks, but calculated into dollars. (We all got pretty good at this, remember?) There was a gas range at \$1,500, and another gas range for \$900.

On Friday afternoon we took a guided tour of East and West Berlin. It was again a sharp contrast. The stark difference was again evident.

We saw the balcony where John F. Kennedy made his famous remark "*Ich Ein Berliner.*"

Driving through Berlin we realized that the city was not only one of concrete but there was also plenty of greenery on the beautiful tree-lined streets.

We noticed the church bells ringing and **David Hedrick** asked why. We were told that young people wait until Friday afternoon to get married so they can have the whole weekend to party.

We saw the Tempelhof Airport which played a major role during the blockade in 1948-49. The Russians tried to push the Americans, British, and French out of Berlin but after eleven months the Soviets gave up. The armada of planes that hauled supplies to keep the Germans alive prevailed. There is a monument dedicated to the 73 airmen that lost their lives during this period. When you consider that a plane was either landing or taking off every 60 seconds during this period, there had to be some crashes.

As we went through the 17 sections of Berlin (they are similar to boroughs) we were informed that the degree of destruction ranged from 65% to 95% during World War II.

We learned that many Turks and Italians came to Germany in the 60s and 70s due to the lack of available manpower. Consequently, many of the foreigners who came in as laborers have achieved success and wealth.

Now there are many Romanians, Russians, Asians, Arabians, Saudis, and East Germans migrating to Berlin causing the problems we have been reading about. Unemployment is rising. We learned that in Berlin 60% are Lutheran, 12% Catholic, and 28% have no religion.

We visited the Brandenburg Gate. We were hurried off by the tour guide because there was a "skinhead" demonstration. It

looked like it was getting nasty. Many of us learned something that we never realized. Many European cities in the early days had walls around the city for protection. Of course they needed a gate to enter or leave. Thus the origin of the Brandenburg Gate.

Near the Brandenburg Gate is the Reichstag. We heard so much about this during Hitler's heyday. In this immediate area part of the Berlin wall is left standing. It is a reminder and memorial to those that lost their lives as they tried to escape to freedom.

Actually there were two walls. There was a buffer zone which was a no man's land. A person trying to flee had two walls to get through. If caught between the two walls he was like a caged animal with very little chance to escape the gunfire of the guards.



A memorial placed by a family to commemorate the site where their loved one was gunned down as he attempted to climb the wall to freedom.

The Reichstag.





Checkpoint Charlie.

Checkpoint Charlie was a very interesting stop. Trying to visualize what it was like back in the days of going back and forth between East and West Germany was a sobering thought.

There was a sign on the wall that says, "There are times, people, and events on which and only whom history can pass final judgment. The only thing that remains to be done by the individual is to report on what he saw happening and what he heard." This was a quote from Titus Livius.

Checkpoint Charlie.



The following quote was also on the wall:

"Some called this the 8th wonder of the world or the monument of the century. Historically, the first border produced in series erected around a whole country and a whole city. This wall is left as a reminder of grief of the Hitler war and subsequent division of Germany and Europe and is to be a monument for human disillusion at the same time. World wide it was believed that the structural reformability of the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and not only the desire for freedom and the strength of the non-violent struggle from Moscow to East Berlin, from Leipzig to Warsaw and Prague and Budapest."

Guard Tower on East Berlin side.



Berlin wall with guard tower in background.



The wall is 160 kilometers long and was built in 1961. Germans were not permitted to cross the wall. After much bitter debate and ten years later the Russians finally gave in and allowed the East and West Germans 30 days visitation rights per year. A total of 500 people were killed trying to escape.

Our tour guide Johanna, a Latvian, spoke very good English. She was knowledgeable and articulate. We also learned that Berlin is 345 square miles and with a population of about 4 million. Berlin has 23 boroughs. You can still see war damage from World War II. A lot of graffiti can be found on walls of buildings and side streets.

As our tour guide bid us farewell, I'm sure many of you men, as well as myself, reflected back to that April 1945 day when we were pulled out of action in the Dessau area to rest for the final assault on Berlin. Thank God, it never happened for us. We were spared. I'm sure not many of us had any regrets that we didn't have a chance to visit Berlin back in 1945. To most of us, this was our first visit to Berlin. We enjoyed it.



Can you find yourself, Ernie?

Berlin Wall



Friday evening at 7:00 p.m., our great congenial tour guide, **John O'Brien**, hosted a farewell dinner. Typical O'Brien style, it too was a classic. This was a dress occasion and all the ladies looked so pretty and the men so handsome, as if they were going to their senior prom. The meal, drinks, and companionship were first class. **Bill and Sarah Heinz** arranged to tape everyone so that most of you have this great event captured on tape.

The evening was a happy note. We will all remember **Walter Stitt's** invocation. Gosh, his church members are lucky to have a man such as this for their minister. I heard one of his sermons in Omaha. He speaks from the heart with a lot of feeling.

We remember **Bill Walls** exhorting all of us to stay alive and keep our health so we can return in 1994.

Who will ever forget **Gene Turcotte's** sincere and from the heart "thank you" to the whole group. His meaningful and emotional comments reached us all.

John O'Brien's remarks made us all feel good. John, you did a superb job of leading us with the discipline required to keep a group of 70 people in line so they are not running helter-skelter in all directions like teams of runaway horses. We

learned one thing, John, and that is you get upset if you can't keep on schedule. And that is good.

What about **Dennis O'Brien's** story about **Clem**, the bird, the dog, and the squirrel? Good job, Dennis. I've told that story several times.

From this special event came our nickname "Recharged Spearheaders." Thanks to **David and Sherra Hedrick** for sponsoring the contest.

So in 1994 it will be "The Recharged Spearheaders Final Request." **Bill Wall** suggested the next tour be called "Final Request".

We had a perfect setting to celebrate **Marjorie Julian's** birthday.

We recall the presentation of the purse to **John Paul** and **Greg**, our wonderful drivers. I forget who made this presentation. Oh yes, it was "Bashful Bill." Bill correlated our trip to our landing on Normandy.

Greg and John Paul successfully guided us through France and Belgium. They were greeted by the throngs as they triumphantly steered their buses through the curvy, narrow streets of France, Belgium, Holland, and Ger-

many. At times, I remember Leipzig, that if the bus would have had an extra coat of paint, it would not have fit. What about the low, narrow tunnel in East Germany? They almost had to let the air out of the tires to get through. Yes, John Paul and Greg, we appreciate the fact that you got us through without any of us getting lost or hurt. You are truly good "Spearheaders." This was demonstrated when the group placed the insignia on your windshield and "capped" you as honorary "Spearheaders."

Fond farewells were given as each of us headed to our rooms to pack. Tomorrow we leave for New York and home.

The wonderful trip is over and all too quickly, but we all carry many wonderful memories of our new friends.

So now we plan for our trip in '94.

Farewell



Following is an excellent summary of our trip written by **John and Marcella Vondra**. We believe it is a fitting completion of this great trip.

Marcella and I enjoyed the company of all the Spearheaders. The highlights of the trip focused on our welcome in the towns of Fourmies, Avesnes, and Maubeuge, France, and the welcome we received in the towns of Malempre and LeGlaize, Belgium. Yes, even the Mayor of Stolberg, Germany, greeted us.

We were wine and dined with so much wine, champagne, and food until John broke out in a rash that looked like a bad case of measles. That curtailed John's wine and champagne but the French, Belgium, and German beer sufficed.

John says the visit to Normandy and Omaha beaches brought back many memories as he found the exact location of the area where he had landed. The Hedgerows are still there as are the many apple orchards loaded with fruit.

At Margraten, Holland, where many of our 3rd Armored are buried, John found the grave of his very close friend, Lt. Sasson, killed in action on April 15, 1945, in Dessau, Germany. Of course, this is the cemetery where General Rose is buried.

Cologne is an inspiring city. Our hotel was near the famous cathedral. The sunset cruise down the Rhine from Cologne was quite impressive with all the lights.

The cruise the next day down the Rhine starting at Koblenz was quite memorable. John found the site at Koningswint where we crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge. We stopped at Remagen to view the site of the Remagen bridge, which was captured by our buddies of the 9th Armored.

We got off the ferry boat at Rudesheim, a beautiful wine growing village, and headed for Frankfort, where we stayed for two nights.

We spent a most enjoyable day in Friedberg, Germany, where we were guests of the "Iron Dukes," 67th Armor Brigade. The 67th now includes about ten members of the disbanded 3rd Armored Division. This base was the home of the Spearhead Division since 1955.

They threw out the "red carpet" for us. We were treated royally. They could not do enough for us. They gave us a tour of the camp and showed us how they do their training using simulated tank exercises (the age of computers and kids growing up playing Nintendo). It was most impressive.

Then on to their training grounds where we were served a field lunch prepared in vintage World War II style. Many Spearheaders had the privilege of driving vintage World War II tanks, trucks, half-tracks, and jeeps. We were thrilled to have our wives share this experience with us.

The young soldiers of today got a kick out of us 70+ year olds acting like a bunch of kids around a Christmas tree with our new toys. The young soldiers took us for rides in today's modern tanks and other equipment. Our tour through the motor pool was an education. It reminded us that the equipment that won the war in 1944-45 are mere antiques in comparison to today's modern technologies. It all brought back many memories. A few tears were shed too.

The evening was spent with the officers, wives, and enlisted men of the 67th Armor Brigade. The food, drinks, and company were great. The exciting day ended with some very sincere words from the officers commending us old-timers for the job we did during World War II. We will always remember the parting words of one of the men's wife, who said, "If it weren't for you men we would not be free today".

With this wonderful experience behind us we drove to Marburg, Paderborn, and Nordhausen. Again it brought back memories of those storming, dying, fanatic Germans at Paderborn, as well as the starving, dying, slave laborers we encountered as we set them free.

Then on to Leipzig where we stayed at the famous Hotel Astoria where all the famous and wealthy used to stay until the Russians and Communism took over and let it run down. There is evidence that they are trying to build business back up now, since it is located in what was East Germany.

On to Dessau, our last forward movement during World War II. This is where the 3rd Armored units were told to pull out after finally establishing a bridge over the Elbe River (at a terrible loss of life to our engineers who kept building the bridge while it continually was shelled.)

On to Berlin via the Autobahn, the route we took as we headed toward Gross-Gerau, Darmstadt, and the Frankfurt area after World War II.

We had an all day tour of Berlin. What an education. It is a study of Communism and Capitalism, the difference between East and West Germany, East and West Berlin. It was like rolling back the calendar a half century.

The highlights of Berlin tour were the Olympic Stadium, site of 1936 Olympics; Potsdam Square; Brandenburg Gate, where we witnessed a "skin-head" demonstration (it wasn't pretty); the Reichstag; the wall, where it used to be and what is left; and checkpoint Charlie, which has turned into a hacker's market where you buy things by haggling. A great experience.

That evening John O'Brien, our tour guide and a former company commander in a tank company in the 32nd Armored Regiment, hosted a farewell dinner.

John and Marcella feel that John O'Brien along with his son, Dennis, and grandson, Grant, provided us with a super and enjoyable trip.

Marcella says that she was very impressed and inspired when we Spearheaders related our individual experiences as we drove through the towns and other locations, telling just where the enemy was located or a house that was used for cover as we were being shot at or shelled. Marcella says, "During the war, I, and all Americans, had no idea of your whereabouts, so this made it very interesting to the wives."

"Also," Marcella continues, "the friendly receptions we received were beyond anything I expected, especially in Stolberg, Germany."

John mentioned locating the exact spot where he disembarked on Omaha Beach, Normandy.

We were all surprised that there are still reminders of the invasion. There are still bomb craters and German pill boxes overlooking the English Channel.

The American cemetery in Normandy is an awesome and emotional experience. The reminders of those who are visiting to observe silence and show reverence to those who gave their lives for the freedoms we all have today is sobering. The neat white crosses of those many American soldiers overlooking the English Channel is a grim reminder of the price we paid for maintaining our freedoms.

Thank you John and Marcella -- a job well done.





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*Bill Ruth talking with
our two bus drivers.*

*Greg Gessert
is on the left.*

*John-Paul Weber
is on the right.*

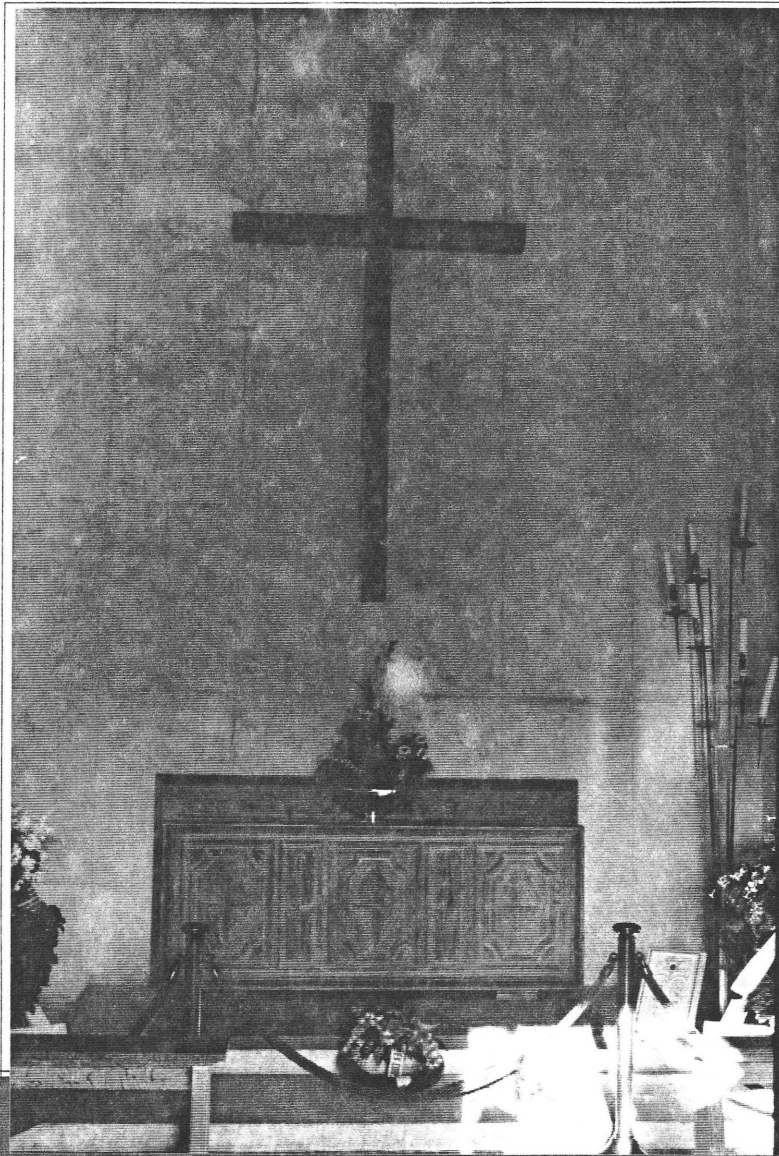


We saw them navigate some narrow roads and streets, get us through some narrow low tunnels, and successfully drive us through France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany, a total of 2,500 miles.

We hope we get them again in 1994.



This is John-Paul at the wheel.



O GOD
WHO ART THE AUTHOR OF PEACE AND LOVER OF CONCORD
DEFEND US THY HUMBLE SERVANTS
IN ALL ASSAULTS OF OUR ENEMIES
THAT WE SURELY TRUSTING IN THY DEFENSE
MAY NOT FEAR THE POWER OF ANY ADVERSARIES

