

## LOOKING BACK

## Bitter cold Christmas, a bloody New Year

by Al Alvarez

Special correspondent

After spending an afternoon watching an engineering squad cover land mines with dinner plates they scrounged up from nearby Belgium homes, we figured they must be short on land mines. Passerby's taking peeks at what the engineers were doing thought they were clever. "Look at him now. He's putting real mines among the dinner plates ... very clever, these Americans," one replied as the porcelain covers inhibit the mine metallic detectors.

Later in the afternoon it snowed, and our forward area was dimpled with the ingenious defensive preparation.

Then the German counter fire re-intensified and seemed to be directed towards our high ground

and steeple, so we began moving into town to the second floor of the town hall or bar room when suddenly we heard a loud "kaboom!"

The biggest tank we ever saw just blew our jeep into kingdom come.

Luckily, no one was hurt and we were all happy we went to church the previous Sunday.

We countered the German fire with purple smoke to mark air strike areas as the fire direction center insisted — but no aircraft was available.

After a couple more rounds landed then whistled after, (the tank) backed out somewhere into Faymonville. The troops were suddenly quiet as we hurriedly plastered the town with high explosives and set numerous fires, everyone privately hoping he was through with us

good guys.

Our chief of detail and boss, Staff Sgt. Joseph Desforge, and motor sergeant, Shorty Hofer, finally arrived with our replacement jeep along with food and extra radio batteries.

While delivering the jeep they informed us that we would be stopping an enemy armored attack on the northern shoulder of the northern shoulder of the northern shoulder called "the Battle of the Bulge."

But as we prepared for our next mission, we encountered some new problems of our own as our "posit" rounds began exploding prematurely over our heads.

As if that wasn't enough, Sgt. Ringer's howitzer, back in the firing battery area, had a muzzle burst and the gun was destroyed — luckily with no gunner casualties. We suspect the problems were a result of

the intense cold on the metal tube and the sudden heat the morning firing caused.

I remember the bitter cold of this December, with all the troops occupied with ways to keep warm. The approved method at the time was layers of any clothing, many of the brainy GIs even wrapped blanket strips over straw around their boots which created an incredibly large footprint in the snow. Just about anything for insulation to stave off trench foot while occupying their foxholes.

During our lengthy and boring time on watch, someone mentioned that today was Christmas, making it the Lucky 7th Artillery Battalion's third Christmas spent overseas.

We all celebrated Christmas in our own way. Coté began reminiscing

about his Christmas in Africa in 1942 and on the moors of England in 1943 while Lt. Cangelosi celebrated by knocking out a machine gun position at coordinates 864-013 with two direct hits.

The doughs cheered and waved their arms and weapons while stamping their cold feet in their exposed foxholes.

Afterwards, down in the chow line, the cooks told us we did a great job and even gave us an extra helping of meat.

Christmas to New Year's Day was spent continuously firing at enemy troops and tanks in the open. Our records show we averaged more than 1,800 rounds per day during the last days of December 1944.

Our uninterrupted night defensive fires, requested by our supported 16th Infantry, commenced with

the coming of darkness and carried over until daybreak. That, along with our wall of steel, both harassed and hampered the enemy's efforts to exploit and enlarge his armored thrust. Another strong tank counterattack was repulsed in area 053-013 by direct fire near a set of railroad tracks not far from Steinback, Belgium. Now the blackened hulks of destroyed German tanks stood out against the snow. But soon, New Year's Day opened with hordes of German aircraft strafing our positions, and as usual, the poor bloody infantry suffered the casualties.

*(Editor's note: This is a series of memoirs by Lt. Col. Al Alvarez, who retired from XVIII Airborne Corps and now volunteers at the Airborne Special Operations Museum.)*

## BUSTER'S BATTERY



by Maj. James Crabtree

## MILITARY TRIVIA

## This week's trivia: Land Torpedoes

by Maj. James Crabtree

XVIII Abn. Corps PAO

The U.S. Civil War saw many technological innovations, such as military telegraph and railroad services, aerial reconnaissance and armored warships. However, few people know that it was during the Civil War that explosive mines were used in combat in significant numbers for the first time.

During the 19th century, explosive devices were generally known as torpedoes. Only around 1900 did the term torpedo come to be used when referring to a self-propelled underwater missile.

During the Civil War, torpedoes, in the form of land and sea mines, were used primarily by the Confederates as a defensive weapon to help the Confederacy during the years of retreat in Virginia and Georgia.

For instance, the U.S.S. Cairo, a Union gunboat operating on the Yazoo River, was sunk by an electrical mine. This was the first time a ship was ever sunk by a command-detonated device. Ironically, the mission of the Cairo was to locate mines.

The famous phrase "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" was uttered by Adm. David Farragut as he referred to Confederate mines blocking Mobile Bay. A Union ironclad, the Tecumseh, had just been blown up by a mine as the Union fleet entered the bay, and if the remaining ships stopped short of the minefield or slowed down, they

would have been decimated by shore batteries. Farragut's determination saved the day.

Land torpedoes had their role to play as well. The Confederate War Department's Torpedo Bureau invented, constructed and deployed mines around defensive works at Richmond, Yorktown, Charleston and Savannah. Land mines were also buried in front of rebel fortresses such as Fort Fisher in North Carolina and Fort Pulaski in Georgia.

Initially the mines were simple metal canisters packed with gunpowder and detonated by a soldier who triggered them with a cord. This evolved into percussion-detonated devices that could be buried and forgotten until some unfortunate person ran into them. Cannon shells were often adapted for that purpose. All of these devices were large when compared to modern land mines and the unfortunate soldier who triggered one often "disappeared" in a spectacular explosion. This was very bad for morale.

To say the least, Yankees did not care for this innovative type of warfare. Calling the torpedoes "infernal machines," Northerners railed against their use as a war crime and Union officers struggled to deal with them in the field.

During Gen. Tecumseh Sherman's March to the Sea, he ordered an assault on Fort McCallister. Confederate land mines took a heavy toll on Union troops, far more in fact than the fort's garrison had managed to inflict. Sherman ordered the remaining mines cleared by prisoners of war captured from the fort, using the logic that they were more familiar with the devices, having planted them there in the first place.

Mine detectors were decades in the future and the use of prisoners of war could be termed a "field-expedient" method of removing the threat, one that minimized friendly casualties.

Land torpedoes did not have a great enough effect on the war to prevent Confederate defeat, but during the World Wars they would come into their own as weapons. Another legacy was discovered in the 1960s when five Confederate land mines were dug up near Mobile, Ala. They supposedly were still active and dangerous.

## RANGE SCHEDULE

From Monday through Nov. 5, units on Fort Bragg will be conducting small arms and high explosives firing in the Fort Bragg range area. All personnel are warned against entering any danger or impact area without specific approval from the installation range officer. The Fort Bragg range area is not considered an open range. Entry into or use of fixed ranges, observation posts, training facilities, or areas other than designated recreational areas on

Manchester, Plank or King roads, must be approved by the installation range officer. The schedule below is subject to change without notice to the public. Additions and/or deletions occur frequently. Commanders with a few individuals who need to fire may coordinate with the using unit to add firers to that unit's range. The following is the weekly range schedule that indicates the units that will be using the ranges.

**PISTOL 38/45/9MM**  
Tuesday  
Range 29: 66C/2: 1/73CAV  
Wednesday  
Range 66C/1: DGNBDE  
Range 66C/2: DGNBDE  
Friday  
Range 29: COSCOM  
Saturday  
Range 29: 1/120IN  
Range 66C/4: 362QM  
Sunday  
Range 29: 1/120IN  
Range 66C/2: 319MI  
Range 66C/3: 319MI

**M16 ZERO/QUAL**  
Monday  
Range 52: 519MI

Tuesday  
Range 28: 1/73CAV  
Range 31: DSTB  
Range 50: 1/504  
Range 52: 519MI  
Range 58: 1/504  
Wednesday  
Range 31: 1/507  
Range 41: 3/73CAV  
Range 50: 1/504  
Range 52: 519MI  
Range 58: 1/504  
Range 59: 1/73CAV  
Thursday  
Range 28: 1/7SFG  
Range 31: DGNBDE  
Range 35: 96CA  
Range 41: COSCOM  
Range 50: 1/504  
Range 52: 2/7SFG

Range 58: 1/504  
Range 59: 1/73CAV  
Friday  
Range 28: 1/7SFG  
Range 31: 1/504  
Range 35: WAMC  
Range 41: 362QM  
Saturday  
Range 28: 1/120IN  
Range 41: 362QM  
Range 50: 362QM  
Range 52: 362QM  
Sunday  
Range 28: 1/120IN  
Range 41: 362QM  
Range 50: 362QM  
Range 52: 362QM

**M16 QUAL**  
Monday

Range 33: 1/73CAV  
Tuesday  
Range 33: 1/73CAV  
Range 43: 1/73CAV  
Range 56: 1/504  
Wednesday  
Range 33: 1/507  
Range 43: 1/73CAV  
Range 56: 1/504  
Thursday  
Range 33: DGNBDE  
Range 34: COSCOM  
Range 43: COSCOM  
Range 56: 1/73CAV  
Range 57: 1/504  
Friday  
Range 33: 1/504  
Range 43: 362QM  
Range 56: 362QM  
Saturday

Range 33: 1/120IN  
Range 43: 362QM  
Range 56: 362QM  
Sunday  
Range 33: 1/120IN  
Range 43: 362QM  
Range 56: 362QM

**M60 SAW/ZERO**  
Monday  
Range 53: 2/325  
Tuesday  
Range 66B: 2/7SFG  
Wednesday  
Range 66B: 2/73CAV  
Thursday  
Range 53: 1/507  
Sunday  
Range 53: MUIC

**M60 SAW/TRANSITION**  
Monday  
Range 54: 2/325  
Tuesday  
Range 54: 1/504  
Range 66A: 2/7SFG  
Wednesday  
Range 54: 1/504  
Range 66A: 1/73CAV  
Thursday  
Range 54: 1/504  
Range 66A: 2/325  
Friday  
Range 54: 2/325  
Range 66A: 8POB  
Sunday  
Range 54: MUIC

**Next Week:**  
What skull became an issue in settling a war?