

RAINBOW TRAIL

The Millennium Legacy (Rainbow Family) History Newsletter
of the 42nd Infantry "Rainbow" Division

August 2026 Volume 25, Issue 2 also online at <rainbowvets.org> NEWS link
"To Find, Preserve and Share Rainbow Division History"



REMEMBERING The Battle of Croix Rouge Farm, Fère-en-Tardenois, FRANCE

The old battlefield on his left overseen by the sculpture, The Rainbow Soldier, created by James Butler MBE RA and the ivy-covered remainder of the fortress of the buildings of the Croix Rouge Farm to his right, Charlie Diaz, Oise-Aisne American Cemetery superintendent is surrounded by timeless connections to the men and events of July 28, 1918.



(all photos of Croix Rouge Farm and the Oise-Aisne American Cemetery in this issue are by Béatrice Dahm, photographer of The Great War)

From The Rainbow Reveille December 1921
page one:

SERINGES CEMETERY WILL BE MAINTAINED

The last long sleep of our dead buddies on the Ourcq river will not be disturbed, the war department ruled since the Cleveland convention.

Announcement by the war department that the Rainbow Division dead in the Seringes (Fère-en-Tardenois) cemetery would be disinterred and removed to Belleau Wood cemetery met with such a storm of protests from General Menoher and other members of the division, that a halt was called in the plans.

The Rainbow men pointed out that historical and sentimental reasons demanded that no change be made. Provisions will be made for the perennial care of the graves and the old buddies are all glad to know that the dead boys will lie on the bank of the river where they immortalized themselves.

In our very first issue of RAINBOW TRAIL, January 2000, WWII Rainbow veteran, Bill Shurtleff began a two-part story, "Journey to the River Ourcq," thus beginning our mission to "FIND, PRESERVE and SHARE RAINBOW DIVISION HISTORY." All RAINBOW TRAIL issues, this one included, can be accessed and read through the NEWS

link on <rainbowvets.org>
<https://rainbowvets.org/rainbow-trail-archive/>

Through our 26 years of publication, we have been so fortunate to meet along the way, those who wished to share their veteran's experiences. One of these sons of the WWI Rainbow is John Devlin who photographed for us a mural painted in the NYC Armory by the Father Duffy Chapter. His father, Matthew J. Devlin, Sr. was an active member and John spent many hours in the armory with the veterans of the 165th Regiment. In 2008 he sent us this photo (L).



Oise-Aisne American Cemetery, Seringes-et-Nesles, France; "It lies about a mile east of Fère-en-Tardenois, which is 14 miles NE of Chateau Thierry." (from American Battle Monuments Commission webpage for this cemetery).



BATTLE of the OURCQ

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July 28, 1918 – July 25, 2026

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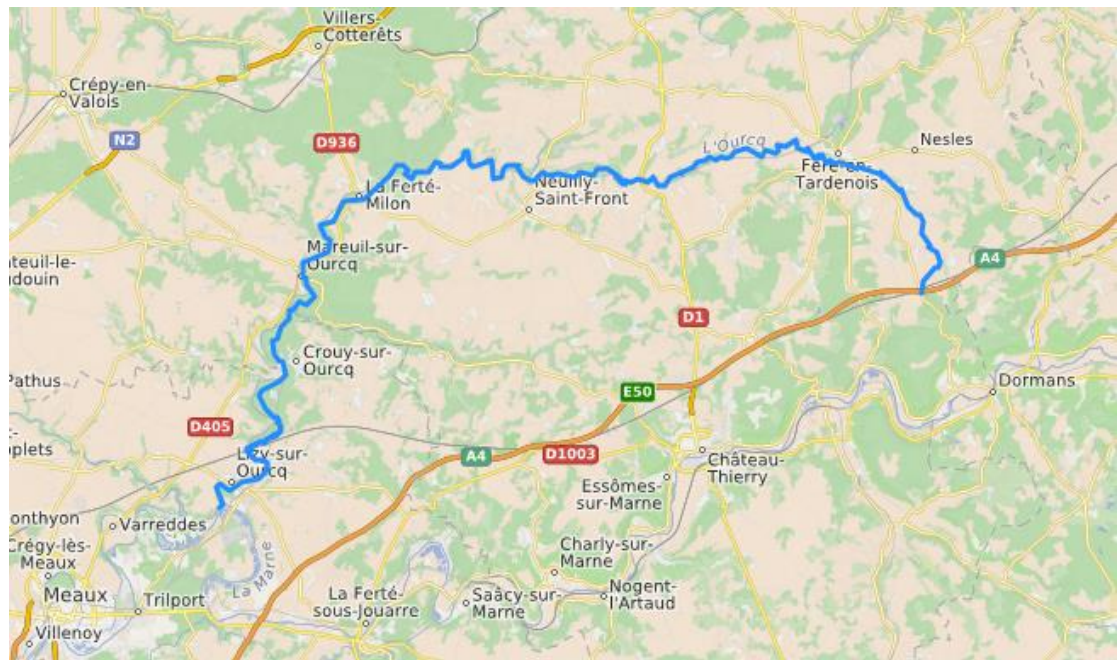
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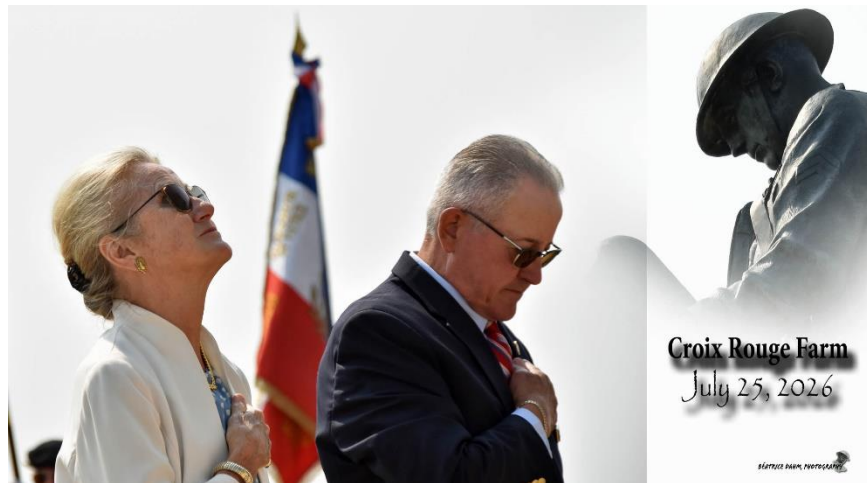
Inquiry from Trostberg,
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Sub-camp of the Dachau
Concentration Camp System



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=84663654>

The course of the RIVER OURCQ

A Remembrance address from Monique Brouillet Seefried, Ph.D., who served for 10 years as WWI Centennial Commissioner, was chair of the Croix Rouge Farm Memorial Foundation and is now on the board of advisors of the American Revolution Institute.



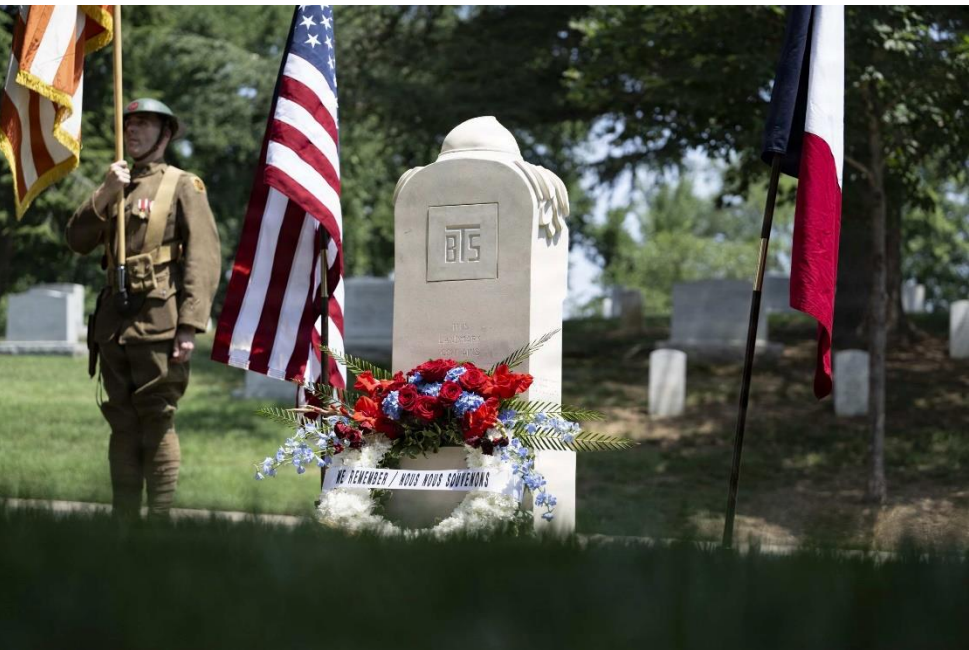
It is always with intense emotion that I find myself among all of you today, like every year since its dedication in 2011, in front of this powerful memorial.
The Rainbow Soldier,

carrying his dead comrade, on a battlefield that saw one of the fiercest combats in WWI of the 42nd US Division. It is the work of the late British sculptor James Butler, and was commissioned through the generosity of the late Nimrod T. Frazer to remember his father and his fellow soldiers who fought on this battlefield 108 years ago.

In the United States, at a time we celebrate the 250th of the creation of our Nation, we also celebrate and honor our first alliance with France which made our Independence possible.

And France in the United States does not forget the American soldiers who came to its rescue in WWI. This July, I've already attended two events remembering them.

At Arlington, on July 5th, took place the rededication of the *Sacred Soil Marker* honoring American soldiers who died on French and Flemish battlefields in WWI. In 1929, the original marker conceived by the



sculptor Gaston Deblaise, a French veteran of that war, was installed at Arlington containing soil of battlefields where the blood of American soldiers was shed. This marker was removed in 1938, due to deterioration, and almost lost to memory. Its restoration was a



transatlantic project to honor Franco-American relations during the 250th anniversary of the independence of the United States.

A delegation of Gold Star Mothers went to France to collect again this sacred soil, from mostly ABMC cemeteries, and it was placed in the restored marker which now stands in section 18 of Arlington cemetery.



At the French Consulate in Atlanta, on Bastille Day, a dog tag lost in the Vosges region by an Alabamian soldier, Hilliard Chastain, a wagoner in the 167th Infantry Regiment Supply Company, 42nd Division, was returned to his grandchildren and a framed poster of the Rainbow Division Memorial at Croix Rouge Farm was offered to the family. Hilliard Chastain departed France on April 15, 1919 to return to Alabama on the USS North Carolina. Therefore, he must have participated in the battle of the Ourcq River and maybe have been at Croix Rouge Farm.

Here, today, on this Croix Rouge Farm battlefield, I would like to

express my gratitude to the city of Fère-en-Tardenois and its mayor, Madame Madeleine Gabriel, for taking such good care of this beautiful historical site and memorial, and thank Senator Antoine Lefevre, president of the Franco-American friendship group at the French Senate, congressman Jocelyn Designy, Mayor Didier Fernandez (Seringes-et-Nesles) and all other elected officials for their presence.

This Rainbow Soldier, on this beautiful day, stands like a true Rainbow in the sky, a beacon of hope for French-American friendship and peace in our world. Thank you.



Photo one: Dr. Monique Seefried and Superintendent Charlie Diaz at Croix Rouge Farm commemoration.

Photo two: Photo and Caption by Department of War; "Visitors attend a rededication ceremony of a sacred soil marker at Arlington National Cemetery, July 5, 2026." (credit: Elizabeth Fraser, Army); <https://www.war.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/4539289/battlefield-soil-monument-restored-at-arlington-national-cemetery/>

Photo three: Frank Blazich, PhD, an Air Force veteran and curator of Military History at the National Museum of American History stands with Dr. Monique Seefried at the Sacred Soil marker, Arlington National Cemetery.

Photo four: Gold Star Mothers stand at Sacred Soil Marker; photo taken by Monique Seefried.

Photo five: A family member of Hilliard S. Chastain receives his lost WWI dog tag; photo courtesy of the French Consulate in Atlanta. This photo was found here: <https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2026/07/16/france-returns-ww1-dog-tag/>

Photo Six: Officials attending the commemoration, identified by the sashes they wear greet participants: from left to right, Mayor of Fère-en-Tardenois, Madame Madeleine Gabriel; Mayor of Seringes-et-Nesles, Didier Fernandez; Congressman, Aisne, Jocelyn Designy; Senator, Aisne, Antoine Lefevre.



This beautiful wreath, presented by Monique Seefried is also her gift each year in commemoration at La Croix Rouge Farm as an honored member of the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation.

Below, Charlie Diaz at the grave of the last Soldier buried at Oise-Aisne American Cemetery, with great ceremony on June 7, 2023. The story of this Soldier, "Known but to God," is found in the July 2023 issue of *The Rainbow REVEILLE*.



Stories! History! More!! To be discovered on the HISTORY DATABASE and NEWS links at <rainbowvets.org> as we fulfill our earnest wishes to place as much RAINBOW DIVISION HISTORY online to all who seek it. We are slowly but steadily achieving this goal. Below are two stories found in early editions of The Rainbow REVEILLE among many now posted there.

THE “RAINBOW” 1917

*Two towns there be in the world today,
More strange than old cities of high romance
Glimpsed through the mist-wraith
Golden-gray –
An American Port, Somewhere-in-France.*

*Between them twain is the old, old sea,
The path of peril, of stress and strain;
Above, in the heavens arching free,
A RAINBOW stretches between them twain.*

*By the path of the peril from shore to shore,
With eyes alight, with hearts aglow,
The sons we got and the sons we bore
Are going the way crusaders go.*

*God, keep them strong for
The crusade's might,
The task is grim and the duty stern;
And hold us worthy the splendid sight
The day our glorious sons return.*

*When wrong is righted they'll all come back
Some by the way of the old, old sea
And some on the shimmering
RAINBOW-track,
Immortal, young for eternity.*

*But today is the day of the going – Yea,
We gird our hearts and straining glance
To those mystery towns in the world today –
An American-Port, Somewhere in France.*

*By Charles Washington Coleman
Washington, D.C., October 1917*

real philosopher. In fact, I believe that all good soldiers are, and although many of us paid the highest price for it, the Army was the one school that taught us the most. In spite of our resolves to do this and that, to go gunning for the top sergeant and to muss up the second “Loot,” just as soon as we were discharged, they have been forgotten just like a New Year’s resolution. Instead, as Old Bill says, “We sort of miss the blinkin’ war now she’s over.”

We had come to LORRAINE with the strains of Madelon in our ears, and time and again we assured the natives that “the Yanks were coming.” Finally, our artillery was in position, occupied itself pleasantly by “potting” villages occupied by the Germans, battalions relieved each other regularly, the Commissary was functioning fairly well, and on the whole, it was a pleasant war. Occasionally, a Boche patrol wandered into our lines, and we returned the compliment with regularity. The reports of the German offensives in the North and against Paris made us chafe in this so-called quiet sector. Although slightly jaded by four months of trench warfare, there was the desire for open combat and the opportunity to throw its weight against the Germans. Although the Projector Gas Attacks had thrown a pall over that last month in the BACCARAT Front and our casualties had been heavy, yet there were brighter days. Mess call comes, even after battle, not in the familiar bugle strains but in the shape of a corporal with a few cartons of hard tack and a can of gold fish. Occasionally it was worse, and once or twice it was better. In any event, the meadow or the roadside served as your breakfast room and you could eat peas with a knife if you chose.

The Rainbow REVIEW Vol. I No. I March 1920 BACCARAT NUMBER
page 4

THE BACCARAT SECTOR

LORRAINE and Spring of 1918 will always be closely associated in the memories of the “Quarante Deuxieme Division,” and what a varied train of associations these two words bring in their wake. Trench Warfare – our first sector; seen by the glare of the rockets; artillery fire; the whistling of machine gun bullets overhead; the making of our first relief; standing to in the dim hours of the morning with the thought of German Veterans in front of us; these were the emotions that filled our minds when we first entered the Lorraine Lines. In the light of after events, how different they all seem. It was the youth of the Division, before the days of Champagne, Château Thierry and the Argonne; those terrible days that were to bring the Forty-second to its maturity and make it the shock division of the American Expeditionary Forces. Strange it seems to go back to those Lorraine Hills where we gazed for the first time into that mysterious unknown of which we had heard so much, and whose fame had filled the imagination of the world for four years; to peer again into No Man’s Land and over the crest see the enemy lines. The more tragic events that were to follow have somewhat dimmed the memory of those early days, and by contrast, how serene they seem in comparison with that long odyssey whose turning marks may be traced by the rows of crosses on the banks of the Marne, the Ourcq, and later on the Meuse.

At Baccarat, in comparative quiet, with the fast-approaching spring, the mud and the horrors of the Epic Winter March of the Division were gradually forgotten and the troops waited serene and confident on guard in the passes of the Vosges, whose forest shade and verdure reminded them of the foothills of the Alleghenies. The Vosges valleys were indeed beautiful but some twenty centuries of civilization had mellowed their once rugged lines. Scenery, well, it may have been that to those who had the advantage of a limousine, but the doughboy with his full pack, his iron lid, and his hob nails had quite another name for it. But even war could not break the spirit of the American soldier, and through it all, he was a

Montigny, Pexonne, Neuville, Ste. Pôle and St. Maurice with their ruins will long remain engraved in the remains of the Infantry of the Rainbow Division. Poste de Chasseurs on our right and Ancerville on our left marked our front and a curtain of hills shut it off from the Valley of the Meurthe and BACCARAT, the Division Headquarters. War had touched but lightly that valley and the city, except for the squares across the bridge leading up to the heights of Domèvre. Here destruction had been meted out in its worst form, the Cathedral and squares about it completely wrecked. Various explanations concerning this havoc are offered by the inhabitants of BACCARAT, the prevailing one being that of incendiary bombs at the time of the German retreat in 1914. The fact remains, however, that only the buildings on one side of the River Meurthe have been so destroyed while the other side containing the famous Baccarat Glass Works somehow escaped.

BACCARAT was always a pleasant place for the soldiers on a day's leave from the trenches. I remember one evening seeing one of the doughboys seated at a rustic table in front of the inn at the turn of the road to Merviller, perspiring and dusty though he was, he was smiling. With a big tumbler of that Baccarat beer in front of him, he seemed so contented. But little did he know that his call had come. The Orders were already at Division Headquarters, and this time it was to be the Champagne Front and his last battle.

The tour of the 42nd Division on this BACCARAT FRONT will long remain in our literature, it has been recorded in lines that will outlast even the stone; school children of future generations will read of Rouge Bouquet, that dug out grave where our comrades lie "never to laugh or to love again or to taste the summer time."



On June 20th, 1918, the 42nd Division left the BACCARAT FRONT for the CHAMPAGNE. Strange coincidence it was the 42 French Division that broke the German center in the battle of the Marne in 1914, and her sister, the 42nd American Division that was attached to the 21st French Army Corps, to break the last offensive of the Bavarians and the Guards in 1918.

By A RAINBOW DIVISION VETERAN (anonymous)

Photo upper left: U.S. Signal Corps photo #18795:

"Street in Fère-en-Tardenois 8/2/18"

Photo upper right: U.S. Signal Corps photo # 18798:

"Destruction of Seringes 8/3/18"

The Story of Rouge Bouquet is found in the August 2013 issue of RAINBOW TRAIL, here:

<https://rainbowvets.org/wp-content/uploads/RAINBOW-TRAIL-2013-8-August.pdf>

The Rainbow REVEILLE April 1929

A WELL-REMEMBERED INCIDENT

By Former Commander Rainbow Division Chas T. Menoher,
Major General U.S. Army (retired)

The Rainbow Division was in the line in the Baccarat sector, alongside of and under the French 7th Army Corps, commanded by General de Bazilaire. Time: the early part of 1918.

The Division had been in the sector long enough for a number of things to happen, among them, some “conduct” by Major William J. Donovan, commanding one of the battalions of the 165th Infantry (old 69th New York.) This conduct was of such nature as to warrant the French, with their usual liberality and promptitude in such matters, in bestowing upon Major Donovan the Croix de Guerre.

At about this same time, the Secretary of War, Mr. Baker, on a very active visit to France, inspected the various elements of the Rainbow Division. Among those so inspected being Major Donovan with his battalion. The time was so short and the schedule under which we were working was so close that some of the elements of the Division were actually inspected before it was fairly daylight. It is recalled that as the Secretary finished the inspection of one of the battalions, he remarked to the effect that the sun had not yet risen. The sun rose a few minutes later. Yet, the Secretary of War and his party had breakfasted and had travelled some thirty to forty kilometers to the place of inspection.



As the Secretary of War approached Major Donovan in his inspection, it was noted that Major Donovan was wearing his brand-new Croix de Guerre. Realizing the prohibition against the acceptance of decorations, etc., the writer deliberately invited the attention of the Secretary to Major Donovan and his Croix de Guerre, and related the circumstances under which it had been earned and bestowed. The Secretary complimented Major Donovan in very gracious terms for his splendid example, and then turned to go.



Still realizing in a hazy sort of way perhaps, that the question of the meaning of the decoration had not been settled, and still further realizing the priceless value to everyone in the Division of Major Donovan’s example, the writer again invited the attention of the Secretary of War, this time to the effect that Major Donovan was wearing the French Croix de Guerre in violation of law, etc.

The Secretary paused for a moment only, returned to Major Donovan and said to him: “Major Donovan, you have my executive authority to wear that decoration. If anyone questions in any way your authority to wear it, please refer them to me, the Secretary of War.”

But Major Donovan did not cease to accumulate decorations, nor did he cease, nor has he yet ceased to be a golden example to everyone who essays to wear the uniform. We all know how he came to be called “the fighting head of the Division;” how, when most severely wounded, he refused to leave the firing line, but continued to accumulate more decorations; and how finally, he came home at the head of his regiment, Colonel Wm. J. Donovan – the man who stopped at nothing and whom nothing could stop.

Photo one: Lieutenant Colonel William J. Donovan War Department. Army War College. Historical Section. World War I Branch. ca. 1918-ca. 1948 - [File:111-SC-25158 - NARA - 55209863.jpg](#)
Lt. Col. Donovan , 165th Reg. Inf. formerly 69th Regt. Inf. N.Y.N.G., 42nd Division. Note the stripes indicating the D.S.C. which he won for bravery at Château-Thierry and the French Croix de Guerre which he was awarded on another occasion. Hazavant, France.

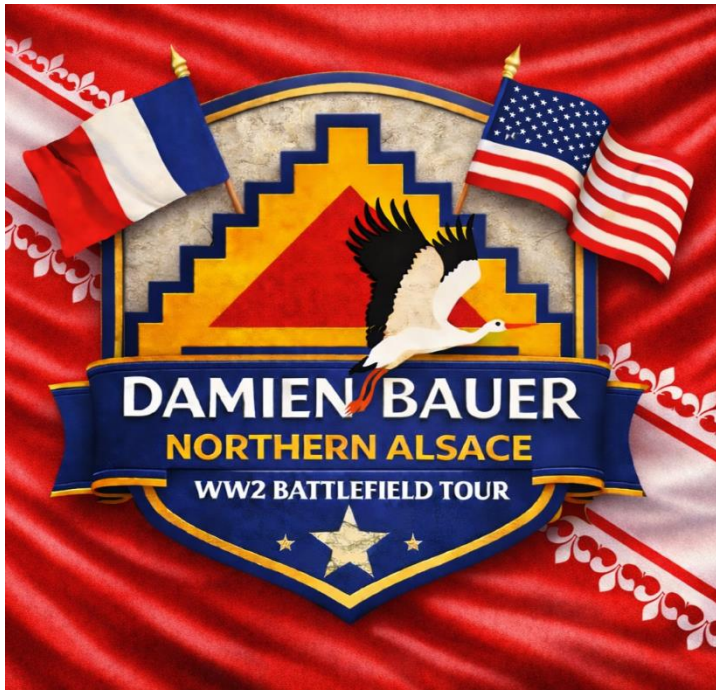
Photo two: Newton D. Baker, U.S. Secretary of War inspecting graves of 165th Regiment troops at Croismare, France (LORRAINE); National Archives Record Group III; from the personal collection of Rainbow Archivist, J. William Keithan

Photo three: Major General Charles T. Menoher (National Archives and Records Administration)

A NEW WORLD WAR II ALSATIAN BATTLEFIELD TOUR EXPERIENCE

Damien Bauer

Bdww2bt@outlook.fr



Damien Bauer has many times over the years taken us visually through RAINBOW TRAIL pages with history, descriptions and photos that illustrate the stories we publish.



Battlefield historian and WWII reenactor, Damien Bauer introduces his new *Northern Alsace WWII Battlefield Tours* which opened officially July 1st, 2026 -

"Driven by a desire to understand, remember, and pass on history, BD Northern Alsace WWII Battlefield Tours offers private and personalized guided tours retracing the liberation of Northern Alsace from November 1944 to March 1945.

"A land of fierce fighting, Northern Alsace became one of the main operational theaters of General Patch's U.S. Seventh Army. This border region, shaped by history, was repeatedly passed from one side of the Rhine to the other through centuries of conflict between France and Germany.

"My tours are primarily intended for American families wishing to walk in the footsteps of a father, grandfather, uncle, or great-uncle who fought here, but also for anyone seeking to better understand what these men endured. Between late November 1944 and mid-March 1945, the fighting in this region was long, brutal, and too often overlooked.

"These tours invite visitors to follow in their footsteps, experience the terrain, and better understand the decisions, fears, and courage of the soldiers who fought here. From the Low Vosges to the Lauterbourg Salient, marked by the bloody Battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen, along the Moder defensive line, to the banks of the Rhine and the violent fighting surrounding the reduction of the Gumbshheim bridgehead, the battlefields come back to life through the story of Operations Nordwind and Undertone.

“Depending on each visitor’s wishes, additional sites of remembrance may also be explored, including Maginot Line positions, remains of the Siegfried Line, and military cemeteries where those who never returned home now rest.

These visits are always conducted with respect and without haste.

“With several years of field experience, every tour is carefully prepared using wartime archives, maps, and firsthand accounts in order to restore a face, a name, and a story to the men who fought here.

“For a more immersive experience, tours may also be conducted aboard authentic WWII vehicles, including a Willys Jeep and 1944 Dodge WC-52, offering visitors a glimpse into the daily reality of the soldiers during the war.

“Personalized advice regarding accommodations, restaurants, and museums can also be provided to help create a meaningful, respectful, and deeply human journey of remembrance. For any information, please feel free to contact me.”

THE NEW BATTLEGROUND -A Fight for Truth and Honor HATTEN-RITTERSHOFFEN 2026

Muriel Maniere, COLLECTIF HATTEN DEMAÏN writes (August 5, 2026):

“The latest news here is the publication, at the beginning of July, of the prefectural decrees concerning the Declaration of Public Utility and the environmental authorization. These decrees allow for possible expropriations and the start of earthworks, beginning with the construction of a roundabout in front of the ESCH casemate.

“We have been able to bring together a group of sixteen residents of Hatten who have agreed to stand with us in filing an appeal before the administrative court to annul these prefectural decrees. The main points raised by our attorney will focus on the legality of certain procedures, the environmental and agricultural risks, and of course the fact that construction work is being launched before the historical authorities have issued their decision following our request to protect the Esch casemate. We are therefore taking legal action against the French State and the Outre-Forêt Community of Municipalities. We have set up a fundraising effort hosted by a partner association, which for now covers our initial expenses.”

Erin Faith Allen, FORTITUDE INVESTIGATIVE WAR RESEARCH writes (August 7, 2026)

To Whom it may concern,

Re: The historical and memorial significance of the Hatten-Rittershoffen battlefield, its Maginot casemates including the Esch casemate, and the Jewish cemetery, and the case for their preservation

I write as an investigative war historian and the founder of Fortitude Research, and as someone who has spent many years inside the archival record of the 42nd “Rainbow” Infantry Division. I have been reconstructing the Battle of Hatten-Rittershoffen from primary sources in partnership with the Rainbow Division Veterans Foundation and in support of the Collectif Hatten Demain, writing the individual stories of the men who fought there. I offer this statement so that the battlefield surrounding the village of Hatten is not mistaken for empty ground.

You are certainly familiar with the battle already, so I will speak only to what it cost. The men who held the line at Hatten had been on the Continent for four weeks, and most had never seen combat. Lieutenant Colonel Rusteberg’s 1st Battalion of the 242nd Infantry entered the village with more than 780 men and came out with 264. In that single battalion alone, 516 were lost to death, wounds, or capture, in the village and in the fields around it. Hans von Luck, who led a Panzergrenadier regiment against them, called the fighting *“among the hardest and most costly of the whole war.”*

Men on both sides died, and so did the villagers, and when it was over the survivors climbed up out of their cellars into a village and fields that held the dead of three nations. The battlefield is the ground where men who owed these villagers nothing bled to keep them alive.

A battlefield is measured across all of its ground.

The people of Hatten and Rittershoffen did not flee. They had already endured the forced evacuation of 1939, and they refused to be driven from their homes a second time, and so the battle came to them where they lived. They went down into their cellars and stayed there while the tanks rolled overhead, while the barns burned, while the dead of both armies and their own neighbors lay in the streets above them. At least 123 people from the two villages died.

The full circumference of a battlefield is the field the attacker crossed and the field the defender held, the fortifications that anchored the line, the streets where the tanks fought, the cellars where the families waited, and the burial ground that received the dead. The Maginot casemates, the Esch casemate among them, are the physical spine of the American defense, and they still carry the marks of the tank and artillery fire that struck them. The Jewish cemetery belongs to the memorial ground of this community and of the larger history of Alsace, a borderland whose people were annexed, conscripted, deported, and persecuted. To protect one fragment and surrender the rest is to attempt to tell the full story inside a book that has had most of its pages torn out. The whole field is the monument, or there is no monument.

The quiet of these fields is what the passage of time looks like.

Eighty years after a battle of this violence, it is entirely normal to walk these fields and find little unexploded ordnance and few visible impacts in the open soil. That absence is exactly what the historical record predicts. It is the signature of a battlefield that was fought over, cleared, salvaged, rebuilt, and farmed for three generations.

Since 1945 the ground has been cleared and worked many times over. The retreating armies left the fields sown with mines and booby traps, so dangerous that even recovering the frozen dead was lethal work, and after the war France mounted an enormous national effort to clear its soil of mines and shells, Alsace among the most bitterly contested ground in the country and cleared at real cost to the men who did it. The burned tanks and the wreckage of some sixty armored vehicles did not stay in the fields; steel was scarce, and battlefield metal was gathered and sold for scrap. The villages, very nearly destroyed, were rebuilt almost wholly from the ground up, and then came eighty years of plowing, of frost and thaw, of farming that lifts and removes whatever surfaces each season. The stillness of a field at Hatten today is the achievement of that long recovery, and it does not erase the violence that came before it.

The proof of the full cost of this battle was never in the dirt to begin with. It lives in an overwhelming and verifiable record: the after-action reports and unit journals of the 242nd Infantry, the morning reports and casualty rolls that name the dead and the missing man by man, the Presidential Unit Citation awarded to the battalion, the Medal of Honor given to Vito Bertoldo, the German accounts including von Luck's own, and the testimony of others who lived it from below. I have spent many hours inside these documents. What they establish is not in doubt. A field can be swept clean of every last fragment of metal and still it remains, beyond any question, the ground where more than two thousand men were lost and more than twenty thousand fought, among the villagers and in their fields.

Where I stand as a historian.

The Hatten-Rittershoffen battlefield, its Maginot casemates including the Esch casemate, and the Jewish cemetery together constitute a site of the highest order of historical and memorial significance, and one of the most severe and least-known engagements of the war in the West. Ground of this significance, once built over, cannot be recovered. A geothermal and lithium extraction complex can be sited elsewhere. This battlefield cannot be moved, and it cannot be made again.

A shell in the soil was never the full measure of this ground, and its absence is no measure either. A shell is inanimate, a fragment that outlasted the flesh of the men who fell beside it. What measures the sanctity of a battlefield is the life given to hold it, across the full circumference of Hatten, not only the scattered points where metal happened to fall. Those lives, and the losses carried by the families who survive them, need protection now.

I make this statement in support of historic monument classification and of every effort to keep this ground intact and visible. I am glad to provide the underlying documentation, the soldier records I have reconstructed, or any further attestation the community, the Communauté de Communes de l'Outre-Forêt, or the authorities may need.

Every name on the casualty rolls belonged to a living, breathing human: A father who did not come home. A son who went missing on this ground and remains Missing in Action. A man who left an arm or a leg in the snow and carried the rest of the war home inside his body. Their families are living still, in children and grandchildren who carry the burden of what this field cost them. Ground that holds this much loss, for so many families, cannot be turned into a site of commerce. It was paid for once already, in the only currency that does not come back.

With respect, and with gratitude for those who are endeavoring to protect this ground,

Erin Faith Allen

Investigative War Historian

Founder, Fortitude Investigative War Research

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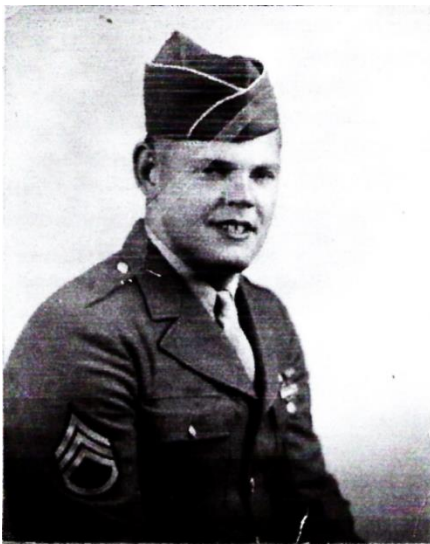
<https://www.fortitude-research.com/>

RAINBOW RIFLEMEN (PART XI)

By Robert "Bob" Spearing

Company G, 242nd Infantry Regiment, 42nd Infantry "Rainbow" Division

Continued from our February 2026 issue of RAINBOW TRAIL



Robert Spearing #3
Army - WWII

Meanwhile, we are all still trying to survive the bitter cold December air of Southern France. As for me, I'm not feeling very soldierly about it. I feel more like we are all on some scouting trip that has somehow gone awry and that some of the dads and scoutmasters have forgotten to bring the correct number of hotdogs.

It is all so disorganized.

Truly, in surveying the camp scene, I was reminded of the shacks and desolation and the rotten smoky smells associated with the hut cities built by the bums and other dispossessed people all over the country dumps during the depths of the Great Depression in the 20's and 30's. Driving by in our Hudson automobile, I tried to imagine just how it must be to sleep in one of those cardboard and wood shacks in the middle of the winter. Now I knew that unless one had some sort of stove or at least four heavy woolen blankets, the air in the tent never got warm enough from body heat to allow one to get a comfortable rest. Just being fully dressed wasn't enough. The extra blankets

were a must. The only other apparel removed for the night was our boots, and these had to be carefully stored under the covers to keep them soft and pliable, because if they were left outside, they became so stiff from the cold that it took almost an hour to work the leather loose again.

I use what spare time I can find to write letters and postcards to my darling wife. I hope that they will get back to her in a reasonable amount of time so that she will be able to get some replies back to me. There isn't

too much I can say because of the censorship that is imposed. We are told just about what we can say and what we can write. All of the letters must then pass through the hands of one's platoon leader and be ok'd by him before they will be mailed. This, of course, makes one extremely sensitive about writing anything very intimate. Because of this, most letters are, in general, very dull. Such big events and places in one's life and nothing can be said. Like being at a beautiful summer camp and not being able to relate anything about where and when, etc.

A day later, another pass was issued to Parrish and I. Again, we left for town shortly after 6 p.m. It was the usual wild ride down the hills leading to the city in the back of an open trailer truck driven by an Italian P.O.W. These were the people that had hauled us to Delta Base (our camp) when we disembarked. They were completely free to come and go as they pleased as long as they attended to the duties assigned to them by our local MPs. They had no desire to escape; they liked their jobs and the benefits. They lived in homemade shacks on the fringe of the camp and anyone could visit them. Being curious, I, too, paid a visit and took in the comforts that they had manufactured for themselves: stoves and cots, (probably stolen) from American stores. They didn't speak English very well and it was hard to understand what they were saying. The little conversation I had with them taught me that they didn't think much of us Americans as soldiers. They thought that in that department, even though our prisoners, they were better than us. Some gall!

As drivers, all of them were the same, especially on the downhill course. One word said it all: "Maniacs!" Parrish and I had to hold on for dear life whenever a curve came into view. It was a great relief to both of us when the truck finally screeched to a halt in the town square.

It was already dark and very cold. The first sight we saw was a very welcome one, indeed. It was a well-lit, plate glass window in a tavern. It looked so warm and inviting, that we just naturally hurried to get inside. Once inside, however, it wasn't warm at all, the temperature was just the same as outside. As usual, a disappointment to us Americans who were so used to warm buildings. We needed warmth, and Parrish suggested that we have a glass of cognac, and I agreed. Having never had anything stronger than wine or beer (and not much of that, either), I was not prepared for the kick one got from sipping French cognac. The bartender filled two tiny glasses and pushed them toward us while, at the same time, telling us that he wanted 40 francs each (eighty cents apiece). I took a quick sip and thought I had been poisoned! It tasted like kerosene and it burned like fire. It was no pleasure for me, and if I could have dumped it on the floor without looking like a yokel, I'd have done so. Instead, I just covered up the choking sensation and made as if everything was just fine. I could see no visible signs of discomfort on Don's face. I thought, "God, these Southerners can drink like Russians!" Eventually, I got my voice back and the heat of the first sip was radiating from my stomach to my feet and then back to my face. I hoped it didn't look as red as it felt, which was as red as a lobster!

At the same time, I was starting to feel very relaxed and that was great. I could use more of that! I took another sip. Ugh! But well, it wasn't quite as harsh as the first sip, and I was sure getting warmer and feeling a lot more relaxed. I threw the last drop down and put my glass back on the bar. What I wanted now was a cold glass of water. Instead, before I could say a word, Parrish had the bar tender refill my glass. Getting this one down was going to be a real challenge, and I vowed inwardly, that this would be my last cognac, no matter what!

Somehow, I managed gracefully and suggested that we step back and sit at a table where we could be more at ease (and away from the quick service at the bar). As I was finishing the second glass, the door swung back and Lts. Daly, Collins, and Shepherd walked in. Seeing us, Daly came over and invited us to join them at their table in the rear. How could we refuse our own officers? We went back and sat down at a large round table where Daly quickly ordered champagne for all in his very classy West Point French. The proprietor was very impressed and scurried about attending to all of us. All the while, he kept up a running conversation with Daly about (as Daly told us later) how it was possible for officers to sit at the same table drinking with enlisted men. This, he emphatically announced, would never happen in France. Daly said that that was too bad, but that we Americans had much different customs. I did not drink any champagne. I had heard it somewhere that mixing one's drinks was bad for business, so I asked (what a glutton for punishment!) if instead, I might be able to have a glass of cognac. Daly was delighted, but I wasn't, I didn't know how else to stay sober and not get sick! Where I was going to put this one, I didn't know, but with it all, I must say that I was now feeling very

good indeed. In short order, the table took on a gala, almost festive aura. The conversation was humorous, witty, and loud. I took my time with my cognac until my face began to feel as though the skin would peel off from the heat, and then I decided that I'd better put some cool water on it before it gets worse. I excused myself and headed for the men's room. I soon learned that that could also be the Ladies' room in France. However, on this occasion, the only other occupant was PFC Russell W. Parry of Keego Harbor, Michigan.

While I splashed water on my face from the sink's tap, he filled me in on what a big deal he had just made with the tavern's proprietor. He had just traded an entire carton of Lucky Strike's for a bottle of Cognac. He went on to say that one thing he knew was that tonight, with his bottle of antifreeze, he was going to get a decent night's sleep no matter what the temperature was and, regardless of the rocks in his pup tent. I could only agree with that!

Back at the officer's table, everyone was slightly drunk and getting more drunk. I looked at the time and told Parrish that we and the other enlisted people there had better be leaving now, since we only had an hour to get back to our camp. No one really wanted to leave, because things were just getting warmed up, but Parrish and I and six others from our company headed for the door. Out on the street, we had a discussion as to which direction would be the shortest distance to the trucks. Someone suggested that since there was so little time, we should grab the first trolley car that headed our way. We all agreed and got out by the tracks in the middle of the road. In a short time, a very dimly lit trolley came swaying toward us. We all put up our hands and waited for it to stop. It slowed down, but then it went right on and passed us without stopping at all. What the hell was this? Then someone said that they thought they heard somewhere that none of the trolleys in France actually stop completely until they get to the end of the line. They slow down for pickups and for getting off, but never come to a complete halt because it takes too much electricity to get moving again and with the war on, there was no other way for them to keep the lines running. Well, that was probably it. When the next trolley came along, we braced ourselves to leap on as it passed, but none of us made contact. There was hardly anything to get a grip on. As the rear platform-loading stairs went by, we all began to chase it because there was a pair of good handrails on each side. It was some chase. None of us realized how really boozed we were until we tried to run! In short order, we were strung out from one to eight in a staggering, weaving line with only the first two of us, Parrish and me, successful in boarding it. The others all managed to trip and sprawl face-first, one after the other, on the cobblestone road. What a sight! Parrish and I laughed for ten minutes straight and then the laugh was on us because we forgot to get off at the proper corner!



Now we couldn't get off the trolley, either, because it was hurtling downhill at such a wild clip toward the lower Marseille Harbor. We hung on for dear life as the car swayed and rocked worse than a roller coaster. Standing on the rear platform with us was a natty-looking French sailor. He was neatly attired in his dark blue uniform with a funny-looking pancake hat cocked over his left eye. On top of his hat was a red topknot. I had seen these in our newsreels and it was a treat for me to see just what it looked like in person. The sailor was watching the streets intently, and the next thing we knew, he was hanging onto the handrail preparing to LEAP off! I thought, "He'll surely get himself killed." We watched in horror as he jumped and then bounced from one side of the narrow street to the other making several somersaults until finally coming to a sudden halt against a brick foundation. To our mutual amazement, he got up immediately, dusted himself off, and just disappeared down an alley!

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/81/ONI_JAN_1_Uniforms_and_Insignia_Page_091_French_Navy_WW2_Seamen_July_1943_Field_recognition._US_public_doc._No_known_copyright.jpg?utm_source=commons.wikimedia.org&utm_campaign=index&utm_content=original

The trolley gradually slowed down and came to a shuddering halt. I could see the dim flickering of the lights on the harbor waters. It was the end of the line, all right, because by his gestures, the conductor was telling us to get off. But where were we? It was so black that I couldn't make anything out. As my eyes became accustomed to the shadows, I began to see a lot of soldiers milling about between several low buildings. I couldn't make out their features, which was strange, but then I heard them talking. They were all blacks. Parrish and I had landed right in the middle of a Negro Port Battalion. I never realized how difficult it was to see a black man at night as we approached one who appeared to be a Sentry. We asked him if he could

give us directions to Delta Base. He couldn't have been more cooperative and friendly. He told us to walk back through their camp to the road that ran behind it. Here, he said, trucks headed for our camp, ran all night and that anyone we stopped would probably take us there. We walked through the camp hearing, but hardly seeing the people on each side of our path. The road behind the camp was just as dark as the rest of the area, but we didn't have to wait long before an army truck came along and picked us up. To make sure the driver was going where we wanted to go, I worked my way forward to the cab's rear window and looked in at the driver. He, too, was black, but somehow, he didn't look like an American black and he didn't talk like one, either. When I shouted over the engine noise to ask if he was headed for Delta Base, he just gave me a big grin and mumbled something like, "wee, wee." Then I saw a big picture of Charles DeGaulle pasted over the dashboard. Holy cats! He was a French Senegalese! I crawled back to Parrish and gave him the news. He just laughed and said, "Sure looks like we're going to be A.W.O.L. tonight!" But after a few minutes, the truck stopped and the driver motioned for us to get out. With much sign language, he let us know that another truck would soon be along to take us directly to Delta Base.

I have felt lonely and homesick before in my life, but I don't think it was ever as much as I did for the half hour that Parrish and I stood at that dark intersection on the road waiting for an American supply truck to pick us up and transport us back to our miserable pup tents spread out on that rocky mesa. At first, just the two of us were standing on the corner, then several more trucks dropped off some more GI's all headed for the same place. There wasn't much conversation; I think most of us were thinking the same thing.

FRANCE OCCUPIED BY AXIS POWERS 1940-1944



Just across the road was a string of houses. They all looked so cozy and tidy for the night with their wooden shutters closed and their brick chimneys venting thin streams of wood smoke skyward. One didn't require much imagination to picture just how things might be inside. Being a family man myself, with a wife and children of my own (three thousand miles away), standing there in the dark taking in this scene was truly one of the most demoralizing moments I ever experienced. The country belongs to the French and the Germans have occupied it. We're here whether we personally like it or not, to help them chase the Germans out and we may very well die doing it. But here are the French, and I don't care what their military age or status is, they're not in uniform, not fighting, but living rather normal lives while we do all the dirty work. The Germans surely needed to be trounced, there was no question about that, but I thought that every Frenchman who could breathe, should have been out there fighting and dying with us, experiencing the same hardships that we were.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet_Line#/media/File:Vichy_France_Map.jpg

The French Resistance in WWII: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Free-French>

Free French, "In World War II (1939-45), members of a movement for the continuation of warfare against Germany after the military collapse of Metropolitan France in the summer of 1940. Led by General Charles de Gaulle, the Free French were eventually able to unify most French resistance forces in their struggle against Germany."

The next morning, we get news of a big treat. After two weeks of no bathing, a portable shower outfit is rolling our way in two hours. It will be set up on level ground just to the south of our bivouac area. We will be sent, one squad at a time, until the entire company has been serviced. As for myself, I am still itching from the saltwater shower I took on the ship!

When orders arrive to fall in with soap, washcloth, and towel, we are ready. Also, we line up dressed in as little as possible. The shower, or bathhouse, is nothing more than the back end of a large trailer truck in which a series of nozzles has been bolted into the ceiling. The floor is made of wooden duckboards and a tent is erected on the back at ground level also with a duckboard floor and also supplied with benches and clothing racks. The tent is about 12 x 15 and affords room for about one squad. An Italian P.O.W. (Prisoner of War) is in charge (what irony) and instructs us to disrobe and wait for the p.a. system to give us further instructions. A recorded voice tells us what is about to happen and how many minutes each operation will take. Then, on the command of a whistle, things begin to happen. This is the first time in my life that I ever took a shower “by the numbers.”

We are told that the first volume of water is to wet ourselves down thoroughly. For this, we will employ our washcloths over all body surfaces. The flow will last exactly one minute. At the whistle, we get ready, and sure enough, warm water begins to trickle down on our heads. When the water stops, we are told to soap ourselves down from head to toe with our sopping cloths. For this, we are given three minutes. When we have completed this operation, the voice on the record says that we will now get a warm rinsing flow that will last for two minutes and that we should make the most of it because this will be the last of the water for us. I’m sure glad when the whistle blows and the warm water begins to trickle down on my head and back, because there is no additional heat in the tent to thwart the December chill outside which is now getting colder.

The time allotted for the rinse is barely enough to flush away all of the suds. I could have used at least another minute, but with the shower over, we all hustle down the wooden stairway to our clothes in the dressing tent. Here, we juggle from one foot to the other on the already slimy, muddy duckboards to keep from getting our new pair of socks soiled. We all get into a fresh set of underwear and this feels as good as crawling between a set of freshly laundered bed sheets!

Hiking back to our tents, I feel so relaxed and sleepy that I could lay right down on the open ground and cork off right there back in my pup tent, and that’s exactly what I did. What a luxury any kind of a bath is when it’s so hard to come by.

This was our last moment of relaxation at Delta Base. We had received orders for our regiment to prepare to ship out by rail within twenty-four hours. We know things are serious up on the line because we’re lined up into company fronts and given a religious service with all three chaplains participating. It is the usual service and all of us (most of us) are impressed because we know now, that in a short while, our fate will be in God’s hands. The nearer we get to the shooting, the more religious questions are being asked of the Chaplains.

From the first day I spoke to Casteel and realized the guy’s qualifications, I had taken the matter up with the platoon sergeant who told me to speak to Lt. Collins. Lt. Collins was quick to observe that all I had said had been correct and told me he would take it up with the company commander at the first proper opportunity. Needless to say, I was happy when the day before we were to be sent north, he told me that Captain Reiter had been totally sympathetic to the situation and had managed to make arrangements for Casteel to be transferred to Headquarters’ Company the next morning, just before we moved out. I would also be getting a new replacement.

In the morning, orders came that Pvt. Casteel was officially relieved of duty with our company and would be immediately transferred to Headquarters’ Company of our regiment. He left with the blessings and good wishes of all of us; however, a few hours later, it came as a real jolt when we received word that Casteel had made an error. Instead of going to Headquarters’ Company of the regiment, he blundered into some combat company’s headquarters and loaded on the train with them. Now, he was on his way to the front. (Thirty-eight years later, I would locate him in Kress, Texas. It seems he had gotten to the proper company after all and survived the war.)

An hour before my platoon was to leave, my replacement for Casteel appeared. Robert Lee King was 18 years old and about 5' 11". He weighed about 180 lbs. and had blonde hair and blue eyes. He was a native of New Edinburgh, Arkansas. He reported to me with all of his gear and duffle bag. I liked his looks immediately and welcomed him to our squad. I could see that he liked that. In a few short days, I would learn what a good soldier he was, but now, I was too busy getting my crew lined up for the trucks. An hour later, we arrived at the railhead and got our first good look at a French boxcar.

Although I asked Collins, there was still no word on a safe place for Silberman. We would keep trying.

Marseille & The Forty & Eight

I had heard a lot about these things from WWI vets. I knew that they had a special organization for all of those who had had the need to ride them – The Forty & Eight Organization. At veterans' conventions, this group was always played up as a bunch of harmless hell-raisers. I don't think there is anyone in America who is not familiar with the locomotive type vehicle that they display wherever they go. It is, of course, railroad locomotive housing built onto an automobile chassis which has a mechanical feature built into it that allows the forward part to rear up at the pressing of a button, all very humorous really, but riding the actual boxcar is another story!



*The French **Gratitude Train** (French: **Train de la Reconnaissance française**), commonly referred to as the **Merci Train**, were 49 **World War I** era "forty and eight" boxcars given to the United States by France in response to the 1947 U.S. Friendship Train. It arrived in Weehawken, New Jersey on February 2, 1949.*

Background

*The idea to send a "thank you" gift to the United States for the \$40 million in food and other supplies sent to France and Italy in 1947 came from a French railroad worker and **World War II** veteran named Andre Picard.^[1] Donations for the Merci Train came from over six million citizens of France and Italy in the form of dolls, statues, clothes, ornamental objects, furniture, and even a **Legion of Honour** medal purported to have belonged*

*to Napoleon.^[2] Photograph of boxcar from French "Merci train," a gift from France to the United States in grateful recognition of U.S. aid to France after **World War II**.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merci_Train#/media/File:Friendship_car_at_the_National_Railroad_Museum.jpg*

The French lettering on the side says eight horses or forty men. Maybe back in the 14th Century, but surely not today! I have never seen anything so tiny or toy-like in my life. In regard to size, I'm used to looking at American freight cars and these 40 x 85 can be only one-third of their size. Aside from the wheels, bolts, and ladders they are made completely of wooden planks (hard, wooden planks especially the flooring). In the center of each side, there is a sliding door. There are enough cracks and splits in the wooden sides and floor to ventilate it without even opening a door. Two squads crawl into each one and this affords just enough room on the floor for everyone to stretch, if in need of sleep. Boxcar is the proper description. In every aspect, that is exactly what they look like, a rectangular, square-corner box on wheels. After riding an entire night in one of these boxcars, it feels like you rode on square wheels as well.

An hour after dark, the car jerks forward and slowly pulls away from the loading platform. We are on our way, but not too swiftly. Having ridden the Pennsylvania R.R., the Santa Fe, Erie, New Haven/Hartford, the West Shore, and the Grand Central all of my days, I just can't get used to the appearance, sound, and movement of this railroad. I feel like I'm on an oversized Lionel train underneath the Christmas tree. Even my electric trains had a more serious whistle. The whistle on this French engine sounded for all the world like an overheated teakettle! It is so ridiculous, a huge steel locomotive that gives off nothing more than an enraged "peep," and it proceeded to peep, all through the night as it passed through one crossing after another. I heard all of them, too, because no matter how I positioned myself, I could not get comfortable enough to sleep. Only once, did I spread a blanket out on the floor and stretch out. After fifteen minutes,

though, my hipbones couldn't take it anymore. It was like reclining on the hood of an operating jackhammer, or worse yet, a pile driver! I spent the night squatting next to the rear side, but oddly enough, despite this torture, there were several soldiers who did manage to get a full night's rest anyway. The only time they woke (and became annoyed), was when someone had to step over them to urinate out the sliding door.

As dawn broke, the train was laboriously chugging up a slight, but long upgrade. Again, I'm reminded that one of OUR locomotives would have been hustling up this slight incline as fast as it would have on level ground! We are passing between two broad meadows, but we're moving so slowly and seem to be struggling so hard, that I feel as though if two or three of us got off and pushed in the opposite direction, the train would surely stop altogether. However, this pace is a break for several of those who have to defecate. Two noncoms step off the train and assume a squatting position as the cars inch by. It is a comical sight and the entire train is enjoying it, especially as the train begins to pick up speed and the two of them have to sprint back to our car, naturally, amidst much hooting and catcalling!

Breakfast is what we have left over from the K-ration box we were issued the night before, but I was hungry and finished it all last night. Also, stupidly, I have emptied my canteen thinking that the train would certainly stop somewhere for refilling. Now I am both hungry AND thirsty and NO ONE knows or has ANY idea just when we will be getting anything more.

When we do make a stop at a small village later on, I will be able to get something to drink, and I will also learn why the French have good cause to dislike us Americans. In the meantime, from my grammar school geography days, I know that we are traveling on the main French railway road north, via the Rhône Valley. The countryside here is beautiful and reminds me much of Bergen County, New Jersey especially the boroughs of Saddle River and Upper Saddle River. We are going to pass through such towns as Valence, Lyon, Macon, Chalons, and Dijon.

From time to time, we are sidetracked to allow another train coming from the north to pass by. They are mostly hospital trains, and we strain our eyes to see its occupants. Most that we can see are seated in coaches near the windows. They all look so comfortable and neat and clean in their bandages. Most of us are thinking, "Lucky boys that they are, out of this mess!"

During a sidetrack, we are not permitted to leave the train at any time. Word comes through to us that our division is now part of General George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army and in a short amount of time, we will receive patches to sew on. I was not personally happy about this. I had already heard enough about old "blood-and-guts" Patton from an eyewitness (a Signal Corps technical sergeant), who had served in Africa with "Georgie," and I knew that I wouldn't enjoy serving under his command. Years later, when all sorts of books about Patton were published, I was amazed at how accurately this sergeant had been able to describe some of Patton's idiosyncrasies back then.

We are going to make a stop at the next village station, and this will give us all a chance to barter with the local inhabitants. There is bound to be food and drink, and we have what the French want most, American cigarettes. At the stop, the trading is brisk because we will be staying for no more than a few minutes. In fact, the standing time is so short, that I'm almost done out of getting to the platform side door because of the crush and the clamoring of the others. When I finally do make it, the only Frenchman standing there has one bottle of wine to sell, and I manage to get it from him just as the train begins to depart with one package of Old Golds. I look my prize over, and it is just a fifth of what appears to be a very weak-looking white wine. Never mind, I'm so thirsty that I just remove the cork, tilt the bottle overhead, and in one succession of delighted gulps, I swallow the entire contents! What a taste, what a satisfaction. It was a delicious tart, white wine that tasted almost like cold, sugar-sweetened lemonade, which, to me, is the most thirst quenching and satisfying of all drinks. It was just what the doctor ordered; however, not having drunk white wine before, I was in for some awakening and experience that commenced immediately! As I lowered the bottle, I was standing in the middle of the boxcar floor between two open sliding doors. In a matter of seconds, my vision began to blur. Holy cats! I was getting cross-eyed (cockeyed would have been a better description)! It was coming on so fast that I wasn't even going to have an opportunity to grab on to anything that I could hang onto. I didn't want to call out to any of my car mates, because I'd have been the laughing stock of the entire company. I decided to just stand still and try to balance myself so I wouldn't fall out of the open sliding doors!

As I stood there swaying with the rain, hearing but not understanding or really seeing what else was going on, I felt as though there was a giant hand clasping my helmeted head and pulling it upwards towards the ceiling. It felt like a vice had enveloped my skull and as crooked as I was (and I'd never been this way before in my life), I knew one thing, I was never ever going to drink white wine again on an empty stomach!

An eternity seemed to slip away as the landscape peeled by on both sides. Then, hurray! Gradually, my vision returned, and I was able to make my way to the rear of the car where I slumped down unobtrusively with none of my buddies the wiser. They, too, were feeling no pain, but at least they had the good sense to position themselves safely BEFORE they drank.

The cigarette was one of the reasons why the French had a burner on for us Americans. While bartering was going on, some wise guys would seize upon the opportunity to have a little "fun" with the French. All they had to do was throw a few butts out onto the railway platform and a general melee would ensue. The French would scamper and vie with each other over a single cigarette. When I saw this, I thought to myself, "Sure, they're picking them up, but they will never forget who it was that made sport of them."

At several crossroads, there are groups of burned-out armored vehicles. Most of them are German, but a few are American. We take all these things in and comment on it, but it then becomes a bore, and we go back to daydreaming. Still no food is being issued and it is getting very cold out.

Towards late afternoon, the train halts astride the crossing at Dijon. We sadistically enjoy the consternation of the Brass tied up on each side. We do not know what the cause for the halt is, but then we hear there is a bakery shop no more than a block away where fresh bread can be purchased. We take a chance and run to the shop. We arrived at just the right moment, too, because a few minutes later it would be closed. The baker is prepared to sell, but after looking our mob over, he decides that there will be only one loaf to a soldier or there won't be anything left for his regular customers. We were ready to settle for just half a loaf each. What loaves they are – huge, round, brown, and heavily crusted! They are coarse in texture and slightly bitter, but they are still warm and fresh from the oven. We stuff chunks of it into our mouths as we run back to the train, and if we only had some butter and a cup of hot coffee, it would have been a feast!

The air in Dijon is crisp and cold and there is a beautiful sunset. Night follows swiftly and the train moves on, but after a while, it stops for what we think is another sidetracking, but instead, it turns out to be our destination. We will have to stay in the cars until morning since there will be no transportation until then. We're supposed to stretch out and sleep, but who can sleep? I'm still hungry and when I'm hungry, I can never sleep.

As we detrain in the daylight, I can see why the train cannot go any further. The rails in front of the steaming engine are grotesquely twisted, reaching for the sky. The Germans have done a thorough demolition job.

Our company loads up on some canopied trucks and heads north along the twisting, rural roads past some small shelled-out villages and little farms. The general area has a drab, tired look to it. We slow up on an upgrade that brings us into a huge open-air supply dump. It is an ammunition dump and all the shells are stacked neatly in square lots that stand about five or six feet high. Most of the stuff is partially hidden under a grove of leafless fruit trees, but some more of it is out in the open. I didn't like the way it looked. What if a lone German fighter stumbled onto it and made a strafing run? I was very happy when we left this far behind.

The trucks come to a halt in the middle of a very small hamlet of some ten houses and a church, which are located on the left side and "y" shape in the road that leads into town.

December 21, 1944

My squad is allotted a vacant, two-story house, and we quickly learn that the best room is a bedroom on the second floor that has a workable wood stove. If all goes well, we should be able to make up for some of the abuse and wear that we had to endure on the train. A runner comes in and drops off a box of 10-in-one rations. This will be just perfect. My crew and I start up the fire and get the meal cooking.

At the conclusion of our meal, Lt. Collins sends word that we can all get out on the road and stretch our legs. This is something that we are all very grateful for. There are a few farmhouses up the road that are occupied, and we drift up there to see what the French might be able to tell us. The civilians are friendly enough, but not overly so. I find them to be a little mocking towards us. This is difficult to understand. After all, are we not there to help them free their country from Hitler? We ask them how the Krauts have been treating them, and the spokesmen for the group lets us know that they think the Germans are very forceful people who know just what they want and just how to get it. In not so many words, he indicates to us that in contrast, we Americans are a bunch of lollipops who have no idea what we want or how to get it.

Farther on up the road, we meet up with a Billy goat, and he doesn't like us very much at all. He takes one look at us and sweeps in at the lot of us, intent on butting whoever is nearest. The French just stood back and giggled until I made a motion with my rifle, which prompted them to finally run out and drag the beast off with a leather halter.

We are to stay in this place just for the night. Sentries will have to be posted. Since we do not have the authorized password for the area, we tell Lt. Salopek that his nickname of "Long John" will have to do.

During our tour, it doesn't take us long to locate the graves of two German soldiers in the small cemetery in front of a Catholic church. There are two crosses, and on top of each, rests a steel German helmet with no inner lining. Naturally, we have to try these on and our curiosity is so aroused, that we have to hunt up a local civilian to tell us the story. The Frenchman says that the two were left behind the German retreat to rear guard it. When the Americans arrived, these two put up a gallant fight, and in the process, killed and wounded several Americans; however, when they finally ran out of ammunition and had to surrender, the Americans were understandably unsympathetic and shot both of them right where they stood.

We spent one night in this French village (Lostroff). Most of us were just too happy to be billeted in houses no matter how rundown they were because most had wood burning stoves that kept us warm during the night. Rations (10-in-one) were doled out per squad and it didn't take us long to consume them.

The night passes quickly and quietly. I tried to dry out the felt liners of my snow packs by hanging them next to the wood stove overnight, but they are still not dry in the morning, and I put them back on again anyway. Once my feet are resting on them again, it's the same old story. They are soggy and mushy and they feel just like two damp sponges. I would like to throw the packs, liners, and socks away and get my old combat boots back. It would have been much easier to endure the Achilles tendon pain produced by them than to have my feet continually wet, but I have no choice. I have to wear the wet snow packs.

An excellent piece of news! We have been relieved from Patton's Third Army and will now join the Seventh under General Alexander Patch.

Once again, we are waiting. This time, we're sitting on our packs alongside the village road. The weak December sun is out and although it gives no appreciable warmth, at least it gives an illusion of cheer to the drab, winter landscape. The trucks come and they are the open-backed trailer-type, with cattle fence for siding. Our platoon climbs into the back as Lt. Collins climbs in with the driver. I do not know the distance we are to ride, but I have a feeling that it will surely be all day, and maybe, part of the night, too. The trucks roll away over the hilly farmland where we can see farmers plowing in the fields with teams of horses. I'm amazed that the soil can be worked at this time of year. Then I see that they are not plowing, but harrowing, which can be done at almost any time. The trucks go on and on to the east, and from one little hamlet to the next. When we see people, they do not wave to us, but rather turn away and attend to whatever it is they are doing. This shows the uneasiness that has come about due to the German offensive to the north. The reports (when we hear them) are not good. Towards dusk, a halt is called along the main highway so that we can relieve ourselves and stretch our limbs.

Standing by the tailgate in preparation for loading up again, I'm startled as a box of some kind hits the road next to me and shatters into several pieces. The truck it fell from kept on going, oblivious, I'm sure, to the fact that anything had been lost. Several of us began to collect the items that were scattered over the road. It

didn't take us long to realize that what we were picking up, was the belongings of a GI who had been killed in action. No doubt, his body was in that very same truck that had just passed us, the Graves Registration outfit. I'm sure these personal things were all supposed to be mailed home to his relatives, so we packed up what we could find and gave it to our driver who said he'd try to get it to the proper authorities when he returned to his motor pool.

The sun was just about down and so were our spirits. If this wasn't enough, we passed several roadside graves. It was just like all those WWI movies; the rough, brown mound of earth with the rifle bayonet stuck down into it and the dark helmet sitting slightly cocked on the butt of the rifle with the chin strap opened, blowing in the wind. Then, the perfect finale, we passed a WWI cemetery just as daylight faded. After that, there was very little conversation.

The trucks continued on into the night, climbing up and around the Vosges Mountains. We were getting very weary and extremely cold. It was becoming an effort to grip onto the railings.

NEXT ISSUE of RAINBOW TRAIL ***RAINBOW RIFLEMEN Part XII: The Seventh Army & Alsace*** "Moving slowly, we arrived on the main street leading into Strasbourg..."

AND ONE MORE... The Rainbow REVEILLE 1936 November-December issue



SLENKER CARRIES ON *By Harry Barnhart*

In the course of the St. Mihiel drive, Colonel Garrett was as usual following up the infantry advance laying down telephone wires, so that no sooner would our infantry take an objective, than he would be able to handle telephone communications from that point. In this instance, one Sergeant Slenker was carrying up a reel cart and, as usual, maintaining constant communication with Colonel Garrett's post of command.

The Colonel, making one of his frequent checks on Slenker's progress, cut in on the line to hear Slenker reporting to the man at the field switchboard that one of his horses had just been killed by a burst of shrapnel and that he was unable to carry on the heavy cart with one horse.

"Slenker," said the Colonel, *"go out and get another horse and move that cart up."*
"But Colonel," queried Slenker, *"where am I going to get a horse up here?"*
The Colonel firmly responded: *"Get that horse and get that cart moving."*

Some minutes later, the Colonel cut back on the line to check progress and overheard Slenker almost tearfully exclaiming to the p.c. operator:

"How in hell does that bald-headed so-and-so expect me to get a horse up here in no-man's land? And now the other gee-dee horse has been killed!"

“Slenker,” interposed the Colonel – and there was a long, painful pause – “you are going out at once and get two horses and move that cart forward.”

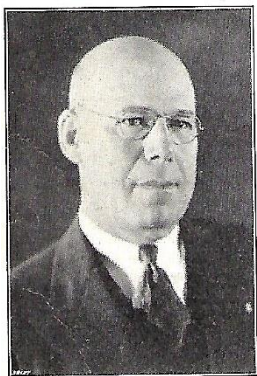


Now, when even one of Colonel Garrett's boys has just called his commanding officer a 'bald-headed so-and-so', it's up to him to get action and get it quick! Slenker got action. Rushing from the telephone he stopped the nearest team of supplies he encountered.

“You dirty thief,” he shouted to the driver. “give me back my team of horses!!”

Well, you know how many guilty consciences there were in the supply train.

The driver apologetically explained, *“I didn't know they were your horses,”* and promptly pulled his wagon off the road and surrendered his team to the Signal Corps man – and the wire reel moved forward.



Ruby D. Garrett

Ruby D. Garrett (Colonel, U.S. Army Ret.) served as President of the Rainbow Division Veterans Association from July 1935 to July 1936. A portion of his farewell message in the July 1936 issue of *The Rainbow REVEILLE* reads:

“Fellow Rainbowers: -

At this season, each year, we pledge ourselves anew to a comradeship that will endure throughout the years. The Rainbow must forever remain a symbol of our service and a happy reminder of the noblest traditions of our grand Division. Each year, the ties that bind us should grow stronger. In reverie, we reach back through the years and live again our stirring experiences in France – the Champagne, Chateau Thierry, St. Mihiel and the Argonne....”

Photo one: Colonel Ruby D. Garrett on field telephone WWI

<https://missourioverthere.org/explore/collections/garrett-ruby-dwight-collection/>

Photo two: U.S. Army Signal Corps #153395 February 25, 1919: “Col. Ruby D. Garrett, Chief Sig Officer of the 42nd “Rainbow” Div, receiving the first prize in the hurdling contest.”

Photo three: Ruby D. Garrett portrait from the cover of the October 1943 issue of *The Rainbow REVEILLE*

On July 25, 2026 we received the inquiry below. Official documents of the 222nd Infantry Regiment of the 42nd Infantry “Rainbow” Division record their presence in the vicinity of Trostberg, (Bavaria) Germany in the early days of May 1945.

If anyone has information that may help this researcher, he would like to hear from them.

Dear 42nders! I am researching the history of my hometown Trostberg (Bavaria), and especially the last months of WW2, of which there is almost nothing left in local documents. As I know, the 42nd rainbow division was heading east from Munich towards the Austrian border in the first days of May 1945. I guess that some units of the 42nd came through Trostberg, where there was an official surrender on May 5th at the town square. In the neighbourhood of the nitrogen plant there was a small **subcamp of the Dachau-Concentration camp**. I hope that perhaps the 42nd veterans have some documents or (even better. photos) of that structure as there is nothing but some aerial reconnaissance photos. I would be very glad if I could find some relevant documents and I am looking forward to reading from you.

Thanks and regards, Arthur

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For questions or submissions, please contact the editor, *RAINBOW TRAIL*
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