



## A brother gets closure

By Jon van der Hagen

I approached Bastogne from the west along highway N4 and thought that the landscape in March 2008 was not unlike Minnesota's. Gone were the ravaged buildings, smoke, and debris of war. An old Sherman American tank adorned McAuliffe Square amid posters for the annual "Nuts" Festival, a tourist gambit on General McAuliffe's famous one word retort. I had spent two days exploring memorials and monuments around Bastogne, Belgium, and later dined next to portraits of Tom Hanks, Steven Spielberg and Stephen Ambrose at the Hotel Melba, cherished reminders of the filming of *Band of Brothers*.

Sixty-three years earlier, in late 1944, Bastogne was a vital crossroads targeted by a massive German offensive. The forty days of fighting resulted in 105,000 U.S. battle casualties and 19,200 KIA.<sup>1</sup> Those 19,200 represented the cream of American youth, including a likeable guy from Little Falls named Elmer Guck.

Fast forward to the present. A local newspaper article described my interest in military history and my work as a museum volunteer. A week later the newspaper sent me an email: "Al Guck called and would like you to contact him. I believe he wants to talk to you about his role in the Battle of the Bulge." I expected that I would call Mr. Guck and help to secure his oral history for the museum. "No," replied Al, "I was too young. I served during the Korean War. My brother, Elmer, served with the 103<sup>rd</sup>, and was killed in France." Perhaps if we shared information, he summarized, I could find out what happened? I gulped. This could give new meaning to *a needle in a haystack*. "Sure, how about Friday?" I asked, my bravado eclipsing caution and naïveté.

I can't pretend to be an archive rat like admired historians. The museum's military library at Camp Ripley preserves Minnesota interests; I had reservations about its cache of 103<sup>rd</sup> information. I decided to try the internet first.

The 103<sup>rd</sup> "Cactus" Division shipped to France in the fall of 1944 and was assigned to the US 7<sup>th</sup> Army. My computer



Elmer Guck of Little Falls, 1943



Elmer's younger brother, Al, while on active duty during the Korean War.

research revealed that the 103<sup>rd</sup> was sent to Alsace, an area as Germanic as it is French—information I shared with Al that Friday. As we sat, Al took items from a private folder.

Staff Sergeant Elmer Guck was a squad leader for a Heavy Weapons platoon, Co G, 409<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 103<sup>rd</sup> Division. He was the second oldest of twelve born to Frank and Rose Guck. Like many others who graduated from high school in 1936, Elmer felt a patriotic pull after Pearl Harbor. He joined up in 1942. "We grew up kind of protected," said Al. "We were hard-working, honest, kept our word . . . and we were the laughing Gucks—a close family who enjoyed, protected and loved each other immensely." All five sons served in the military, but in 1944 the world changed sharply for the Guck family.

Elmer came home for a two week furlough late that summer, before shipping to France. "He told me that he

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## ALLIES



Elmer Guck is buried with 10,500 others in the Lorraine American Cemetery near Moselle, France.

didn't think he was coming home," Al confided. But he was anxious to go, confident that he was serving with an exceptional unit and commander. "My mother worried about him all the time," Al recalled, "but his letters home consoled her." Elmer and his mother had a strong bond and, with her, Elmer was careful to sound upbeat and optimistic.

Al explained that Elmer was "missing" in France from September through January 1945. "And then the chaplain sent us a telegram," Al continued, at which point he showed me the Western Union telegram confirming Elmer N. Guck was Killed in Action 8 February 1945. This created some angst for me. I had a hunch about Elmer's death, but if he was missing, he could have died any time before 8 February 1945, with the date merely serving as an arbitrary marker. Like a good son, Elmer wrote regularly. Next to the telegram was a photocopy of a letter. Was that from Elmer, I asked? "His last letter home," replied Al, as I spied the date: *26 January 1945, France*. "But Al," I inquired, "if he was missing all that time, how could he have sent a last letter on 26 January 1945?" "I didn't mean *missing*; I meant *we didn't know where he was*," clarified Al.

Could I read the letter, I asked. Elmer wrote about general things, careful to avoid the censor's redaction marks. He asked about home. In response to what I perceived was an earlier exchange regarding local people who hoped to see the sights of Europe, he quipped that perhaps they should come and see the sights now. In an ominous following paragraph, Elmer confirmed that he was "sending \$75 home to . . . put it in the bank . . . and if

anything should happen to me, you know I want this money to go to you, mom and dad." If only for a second, Elmer betrayed a fear. Like many then surviving from foxhole to foxhole, he knew full well the risks of war.

And now it was my turn. Al had shared coveted family information. He is 87 now, the youngest and last of his brothers. Elmer was childless, so Al was the proxy guardian of his brother's memory—a treasured, fragile family asset that Al wanted to share with someone younger. Were there more pieces to the puzzle?

The massive German offensive had failed by late January 1945. None of Hitler's key goals had been achieved, and the German war machine was now depleted of vital resources that could not be replaced. Eisenhower, in the

meantime, had been maintaining a broad front, hoping to stretch the Germans beyond their defensive capacity. This created enormous logistical challenges and was not well received by all areas of command. On average, the Allies used more than two tons of ammunition every minute of every hour every day during 1944.<sup>2</sup> Nearly four million American soldiers in Europe needed everything from shoe laces to hand grenades—all manufactured in the US for shipment overseas—and with many of the European ports in ruins. Once unloaded at a harbor, those precious supplies had to be shipped long distances overland to the advancing army. Gasoline and transport trucks were in short supply. The other obvious alternative, railroads, had been devastated by pre-emptive bombing prior to D-Day. Locomotives and railcars were being built in the USA or borrowed from Britain, and then shipped piecemeal to France for reassembly and disposition. It became customary for GIs to take supplies from the newly dead, from the Germans, or to simply go without.

At the front, troop strength was also in short supply. Army depots were nearly void of replacements. The UK had been sapped of manpower and American draft counts rose to nearly 100,000 per month.<sup>3</sup>

Four years of planning and execution, deployment and fighting had not curbed Anglophobia. Fractious behaviors and animosities still plagued Allied leadership. Eisenhower's masterful diplomacy placated choleric playmates although great squabbles occurred between Field Marshal Montgomery and top American commanders. Many historians now concede that Montgomery was a peevish



and solipsistic man whose tactical brilliance was overshadowed by his arrogance. In short, he was a festering thorn in the Allied backside.

It was in this context that young Elmer Guck found himself in a foxhole writing home on 26 January 1945. The 409<sup>th</sup> was deployed a mile south and west of the village of Kindwiller, France, along the Moder River, near

the Rhine. The 7th Army was heavily engaged with the German 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which had attempted to break through and advance across the plains to the Vosges Mountains, but the German plan ground to a halt on 25 January 1945 after American reinforcements arrived from the Bulge salient. The area grew uncannily quiet from 26 January until 4 February 1945. Regimental commanders became nervous. Was another German attack imminent? Elmer's Company G had been held in reserve for the week and seemed a good choice for an intelligence mission; captured German prisoners would provide such information. Elmer's CO, Captain Roger Craddock, was a highly regarded infantry leader with demonstrated planning, execution and command abilities. Asked to coordinate planning with battalion and artillery commanders, Craddock recommended a night raid with Kindwiller as the agreed upon target.<sup>4</sup> Across a wide open agricultural plain, barely miles from the German border, the town was believed defended by a reinforced platoon of only 40-60 Germans.

Craddock took two days to personally reconnoiter the town. He arranged artillery and communication support, selecting targets, weapons, communication sets and telephones. He arranged the timing, point of debarkation, and withdrawal.

On the afternoon of 7 February, three platoons of G Company swapped their rifles for fully automatic weapons. This assured heavy fire power for close quarter fighting. All men were stripped of loose equipment, personal effects and identification except dog tags. Those with a cough were re-assigned. At 2200, the men left for a regimental outpost and were joined by the regimental commander and artillery liaison officer Raymond Barrett. Barrett accompanied them on the mission. At 0100 8 February 1945, the company departed in column formation along the northern shoreline of the Moder River, advancing west through an outpost at la Walck onto a plain south of the village. They turned north and deployed in skirmish formation. Approximately 200 yards north of the outpost, the company encountered an enemy patrol of four soldiers who were quietly captured and transferred

to the outpost. In that skirmish line, nervous, watchful, and disciplined infantrymen continued north to Kindwiller. A low damp fog obscured landmarks and Craddock called a halt 300 yards south of the entry point. A phone call to Regimental artillery resulted in two well-placed rounds to bracket the town, reassuring the company of its whereabouts.<sup>5</sup> The platoons reformed into columns 150 yards from the town and double-timed toward the center. German defenders opened with heavy small arms fire, but the entrance was breached.

Sgt. Robert Leslie, 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, in an account written years later, picks up the story: "I got up to a barn door which was locked. . . . Machine gun fire turned toward me and I moved back to the building. I then threw a concussion grenade. . . . I continued fire and stopped the enemy fire a couple of times . . . we shot the lock off the barn door, pushed it open and dived in. We advanced to a house and cleared it except for the cellar. When we opened the cellar door, a German soldier ran down the steps. We threw a grenade down the cellar."<sup>6</sup>

Fourteen minutes after the breach, Co G had captured 15 prisoners. Flares signaled withdrawal. Coordination of the artillery detachment and searchlight detachment allowed the company to pull back while mortar and cannon rounds pummeled German artillery batteries to the east with counter battery. Guck's Heavy Weapons platoon had been the vanguard of the withdrawal operation, and as such drew disproportionate attention from German mortar and 88s on the eastern side of town, until silenced by regimental artillery. Two noisy prisoners were shot during the withdrawal.

I explained to Al: This was a precisely organized and coordinated raid. The Army thought enough of it that a report written by the artillery liaison officer was used at Fort Benning Infantry School as a training tool for infantry officers. "Your brother," I said, "really *was* with an exceptional outfit." As I read the results to Al, I sensed his emotions. I felt tension in my voice as I read the last part of the action report out loud. "Al, they captured a total of 13 German soldiers and killed and wounded many more," I told him. "Their mission was accomplished. There were reports of 18 Americans wounded, six missing, and one soldier was killed.<sup>7</sup> I think that *was your brother*—or perhaps one from the 18 who may have died that day." My report was finished. Al sat quietly.

"Thank you," he said finally. "That's more than we ever had." He paused before continuing. "I'll share this." There was a tremor in his voice and perhaps a little moisture in our eyes.

"What do I owe you?" he said as we exchanged the cus-

**Continued on the next page**

## CURATOR'S NOTES

By Doug Bekke



Work has progressed in the curatorial area with great support from the museum volunteer staff. Kerry Beckenbach and Paul Cantleberry have been working hard on building exhibit cases for the exhibit on U.S. heroism and achievement awards that will be located in the hallway outside the Honors Room. This has been a much delayed project and it will be great to see it completed this spring. A second exhibit in the

in the Honors Room will display a complete collection of U.S. military badges. All branches of the service will be included. It has been a long, expensive, and more difficult task than I had anticipated collecting all the badges, and it will be great to see this exhibit completed. Many thanks to Kerry and Paul for their dedicated work.

Another volunteer, John Deuhs, has been working hard on the inventory, cleaning, restoring, and exhibiting of our firearms. He has great knowledge in this area and he is putting his knowledge to very good use making sure that everything in this part of the collection is in great shape

and well taken care of.

This winter the museum received another Legacy Grant to complete the process of computerizing the museum's collection catalog. This is a huge job. Peggy Thompson has been hired back to complete the project. Kate Prichard has also been hired to work on the project. Kate has had very good experiences working in museums in England. She also volunteers as curator at the Minnesota Air Guard Museum. Doug Thompson continues to apply his great knowledge of military artifacts to the inventory portion of this project. A new volunteer, John Loxterkamp has also started working on this project. Much work remains but we are making good progress.

In late March, another volunteer, Diane DeVere, started working at the museum doing transcriptions. Four transcriptions are of WWII 34<sup>th</sup> Division interviews I did several years ago. It will be great to see them completed. Other transcriptions are of recordings found in our archive that were done many years ago. Diane's work will be very valuable as Vietnam veterans' interviews are conducted in preparation for our Vietnam exhibit opening in July 2015. Thanks, Diane, for your dedicated work.

The tempo of work is only going to greatly increase over the summer and fall. Thanks very much to our volunteers whose efforts and devotion to our "cause" make so much more possible at the museum.

## A brother gets closure

Continued from the previous page

tomary handshake and pleasantries of a couple of casual friends. "Nothing Al," I replied. Closure, I thought to myself, was payment in full.

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*Jon van der Hagen is a family practice and emergency medicine MD in the Brainerd/Baxter area. He is passionate about history, especially military history, and volunteers regularly at the museum as a tour guide and assistant in the library. He is also on the Board of Directors for the Military Historical Society of Minnesota.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Atkinson, Rick, *The Guns at Last Light*, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett, Raymond D. *The Kindwiller Raid*, pp. 10-17.

<sup>5</sup> It was not uncommon for opposing forces to "ex-

change" artillery rounds periodically, so this would not necessarily have aroused suspicion by the enemy.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie, Sgt. Robert. *News from the Cactus Patch*, February 2009, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Subsequent corroborating research has suggested that 5 soldiers died that day. S/Sgt. Elmer Guck was the highest ranking.

## Bibliography

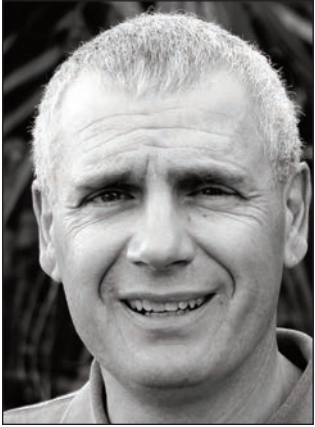
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## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

By Jeff Thielen



This column is all about promoting the museum. If you are reading this you know what a great experience visiting the Minnesota Military Museum can be. The adage “build it and they will come” is true—but only if “they” know we built it.

Like most of the area’s museums and attractions, we struggled last summer with our attendance numbers.

The cold and snows of this past winter and our late spring are also keeping attendance down.

Every year we look at how we can promote and market the museum with a limited advertising budget. We try to target advertising to individuals and groups who are likely to visit. Our new 12-minute virtual tour DVD has been distributed to public television stations and community cable access stations across the state. It has also been delivered to all County Veteran Service Officers and VA Hospitals to increase our awareness with veterans.

We work with local Chambers of Commerce and Visitors Bureaus and have increased contacts with bus tour pro-

motors to bring in larger groups.

We understand the value of social media and try to keep up with Facebook, but have not ventured much beyond that media. Thanks to a dedicated volunteer our website is always current with the latest information on happenings at the museum.

Some of our best marketing success stories have come from press releases designed to inform the public of special events and happenings at the museum. We send releases to area radio stations and papers in a 60-mile radius of the museum. If you are not seeing or hearing these releases in your area and would like to, please do me a favor and provide me with the contact email for your local radio, newspaper, or free advertiser paper, or provide me with your email and I will send the release to you to pass on to your local media. Our press releases are also now online (click News and Events on our website homepage).

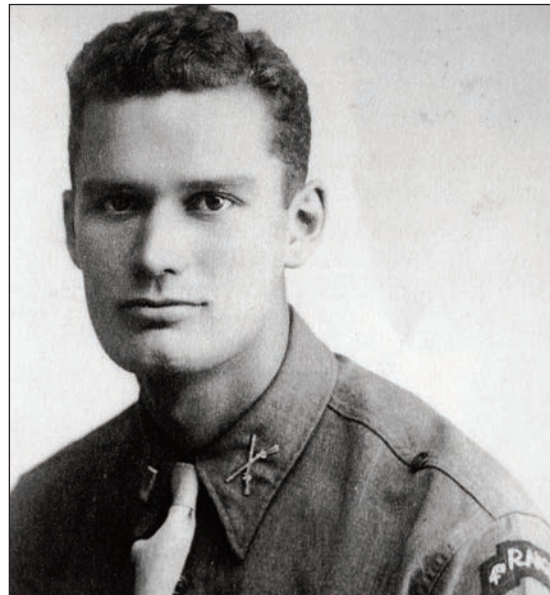
We are the only museum in Minnesota serving all branches of service from frontier days to the present and represent all Minnesota veterans. This is the message we need to continually promote with the media and one you can promote with media outlets in your area. Your help with promoting our releases will bolster the museum by increasing public awareness, support, and visitation.

We have built it. Now we need your help in letting others know about it, so they will come.

## Museum inaugurates ‘Featured Veteran’ exhibit

The museum recently launched a Featured Veteran exhibit, in which a Minnesota veteran is identified, a brief military biography is written, and a temporary exhibit created that contains photos and artifacts related to the vet’s service. This exhibit will highlight one Minnesota veteran at a time and is a part of a larger space in the museum that includes a Veterans Support Wall and an informational kiosk for veterans. “Our plan is to feature from eight to ten veterans each year,” says Doug Bekke, curator.

The current Featured Veteran (and our first one) is Donald S. Frederick. Frederick, from Richfield, MN, was a WWII veteran and member of the famed 34th Infantry Division. He was on the first troopship to head for Europe shortly after war broke out, and became one of the original Army Rangers (First Ranger Battalion aka Darby’s Rangers). He was later taken prisoner by the Germans while on patrol in Italy. You can read more about him and about each subsequent Featured Veteran by going to the museum website or visiting the museum in person.



1LT DONALD S. FREDERICK

**ALLIES****OUT OF THE ARCHIVES**

By Chad Conrady



The one nice thing about a long, harsh winter is that it allows for plenty of time to get things moving along in the archive. My focus since starting in September has been to process the collection of records originating from the Adjutant General's Office (AGO). These records fall into three distinct sets: a general collection, a muster roll group, and a pay roll group. Of these, the general records group is the most diverse, including

such topics as the organization and re-organization of the Minnesota National Guard from about 1919 to 1972, armory and non-armory construction, Federal induction, and National Guard support of civil authorities.

The muster roll records present the composition of a unit as it is taken out of state control and activated into Federal service, providing not only a soldier's name, rank, date of enlistment and promotions, but also the names of officers' wives and children. The oldest muster rolls date back to the Spanish-American War, and continue through to the Korean War. Both Jeff Thielen and I are excited to present the World War One muster rolls as the museum's first contribution to the Minnesota Reflection Collection,

which allows the public to view these records online. They are currently at the Minnesota Historical Society for digitization and they will hopefully be added to the collection sometime this summer.

The payroll records in the archive's collection cover many time periods in multi-year spans, such as records from 1885-1915, 1921-1923, 1922-1941 and the years 1946-1949. These provide a detailed census of the National Guard as they collected wages for attending armory drill and field training. Records such as these provide a researcher with the opportunity to follow the progression of guardsmen through the ranks. The payroll records also show some personal details of the officers, as well as documenting when soldiers were transferred or no longer in the National Guard.

In the general AGO records group, I have processed approximately 25 cubic feet and there are at least another 10 to 15 cubic feet that I have surveyed, but not yet processed. The processed muster rolls are about two cubic feet with another five cubic feet to go, and I have processed approximately 6.5 cubic feet of pay roll records with about 10 cubic feet to go. It's labor intensive. One of my objectives is to go live with ArchivesSpace, an online archival finding aid program, which will allow the public to view an institutional standard description of archival holdings that I have processed and made accessible. With luck we'll have this up and running by May. It will make the Minnesota Military Museum one of the first archival institutions in the country to have documents and records available through ArchivesSpace.

**Financial Report for Museum Operations in Calendar Year 2013\***

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$</b>
Cash donations	\$ 39,856	Salaries and wages	\$ 87,728
Grants	38,925	Payroll taxes	6,478
Legislative appropriation **	110,000	Contracted services, curatorial	36,900
Membership dues	6,040	Contracted services, archival	10,971
Admission fees	22,113	Collections and exhibits	17,792
Interest on accounts	3,731	Special projects	9,128
Net store sales	21,415	Advertising and promotion	4,120
Miscellaneous other	4,310	General expenses	8,050
	<u>\$246,390</u>	Insurance	2,828
		Transfer to endowment	3,500
		Miscellaneous other	145
			<u>187,640</u>
		Carry forward and fund transfers	58,750
			<u>\$246,390</u>

\*The museum's fiscal year and calendar year are the same.

\*\* \$220,000 for the 2014-15 biennium (1 Jul 2013 – 30 Jun 2015). For purposes of this report, half is assigned to 2013 and half will be assigned to 2014.

# DONOR HONOR ROLL, January -- March 2014

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## ARTIFACT DONATIONS

The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:

Richard Cragg ▪ Lyle Doerr ▪ David G. Fisher ▪ Margaret Fletcher ▪ Clifford and Betty Johnson ▪ Danny Noss ▪ Earl Plattner ▪ Anita Scheunemann ▪ Sandra Sedo ▪ Mrs. William Simonet ▪ Dave and Linda Taylor ▪

## CONTRIBUTIONS

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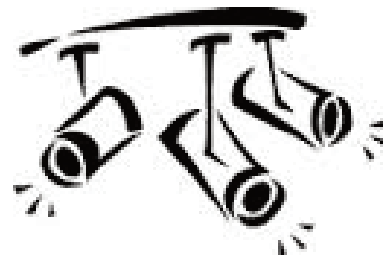
**New Members:** Patricia Grothe ▪

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## SPOTLIGHTED RECENT DONATIONS



The past few months the museum has received only a few artifact donations. This has given us a chance to get caught up on work left undone during busier times.

We were especially pleased to receive a donation of Navy artifacts from Dick Cragg of Hastings related to his four tours of duty as a Navy officer in and off the coast of Vietnam.

The museum has not collected very many artifacts from the Vietnam War -- nor very much from the Navy, either -- and we are now playing catch-up. Thanks, Dick.

**ALLIES**

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**MEMBERSHIP LEVEL**  Regular - \$30/yr  Family - \$55/yr  Supporting - \$100  Life - \$500

(Life memberships may be paid in four installments of \$125 each. Tell us if you want this option.)

Additional contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

All memberships are acknowledged in the museum newsletter and in our website's Donor Roll Call. Contributions of \$500 or more in a single year and all Life memberships are also recognized permanently on a plaque in the museum lobby.

**How would you like to receive your newsletter?**  Postal mail  Email

**Would you like to receive information about volunteering?**  Yes  No

**PROCEDURE**

**Pay by mail:** Print this form and mail with your check (payable to the Military Historical Society of Minnesota) to: Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Highway 115, Little Falls, MN 56345. If you prefer, you can mail or fax (320-632-7797) this form without payment and follow up by calling the museum at 320-616-6050 with your credit card information.

**Pay online:** We also have a simple, secure way for you to become a member or renew your membership online. Go to our website at [mnmilitarymuseum.com](http://mnmilitarymuseum.com). Click on Support Us>Become a Member and follow the prompts.

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