

The Old Hickory Chronicle

Newsletter of the Old Hickory Association

July/August 2005

Magdeburg Revisited

Submitted by Frank Towers

Frank W. Towers, formerly a 1st Lt. of the 30th Infantry Division, the U.S. unit that liberated Magdeburg on 18 April 1944, pays a return visit to this famous City.

It was 60 years ago that I last “visited” Magdeburg, Germany, the last City on the Elbe River, that my 30th Infantry Division captured on 18 April 1945.

At this point, the war was over for us, as we had reached the Elbe River, the final demarcation line, defining the line between the Allied Forces and the Russian Army, then on its way to the final destruction of Berlin, and the end of the war on 7 May, 1945.

About two years ago, I was contacted by a young researcher, Miss Antje Villard, asking for information on the capture, (liberation), of Magdeburg by the 30th Infantry Division and its attached units. I responded by sending her considerable material that I had on this phase of the war.

Since the end of the war, they had been under Russian domination, and were in the divided section of East Germany, under strict Communist rule for over 30 years. Thus they had little contact with the outside world concerning the Battle of Magdeburg, 13-18 April 1945.

Under the control of the Russians after we left there, the citizens of the then “East Germany” were prohibited from speaking and teaching English, books and documents were purged from libraries, indicating that the Americans were the true liberators and monuments were erected to glorify the deeds of the Red Army.

I never heard any more from Miss Villard until about two months ago, when I received an E-mail message from her, asking for more details on the ‘liberation’ of Magdeburg, as they were planning the 60th anniversary of their liberation with a big celebration. This was to coincide with the 1200th anniversary of the founding of Magdeburg back in the Middle Ages.

During the course of my communication with Miss Villard, she extended an invitation to me, from the Lord Mayor of the City of Magdeburg, to be their guest during this celebration, which I accepted, and then started to prepare to participate in this epic and emotional journey.

During the course of the capture of Magdeburg, we encountered strong opposition from the remaining garrison of the German Army still holding out in the City, under the command of Lt. Gen. Regener. In spite of a meeting and discussing the terms of surrender with Regener’s Chief of Staff, Col. Cobalt, he stated that Lt. Gen. Regener did not wish to discuss such a matter. Consequently, the battle and destruction of the City continued.

In spite of the many previous bombing raids on the City, the center of the City lay in total ruins, but the German Commanding General, Lt. Gen. Regener, still refused our offer of surrender, and this brought about another, and final, aerial bombardment of the city on 16 April. After this, the German troops saw the uselessness of trying to hold out any longer, and they began piecemeal surrender.

Magdeburg was an airplane manufacturing center, with many small airplane parts factories in

the surrounding suburbs of the City. In addition, there was a large ammunition plant there. All of these were the prime targets of the many air raids carried out upon the City in previous months, and particularly a large air bombardment on 16 January, 1945.

Unknown to us at the time of the beginning of the Battle of Magdeburg, was the fact that there was a substantially sized Slave Labor Camp housed in the outskirts of the City. This Slave Labor Camp was actually liberated on 13 April 1945. It held American and British P.O.W.'s, many of whom were air force crews who had bailed out of their planes as they were being shot down, and as well as many Allied P.O.W.'s who had been taken prisoner during the preceding months. Among them were many Displaced Persons from many of the surrounding overrun countries of Eastern Europe in the past several years. Last but not least, was a large contingent of Jewish slave laborers, who had been spared a trip to the main death camps, due to the fact that they were young, strong and able to work hard and long hours in some of these factories, up to 18 hours a day.

This was the most pathetic group of humanity that I had ever seen! Bodies, some a little more than skin and bones, hardly able to move, and clothed in ragged clothing and uniforms, made a frantic effort to reach out to us to greet us and to beg for food, water and cigarettes. They were so happy to see us, knowing that they had been liberated, most were in tears of joy, and many were emotionally unable to speak.

Additionally, about this same time, near a small town of Farsleben, just west of Magdeburg, a train was discovered which was well overcrowded with about 2,400 political prisoners, men, women and children, most of them being Jews.

Many of these prisoners had gone for days without food, water or sanitary facilities, and they were weakened by exhaustion, hunger and disease.

After all of the joyous greetings following their liberation, there was a problem: What to do with all of these people, who then numbered in total well over 4,500. It was an immediate necessity to get them out of this immediate area, as the final push of the battle and an air bombardment was about to take place.

At this same time, the Russian Army was preparing to move across our front, on the east bank of the Elbe River, enroute to Berlin, only 80 miles, (130 km) away. Not knowing the precise attitude of the Russians towards these Displaced Persons, and particularly the Jews, it was thought best to remove them far to the rear and away from our front line.

As rapidly as possible, all available 1 ½ and 2 ½ ton trucks were assembled and loaded up with these liberated prisoners.

At this time, we were aware of a German Luftwaffe air base near the town of Helmstedt, not too far east of Brunswick, where there were a large number of barracks, which had recently been vacated by the German Luftwaffe personnel, and it was decided by the Military Government Section, to move them there, where they could receive medical examinations and assistance, as well as given some available clothing, such as it was, and started a feeding program, conducted by the local German citizens of the town. The German citizens "were ordered" to obtain whatever supplies they could gather, and start to prepare meals for these former captives.

In previous cases, where smaller slave labor camps had been over run and liberated, the local German citizens "were ordered" to take them into their homes, and to care for them until the appropriate authorities were able to organize centers, where they would be processed and then attempts made to return them to their native homelands.

During the preceding months of the war, I had been a Liaison Officer, relaying messages and orders between the Division Headquarters and the 120th Regimental Headquarters. At this point the Division Headquarters was located in a leather tannery in Wolmirstedt, and the 120th Regimental Headquarters was located in Barleben. In this position, I was able to have access to the 'big picture' of what

was going on in our battle zone, on a large scale. So at this time, the war was basically over, and my duties were at a minimum level.

At this point, I was temporarily assigned the duty of 'lead escort' to guide this convoy of trucks back to Helmstedt, deposit this frail and sad group of humanity there, and then return for another load, over a period of the next two days.

Magdeburg finally surrendered on 18 April, and this was the end of combat for the men of the 30th Infantry Division, as we were not to be allowed to cross the Elbe River. This was assigned to be Russian territory – all of the way to Berlin. Our duties then changed to organization and operation of the City of Magdeburg, "Occupation duty", and we quietly waited for the Russians to proceed in front of us, to make the final thrust to Berlin, and then on 8 May, the war ended.

Unknown to me then, among this group was a Jewish man from Riga, Latvia.

Through the years, and as yet not totally clear to me, is how this man immigrated to the United States of America, and settled in Boynton Beach, Florida, only 250 miles from where I live in northern Florida!

Recently, this man, Ernest KAN, had been in contact with the authorities in the City of Magdeburg, and they in turn gave him my address, and he contacted me. Since then, we have had a few E-mail contacts, and we have each come to learn and agree that he had been a Holocaust Survivor, who was among the group that I had escorted back to Helmstedt on 13-14 April, 1945. We also learned that we had a mutual friend, Col. William D. Duncan, who lived in Vero Beach, Florida, near where he lived, but who had passed away just a few years ago.

Mr. KAN had also been invited back to the City of Magdeburg for the celebration on 17 April, and there we met for the 1st time in person! This was a very unique and emotional meeting! We both spoke to large audiences, giving our views as to what happened during those very dark, but joyful days for the liberated people of the City of Magdeburg.

We have come a complete circle after 60 years, by way of circumstances that neither one of us was responsible for, and had never dreamed of such an event ever happening.

In communicating with Mr. KAN, he has agreed to be one of our speakers at the Memorial Day ceremony to be held at Camp Blanding, Starke, Florida, on 30 May at 2:00 P.M. on the grounds of the Camp Blanding Museum.

Now, backing up a bit, on 15 April of this year, I left for Magdeburg, and upon arrival, I was confronted by a group of TV and newspaper personnel, as I had been the first combat veteran of their liberators to visit the City of Magdeburg. The City has only been "free" since 1989! Magdeburg had been in the Russian Zone of Occupation all of these years, and outside contact was very limited.

Magdeburg was not recognizable to me, as the last time that I had seen it, it was just a total pile of rubble. However, I was escorted to a very modern Hotel Maratim, with all modern conveniences that could match any comparable hotel in the USA.

The most important highlight of the trip took place on 17 April, Sunday. We were greeted by the Lord Mayor of the City of Magdeburg and given the symbolic 'keys to the city' after a hearty welcome.

I was scheduled to speak to an audience of about 1,000 people in the Magdeburg City Theater, with all eager to hear of the advance of the 30th Infantry Division to Magdeburg and the final capture of the City on 18 April 1945.

I was followed by Mr. KAN, who gave a summary of his early life, his being taken prisoner – just because he was a Jew – his life of incarceration and work as a slave laborer right there in Magdeburg, which was very compelling, and then finally his liberation by the 30th Infantry Division.

We continued a part of the next week together, having a complete tour of the City of Magdeburg, with the only thing that I do remember, which is the Dom Cathedral, although badly damaged at the time, has been almost fully restored to its previous greatness and beauty. Mr. Kan recognized almost

nothing except the camp building where he was housed and the ammunition plant where he had worked, now long ago abandoned.

On one of the next few days I was escorted to Barleben, where the 120th Regimental Headquarters had been located. The building, now almost unrecognizable to me, had been totally renovated, and now housing a day care center sponsored by the City of Barleben. Then a visit to Wolmirstedt, the location of the Division Headquarters during the Battle of Magdeburg. The Division Headquarters had been located in a leather tanning factory, but unfortunately, it had burned down about 5 years ago. On we went to Rogatz, our eastern most position on the Elbe River, then on to Colbitz, where we had overrun another small concentration camp. At Colbitz, we had a nice 'red carpet' reception and a tour of the local brewery. Samples were plentiful and Free!

On one of the days we were invited to speak to another group of about 500 persons, in a cultural center, a building that had survived any severe damage, and was a national historical site. Then more visiting around the city.

Another highlight of the trip was a day trip to Berlin – a city that we had been “cheated out of” by the Russians! It too had been totally reconstructed. We had a complete tour of the inner city of Berlin, viewing most all of the important buildings, including the Reichstag Building, comparable to our Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. We visited Check-Point Charlie, the main crossing point between East Berlin and West Berlin, and saw a portion of the Berlin Wall of the Cold War era. Next we visited the Allied War Museum, which covered the entire occupation period of Berlin, and then we had a nice leisurely cruise on the canals of Berlin, giving a different perspective of the modern architecture of the buildings.

Finally, but not least, we visited the newly constructed Jewish Holocaust Memorial, which is to be dedicated on 8 May 2005, 60 years after VE Day, in 1945. It is quite ironic that this Jewish Holocaust Memorial is situated in downtown Berlin, in full view from the German Reichstag Building. It is situated nearly on top of the former bunkers of Adolph Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, the two main architects of The Final Solution, “The Holocaust”, in which over 6 million Jews and 5 million other political dissenters were murdered.

Following our return to Magdeburg, we were hosted by the family of our guide of the week, the Villard family, having a wonderful reception, and a great meal in a home – so much more down to earth than in a restaurant. The family was so receptive and warm towards us, it made us all have more faith in all humanity. These were not the ‘monsters’ that we had envisioned during the war days.

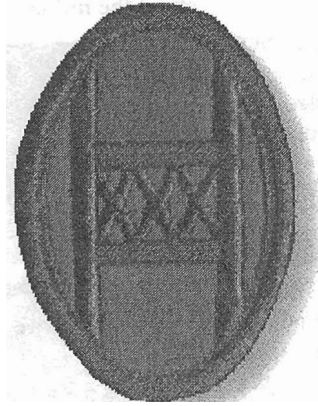
The next morning it was up before the crack of dawn, to drive 130 km to Hannover, to catch our flight home, then a long, long all day journey, arriving back in Orlando at 7:00 PM

So ended this epic visit to Magdeburg, and a reception that I can never forget.

Frank W. Towers
30th Infantry Division

Memorial Day 2005

Submitted by Mike Owens



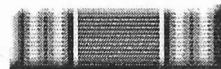
The Old Hickory Association rededicated the 30th Infantry Division monument placed on the North Carolina Capitol grounds. The monument was placed there after World War 1 by the mother' and friends of those 30th Division men who had been killed in action. The OHA took a moment prior to the start of the event to remind those attending of the service and sacrifice that the 30th Infantry Division has always provided this nation. The lineage of the Division can be traced to virtually every armed conflict that this nation has ever been a part. The Thirtieth Division has had a long tradition of southern military service. The 120th Infantry Regiment was descended from the First North Carolina Infantry, famous for its performance in Pickett's Charge. The North Carolinians, led by Lew Armistead waving his hat on his sabre, broke through the Union line at Gettysburg to achieve what is called "the high water mark of the Confederacy". Furthermore, components of the 120th could trace their heritage to units which fought the Tories at King's Mountain in 1780, and to pre-revolutionary war frontier Indian fighters called the Parkton Rangers. Also, the 117th Infantry Regiment came from the famous Tennessee Volunteers of the Mexican War, and also could be traced to units which had fought in the revolution. Furthermore, it was stated that again today, the 30th HSB (Heavy Separate Brigade) had just returned from duty in Iraq. As a pointed reminder, the OHA detailed the actions of the 30th Division during World War II. Also, it was pointed out that the Division was voted the "Finest Infantry Division in the European Theater of Operations during WWII". That distinction came with a heavy price.



Killed in Action: 3,003

Wounded in Action: 13,376

Died of Wounds: 513



UNIT NEWS

CFF 2005

The board of directors for Celebrate Freedom has decided they do not want to go with the field kitchen for the 2005 event. Kip Fordham would still like to us attend but has requested that we come up with some type of class to teach. We are open to suggestions on this issue.

OHA Storage Moved

With the help of Jaime Layman, Brett Bondurant, and Jim Higgins we got moved out of our former storage shed up in Butner. It was a brutally hot day with we had to stop for occasional liquid refreshment in order to maintain our stamina. It did seem that we had to stop more and more often as the day wore on. We loaded everything into the group's new enclosed trailer, which quickly became overloaded which I learned while attempted to stop for a light while going downhill.

We are currently constructing a new storage shed down here in Garner. Thanks to Jim Higgins, Matt Koonts, and Clint Yarbrough for lending a hand and tools for getting that project underway. Hopefully it will be completed in the next couple of weeks and we can get the equipment out of the trailer and into the shed.

The trailer will then be set up to carry our most common display items including all our tents. This way we can just take the trailer to a display and pull out what we need and not have to people together to load and unload from the storage shed.

Thanks again to those that helped when needed.

Kings Mountain Time line: by Brett Bondurant

On the weekend of May 28-29, 6 OHA members participated in a time line event held at Kings Mountain National Military Park, Kings Mountain, South Carolina. Kings Mountain was a very important battle in the Revolutionary War where "over the mountain men" (militia) defeated a force of disciplined British loyalist troops. A victory that helped turn the tide of the war in the South.

A time line event consists of uniformed persons portraying military units from various periods of U.S. history, from the Revolutionary War to the modern military. Each period sets up displays in chronological order so the public can see how the military has changed throughout the ages.

Time periods represented at Kings Mountain consisted of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War, WWI, WWII (Army and Navy), Korean War, Vietnam War, and the modern military. Brett Bondurant portrayed a Korean War soldier and had a 1951 field inspection layout, Robbie Lamb had a WWII field inspection layout along with his medical impression and wore the wool OD uniform, Patrick Morton assisted with the WWII display and wore HBT's, Walt Sowinski assisted the Vietnam unit (199th) Kent Triplett set up has machine gun display with his 1919 .30 machine gun and other items, and Clint Yarbrough, dressed as a National Guard soldier in denims and set up his mine detectors display. OHA members also par-

ticipated in a demonstration where weapons from the various time periods were explained and fired for the public.

I think everyone involved had a great time educating the public about the military history of America.



NCMHS Annual Meeting

Three members of the OHA attended the annual meeting of the NC Military Historical Society held at the state History Museum in Raleigh. We had been asked by Si Harrington, President of the society, to set up a small display as the theme of the day's discussion was the history of the 30th Infantry Division. We elected to set up our historical display which included our display boards, company photographs, and our collection of 1941 annuals and unit combat histories. While Brett Bondurant and I concentrated on the WWII display, Neil Trivette set up a great display of WWI memorabilia which was just a small part of his collection.

All the members of the society were extremely impressed with our display .

Fourth of July Display

The OHA set up a display at the state capitol in Raleigh for the annual Fourth of July celebration. The weather cooperated and we had a good turn-out of both our members and the public. Thanks to Brett Bondurant, Jim Higgins, Bobby Meyers, FJ Hale, Ken Hyatt and Don Shupe for their support.

2006 National Reunion of 30th IDA:

The OHA has submitted a proposal to host the 2006 National reunion in Raleigh. We had originally planned on it being in September of 2006 but we ran into a scheduling snafu with the hotel and had to move the date out to the end of October.

It will be held at the North Raleigh Hilton where we have hosted the Tar Heel Chapter reunions the last two years. We will be looking for a lot of support from our members for this project so pleas be prepared to step up and help.

OHA going to St. Louis

Six members of the OHA will be traveling to St. Louis, Missouri to support the 30th Infantry Division Association at their National reunion August 31st through September 4, 2005.

Dave Curtin, Jim Higgins, Matt Koonts, Mike Owens, Don Shupe and Neil Trivette will be leaving Tuesday morning August 30th in order to arrive sometime Wednesday morning in St. Louis in order to get our display set up in time for the reception Wednesday evening. We are planning on setting up a display similar to the National at Fayetteville last September. In order to get it all out there we will be renting a truck and a car to carry the OHA members.

In addition to the display we will be providing a Color Guard for their business meetings and the Memorial Service and we will be running the hospitality suite in which the display will be set up just like Fayetteville.

We will be getting some support from some mid-west groups just as the 105th Combat Engineers, the 117th Infantry, and the 2nd Ranger Battalion. The 2nd Rangers are from St. Louis and have offered to bring out some vehicles to display in front of the hotel.

Busy October Again

It looks like it will be a busy October, just as it was last year. We have three events on the schedule already.

On October 8/9 we have been requested to setup a display at the NCMHS museum at Kure Beach, NC. The following weekend we have been contracted to setup a display at the Chesterfield, VA air show. Last year they paid us \$1500. Two weeks later will be the Celebrate Freedom display in Camden, SC, and the first weekend in November will be the reenactment in Warren County. Please take a close look at this schedule and think about which ones you can help with. We can't expect the same members to try and do all the them. So again I ask that you please be prepared to help out.

2006 European Tour

"Back to the Bocage" The Second Armored Group's Summer 2006 Operation Cobra liberation tour

Dear All,

Following contact with the towns in the Normandy area, we have decided to commit 100% to a major Second Armored tour of the Bocage area to take place in July-August 2006. This tour is now officially launched and will go ahead barring national emergency or nuclear winter!

It is planned that this trip will follow the usual, well established and perfected Second Armored policy. Everything will be 100% official and run in conjunction with the local and national governments in France with permission for our selves, our weapons and our Armour. Gerald, who did a superlative job of French liaison on the 2004 "Seine to the Siegfried Line" trip has kindly agreed to take on the task of co-ordinating this side of the event.

Jon Heyworth, Nick Heighes and Ian Saunders will take on the other organization as usual. Tom Bowers and Russ Kirby will do their usual excellent job of USA co-ordination.

This trip is open to all re-enactors and the owners of suitable

vehicles who fulfill the well established uniform and personal appearance criteria and will be run along the well tried Second Armored trip principles of everyone is welcome and equal and that this trip is a self financing entity. You MUST abide by our authenticity standards and you MUST be paid up in full.

It is planned to travel on the ferry from Portsmouth to Cherbourg and travel via St Mere Eglise and Omaha beach down to St Lo and through the bocage country along the Second Armored's cobra route across to the Falaise pocket area and then swing up to Caen to take the ferry back to Portsmouth. Approximate mileage is in the region of 350. The duration of the trip is expected to be 9 days over 2 weekends. Cost of the trip will be £ 350.00 payable by a £ 50 deposit and equal installments by set payment dates. This covers the entire cost of the trip including all food, ferry, fuel and transportation except for museum admissions.

As usual, deposit is final. If you pull out of the trip for any reason, all money paid in is lost. If the trip is canceled for any reason by us, all moneys paid in less that which can be shown to have been irrecoverably spend is refundable. Any money left over after the trip is completed will be refunded.

In line with our policy of continual expansion and "pushing the envelope", it is hoped to take the following vehicles organized in the following way:

C Company 82nd Recon Battalion :

up to 12 M8 armored cars

up to 12 mg and mortar jeeps

up to 3 2 1/2 ton truck

kitchen trailer

D Company 82nd Recon Battalion:

up to 5 M5 light tanks

D company 41st armored infantry:

up to 5 half-tracks with 1 57mm A/T gun

B company 48th Medical Battalion:

up to 5 ambulances and a jeep

MP platoon:

up to 10 Harleys

The tanks will be transported by low loaders where they are not running cross country or at a commemoration. Full breakdown low loader cover will also shadow us with dedicated hired crews.

We would like to aim for no less than 200 participants on this event - easily achievable if everyone who came on the 2004 trip brought just one friend! The mileage on this trip will hopefully be limited to no more than 30 miles per day except for a possible 50-60 mile trip on the first and last days to and from the port.

Camping will be combat on this event. We are aiming for ruined chateau, farms and orchards throughout. Do not expect a shower and a flushing toilet and you will not be disappointed! It is also hoped to be able to do at least half of the trip across country. Several town liberation scenarios and commemorations are already in the pipeline and it is hoped to be able to do some level of firing re-enactment both by day and by night as we did in 1999. If you are interested in this event please register your interest as soon as possible please. A DVD is available of the 2004 trip and further regular information will be forwarded during the run up to departure.

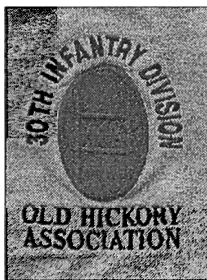
jon heyworth <jonm4sherman@yahoo.com>

For Sale

Old Hickory Association Items:

Grey T-Shirt w/ OHA logo, S-XL \$10, XXL \$12.50
Golf Shirt, White or Grey, w/ OHA, S-XL \$22.50, XXL \$25.00
Grey Sweatshirt w/ OHA logo, S-XL \$18, XXL \$20.00
Ball Cap, Grey body w/ blue bill w/ OHA logo, \$11.00
Prices do not include shipping.

Contact Brett Bondurant
919-431-0984,
bbondo@bellsouth.net



Reproduction Items:

World War II Reproduction Rations
Complete reproduction of WW2 K ration, C ration, and D bars, as well as other accessories such as Foot Powder, Charms, PK gum, fuel tablets, batteries, and more. Catalog available.
www.angelfire.com/nc/stug
Todd Hogan, 224 S. Melville Street, Graham, NC 27253
Email: thogan@triad.rr.com

World War II Impressions

U.S. Army uniforms and accessories. Catalog available.
7165 Adwen Street, Downey, CA, 90241
Fax and Phone: (562) 927-6922 Email: WWIIIMPRESSIONS@MSN.COM

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Salinas CA 93901
Toll Free Order Line: 888-431-2351
Inquiry Line: 831-754-2351 <http://www.whatpriceglory.com/usunif.htm>

Upcoming Events

August 31-Sept 3, 2005

30th IDA National Reunion
St. Louis, Missouri

October 8/9, 2005

NCMH Museum Display
Kure Beach, NC

October 15/16, 2005

Chesterfield, VA Air show

October

27/29, 2005

Celebrate Freedom
Camden, SC

November, 2005

Buck Springs
Reenactment
TBD

October 2006

30th IDA National Reunion.
Raleigh, NC.

The Old Hickory Chronicle is the newsletter of The Old Hickory Association. It is published 6 times a year in January, March, May, July, September and November. Articles are contributed by members of the Association and submissions are always welcome.
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