

## ■RUPLINGER: BATTLE OF THE BULGE

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in half in reclaiming the valuable harbor of Antwerp, the Battle of the Bulge wore heavily on United States forces that were greatly outnumbered as the Allies were mostly caught off-guard by the attack. The battle took place over a three-week period starting Dec. 16, 1944, and claimed the lives of almost 20,000 American soldiers.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Tiger Division worked to secure the southern hinge of the Bulge in brutally cold conditions while greatly outnumbered and under-equipped. The Germans also took advantage of heavily overcast weather conditions at the time of the attack, which grounded the Allies' overwhelmingly superior air forces.

"The Germans had us surrounded and had cut off our supply lines. Everything was fogged in, so we could not use planes. Communication was knocked out and we were out of ammo," Ruplinger said. "The Germans had given us two hours to surrender or face complete annihilation. We were just sitting there waiting for what would happen next."

"The day was Dec. 24, 1944. The 10<sup>th</sup> Division was unable to communicate with those outside the area due to the weather, so Ruplinger switched over to a commercial radio setting where he was able to pick up a German station featuring Axis Sally, a propaganda broadcaster whose job it was to put fear in the Allied forces and make them homesick.

"At one point she said that they had us encircled and were preparing to completely annihilate us as a Christmas present for Hitler," Ruplinger said. "It was minus 20 degrees and we very under-equipped to handle the cold. We would have been annihilated on Christmas."

At the time the Tiger Division was under the command of the often profane but religious General George S. Patton as part of his Third Army. Ruplinger said upon learning about the soldiers being fogged in and the almost certain annihilation they faced, Patton went to the chaplain Christmas Eve to pray for nice weather so the military's vastly superior aerial forces could be sent to help.

"I woke Christmas morning and looked to the sky and it was as clear as a bell. And there were waves of (Allied) bombers coming one after another," Ruplinger said.

At that point, Ruplinger said an unknown man approached three generals that were stationed on the ground and requested a radio to talk with the bomber pilots. The man gave coordinates where German ammo and precious fuel were being stored. The pilots used the coordinates to eliminate the targets with precision. Ruplinger said following the successful aerial attack they went to thank the unknown man but he was gone and nobody knew who he was. He added Patton's prayers were always answered.

### A nurse's wedding, funeral gown

While the Christmas Day air raid by the United States was able to save many, it didn't come soon enough for a local nurse who had volunteered to help care for the many wounded coming into a makeshift hospital the 10<sup>th</sup> Division's doctor had set up as the Battle of the Bulge raged on.

On Christmas Eve, the German Army conducted a significant bomb raid on the area to make way for the ground assault set to take place the next day. As medical supplies dwindled and the number of fatally wounded began to mount, a young nurse and another answered the doctor's call for volunteers to help out at the hospital that had been commandeered out of a city house. The young nurse told the 10<sup>th</sup> Division's doctor she was engaged to a soldier in the army and planned to make her wedding gown out of the silky, white material from one of the parachutes.

Ruplinger said it was feared everyone inside the hospital was killed when a bomb hit and collapsed the home that night. However, the doctor alerted some soldiers to a basement level of the home where one of the nurses was pulled from a window before the building completely collapsed, killing everyone else still trapped inside.

"The nurse was able to tell the doctor where the other nurse's parents lived," Ruplinger said. "He wrapped her in that white parachute and later went to help the family bury her. She was buried in her 'wedding gown'."

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill later called the victory at the Battle of the Bulge one of the greatest of the war. Ruplinger said they were well aware of the importance of protecting the port of Antwerp and how the direction of the war could have changed had the enemies been able to reclaim the supply route.

On Dec. 31, 1944, the 10<sup>th</sup> was released from Patton's command and over 1,000 men were sent to Metz, France, to recuperate following two weeks of intense fighting at the Battle of the Bulge. They had secured a large cement block building upon arriving at the city where they had planned to rest and recover, and while inside, heard a bunch of shooting taking place. They looked out to find German fighter planes destroying their vehicles. It was then Ruplinger said one of his fellow soldiers ran outside and used the machine gun on a tank to take down one of the planes.

The plane, it would turn out, was a German Me 262, a first-of-its-kind jet bomber the Germans had developed and introduced to the world for the first time at the Battle of the Bulge. Ruplinger snapped a photo of the downed plane, which he still has to this day.

### A miracle to survive

On more than one occasion the war almost claimed Ruplinger's life. The last thing he remembered was standing with a lieutenant looking down a road in a village that the Germans had been heavily bombing with artillery shells when everything went blank.

"It is not like in the movies where you hear a screech. Those are the ones that you waved at as they went by," Ruplinger said in adding it was the ones you didn't hear coming that would take your life.

"When I came to I was lying in the weeds in a field. I did not know what had happened or how long I had been lying there. I did not know who I was, and when I was finally able to get up, I walked back to the street where I vaguely remembered standing



Ralph Ruplinger

with someone."

When he got back to the street he could see someone lying on the other end of the road and people rushing to help him. He walked down to where the man was and learned an artillery shell had gone off right between where he and the lieutenant had been just moments prior. Fortunately the soft ground they had been standing on absorbed all the shrapnel from the bomb, so both men were able to walk away after being blown a considerable distance from the nearby impact site.

"There were a lot of times I was not sure how I survived," Ruplinger said in his *Tomahawk Leader* interview, recalling another time his partner had mistaken him for a German soldier and almost shot him point blank in the head had the gun not failed. "There I was just lying in the grass. I guess I just got lucky there."

While the 10<sup>th</sup> Tiger Division fought the SS and German Army, Ruplinger said they always treated the German people good and would even give frightened children candy while conducting searches of homes in the many villages they had to clear along the way. He recalled one day he was guarding a group of prisoners who were talking in German about relatives that had previously moved to the United States. Not knowing that Ruplinger was an interpreter, one of them finally

concluded that they all should have gone over to America while they still had the chance.

Ruplinger recalled one German prisoner with an amazing voice who would sing a song "Maria Lina" that he had made up for his wife. He said he was unsure if the song was ever recorded, but often thought of it and even tried to find a copy in the years to follow back in the states. To this day he still wonders about the song.

As WWII was winding down, the 10<sup>th</sup> Tiger Division was called to help secure a vast amount of wealth being stored in a remote area of Bavaria where the German elite had stashed large amounts of gold and other valuables in caves. Deep valleys and mountains cut the area off from its surroundings, and the only access was a bridge that had been mined to blow up in the event the Allied Forces had prevailed. Ruplinger said they were able to save the bridge and later located the vast supply of gold bars and other gems that had been stashed away.

"One guy even found one of the gold bars had been hidden away in a stove that he found while trying to light a fire," he added.

Upon arriving back in the states, Ruplinger went to Tennessee to see his wife and finally meet his year-old child (Ruplinger was the first soldier from the division to have a child



**THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN after Ralph Ruplinger returned to America following World War II. He arrived in Tennessee only to find his wife and newborn child were visiting his family in Tomahawk. Ruplinger would leave for home a short time later to reunite with his new wife and meet his year-old son for the first time.**

born while overseas). Unfortunately, he would learn his wife and son, Donald, were visiting family in Tomahawk at the time and they would have to wait a bit longer to be reunited.

In 1978, the Ruplingers joined others from the 10<sup>th</sup> Tiger Division in going back to Europe to tour the many locations where the division had once been. They also reunited at a different location around the country for 30 years up until 2006, when a Final Salute was held for the 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Tiger Division due to health reasons of survivors.

Ruplinger took part in the Never Forgotten Honor Flight to D.C. in 2011, where he was able to view the many monuments the nation has constructed in his and other veterans' honor.

One month after returning from the flight, Ina "Susie" Ruplinger passed away at the age of 91. The couple that fate had brought together while crossing paths on a train were married for 68 years.

The two had four children, seven great-grandchildren and nine great-great-grandchildren with another on the way. Ralph will be 95 in February.

His family recently went in to purchase an "Ike Jacket" that included replicas of all the military patches and armbands he earned while serving in WWII and at the Battle of the Bulge. He wore it in Tomahawk's July 4 Pow Wow Day Parade, where he proudly served as this year's Grand Marshal.

Ralph Ruplinger served in the deadliest battle the United States was involved in during WWII. And thanks to many answered prayers and the guidance of fate, he was able to survive and is still going strong to this day.



**VFW ADDS INGMAN'S NAME:** The Tomahawk Wurl-Feind Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2687 proudly announced the name of Medal of Honor recipient Einar Ingman has been added to the post's name. VFW member Bill Burcalow said the organization began efforts to have Ingman included after a recent rule change allowed posts to take the name of surviving Medal of Honor recipients. He added the Wurl-Feind-Ingman Post 2687 is probably one of, if not the first post to change its name to have a Medal of Honor recipient included in its title. Ingman earned the Medal of Honor for his acts of valor in combat during the Korean War. Pictured with the plaque dedicating the post as the Wurl-Feind-Ingman VFW is, front from left, Burcalow, Bob Zipp, David Hubatch, Ron Jensen; back, Bill Schwaller and Gerry Dvorak.

- Leader Photo by Jed Buelow

## Lincoln County Supervisor John Bailey remembered; replacement being sought

By Kathy Tobin

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Lincoln County Board District 18 Supervisor, Harrison Town Board chairman and business owner, John E. "T.C. John" Bailey, 59, died Saturday, July 19 in Bundy, doing what his family said he loved, serving his customers.

He was a 1973 graduate of Rhinelander High School. He and his sister opened Bailey's Town and Country Inn in downtown Bundy in the late 1980's. He owned and operated that business at the time of his death.

Bailey was elected to the Lincoln County Board in April 2008 and was serving as chair of the Land Services Committee, vice-chair of the Highway Committee and as a member of the Board of Health and Forestry committees.

"John was very diligent and thorough. He represented his electors well. He took pride in his position by participating in the appropriate meetings and following through with what was expected of him," stated Lincoln County Clerk Chris Marlowe. "He was a very respected member of our board and will be dearly missed."

"I've know John since he was elected to the board," offered Lincoln County Board Chair Bob Lussow. "I can tell you that he spent the time and was an active member on all the committees he served on as well as the board. While he and I disagreed on some subjects, he was always willing to try to find a reasonable solution to the problem. He was very active in the ATV club and promoted both the ATV and snowmobile groups. I am reminded of the story of a snowmobiler who left his chair for a moment and when he came back, his snowmobile jacket was gone. John went in the back and brought out one of his and said something to the effect that it's cold out. Seems like that pretty much says it all."

His obituary listing other involvement is published on Page 3.

Lincoln County has posted a supervisor vacancy notice in the July 29 *Tomahawk Leader*. District 18 includes the Town of Harrison and Town of King, Ward 1. Letters of interest/qualifications to replace Supervisor Bailey will be taken until 10 a.m. Aug. 6 with Robert Lussow, Board Chair, %Lincoln County Clerk's Office, 801 N. Sales St., Merrill, WI 54452. The County Board expects to approve an appointment at its Aug. 19 meeting. For more information, call 715-539-1019.

## ■TOMAHAWK NATIONALS

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year."

The collection of antique items on display at SARA Park is just part of the interest, as the event draws a lot of collectors and vendors who sell parts and motors along "the strip" (the old plane runway). The show also features a number of water events on adjacent Lake Mohawksin Thursday and Friday that also provide plenty of free and exciting entertainment that can be viewed from SARA Park. Dalle Ave added they make the timed runs a little longer to provide all participants a shot at winning; even those who have missed the first half of the race because their motors won't start.

"It can get pretty entertaining with some of the old motors," he said, adding Thursday night will once again feature the parade up to Kings Dam, which can be viewed from either Veterans Memorial Park or Kwahamot Park, as well as the Evinrude Ice Cream Run on Friday at 1 p.m. that is based on the story of how the first ever outboard motor was made.

This year's show will also celebrate Mercury Outboard Motor's 75<sup>th</sup> year and the Mercury Twister II Outboard Powered Hydroplane Jim Merten of Oshkosh set a class speed record with will also be on display.

Dalle Ave added he has once again been getting a lot of feedback from people planning to attend from all across the country and is expecting big crowds for this year's show.

"As far as facilities are concerned, we could not ask for a better site than SARA Park to host the show," Dalle Ave said. "With water nearby, indoor facilities, space for the vendors, the boat yard and camping, it really is ideal for us."

The Tomahawk National Antique & Classic Outboard Motor and Boat Show gets underway tomorrow and runs through Saturday, Aug. 2. The show runs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, with the arena open until 9 p.m. (except Saturday). This is a show, swap meet and sale.

Among some of the highlights are:  
Wednesday, July 30 – 8 a.m., earliest set-up time; 8 a.m.-5 p.m., registration.

Thursday, July 31 – 8-10 a.m., 11 a.m.-1 p.m., 2-3 p.m. and after 4 p.m., open running; 10-11 a.m., Merc KF5/Mark 5 event; 1-2 p.m., Mod Zephyr event; 3-4 p.m., 5 hp, TS, TN, TD Stock Johnson event; 6 p.m., cruise followed by boat parade around water ski show and hot dog cookout for participants.

Friday, Aug. 1 – 8-10 a.m., open running; 10-11 a.m., Stock Zephyr eliminations, followed by finals; 11 a.m.-noon, oldest running outboard event; 1 p.m., third annual Bess Evinrude Memorial Ice Cream Run.

Saturday, Aug. 2 – 8-10 a.m., open running; 10-11 a.m., predicted log; open running rest of day; meet ends at 5 p.m.; 7 p.m. banquet, with bar open at 6 p.m.

For more information, call 715-536-5649.

## Roundtable discussions with governor's director of Legislative, Local Affairs

Lincoln County will be the site for two roundtable discussions this week with Cindy Polzin, senior director of Legislative and Local Affairs for Gov. Scott Walker. The sessions will take place Thursday, July 31 at 9 a.m. in Room 258 of the Lincoln County Service Center, 801 N. Sales St., Merrill; and 2:30 p.m. at the William Buedingen Training Center, W6147 State Road 86, Tomahawk.

"Cindy will be in the midst of a statewide tour of our 72 counties. Gov. Walker, through Cindy, is hoping to get a better understanding of our individual county needs and how they relate to our statewide needs. These discussions are intended to give the governor feedback as to how enacted legislation has affected us in Lincoln County and how proposed legislation may impact us in the future. This is also an excellent opportunity for us to give the governor's office feedback on how we feel they have performed over the past term," notes Lincoln County Clerk Chris Marlowe.

Persons with questions should contact Marlowe's office at 715-529-1019.