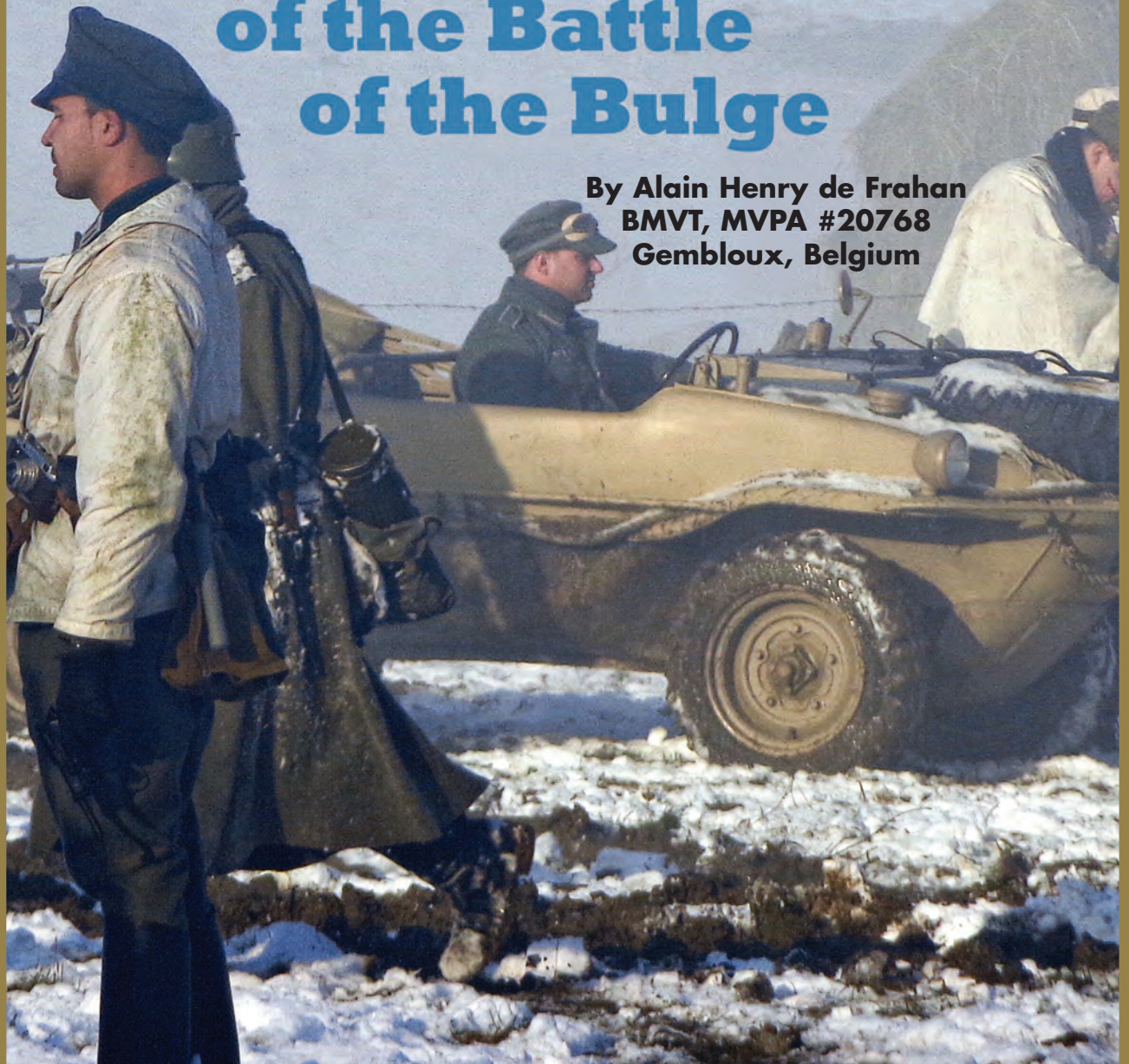


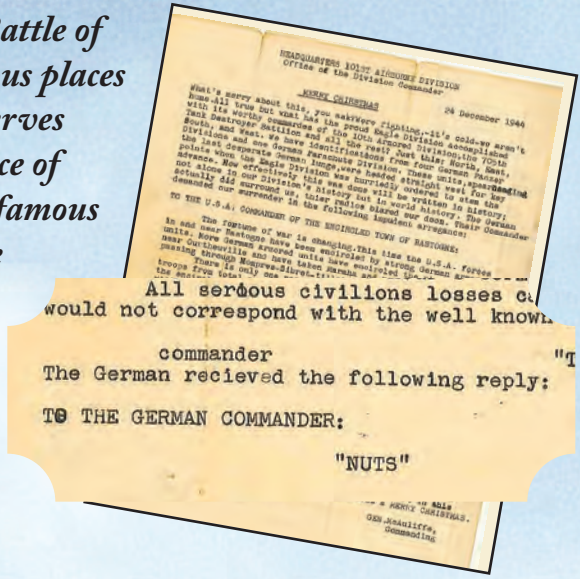
Bastogne 2014

70th Anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge

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The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the 'Battle of the Bulge' saw several events organized in various places in the Belgian Ardennes. Bastogne certainly deserves particular attention thanks to the heroic resistance of the American 101st Airborne Division, and the famous 'Nuts' reply given by Brig. Gen. McAuliffe to the German proposal of surrender. Other cities and villages also commemorated the harsh combat that took place from 16th December 1944 until 31st January 1945, when the German Army was finally forced back to their starting line.



When Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel, commanding officer of the 5th Panzer Armee, launched his offensive in a sector encompassing Bastogne, he created havoc in the area. In December 2014, without needing von Manteuffel to repeat his action, the same region saw nearly the same mess, as no effective coordination of the various events was evident.

Numerous commemorations, military vehicle convoys, marches, etc. took place between the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and eastern Belgium – the latter sector having been much more damaged than the Bastogne area, in December 1944 by the 6th SS Army.

About twenty US veterans who had fought in the Ardennes were invited to various ceremonies, mainly in Bastogne. They expressed their deepest feelings at such a warm reception, and were even congratulated by King Philippe and Queen Mathilde of Belgium.

ARMORED CONVOY – 'TANKS IN TOWN' 2014, AND THE BMVT IN ACTION

Those who attended *Tanks in Town 2014* requested Pierre Deghaye, of the Royal Mons Auto Moto Club (RMAMC), to organize a convoy in the Bastogne area. He accepted and contacted the forestry administration responsible for the area.



The author's Willys MB and Karl Delrue's M5A1 Stuart in Mande-Saint-Étienne, while the convoy of tanks and other armored vehicles was formed up in close cooperation by the *Tanks in Town* team and the Belgian Military Vehicle Military Trust. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).

When Karl Delrue (BMVT) bought his M5A1 Stuart, as a wreck, the turret was missing so he fabricated the entire unit. Standing in the Stuart turret is an 82nd Airborne reenactor (right) and my son William. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



The M4 Sherman, owned by the city of Mons, but operated by the Royal Mons Auto Moto Club, is powered by a Diesel engine. However, the original Continental C1 could still be reinstalled as the engine compartment has not been modified. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



André and William Witmeur, leaning against the M4 Sherman owned by the city of Mons, watch as a Dodge WC57 Command Car passes by in Mande-Saint-Étienne. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



The convoy of armored vehicles could rely on the assistance provided by a Diamond T 969 owned by a member of the French club *Ardennes 44*. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



Didier Ruth (BMVT) always drives his jeep with the windshield folded down, no matter what the weather may be. One tough guy! (© Jean de Moraes).

This superb Ford M8, owned by 'little Nick,' of the Belgian club *Patton Drivers*, made its first sortie on that historical weekend. (© Jean de Moraes).



Thomas Kohl came from Germany with his M16 half-track, which he christened 'Luftwaffe's Nightmare.' (© Jean de Moraes).

André Witmeur, president of the *Belgian Military Vehicle Trust (BMVT)*, and also an MVPA member, joined the project and negotiated a deal with the *Bastogne War Museum* for a special reception of the participants. This close cooperation between *Tanks in Town* and the *BMVT* would prove fantastic!

Saturday December 13 saw about fifteen armored vehicles, and just as many soft-skin vehicles, gathered in the village of Mande-Saint-Étienne, northwest of Bastogne, Belgium.



On snow and muddy ground the Dodge WC63 proves more stable than a 4x4 (© Jean de Moraes).



Déjà vu, December 1944, when the snow started to fall in Belgium. Or when Patton's 3rd US Army started its rush toward Bastogne to break the German encirclement. A Ford M8 is followed by an M3A1 and a M16 half-track. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



Participant vehicles were the M4 Sherman and M5A1 Stuart belonging to the city of Mons, Karl Delrue's M5A1 Stuart, several half-tracks, M8s and M20s from Belgium, France and Germany. They were joined by a handful of jeeps, Dodge trucks, GMCs, two wreckers (a Diamond T 969 from France, and a Ward LaFrance M1A1 from Switzerland), plus an M29 Weasel from the Czech Republic. This very impressive convoy snaked through the countryside trails and roads, at times

under heavy snow that gave the historic touch hoped for by the participants.

At noon, just after passing through Champs, the convoy stopped in Hemroulle for a much appreciated 'soup stop' provided by the BMVT. Then the convoy, led by Wallis Witmeur, began its final leg to the Mardasson memorial, the famed historical monument built northeast of Bastogne. Once parked, each participant received a complimentary ticket to the Bastogne War Memorial

The Studebaker M29 Weasel was obviously in its planned environment; however no opportunity was given to its driver to demonstrate it in deep snow. (© Emmanuel Henry de Frahan).

and lunch, through an arrangement made by André Witmeur and the museum.

At 1730 h a great light and sound show was staged at the Mardasson monument. It was watched by hundreds of spectators, as well as those American veterans who felt able to attend in such wintry conditions.

ACTIVITIES AT BASTOGNE BARRACKS

The barracks of the disbanded 1st Artillery Regiment house a subsidiary of *The Royal Museum of the Army* (Brussels), plus the historic cellar in which Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe – renowned for his explicit reply to the German commander – had established his 101st Airborne Headquarters.

Nearly 12,000 people visited the hangars of the former Belgian army unit during the weekend. They were attracted by the vehicle restoration center where tanks, armored and soft-skin vehicles are rebuilt. The current work in progress on the very rare German SturmGeschutz III Ausf. F.8 deserves a special mention.



Pierre Deghaye, leader of the Tanks-in-Town team (standing right), is conferring in Hemroulle with the driver of the 'Ô Saint-Georges,' the M4 Sherman owned by the city of Mons. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



An impressive gathering of tanks and armored vehicles in Hemroulle for a very much-appreciated 'hot soup halt' offered by the BMVT. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).

Two other hangars are dedicated to various static displays. A poor selection of vehicles in running condition was made available for the short circuit around the parade ground. When one considers how dynamic foreign museums have become by involving their vehicles in reenactments and movies, *The Royal Museum of the Army* should take note.

Their administration was recently questioned about discretely getting rid of many rare and valuable vehicles and parts, which they denied on the ground that these pieces were not officially registered in the museum's inventory. Several Sherman and Greyhound turrets, splendid Kenworth and Ward LaFrance M1 wreckers and a lot of other vehicle



This Ward LaFrance M1A1 heavy wrecker, was transported on a semi-trailer from Switzerland. (© Emmanuel Henry de Frahan).



Three of the half-track participants in the armored convoy were photographed at a halt point. Two of them came from the *Véhicules Militaires Historiques – Anjou* club in France. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).

parts were sold to a scrap dealer! And their actual fate is really unclear. This was disappointing to the people who have been working on the museum's vehicles for decades.

On Sunday afternoon, the museum's Morris Commercial C8 FAT towing a Bofors 40 mm AA gun, a French Renault UE tankette with trailer and the Sherman Firefly took part in the parade in Bastogne.

The M24 Chaffee belonging to Nicolas Georges / *Jeepest* (France) before taking part to the battle reenactment in Recogne. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).





Left, Jef Keuppens (BMVT) with his M36 Jackson tank destroyer in Recogne, before the battle reenactment. (© Jef Keuppens).

BATTLE REENACTMENT IN RECOGNE

About five miles north of Bastogne is the village of Recogne, at the outskirts of which is the German military cemetery for their losses in battle. For a couple of years Recogne was the theater for a static and dynamic reenactment of the fierce fighting that ravaged the village in December 1944, and early January 1945. Serge Balleux, president of the *Duty First* club, was in charge of the reenactment.

Two miles east is Cobru, a smaller village that annually covers the German side. François-Xavier Jordens, leader of the *Historical Military Remember Association (HMRA club)*, presided over the reenactment there.

Both associations are involved in the *Ardennes Memories* <www.ardennesmemories.com>. Due to some atrocities perpetrated by SS units in the area (POW and civilian killings), the battle reenactment

The M24 Chaffee of Nicolas Georges and the M36 Jackson, of Jef Keuppens, are both beautifully restored. They were stopped side-by-side on the fine sunny morning before the battle reenactment in Recogne. (© Jef Keuppens).





Beginning of the battle reenactment in Recogne. A Dodge WC63 towing a 57 mm anti-tank gun is shown moving to its position. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



Hugo Jottard's OT-810 (Czech post-war copy of the Sd.Kfz 251 Ausf.D) and a VW 82 Kübelwagen, brought by the Polish *SRH AAZ* group among, other vehicles and reenactors photographed before the second act that would see the 101st Airborne push the Germans back in the village of Recogne. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



Jef Keuppens' M36 Jackson was neutralized by the Panther. The German reenactors took shelter by it during the American counter-attack. (© Emmanuel Henry de Frahan).



Unfortunately, because of the deep mist obscuring the valley at the beginning of the battle reenactment, Michel Bastin missed the bridge while driving François-Xavier Jordens' OT-810 and got stuck. Jef Keuppens' M36 Jackson, at the conclusion of the show, easily recovered the vehicle. (© Jef Keuppens).

set up by the *Ardennes Memories* association excludes reenactors in SS uniforms. Only Wehrmacht uniforms and vehicle markings are allowed.

At 1315 h on Sunday a spectacular reenactment reminded all of the fierce fighting in Recogne and in the adjoining area. Nicolas Evrard, Daniel Van Boeckel and I broadcast the event on the town's public address system.

About three hundred reenactors were involved, along with an M24 Chaffee, an M36 Jackson tank destroyer, a Panther (the famed Polish copy built on a T-55), a Sd.Kfz 251 Ausf.D (OT-810), as well as jeeps, Dodges, Kübelwagen and Schwimmwagen. Thousands of spectators expressed their strong admiration for the work performed.

There were three acts; German attack, US counter-attack, and street fighting. Thousands of blank rounds were fired, comprising tank shells, hand grenade and mortar shell explosions. Unfortunately, because of the deep mist that obscured the scene at the beginning of the battle reenactment, François-Xavier Jordens' OT-810 driver missed a small bridge, and completely bogged down in a small river.

Additional photographs may be seen at <www.BMVT.eu> Links to the battle reenactment and the Panther in action are, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=rksGtmbRv2o> <www.youtube.com/watch?v=g571yJBOa2c> <www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXZpz--2gsc> Enter: <Bastogne 2014> <Recogne 2014> and <Cobru 2014> in YouTube to see more.

PARADE IN THE MAIN STREET OF BASTOGNE

As usual, on Sunday at 1500 h, dozens of vehicles took part in a parade on the main street of Bastogne to the applauses of a large crowd.

WHAT NEXT?

Much more successful, spectacular, and crowd-gathering commemorations could be achieved. But what is needed is better knowledge, understanding and cooperation among the authorities in Bastogne, toward the ever-growing world of military vehicle and reenactment associations that are willing to discuss common issues. Let's cross our fingers!



Act I of the reenactment. Here the (Polish) Panther and German troops have overwhelmed the American troops defending Recogne. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



After the end of Act II, of the battle reenactment, the Panther took German infantrymen aboard for Act III in the village of Recogne itself. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).



The village of Recogne, north of Bastogne, was the theater of a battle reenactment. In Act III, the Germans are pushed back by the US 101st Airborne. (© Alain Henry de Frahan).

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