

Interviews for “34th ID War on Terror” Book



Reunion - 34th Infantry Division Association

The 2016 Reunion of the 34th Infantry Division Association will be Friday and Saturday, October 14th and 15th, 2016 at the Johnston, Iowa Stoney Creek Inn. This will be the 69th Reunion of the Association.

Please refer to the Reunion Program Information Sheet on page 3 as well as the Registration Form on Page 8, of this newsletter. This is the only mailing for the reunion. This newsletter as well as the information sheet and registration form can be downloaded off the 34th Inf Div Assn Web Site, www.34ida.org

The Des Moines Chapter will host the Reunion at the Stoney Creek Inn, which is the same hotel used for the 2013 and 2014. A special effort is being made to include our many combat veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan deployments of the 1st ABCT, the 2nd IBCT, the 34th CAB, and the deployment of the 34th Inf Div HQ's.

Current Des Moines Chapter President, Col (Ret) Curly Albrecht, said he is anxious to draw many new soldiers, who have served in the 34th Inf Div, to the Friday event at the Beaverdale VFW. All beverages, to include drinks and beer, as well as the dinner, will cost a flat rate of \$15 per person.

The Association's Saturday sponsored activities will be at Camp Dodge and the Stoney Creek Inn.

The featured speaker at the reunion banquet will be Mr. Brian Leehan. Brian is the author of our **soon to be published book “The 34th Infantry Division in the War on Terror, 2001-2016.”**

He will talk about the soldiers he met and the stories he heard while researching the book. This book, which details all the unit and organizational deployments of the division from 2001 through 2016, will be published in early 2017. The book will include a memorial section covering all of the soldiers who lost their lives while serving under the 34 Infantry Division in a combat theater.

Brian is a graduate of the University of Minnesota with an M.A. degree in journalism. A former staff writer with the Star Tribune in Minneapolis, he is also author of the award-winning book **“Pale Horse at Plum Run”** about the 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry (2-135th Infantry) in the Civil War. The book provides a detailed telling of the strategic role the regiment played in the Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg.



Mr. Brian Leehan interviews Lt. Col. John Cunningham at the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum. Brian is capturing dozens of interviews to help tell the history, personal service and sacrifice of the soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division in the Global War on Terror.
Photo by MSG Ashlee L. Sherrill

Your story is needed!

It's a pleasure, and an honor, to be asked to write the history of the 34th ID in the Global War on Terror. The voice of every soldier who deployed is important to telling this story truthfully and completely. The reports and cold statistics are, of course, essential – but the life and heart of the story comes from each of you who served in the multiple deployments since 2002. What everyone did, whether an E-1, General or those in-between, was important to accomplishing the mission.

We are focusing on those 34th ID units from the Iowa and Minnesota NG who deployed between 2002 and now, specifically to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Kosovo, Bosnia, Egypt (the Sinai) and Germany.

If you are willing to be interviewed, or just have a story to share, please contact me. We can set up a time and place, or simply have a phone interview. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you!

Brian Leehan

612-638-8043 (cell); brianleehan@gmail.com

Hello RED BULL TEAM!

Hello Team! This is your spring addition of the newsletter and I hope it finds you well. As always there's been some great progress towards the effort on the history book, the planning for the reunion and continued effort to expand the Association in other geographical areas, while we buildup standing Chapters. We hope to have the 34th Infantry Division Global War on Terror History Book written by the end of 2016, and sent to the printers during the 1st Quarter of 2017. Brian Leehan will be interviewing soldiers and researching the history of the deployments during the summer months.

Included in the letter are more expanded details for the October Reunion in Johnston, Iowa. It will be a great time and I look forward to seeing everyone there. If you weren't tracking we will begin the planning process for the upcoming events associated with the 100th Anniversary of the Division. Next year will be full of great events being held in Minnesota and Iowa. We will continue to work with the Infantry Association here in Iowa to gain and gather more young members to our ranks.

Our Division remains extremely ready for any mission and the men and women are accomplishing tasks and training in Egypt, Alaska, South Korea, Turkey, Fort Polk and on and on. We keep all these Soldiers in our prayers. We must continue to ensure our purpose, our history, and the future of the organization is maintained.



ATTACK!

LTC Tim Sulzner
34th Infantry Division Association President
timothy.j.sulzner.mil@mail.mil

*Final Roll Call Prayer
May they have no
more hills to climb,
nor cold, nor rain, nor mud,
nor enemy fire,
and may they now rest in Peace.*

34th Inf Div Final Roll Call

Names Winter 2016

- Bernard F. Brosky, 1-168 Inf, 34th ID
- Fred Iovanello, E 135th Inf, 34th ID
- Calvin Nading, F 133rd Inf, 34th ID
- Douglas M. Dickerson, 34th ID
- Joseph McFarland, 34th ID
- Tamotsu Akiyoshi, B 100th Inf, 34th ID
- Arthur Seinoshin Kurahara, D 100th Inf 34th
- Shinsuke Shimabukuro, HQ 100th Inf 34th
- Naoki Takamura, A 100th Inf, 34th ID
- Raymond Rudolph, 34th ID
- Arnold L. Crable, 34th ID
- Roger C. Haring, 34th ID
- John Kelly, 34th ID
- Daniel Kishter, 34th ID
- Rudy Monsaas, 34th ID
- Phillip Saladino, A 133rd, 34th ID
- George Zakel, HQ 133rd, 34th ID
- Leigh Davis, 1-168th, 34th ID

Names Spring 2016

- Aaron Kupferschmidt, 133 Inf, 34th ID
- Arthur C. Philbrook, E 133rd, 34th ID
- Dennis Krauth, 168th Inf, 34th ID
- Salvatore J. Prisco, K 168th Inf, 34th ID
- Robert J. Prock, 34th ID
- Theodore (Ted) Friesner, 2nd Bn 133rd Regt
- Jun Shiosake, A 100th Inf, 34th ID
- Hiram Tetsuo Hagiwara, HQ Co, 100th 34 ID
- Glen Nelson Brink, 168th Inf, 34th ID
- Nicholas H. Rech, 34th ID
- Joseph Buhl, 168th Inf, 34th ID
- Vincent Shields, AT Co, 135th Inf, 34th ID
- Elwin H. Diehl, M 168th Inf, 34th ID
- Harry Kiyabu, D 100th Inf, 34th ID
- Malcolm S. Baraibar, 1-168th Inf, 34th ID
- Eugene B. Alexander, E 168th Inf, 34th ID
- Carlos Puntena, C 1-168th Inf, 34th ID
- Dr. Denis Teraoka, D 100th Inf, 34th ID
- Fred A. Takayama, A 100th Inf, 34th ID
- Donald R. Prock, 34 Sig Co, 34th ID
- Raymond H. Rassler, 194th FA, 34th ID
- Robert J Butman, , 34th Inf Div

National Office-34th Infantry Division Association

Iowa Gold Star Museum, Camp Dodge - Bldg 3692,
7105 NW 70th Ave, Johnston, IA 50131
Secretary: COL (Ret) Russ Bierl E-mail: bierlhome@msn.com
 Association Website <http://www.34ida.org>
 Archival & Original Website www.34infdiv.org
69th Reunion 14-15 October 2016, Johnston, IA

Treasurer: LTC (Ret) Mike Musel 515-252-4531
 Email: michael.musel@iowa.gov Gold Star Museum
Senior Historian & Archivist: Pat Skelly 508-524-3948
 E-mail: skelly@milhist.net
Facebook Webmasters: Ashlee Sherril, Herman Poggensee
WEB Site Manager: MSG Daniel Ewer sgtddaniel@aol.com

Facebook 34th Inf Div Assn: <https://www.facebook.com/34InfDivAssoc>
Internet 34th Inf Div Assn: <http://www.34ida.org>
 Also, follow the 2-34th Red Bulls at! <http://www.dvidshub.net/units/2-34IBCT> <http://www.twitter.com/IowaRedBulls>
<http://www.flickr.com/IowaRedBulls>
1st BCT: <http://www.facebook.com/MinnesotaRedBulls>
2nd BCT: <http://www.facebook.com/IowaRedBulls>

34th Infantry Division Association • 69th Annual Reunion

October 14th & 15th, 2016 • Johnston, Iowa

This year's **69th Reunion** of our Association is being hosted by the Des Moines Chapter, under President "Curly" Ron Albrecht, (1-133rd), on **October 14th & 15th, 2016** Johnston, IA.

Johnston, Iowa is the home of Camp Dodge, the 34th Infantry Division Memorial, The Gold Star Military Museum and the HQ's of the Iowa National Guard. The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division has units stationed at Camp Dodge.

THE ARRANGEMENTS

Lodging: The Reunion Headquarters will be the Stoney Creek Inn & Conference Center, 5291 Stoney Creek Ct, Johnston, IA 50131 – Phone Number 1-800-659-2220 or local 515-334-9000.

The room rate at the hotel will be \$93.00 plus taxes. Breakfasts are complimentary. Parking is free. Please make your reservations individually using the phone numbers shown above. Tell them when you register that the Group Rate is for the 34th Infantry Division Association Reunion.

A Hospitality Room will be available Friday & Saturday, during the hours announced in the Reunion Program. Snacks, coffee and non alcoholic beverages will always be available.

The Hotel will provide **airport van transportation** to and from the **Des Moines International Airport**. The 34th Infantry Division Association will provide bus transportation to local events. Let us know your requirements on the reservation form.

Please keep in mind that you need to do two things in order to join us in Johnston:

- Make the **Hotel reservation** – Stoney Creek Inn, Phone Number 1-800-659-2220 or local 515-334-9000. NLT: 25 Sep 16
- Send in your **Reunion program registration** - the form is included in this newsletter at page 7. NLT 15 Sep 2016

Final details and any updated information will be posted to our 34th Association website (<http://www.34ida.org>)

THE PROGRAM

Registration:

The registration fee for the two day conference will cover the transportation bus service, the Friday Evening (dinner, the Sat Banquet and snacks. The Registration Fee, for the two day event is \$65, to be paid with the registration submission.

Friday Afternoon, October 14th:

All are invited for the Kick Off event of the Reunion. Join us for the "Gathering of the Red Bulls", from 2 to 5 P.M. at the Green Acres Room (Lower Level Hotel). Light refreshments & snacks will be provided.

The Registration Table and Hospitality Room will be open from 2 to 5 P.M. in the Green Acres Room & Lobby.

This time will be spent with introductions, and a meeting of all who attend the Reunion.

Friday Evening:

A bus will depart from the front door of the hotel at 5:00 P.M. for the short trip to the Beavertdale VFW Post, #9127. Drinks, beer, and appetizers will be provided as well as a sit down dinner, is all covered by the \$15 Friday registration fee.

Address: 4029 Urbandale Ave, Des Moines, IA 50310 for those who wish to meet us at the VFW. The bus will return all to the Stoney Creek Inn at the end of the evening.

Saturday Morning, October 12th, will start at 9:00 a.m. with the business meetings of our organization: the presentation and approval of reports, elections, and old & new business.

A Briefing on past Afghanistan Operations will start at 10:30 AM.

Noon Lunch will be an individual responsibility.

Saturday Afternoon will start with a bus departing the hotel front door at 1 P.M. for a tour of the WWII 34th Infantry Division Memorial at Camp Dodge, the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum with special 34th Infantry Division exhibits, plus dedicated time available for veterans and family to research the Archives of the 34th Infantry Division Assn.

All are invited for an old time Ice Cream social at the museum. We will return by 4:30 P.M. to prep for the banquet the hotel.

Saturday Evening, will be our last formal gathering of this reunion. At 5:00 P.M. we will gather for refreshments with an open bar. At 6:00 P.M. we will join together for the posting of the colors and a **Memorial Service** conducted by a Chaplain of the 34th Infantry Division Assn. which will include a remembrance of recently deceased members of the 34th Infantry Division as well as any losses in our current forces.

Dinner at 6:30, (paid thru the Sat reservation fee).

After recognition of our special guests, we will feast on a Buffet Dinner. Our keynote speaker will be Mr. Brian Leehan, who is writing the book, 34th Inf Div in the Global War on Terror.

Sunday morning, October 7th, No program events.

Reunion Pocket Program

Friday, 13 October

2- 5 P.M. Registration & Hospitality Rooms open,
Green Acres Room, Lower Level-Coffee, Soda, Snacks
2-5 P.M. Gathering of the Red Bulls. Pioneer Room
(Light refreshments and appetizers provided)

5:00 P.M. Bus depart from Front Door for for VFW Post Beavertdale
5:30 P.M. Drinks, Beer, Appetizers & sit down Dinner at the VFW
Post #9127. All cost covered by Registration fee.

Saturday, 14 October

7:30 A.M. Presidents Breakfast, John Deere Room (Invite)
8:00 A.M. Late Registrations, Green Acres Lobby
Hospitality Room remains Open, (Coffee, Soda, Snacks)
9:00 A.M. 34th Inf Div Assn Business Meeting, Pioneer Room
10:30 Briefing on 34th ID Afghanistan War Operations 2011
– Five years later.
12:00A.M. Lunch at Area Restaurants (Individual Pay)
1:00 P.M. Bus departs – Front door of Hotel
Tour of 34th Inf Div Memorial Monument & Gold Star
Military Museum & 34th Infantry Exhibit, Camp Dodge
4:00 P.M. Ice Cream Social at Gold Star Museum, Camp Dodge

5:00 P.M. Social (Open Free Bar) Green Acres Room
6:00 P.M. 34th Inf Div Assn Memorial Service, Pioneer Room
34th Inf Div Assn Reunion Dinner Banquet, Pioneer Room
Guest Speaker, Mr. Brian Leehan, Author of the
34th Inf Div War on Terror Book (to be published)
Door Prize Drawing

Sunday, 15 October No Activities – Thank You- Travel Safe.



President	LTC Tim Sulzner
1st Vice President	MAJ Randall Stanford
2nd VP	MAJ Jacob Helgestad
1 Year Trustees	Hermann Poggensee LTC Scott Keeley BG Ben Corell SSG Tanner Johnson
2 Year Trustees	SFC James Sherrill Dr. Chris White Daniel Ewer Ken Andresen
3 Year Trustees	Mark Zirkelbach CSM Chris Stroner 1Lt Trent Whitcomb CSM Willie Adams
Secretary	Russell Bierl
Treasurer	Michael Musel
Information Officer	MSG Ashlee Sherrill
SGT at Arms	Jim Berg
Web Site Mgr	MSG Daniel Ewer
Sr. Historian	Pat Skelly
Chaplain	1LT Nathan Perry

Elwin Henry Diehl (1921 - 2015)

– WWII Soldier & POW



The last member of the mobilized unit Company M, 168th Infantry Regiment, who was captured at Faid / Kaserine Pass, WWII, has died.

Elwin H. Diehl, 94, died Friday, Dec. 4, 2015, at the Montgomery County Memorial Hospital, Red Oak. He was the son of Stevens and Alice (Asman) Diehl, was born July 9, 1921, in Montgomery County. Elwin graduated from Red Oak High School in 1939.

Following graduation, Elwin joined the Iowa National Guard, Co. M 168th Infantry in Red Oak, IA. On 10 Feb 1941, Company M was called to active service for World War II. In Jan 1942, Company M was deployed to North Ireland, then Scotland and England.

The 168th Infantry Regiment made an assault landing in North Africa and later was combined into a Task Force under command of the 1st Armored Division, as part of the II U.S. Corps. During an intense German Panzer attack at Faid Pass, Elwin, along with most soldiers of Company M, and 1,200 other U.S. soldiers, were captured or killed in action by the Germans at Faid / Kaserine Pass. He and his unit, to include most of the 2nd Battalion, the Medical, Engineer and Anti-Tank support units, the Regimental HQ's and band were held as prisoners of war for the next 26 months in Germany and Poland. On Sept. 30, 1945, Elwin was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army.

It is argued that the community of Red Oak, Iowa, in this one battle, suffered a higher percentage of casualties, (killed captured and MIA), than any other community in the U.S. during WWII.

Elwin returned to Red Oak, IA, married Carolyn R. Erickson, and farmed for eleven years. He then worked for the Burlington Northern Railroad for 30 years before retiring in 1986. Elwin was a member of the United Methodist Church of Red Oak, a lifetime member of VFW Post #226 of Red Oak, a member of the American Legion Post #575 of Emerson, the Montgomery County Veterans Memorial Court of Honor, and Masonic Lodge #378. Elwin was very passionate about his World War II service and read many books about the history of war.

Funeral services were on Dec. 8, 2015, with burial and military honors provided by the 1-168th Infantry Battalion at Evergreen Cemetery, Red Oak. May God bless his memory as well as those of his comrades who served their country with Elwin H. Diehl.

34th Infantry Division Association Internet and Facebook Sites

We ask that all members and friends of the 34th Infantry Division view our Web Site and Face Book pages for information updates.

The 34th Infantry Division Association thanks Ashlee Sherrill, 34th Div HQ's and CW5 (Ret) Herman Poggensee for continued updates to the Face Book pages.

The URL for the 34th Inf Div Assn. national page is:
www.facebook.com/34InfDivAssoc

The URL for the Des Moines Chapter 34th ID page is:
www.facebook.com/34IDAssocDesMoinesChapter

The URL for the Minnesota Cmdr's Own Chapter is
www.facebook.com/commandersownredbullassociation

We encourage all Red Bull Soldiers who have a Face - book account to log on and share their stories with friends who share their common interests.

MSG Daniel Ewer is Website Manager for the Association Web Site, 34IDA.org Please send us documents to post on this site. We will be asking for input in the proposed book to be written this coming year, The 34th Inf Div in the GWOT.

The Web Site for the actual MTOE 34th Inf Div is:
www.MinnesotaNationalGuard.org/34id/

Pat Skelly, the Association Senior Historian and Archivist continues to make archival posts at the site:
<http://www.34infdiv.org>

Pat is well respected for his detailed work & has done much to bring together WWII and War on Terror archive documents for veterans.

Purpose of the 34th Infantry Division Association (Short Version)

- Maintain association with our comrades with whom we served in the 34th Infantry Division.
- Maintain and honor the memory of those who died in action and remember all of us who pass later.
- Gather and maintain the History of the Organizations, Units and Soldiers of the 34th Infantry Division.
- **Support our "Wounded Warriors" who have faithfully served our nation.**

Mount Pantano (WWII)

By Col. Robert J. Berens
U.S. Army retired

The 168th Regimental Combat Team's attack on the four dominant heights of Mount Pantano evolved into a series of onslaughts by both sides. Gen. Mark W. Clark said it was 'the most intensely fought battle he knew of in the three wars of his experience.'

The stern, white-haired commander of the 34th Infantry Division's 168th Regimental Combat Team seemed uncharacteristically concerned as he issued his attack order for the seizure of Mount Pantano in late November 1943.

The three infantry battalion commanders before him, all in their late twenties or early thirties, noted a rare display of empathy in Col. Frederick B. Butler's manner, the details he provided and the tactics he explained. That he perceived a fateful outcome seemed to be confirmed in his gruff "good luck" upon parting. He had never said that before.

It would be the last such meeting between the regimental commander and his three handpicked subordinates.

The unflappable Col. Butler had cause for concern indeed. During the two-week lull since the third crossing of the Volturno River in Italy and the seizing of the approaches to Mount Pantano, 34th Infantry Division patrols had confirmed that the Germans were atop Pantano in strength and that they intended to stay there. Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark's Fifth Army had come to grips with the German defenses based on the Gustav Line.

Mount Pantano reminded Butler of another German bastion he had encountered some six months earlier-Hill 609 in Tunisia. In both cases, the feature dominated the valley approaches and surrounding terrain. Both had excellent covered routes for maneuver by the defenders, concrete blockhouses and reinforced natural features to provide protection against small arms, mortar and artillery fires. Most disturbing to the 168th commander, however, was the way in which Pantano differed-Hill 609 had a single dominant feature, Pantano had four.

Mount Pantano, rising some 600 feet above the Venafro Valley, consisted of four knobs, simply but conveniently numbered by Allied planners as Knob 1, Knob 2, Knob 3 and Knob 4.

Access to Pantano was limited to one major trail up the steep eastern slope, with minor paths on the flanks so twisted and rough that they were virtually unusable. Thus, any attack from the east would be channelized. Assuredly, this "channel" would be heav-

ily mined and covered by artillery and mortar concentrations. Resupply and reinforcement would be slow and taxing for the attackers.

With the terrain and the enemy limiting his options, Col. Butler designated Lt. Col. Wendell H. Langdon's 1st Battalion to attack up the east slope at night. Division artillery would fire routine harassing and interdiction missions to cover the movement to contact, yet not give away the attack.

Lt. Col. Floyd E. Sparks's 3rd Battalion was positioned on the right flank from where it would support the attackers with long-range machine-gun and mortar fires upon call.

Col. Butler attached weapons companies from 1st and 2nd Battalions to 3rd Battalion to reinforce its support. Lt. Col. Edward W. Bird's 2nd Battalion initially was placed in reserve on the left flank.

Col. Langdon ordered Capt. Benjamin Butler's (no relation to Col. Butler) A Company to lead the column up to Knob 1. Capt. Butler started the steep ascent in the early morning hours of 29 November. Riflemen under a heavy load of weapons and ammunition managed to negotiate the trail without attracting the enemy's attention.

Near the crest, Capt. Butler called for the pre-planned artillery barrage. His two leading platoons advanced on a skirmish line close behind the falling shells. By 0900 hours, the plan appeared to have worked to perfection, with A Company seizing Knob 1 and capturing several Germans holed up inside their blockhouse. A quick interrogation revealed a full battalion of the enemy occupied Pantano, with most of the soldiers disposed in the low saddle at the center of the four knobs-a rear-slope defense.

Capt. Butler knew he had little time to prepare for the upcoming counterattack. Even as he desperately positioned his men, the first enemy attack came. It proved to be a diversion with a few infantrymen demonstrating with automatic weapons and mortar firings.

An enemy-reinforced rifle company struck A Company's right flank. Butler's men took cover in any niche or hole they could find. Methodically, the Germans advanced in a rehearsed response. Bayonets, grenades and automatic weapons came into play. Eventually, the Americans started to fall back under the weight of firepower and superior numbers.

With early success slipping away, Capt. Butler mustered his headquarters group and a rifle squad for a headlong counterattack into the midst of the Germans.

The move not only surprised the enemy, but took advantage of the heights of Knob 1. Confused, the Germans broke off the engagement, but there was no respite for A Company scattered about the prominent landmark. The Germans showered Knob 1 with small arms, mortar and artillery fires.

In addition, they began interdicting the trail, thus slowing progress of B & C Companies. One salvo caught a group carrying ammunition up the trail and hurled bodies and projectiles into all sorts of grotesque positions. Capt. Butler rearranged his men and replaced fallen leaders. With the Germans trying to isolate his company, Capt. Butler knew he was in for the fight of his life.

As a platoon of B Company would arrive, Col. Langdon shunted it to the left so that eventually A and B Companies divided the knob. Sgt. Elmer Popejoy, a B Company veteran of the fighting on Hill 609 and the three crossings of the Volturno River, was not fully prepared for what he experienced now. His platoon leader, Lt. Crayton, had just appointed him platoon sergeant, and he was still getting used to his new responsibilities. In the meantime, incoming artillery, mortars and screaming meemies not only created confusion but were eerie.

Sgt. Popejoy had more or less settled into the perilous rhythm of this battle when a salvo of mortar shells threw everyone into turmoil. Popejoy was occupying a German-dug foxhole with another soldier from Brooklyn, N.Y., when a lull in the shelling occurred.

"Pope, Pope," Lt. Crayton called to him, "Is there room in that hole for me?"

Before Popejoy could answer, another salvo landed nearby. Popejoy crawled to his platoon leader's side in time to hear the battered and dazed officer's last words: "Pope, Pope ... " Popejoy, now platoon leader, returned to his foxhole and found the soldier from Brooklyn dead also.

Since there wasn't space atop Mount Pantano for another full battalion, Col. Butler committed companies from 2nd and 3rd Battalions. He also ordered them to form carrying parties to bring in ammunition and take out the wounded. The precarious situation dictated hard choices; the dead were left in place, and no rations or water were brought in. When rain and snow began to fall, soldiers trapped drinking water in shelter halves.

With all companies now in place around Knob 1, and with massive artillery support from division and corps artillery, 1st Battalion survived the night and beat off a German counterattack the next morning. Thus encouraged, Col. Langdon prepared to push on to Knob 2 in early afternoon. To support this effort, Col. Butler ordered F Company to attack on the left and I Company to attack on the right in attempts to divert the Germans.

At the start of its approach to Knob 2, 1st Battalion ran into minefields. Explosions alerted the Germans, and they showered the exposed troops with small arms and mortar fires. Col. Langdon was with the lead company, which bore the brunt of the casualties. Both Langdon and the B Company commander were severely wounded. (Col. Langdon would survive, but his service with the 168th Regimental Combat Team had ended.)

Col. Butler called off the attack and ordered Capt. Fred D. Clark Jr., now acting battalion commander, to return to Knob 1 for the night. Sensing vulnerability among the battered Americans, the Germans counterattacked Knob 1 with two reinforced rifle companies at 2200 hours. But for a furious, close-in barrage of friendly mortar and artillery fires, 1st Battalion would have lost its tenuous hold on Mount Pantano.

At this point, organizational lines within the 168th Regimental Combat Team were blurred due to losses of key leaders and the intermingling of units. However, the veterans held together and remained confident they eventually would take Mount Pantano altogether. Col. Butler sent Col. Sparks to command the forces on Knob 1 and to attack Knob 2 the next day.

As the fog began to lift the next morning, Col. Sparks and a few enlisted men went forward to reconnoiter a route of attack. Shortly, Col. Sparks, who was leading, was shot at close range by a German with a machine pistol. (Col. Sparks, too, would survive, but a long recuperation ended his World War II service.)

In dire need of an experienced leader on the spot, Col. Butler had little choice but to send Col. Bird to lead the attack on Knob 2.

Col. Bird fared only slightly better than his departed peers. Col. Bird needed more information on the terrain ahead if he was to fashion a plan of attack on Knob 2. Mist and patches of fog still obscured the mountain top, so he decided to walk forward of the outpost a short distance to where a rise in the ground offered a vantage point. He "lightened up" by dropping his pistol belt at the outpost and strode forth with a small map board in hand. A sharpshooter on the outpost was to cover him while he reconnoitered.

A quiet eeriness pervaded the battle site as Col. Bird picked his way forward, scanning the ground for the wire prongs that would trigger a buried S-mine. Some 50 yards out, he glanced up to see a German armed with an automatic weapon standing 100 yards or so ahead. Col. Bird stopped, and the two men eyed one another for several seconds.

Then it occurred to Col. Bird that the German wanted to take him prisoner. Warily, Col. Bird started backward, his eyes still glued on the enemy soldier. Sensing his escape was about to be cut short, Col. Bird spun about and darted toward the outpost. The German opened fire, and Col. Bird felt a tug at his right hand and saw his map board go sailing through the air.

As he tumbled to the ground, Col. Bird heard

the sharpshooter open fire on the enemy. The dramatic little battle was over.

Upon reaching friendly lines, Col. Bird counted eight bullet holes in his right jacket sleeve. One finger had been shot away, and another was dangling by a shred of tissue. After giving Col. Bird a painkiller, the medical aidman cut away the bloody glove and dangling finger.

Even as the aidman worked, Col. Bird called a meeting of company commanders. He fully intended to lead the assault on Knob 2; however, when the shock wore away, the wounded hand began to "throb like hell" and Col. Butler ordered Col. Bird off the mountain. A replacement was already on the way. (Within about 24 hours, Col. Butler had lost the three battalion commanders who had served him since Tunisia.)

Numerous minor skirmishes followed throughout the day. Americans were probing Knob 2 while Germans were probing Knob 1. An A Company automatic rifleman, with a BAR, waited patiently for a German patrol to "get in close" and then he cut down eight of the enemy with a prolonged burst of fire.

On 2 December, in an attempt to break the bloody stalemate, Col. Butler sent 3rd Battalion up the northeastern slopes to Knob 2.

Following a heavy artillery preparation, 3rd Battalion seized the knob after a brief firefight. Sensing the Germans were faltering, an opportunistic Col. Butler ordered 3rd Battalion on to Knob 3, but the Germans committed reserves at that point and pushed the Americans off Knob 2 and on down the slopes.

Col. Butler committed elements of the 2nd Battalion on the left, and, with the added strength, 3rd Battalion regained the heights of Knob 2.

Heavily supported by artillery and mortars, the battalion held out against furious German counterattacks throughout the night.

Relentless, Col. Butler ordered his weakened 2nd and 3rd Battalions to attack Knob 3 on 3 December. Using a double envelopment, the Americans made progress initially, but the Germans counterattacked with two reinforced companies.

Realizing that the enemy was stronger than he thought, Col. Butler ordered 3rd Battalion back to Knob 2 and called in all the supporting fires he could muster. Still, the Germans seized Knob 2 and forced 3rd Battalion back to Knob 1.

In a crucial battle that afternoon, the Americans managed to hold on to Knob 1, but it took heroic efforts to do so.

Every available man was impressed into front-line duty. Members of carrying parties were organized into units and sent into the line. As 3 December came to a close, the Germans broke off the attack. Both sides were so weakened and confused at that point that they were forced to consolidate what they had. The Germans held Knob 2, and the Americans held Knob 1.

On the night of 4 December, the 135th Infantry Regiment relieved the decimated 168th. Harassing and interdiction fires and patrolling continued until 8 December when the 2nd Moroccan Infantry Division relieved the 34th.

Battle casualties for the 168th Regimental Combat Team amounted to 36 officers and 386 enlisted men. Nonbattle casualties were extensive because of the harsh elements and because Fifth Army troops had not been issued winter clothing at that stage. Some had immersion foot so badly they could barely walk. Litter bearers operated in relays, carrying casualties down the hillside for long distances.

Most casualties were among the three infantry battalions. Upon being relieved, the battalion strengths, normally at 800, were: 1st Bn 54; 2nd Bn, 393; and 3rd Bn, 246. A Company had borne the brunt of the four-day battle. Of the seven officers and 173 enlisted men who had first attacked Knob 1, only two officers and fewer than 60 enlisted men walked off Pantano; many were wounded. Capt. Butler, wounded three times, was one of them.

The 1st Battalion was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for its heroic performance on Mount Pantano. Capt. Butler was awarded the Distinguished Cross for his valiant leadership. The battalion surgeon, Capt. Emile Schuster, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for treating the wounded among the minefields of Pantano; once, a bottle of plasma was shot out of his hand by an enemy soldier. Within a month, the 34th Infantry Division would be refitted and committed in the Liri Valley for the drive on Cassino.

As for Mount Pantano, the Moroccans fared no better than the Americans until the Germans abruptly withdrew back into the Gustav Line on the night of 17 December.

Interest in Mount Pantano now had been reduced to that of graves registration units. It would be many months before the last human remains had been retrieved from among the crevices of the four knobs.

A few months before Gen. Clark died in April 1984, he met with Benjamin Butler (then a retired National Guard major general) for an hour-long chat.

Surely, it is a rarity when an ex-Army Group commander can recall what happened to a single rifle company some 40 years earlier, but Gen. Clark told Butler that Pantano was the most intensely fought battle he knew of in the three wars of his experience—World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

COL. ROBERT J. BERENS retired in 1977 after 32 years of Army service. As an enlisted man, he participated in the 1942 invasion of North Africa and the Tunisian and Italian campaigns. He was also a platoon leader in Korea and the information officer of 11 Corps in Vietnam in 1969.

34TH INFANTRY DIVISION ASSOCIATION

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Friday P.M., October 14th thru Saturday October 15th, 2016

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The National Secretary is COL (Ret) Russ Bierl. His E Mail address is bierlhome@msn.com

The National Association WEB Site is <http://www.34ida.org> Phone No 515-252-4531 or email goldstarmuseum@iowa.gov

A newsletter is sent to current members three times a year by U.S. mail. All newsletters are shown on the Association WEB site.

The Iowa Gold Star Military Museum maintains an office for the association. WEB site www.iowanationalguard.com