



THE BLACK CATS



Newsletter of WARGroup,
comprising re-enactors of
1st Batt., London Irish Rifles
US 101st Airborne Div. &
1st Polish Para Brigade
www.WARGroup.net

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IT BEGINS- BLITZKRIEG

THE INVASION OF POLAND

On September 1st 1939, Germany launched its much-anticipated invasion of Poland. Code named Plan White it involved the deployment of 53 Divisions supported by 1600 aircraft in a pincer strike from both the German and Slovak borders that would encircle Poland's 24 Divisions, a move that would forever become known as Blitzkrieg, (Lightning war).

At dawn that morning the 180-man garrison of the naval fortress at Westerplatte found themselves being bombarded by the German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* that had been on a "good will" visit to the port of Danzig. The garrison held out against air and sea attacks as well as repeated naval landings for 13 days before finally surrendering. The neighbouring base on the Hel Peninsula, held out until the 1st of October.

On the 3rd of September Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand all declared war on Nazi Germany after issuing ultimatums for her immediate withdrawal from Poland.

Five days later the German 10th Army led by General Walter Von Reichenau reached the outskirts of Warsaw, while General Heinz Guderians tank corps smashed their way through to the east of the city. A desperate Polish counter attack was launched against the German 8th Army by 10 Divisions that were hurriedly put together by General Tadeuz Kutrzeba near Kutno, but despite some early success the attempt failed to break the enemy advance. Despite acts of high bravery that saw Polish cavalry charging enemy armoured units, the end was inevitable. A serious lack in modern military equipment and tactics plus the dawn of Germanys belief in rapid mobile advance in conjunction with air power proved to be the undoing of Poland. She would not be the last country to feel the wraith of Hitlers war machine.

On September 17th Russian forces launched their own invasion in the east, literally stabbing the beleaguered Polish in the back. Their government and high command fled to Romania, only to be interned there. Soon all resistance against the German onslaught crumbled. 36 days after the invasion began Poland was forced to surrender; and she was then split into two zones of occupation by her conquerors. Thousands of her countrymen refused to capitulate and chose to make their way to other nations that were allying themselves against Hitler.



The invasion had cost the German army 10,572 killed and the Soviet Union lost 734 men in the campaign. Around 50,000 Polish soldiers were killed with a further 750,000 captured. For those who made good their escape, exile would become a means to strike back at their hated enemies. From Norway, Africa, Italy, France and Holland the men and women of Poland would do just that. ROB

LONDON IRISH RIFLES

REGIMENTAL HISTORY PT 3

Late in 1940, the first battalion became part of the 2nd London Infantry Brigade, and it was reformed into the 168th Brigade alongside the London Scottish and the men of the 10th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment. Along with the 167th and 169th Brigades they formed the 56th (London) Division under Major-General C. F. Liardet, and its divisional sign was the Black Cat of Dick Whittington fame.



The 56th had to wait until August 1942 for their first overseas posting and departed Liverpool on the 27th for South Africa onboard the Cargo ship H.M.T *Orduna*. They travelled onto the Middle East where they spent 6 weary months guarding oil wells in Iraq. The 168th brigade along with the Black Cats were then transferred to the 50th Division so as to take part in the invasion of Sicily in July 1943.

The second Bn, now part of the 38th (Irish) Brigade, left Glasgow onboard the transport *Duchess of York*, for Algiers (a port bombed day and night by the axis). The men of the 2nd Bn soon found themselves at the front near Terboursouk, in January 1943.

They were involved in several major engagements that saw them all but annihilate the paratroopers from the Koch brigade of the vaunted Hermann Goering Regiment. From Two-tree hill to Stuka farm and Point 286 in the Bou Arada Plains the 2nd Bn fought bloody hand-to-hand battles against dug in enemy positions, often getting involved in duels with grenades and the bayonet. On Point 286 in particular the fighting was fierce with F Company losing all of its officers while also having to hold off an enemy armoured assault, during the bitter fighting for Stuka farm the combat was reported as being 'room to room'.

During the height of the battles for these positions, on the 26th Feb, the rifles captured, then lost and then recaptured these vital hill top strongholds several times before the timely arrival of 3 Churchill tanks and reinforcements from the Royal Irish Fusiliers finally turned the tide of battle against the Germans.

Total Bn casualties in taking Point 286 alone amounted to 26 killed, 86 wounded and 136 missing & captured.

The London Irish were soon in the heat of battle again at the village of Heidous on the 15th of April and they eventually took the village a week later. They reached Tunis on May 7th and by the end of the month were with the Irish Brigade when it was transferred to Sicily to fight as part of Montgomery's Eighth Army. ROB

US 101ST AIRBORNE

Lieutenant “Buck” Compton- Part I

Lynn “Buck” Compton was born in Los Angeles California on New Years Eve in 1921. He chose to use Buck rather than his mother’s choice of Lynn as a first name. He acted as an extra when young in many films, and was even fired by Charlie Chaplin from the silent movie “Modern Times”! Compton was a keen sportsman, playing baseball and American Football- and was all-League catcher in his senior year at High School. In 1939 he was offered a Football Scholarship to UCLA, but before he could start college his father, an alcoholic, committed suicide. After that tragedy he pulled things together and finally graduated from College in 1943.

From Officer Candidate School, Fort Benning, Georgia, he passed out as 2nd Lieutenant in the Virginia National Guard. However this was dull and he determined to see some action before the war was over by applying to Jump School and to join the paratroopers. “Overseas was where the action was- I wanted to be in the action. I wanted to WIN” Compton said, years later.

After 4 tough weeks he got his jump wings and was assigned to 515th PIR, part of the 17th Airborne Div.

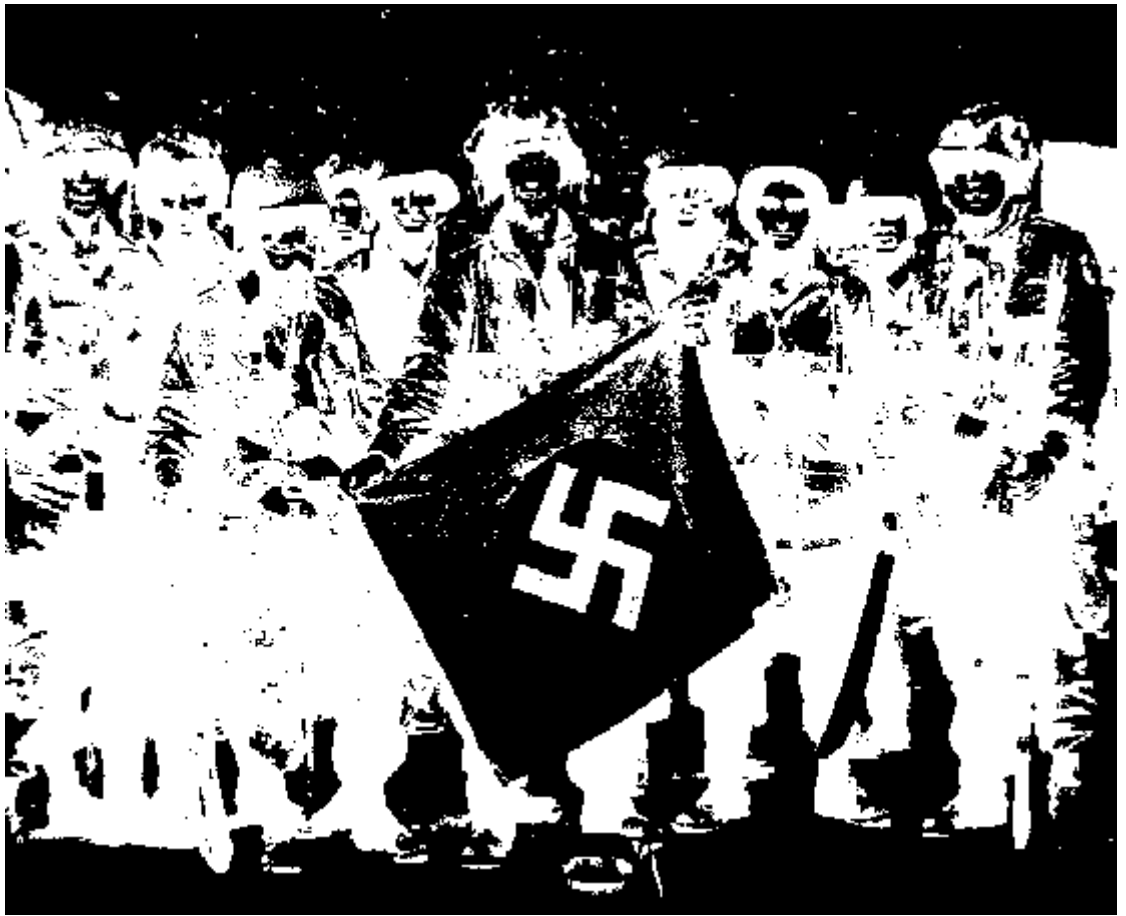
In Dec 1943, he and his new colleagues crossed the Atlantic and soon found themselves stationed at the small, picturesque village of Aldbourne in England. It was here that he joined the now famous “Easy Company”, E Company, 506th PIR, under the command of 1st Lt. Thomas Meehan.



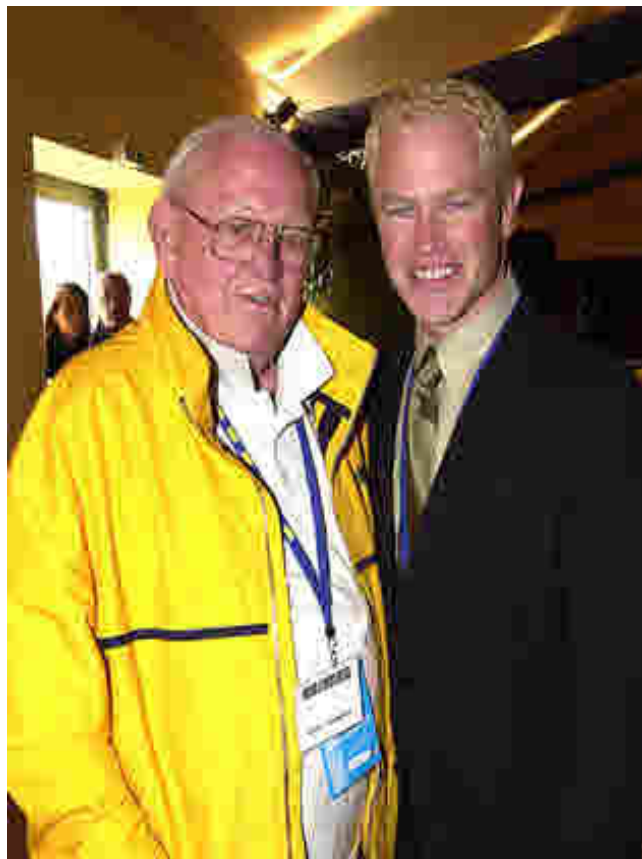
He also met 1st Lt Dick Winters, C.O. of 1st platoon, and his No. 2 Harry Welsh, as he himself took up the No 2 position in 2nd platoon. Like so many officers before and since, he soon realised that it was the sergeants of Easy Company who did much of the “leading”- men like Don Malarkey, Bill Guarnere, and Joe Toye. “They GOT THINGS DONE” he would say after the war.

LT. BUCK COMPTON PT I (CONT)

Compton soon became a firm favourite of the men he commanded-something Winters and he often argued about. Dick believed Compton was too close to his men, which could affect his thinking during combat-Compton however felt Easy Co were his friends, and could often be found playing cards, or “shooting the bull” with them. Operation Over-



lord required 101st Div to drop in the vicinity of St.-Marie-du-Mont and seize 4 causeways behind Utah beach, at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. Each paratrooper jumped with around 70-100 lbs of equipment, and Compton was the first man in his “stick” to jump into the cold night, red, green and blue tracer fire lighting up the darkness all around.



Compton landed alone, in an orchard, with no equipment or weapon (thanks to the infamous prop blast which had torn away his leg bag)! Many men were lost on that “day of days”, but the remnants of the Division did what they were trained to do, getting on with the job in hand.

Compton would go on to fight under Winters at Brecourt Manor, Carentan, and in Holland during Operation Market Garden. The latter required ther 101st to assault the Wilhelmina Canal at Endhoven- a campaign which was to cost Easy Company a third of their nubur, and see Compton wounded in action at the village of Hegel.

To be continued... ROB

DISPATCHES

WW2 training weekend

At Emmetts

Well done to all who attended the WW2 tactical training weekend at Duncannon. It was a full-on session that saw the group working through several tactical scenarios and manoeuvres.



Mike's tactical theory session covered all aspects of allied fighting and deployment in the field, and we followed up with the practical! That went very well and as a group we learned a huge amount about deployment and house to house fighting and clearance. We also learnt the tactical and covert limitation of British Ammo boots! :u)

Again, well done to everyone for putting in the effort!
ROB/DJ

DISPATCHES

Ploughing Day, in association with the Friends of St. Patrick's Hospital, Waterford 17th May 2009

Tramore

Although this was a small event, overshadowed sadly by the elements (quelle surprise!), the display as you can see in the photos was excellent and a great "dry run" for Duncannon.

The new medical tent looked the business, and we were delighted to see Kieran trying out his ~~Sunday~~ Vietnam clothes which looked well too. We also

made a number of new worthwhile contacts.

The Germans also turned out an excellent display, as did our

Roman cousins (no-one mention Monte Cassino!!!).
ROB/DJ





FORTHCOMING SKIRMISHES

DUNCANNON	WW1&2	30TH/31ST JUNE
CHARLEVILLE SHOW	WW2	28TH JUNE
BALLYSCOURT CASTLE, CORK	WW1&2	18/19TH JULY
TRAINING WEEKEND	WW2	EARLY AUGUST
SALUTE	WW1&2	LATE AUGUST

“THE BLACK CATS” NEEDS YOU!
PLEASE email Rob or Doc with any good pics you have, any articles on kit, tactics, history, slang, etc - we want to hear what YOU have to say! (and NOT to keep seeing photos of ourselves - a scary sight, at the best of times!)

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or speak to Rob or Doc