

# CMH NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE COLORADO MILITARY HISTORIANS

VOLUME II, NUMBER III

JANUARY, 1968

EDITOR DAN JONES

129-7942



BLECKLEY



GOETTLER

"BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY"

# THE RESCUE OF THE LOST BATTALION

## AN EPIC OF THE WAR

by

James M. Richardson

### PART II

...Back at Remicourt we were alarmed. Two machines had failed to return. Having no news from the occupants of the machines, we feared they had been killed.

That was the way things stood when Goettler and Bleckley pulled on their flying suits and took the next mission. Yes, they had been through that inferno of fire once. Yes, the last two planes had failed to return. But what of it!

As Goettler said, he and Bleckley weren't quite satisfied with the way they had dropped their first load of supplies. This trip they meant to go lower and cast the packages still nearer the designated spot. That was contempt of danger for you!

By this time the visibility was greatly improved, so Goettler and Bleckley had enemy aircraft to worry about in addition to ground fire. While they patrolled up and down near the lines to satisfy themselves that there were no Fokkers about, the Archies got their range.

Each minute the Americans stayed the shells grew thicker and burst closer. Gliding down sharply as if they were going home, Goettler suddenly reversed his plane and came roaring back towards the lost Battalion scarcely a hundred feet above them!

As Bleckley leaned over to survey the ground, every rifle and machine gun within range turned loose on him. For a moment the enemy forgot all else. This lone plane over them signified what they hated and wanted to overcome, and at it they hurled thousands of bullets with all the skill they had.

Goettler skidded his plane, he made startling turns, he side-slipped a little occasionally, he climbed and he dived. Each time the plane turned and its great mottled belly flopped back into normal position, the men of the Lost Battalion groaned and expected to see it tumble from the sky.

But on its way it went like a charmed thing, roaring up and down and across, rocked occasionally by the wash of big shells that had just passed. Just once Bleckley poured a burst of lead into a German machine gun nest he spotted. The rest of the time he was peering intently at the ground, hoping to get some sure indication of the position of Whittlesey's men.

All day the latter had lain there in their holes, watching bundle after bundle of food and supplies drop just below them, barely out of reach. Starved as they were, they dared not show themselves even now.

But they hoped that Goettler and Bleckley would see them, and they hoped equally that the big De Havilland would come through unharmed.

When Goettler and Bleckley had flown up and down thus what seemed an incredible time to all onlookers, suddenly the plane lurched and started down. It was a perfect target now and, as it sank rapidly, a hail of bullets followed it.

Clearing the ridge but skidding in uncertain lines, fired at constantly as long as it remained aloft, the plane finally crashed on the French sector, west of the American army. A bullet had killed Goettler in the air, and Bleckley was mortally wounded.

The courage and persistence that led the airmen to fly into the face of what they knew was almost certain death caused the War Department to award them the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously. In 1922 this award was raised to the



Congressional Medal of Honor.

Frank Luke Jr., Goettler, Bleckley, and, more recently, Edward Rickenbacker, were the only aviators to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for feats during the War.

The last flight of the day was made by Lieutenant Maurice Graham, pilot, and Lieutenant James McCurdy, observer. Exposed to the same hell of machine gun fire and rifle fire that had already sent three American planes down, they flew over the ravine at a low altitude.

Just as McCurdy prepared to throw a basket of carrier pigeons off the position which he thought the Lost Battalion occupied, a number of soldiers ran from a dugout and fired at his plane.

"What the hell!" yelled McCurdy. "Let's dive on those snipers and find out what's what."

Ignoring the danger, he and Graham swooped down to investigate. They soon found that the soldiers shooting at them were Germans and that the territory presumably held by the Lost Battalion was in enemy hands.

Dazed by this discovery, the two flyers circled the vicinity and then turned their battered plane homeward only after McCurdy had received a painful wound in the neck.

Their discovery was the most important of the day. We now knew definitely that the ground represented by the coordinates Whittlesey had sent back was in German possession. Were we to assume that some error in location had been made? Or were we to assume that the Germans had killed or captured all members of the Lost Battalion?

This brings us to one of the most dramatic incidents of the battle of the Argonne. A small detachment of nine men became separated from the main body of the Lost Battalion. The Germans killed or captured all of them. Among the captured was Private Crowell R. Hollingshead.

The next day a soldier with a white flag in his hand was seen approaching the Lost Battalion. It was Private Hollingshead, who had the following message for Major Whittlesey:

To the Commanding Officer, Second Battalion, Three Hundred and Eighth Infantry, Seventy-seventh American Division:

Sir--The bearer of this present, Private Crowell R. Hollingshead, has been taken prisoner by us. He refused to give the German intelligence Officer any answer to his questions and is quite an honorable fellow, doing honor to his fatherland in the strictest sense of the word.

He has been charged against his will, believing he is doing wrong to his country, to carry forward this present letter to the officer in charge of the Second Battalion, Three Hundred and Eighth Infantry, of the Seventy-seventh Division, with the purpose to recommend this commander to surrender with his forces, as it would be quite useless to resist any more in view of the present conditions.

The suffering of your wounded men can be heard over here in the German lines and we are appealing to your Human sentiments.

A white flag shown by one of your men will tell us that you agree with these conditions.

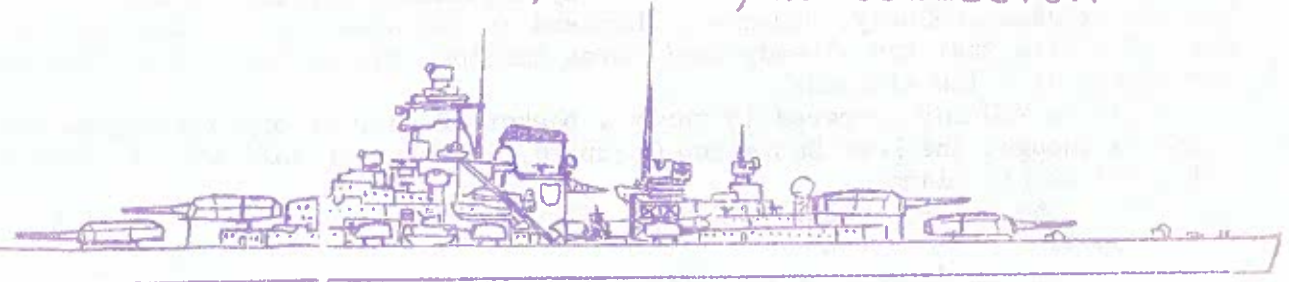
Please treat Private Hollingshead as an honorable man. He is quite a soldier. We envy him.

(Signed) The German Commanding Officer.

We shall never know what passed through Major Whittlesey's mind as he read the message. His men were so starved that they even ate tobacco and roots. Many of them were badly wounded. Their ammunition was nearly gone.

# BONNIE BRAE HOBBY SHOP

HEADQUARTERS FOR THE WARGAMER, MODELER, AND COLLECTOR



BISMARCK



GRAF SPEE



NARVIK



T1-T12



TYPE XXI



E-BOAT

DRAWINGS  
ACTUAL  
SIZE  
OF  
MODELS

HANSA  
MODELS

1/1200 SCALE

1 IN. EQUALS 100 FT.

OVER 700 MODELS AVAILABLE FROM HANSA, MERCATOR,  
STAR, AND OTHERS THROUGH BONNIE BRAE HOBBIES.  
SHIPS IN MINIATURE. MILITARY, CIVILIAN, BOTH PAST AND PRESENT

ALWAYS LARGE STOCK OF FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC  
PLASTIC KITS HERE

IF YOU DON'T SEE IT - ASK US!!!!

Nevertheless the note bore no fruit for the Germans. After reading it the Americans became more defiant than ever. That same afternoon they repulsed two German attacks and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

Critics have often wondered why the Lost Battalion didn't fight its way through the detachment of German troops in their rear and thus rejoin the main body of the American army. Here's the answer. Because Major Whittlesey would not leave the wounded.

On October 7 the visibility was very poor again, but in spite of this the 50th squadron concentrated on the task of finding the Lost Battalion. With McCurdy's discovery to guide them, Lieutenant Robert M. Anderson, pilot, and Lieutenant Woodville J. Rogers, observer, again took up the search.

The enemy fire from the ground was intense, but the Americans stuck grimly to their task. They circled at 300 feet and dropped to 200. Finally they came down to the treetops.

The air was full of red hot lead. Bullet after bullet crashed into the De Haviland--through the tail, through the wings and into the fuselage. No plane could ride through such a hail of lead for long. The two Americans knew it only too well. But they very courageously risked everything, and Rogers finally spotted a battalion panel and two small infantry panels a short distance from the position which Major Whittlesey had given as the location of his troops.

At last the Lost Battalion had been found! With great daring Rogers and Anderson circled over the suffering men for a few moments and then sped to division headquarters to report their discovery.

Rogers' report is preserved in the files at Washington. Here is a copy of what he wrote:

Departure, 10:30. Return, 12:25. Day, 7. Month, 10. Year, 1918.  
Mission: Infantry Contact Patrol.  
Area covered: Binerville and Apremont.  
Pilot: Lieut. R.M. Anderson. Observer: Lieut. W.J. Rogers.  
Altitude 500 m. Visibility fair. Sq'd No. 50.  
Called for line twice: Saw two small infantry panels and battalion panel at 09-03 (94.9-76.3) at 11:30 hr.  
Fire at A9-L3 at 11:35.  
Quiet in North Argonne Forest.

(Signed) W. J. Rogers.

By comparing the map coordinates that Whittlesey sent back by pigeon (294.6-276.3 or 276.4) with those that Rogers used (94.9-76.3) the difference in position may be seen. A very small difference, but one which under the circumstances brought great suffering to the surrounded men.

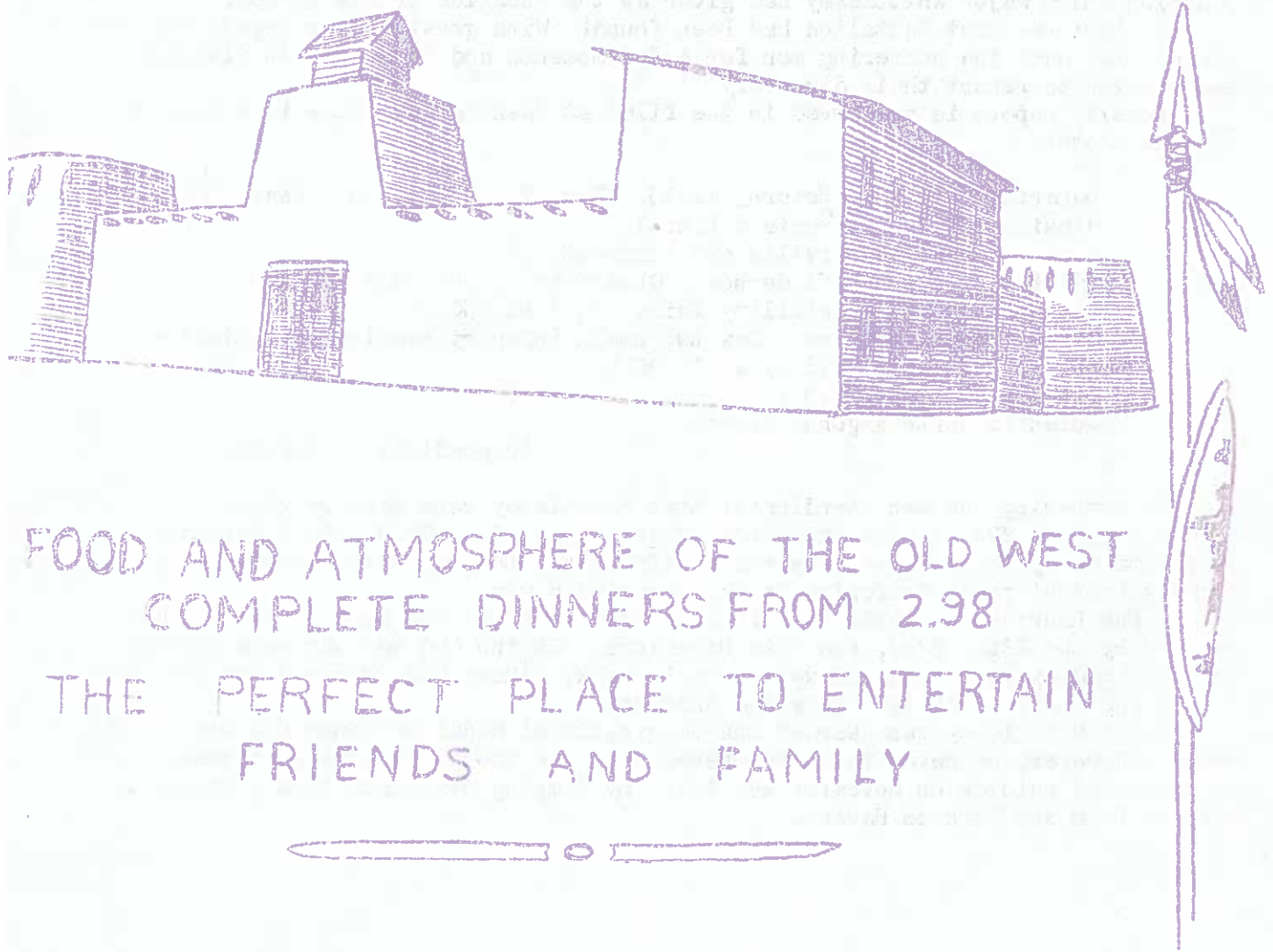
A few hours after their real location became known the Lost Battalion was rescued by the 28th, 82nd, and 77th Divisions. Of the 600 men who were cut off with Whittlesey less than 200 were able to walk. Those who survived the terrible ordeal owe their lives to Rogers and Anderson.

Major Whittlesey was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic stand. However, he never fully recovered from the shock of his experiences, and he committed suicide on November 29, 1921, by jumping overboard from a steamship enroute from New York to Havana.



# The FORT

IN MORRISON COLO.



FOOD AND ATMOSPHERE OF THE OLD WEST  
COMPLETE DINNERS FROM 2.98

THE PERFECT PLACE TO ENTERTAIN  
FRIENDS AND FAMILY



OPERATIONS OFFICE  
50TH AERO SQUADRON  
AMERICAN E.F., FRANCE.

November 13, 1919

DATA ON THE LOST BATTALION, 77th DIVISION  
2nd. Bn. 308th Inf.

STRENGTH

Entered action Oct 2, with 308th Inf. and 2 Co's 306th M.G. Bn.	3 75 officers and men	When reached on October 7 321 officers and men	Losses, killed and missing 54
Co. K. 307th Inf.	88th officers and men	73 officers and men	15
	<hr/> 463 officers and men	<hr/> 394 officers and men	<hr/> 69 officers and men
Of these returned wounded	156 (of which 3 were officers)		
Effectives	238		
Officers killed and missing	9		

missions sent out by the 50th AERO SQUADRON to drop food, medical supplies, orders, ammunition and pigeons, total 15.

1000 pounds of food, ammunition, and medical supplies were dropped from the planes, also three baskets of pigeons.

The battalion was finally rescued on October 7, 1918.

At twelve o'clock, noon, on October 7, one of the observers of the 50th AERO SQUADRON called for the front lines of the 77th DIVISION, and the Battalion panel of the 2nd Bn. was displayed and the observer immediately marked down the correct coordinates of their position, and dropped a message to that effect at the headquarters of the division, and at six o'clock on the afternoon of the 7 of October the Battalion of the 308th was rescued by the DIVISIONAL RESERVES.

The Divisional Reserves had tried to get to the Battalion several times but the commanding officer of the battalion had sent back the wrong coordinates of his position, therefore they were unable to locate the battalion. All of the provisions dropped from the planes of the 50th AERO SQUADRON was not received by the battalion on account of the wrong coordinates being sent back.

Major Whittlesey was in command of the 2nd. Bn. 308th Inf. 77th Div.

Message from G-3 (Operations) of the 77th Division.

"Whittlesey found on the coordinates where we had give our front line. The reason why he was fired into by our friendly artillery was because he had sent back the wrong coordinates of his position."

# Judsons

## HOBBY SHOP

2426 So. FEDERAL

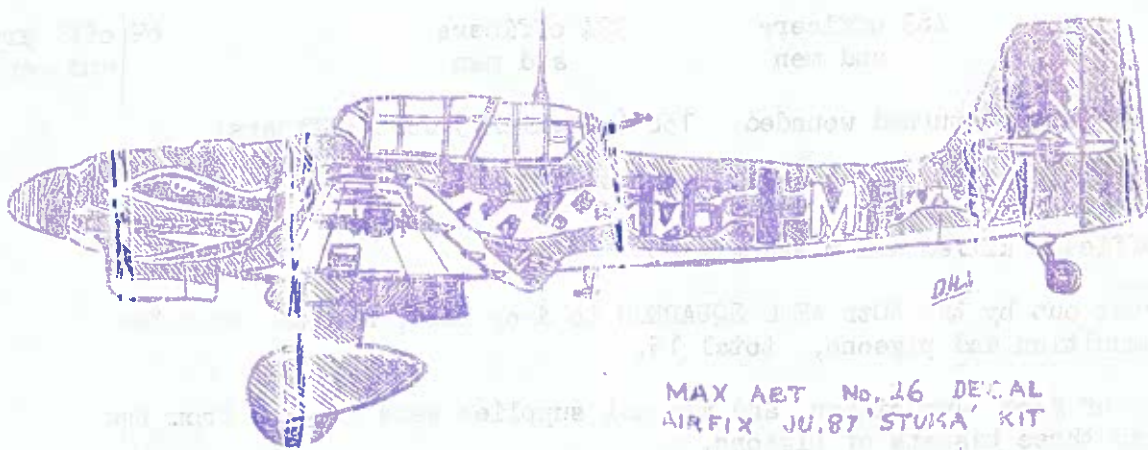
934 0022

SPECIALIZING

IN

PLASTIC — MODEL — AIRPLANE

KITS — DECALS — PAINT



MAX ABT No. 16 DECAL  
AIRFIX 'JU.87' STUKA' KIT

ALSO INCLUDED IN THIS SHEET

TWO ADDITIONAL JU87 MARKING SETS



III GRUPPE STAB.  
Major HANS Ulrich Rudal.



5. STAFFEL II. GRUPPE  
STUKAGESCHWADER 2.

ALL EARLY MAX ABT NUMBERS ALWAYS IN STOCK !!!

ALSO  
HIS-AIR-DEC — DECAL  
DECALS



## LIBRARIAN'S CORNER

Several new books have been donated to the library. They are:

### WORLD WAR II -- EUROPE

Combined Operations, the official story of the commandos. Donated by Dan Jones. The story of the early (to early '43) exploits of the British Commandos. A wartime book, it manages to keep the superlatives under control to tell an interesting fast-paced story, complete with some excellent photo-maps. (Hard Cover)

Crossbow and Overcast, by James McGovern. The story of Germany's development of the V-2 rocket, and of the race to obtain the technical information and the scientists that built it. An interesting account, with the emphasis on the cloak and dagger aspects. Donated by Charles Williams.

### CIVIL WAR

Bruce Catton's early trilogy--Mr. Lincoln's Army, Glory Road, and A Stillness at Appomattox. Catton's excellent history of the Army of the Potomac. Some of Catton's best writing. A gift of Gene Dorr.

The Blockade and the Cruisers, by J.R. Russell Soley. A detailed account of an important aspect of the Civil War, and one which has not received the attention due it. Readable and comprehensive, it was originally published about 25 years after the Civil War. Donated by Ed Meyers.

Any other donations will be appreciated. It isn't necessary to use the library. Just ask Sam for the key and use it at any time.

Any suggestions as to what the library should try to acquire? We do have some budget, so all ideas will be considered.

\*\*\*\*\*

### HISTORIANS SCUTTLEBUTT

The April meeting will feature Mike Ohl, who will be speaking on the subject of "German Policy and Military Tactics During the Prussian War and WW II."

At some undisclosed date (to this reporter, at least,) Jim Colman will speak to the club about Japan. We are looking forward to that.

Well, friends, it's once again time for an Auction. Jim MacLachlan is collecting material for the great event, which is to be held in April. If you have something which you feel should have a minimum price, remember to say so when the item goes to the block, if not sooner.

ATTENTION WARGAMERS!! As most of you probably know, Dick Moore is building a sandtable. So keep a weekend open in the near future, because he is sure to want to test it.

Also on the wargame front, the Jones battlefield is ready for any and all comers.

CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR NEWSLETTER!!!!!!

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

CONFIDENTIAL

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..

... ..  
... ..  
... ..