

Bridge at Remagen after battle report (August 5-7, 2011) by Jack Budnick

We attended the 3rd Annual "Bridge at Remagen" Event in Tidioute, PA. Tidioute is located on the western edge of the Allegheny National Forest and is absolutely beautiful. It was sponsored by The Battle Babies WWII Living History Unit (99th Division) because the 99th Division participated in the battle in WWII. They were interested in sponsoring an event that's related to their unit history. It was attended by the following BROLHO members: Mark Genowitz, Bill Stratton, Walt Matuszek, Jeff Dolhanczyk, Eric Ryan, Tom Knaper, Nancy Lare, Laura McGinnis, Eileen Walsh, and myself. We set up camp in a baseball field along the Allegheny River on Friday. Next door was a bar and restaurant, which did a lot of business, thanks to the reenactors. There were various vendors set up as well. There were a good many Germans with very nice set ups for their encampments. As elaborate as some of them were, they must have been more local than we were.

We had a tactical in a quarry Saturday morning about a ½ mile from our camp. We were driven out on the flatbed of a tractor and trailer. The tactical was an offensive one, with us going against a much better equipped German Army. It was a good tactical with lots of hilly terrain, with a variety of stone piles, high grasses, woods, and water. The attack began with an artillery barrage, of which there was sporadic explosions that continued throughout the battle. It was a really nice tactical.

The afternoon battle was for the bridge that crossed the Allegheny River. Pat Tarasovitch, the event coordinator of the 99th, chose this location for the bridge battle because the bridge is of a WWII era construction and the positive response from the open armed townspeople themselves. We crossed the bridge and walked upriver for about a ½ mile. We waited for the Germans to set up and then proceeded to push towards the bridge. We actually battled thru the back yards of the homes along the river and some people had small deck parties while watching us chase the Germans. We ran across a stream, which was pretty cool, and then thru a playground. We ended up at a lumber yard at the base of the bridge. There was a nice size crowd at both ends of the bridge, with a VIP tent set up with seating for veterans. The women, who portrayed German refugees, ran across the bridge ahead of both armies, fearing for their lives. They heard the Big Red One was approaching, and fast!

We paused at the bridge for the pyrotechnics to go off, first on the German side, and then ours. They did a nice job and the explosions echoed throughout the mountains along the river valley. As we crossed the bridge, the pyrotechnic crew were constantly throwing smoke bombs along the bridge, creating a unique condition that we've never experienced before. There were quite a few people in watercraft on the Allegheny River watching the battle from below.

It was a great event and hopefully, we'll be back again. The 99th Div. did a fantastic job. They sell t-shirts and donate the proceeds to local charities. The reenactor money that feeds the local economy, is greatly appreciated by the local townspeople. We had people handing out bottles of water for the reenactors to drink after the battle as we marched back to our encampment. This is a perfect example of reenactors helping the community and having fun by creating a win-win situation.

Since this was the first time for us, we packed light and plan to bring other items in the future. One of which is proper clothing to swim in the Allegheny River. It was very hot after the battles and the water felt good, even though I was in uniform.

Small side story:

I had been interested in the Remagen Bridge Battle years ago because I had read about it in the newspaper's "Today in History" section since it fell on my birthday of March 7 but in 1945. I had read that the 99th had been there. My late Uncle, Mike Budnick, was in the 786th Tank Battalion, which was attached to the 99th Div. I had asked my uncle if he was at Remagen and he said he crossed the original bridge before it collapsed. They stayed in the basement of the homes along the Rhine and

he witnessed the German jets trying to bomb the bridge. He also heard the original bridge collapse, which killed quite a few engineers. He obtained a few German souvenirs from the house and gave them to me, one being a Nazi banner. For symbolic reasons, I brought the banner to the event with the hopes of having our group pose in front of the bridge with it displayed. I showed this to some members of the 99th, thinking that they would find it interesting that I had an actual remnant from the original battle.

Just by chance, there was a crew from National Geographic, doing a report on reenacting. After the Saturday morning meeting, they said they're looking for a story and they told them about me and the banner. They hunted me down and did a short interview with their camera crew at the quarry after the morning tactical. They wanted me to bring the banner with me at the bridge battle that afternoon, and display it at the bridge.

After we took the bridge, all of us posed in front of the bridge with the banner displayed in front of us and the director, Mike Warner (of Bear Gryll's Man vs. Wild Show), told us what to say and their camera crew recorded it. I heard they're supposed to release the documentary sometime in the spring of 2012. If they don't edit it out, it will be a good piece of publicity for the BROLHO.

<http://www.remagenbridge.com/index.html>