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# Buffalo Soldiers Research Museum Newsletter

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*A Special Note to Honor  
World War 1 Buffalo Soldier  
Dr. John Morton Finney  
(June 25, 1889- January 28, 1998)*

Dr. John Morton Finney lived for 108 years. For this issue, we commemorate his last day of life in January 1998. After serving in WW1, he earned 7 academic degrees, was a teacher and principal at an all-black high school in Indianapolis, and was the oldest practicing lawyer in Indiana. Hats off to our local hero!

## ***Remembering the Wereth 11 - Battle of the Bulge, 1944-45***

On August 5, 1942, the all African American 333rd Field Artillery Battalion was activated at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. They served in Normandy, Brittany where they participated in the siege of Brest and battled across Northern France before arriving in the Ardennes sector as part of the corps artillery of the U.S. VIII Corps.

The 333rd Field Artillery initially supported the 2nd Infantry Division and its



replacement, the 106th Infantry Division. At the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge, they were eleven miles behind the front lines. On December 16, 1944, German soldiers launched a furious offensive that concentrated on a wooded area of Belgium that was defended by an American division. With the rapid advance of the Germans, the 333rd was ordered to withdraw further west, while the Service Batteries were ordered to stay behind to give covering fire to the 106th Division.

On December 17, the troops were overrun with most killed or captured. They suffered more casualties during the Battle of the Bulge than any other artillery unit in the VIII Corps. Six officers (including the commanding officer) and 222 enlisted men became either casualties or prisoners of war.

Eleven of its soldiers became separated from the unit after it was overrun early on the second day of the battle. For hours, they trudged through waist-deep snow with only two weapons. They located a small farming hamlet where they raised a white flag for help. They were hungry and exhausted. Their location was in Wereth, Belgium (near Amel), where a farmer, Mathias Langer and his family, sheltered them.

Langer invited the men into their home where he gave them bread and coffee. Wereth was a town of divided loyalties. It was part of Germany before World War 1 so harboring Americans was risky business.



Shortly after the soldiers arrival and before they could finish their meal, a military vehicle pulled up. A Nazi sympathizer revealed their presence to members of the 1st SS Division. The American soldiers did not want to cause any problems for the family so they immediately went outside with their hands up. The German soldiers, members of the Waffen SS, ordered the Americans to sit on the damp ground behind the house. It began to get dark and the soldiers were shivering. Mathias Langer asked the Germans if the soldiers could wait somewhere warmer. The German soldiers laughed and said that they could warm up when they started running. The exhausted soldiers ran and the Germans followed in their vehicle. Although they had surrendered, they were taken to a field where they were tortured, maimed, and shot.

By early February, the fighting subsided and people began to venture out. Mathias and his wife, Maria, were walking to church when they saw the hands emerging from the ground. The snow was melting and the bodies were visible where they had been slaughtered. Allied soldiers indicated that the soldiers had their fingers

cut off, legs broken, and at least one was shot while trying to bandage a comrade's wounds.

The remnants of the 333rd Field Artillery Battalion were ordered to Bastogne and incorporated into its sister unit the 969th Field Artillery Battalion. Both units provided fire support for the 101st Airborne Division in the Siege of Bastogne, subsequently being awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. They subsequently served in the Central Europe campaign until the end of the war and also served in the Rhineland Campaign.

The 333rd Field Artillery Battalion was inactivated June 10, 1945 in Germany, while the 333rd Field Artillery Group was inactivated at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia on December 30, 1945. Both the 333rd and 969th Field Artillery Battalions were later reactivated, however there were additional reorganizations. Four target acquisition batteries of the 333rd Field Artillery served in Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Today, there is only one target acquisition battery in the Army which still bear the number of the 333rd Field Artillery.

The victims at Wereth were:

1. Staff Sergeant **Thomas J. Forte**, Service # 34036992, buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot C Row 11 Grave 55 awards: Purple Heart
2. Technician fourth grade (T/4) **William Edward Pritchett** of Alabama
3. Technician fourth grade (T/4) **James A. Stewart** of West Virginia, Service number 35744547 buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot C Row 11 Grave 2 awards: Purple Heart
4. Corporal **Mager Bradley** of Mississippi
5. Private First Class **George Davis** of Alabama, Service # 34553436 buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot D Row 10 Grave 61 awards: Purple Heart
6. Private First Class **James Lee Leatherwood** of Pontotoc, Mississippi
7. Private First Class **George W. Moten** of Texas, Service # 38304695 buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot E Row 10 Grave 29 awards: Purple Heart
8. Private First Class **Due W. Turner** of Arkansas, Service # 38383369 buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot F Row 5 Grave 9 awards: Purple Heart
9. Private **Curtis Adams** of South Carolina, Service # 34511454 buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot C Row 11 Grave 41 awards: Purple Heart
10. Private **Robert Green**
11. Private **Nathanial Moss** of Texas, Service # 38040062 buried at Henri-Chapelle Plot F Row 10 Grave 8 awards: Purple Heart

Over the years, the massacre was rarely talked about in the village. Herman Langer, Mathias' son, never recovered from the memory of the soldiers. In 1996 (more than 50 years later), he placed a cross at the site and found the names of the 11 men that no one seemed to remember. In 2001, a small group of Belgians raised funds to purchase the property and build a memorial. It is believed to be the only memorial to African-American soldiers of World War II in Europe.

For the last 10 years, there has been a ceremony in the spring that attracts Americans, Belgians, and Germans. It continues to grow larger every year.



In the United States, historians began to search for their descendants. The body of Pfc. Jimmie Lee Leatherwood, who was 22 when he was killed in Wereth was buried in an unmarked grave in Pontotoc, Mississippi. In 2012, local supporters and Leatherwood's family unveiled an engraved headstone with a short description of how he was killed. In Piedmont, West Virginia, veterans and historians search James Stewart's background. They found letters sent to his mother telling her not to worry.

The service of these soldiers has inspired so many and has attracted worldwide attention. Understanding what they did illustrates patriotism and honor.

Information taken from -

Michaels, J. (November 8, 2013). *Massacre emerges from history*. USA Today for the Indianapolis Star.

Other resources include -

Lopresti, A.J. (2010). *The foxhole: Humanities darkest hour*. BookSurge Publishing, North Charleston, SC.

Moore, C. (2007). *Fighting for America: Black soldiers - the unsung heroes of world war 2*. One World/Ballantine, NYC.

Warthen, L.D. (2013) *Walking in the footsteps of the brave*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, North Charleston, SC.

*The Wereth Eleven* DVD starring Ken Arnold and Corey Reynolds. 60 minute documentary.

For more information about the Buffalo Soldiers and other  
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