THAT WE MIGHT BE FREE

PART 4 _____ *Greetings from Belgium, Freida Marie Taylor*

I started writing this article about a week ago and put it aside because I just didn't have the creative spirit to write. With the current chain of events that have been stirring every imaginable emotion within me, I sat before the screen today and decided to put these thoughts and feelings into words. The heinous attack on the United States Tuesday, September 11th, will go in the history books along with everything I have written about here in my articles. Looked at through curious eyes, World War II now is more real to me. After seeing the devastation, loss of lives and fanatical attack of my country on national television, my confusion, my tears, my compassion for so many innocent families and my anger for revenge turns me in circles. I have watched every station I possibly can, hoping to catch bits and pieces here and there about what is going on. I have prayed with the services, I have cried over others' reports of lost loved ones, I have quietly blessed each and every firefighter, policeman and public servant. I have whispered thank you to the foreign leaders who offered their public sympathy and support. I have secretly prayed for God's sword of revenge on those laughing and cheering over innocent loss of lives. I can only hope that as I write these additional articles, the show of patriotism that is so prominent now will prevail throughout the long road ahead. If we falter at anytime, then all these heroes will have died in vain.

Driving down a picturesque highway, casually glancing to the left and right at the tranquil farms, one thinks this is the most peaceful landscape for a sunny afternoon. Rounding a sweeping bend in the road, dipping down into a little ravine and popping back up into an open field, I nearly flew out of the seat, excitedly yelling, "STOP THE CAR!"

In the peaceful field with grazing cattle all around was a site that looked like it had come from outerspace. The notorious "Siegfried Line" I had heard and read about existed in all its formidable glory, intact, unmovable and impassable. I really had no idea what I expected to see but ancient miniature pyramids with weathered corners and patches of moss, practically overgrown by more than half a century of vegetation was what mostly remained.

After World War I the Germans began reinforcing their borders with the concrete "dragon teeth" from the border of Holland all the way to the borders of Switzerland. As a border country, I would really wonder what my neighbor was up to with his efforts of such concrete constructions. On May 28, 1940, Belgium found out what was happening and surrendered to the German invasion.

Many battles ensued on Belgian soil. A very noteworthy victory for the American and Allied troops was the Battle of the Bulge in the mountainous eastern region called the Ardennes.

http://www.trabel.com/bastogne/bastogne-battleforbastogne.htm

At Bastogne General George Patton came to the rescue of the people and the German surrounded American airborne division.

The famous quote of General Mc Auliffe is carved in stone on the town's square. When asked by the Germans if he would surrender, tired, out of supplies and ammunition and not knowing when reinforcements would arrive, he uttered, "NUTS". The comment became humorous. A single word boosted the moral and courage of the battered division and reinforcements arrived in time to drive the Germans out of Bastogne. A simple four letter word went down in history as a true response when asked for surrender.

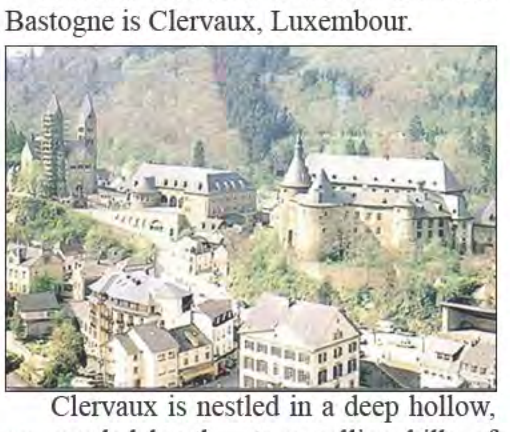
Today, every road that enters into the city of Bastogne is symbolically guarded. A turret of an American tank facing away from the city, is a daily reminder of the price of freedom.

The Bastogne Military Museum offers a history of what had happened in their region and stands as a partner to the American Memorial dedicated to the soldiers who fought and died for Belgium's freedom.

In an inner circle, one reads the detailed story on carved pillars. Surrounded by a fortress in the shape of a five-pointed star, the battalion names and the smell of memorial flowers added to the feeling of honor and respect. The names of the fifty states crown the upper rim of the five-pointed star. From the roof one can look out over the landscape and see on diagrams at each point where the battalions took their stands and liberated towns in their advances. Nearly 48,000 American soldiers lost their lives, were missing in action or were seriously wounded in this battle.

http://www.chez.com/chezlecoiffeur/bast1.htm [be sure to click on the picture when you follow this link!!].

Another liberated town not far from Bastogne is Clervaux, Luxembour.



Clervaux is nestled in a deep hollow, surrounded by the steep rolling hills of farming communities. Many villagers lost their lives when the Germans circled the rim of the hollow, trapping the villagers below. Ville de Clervaux, a castle situated on a mid sized bluff in the bend of the Clerve River in the hollow, served as the headquarters for American troops in the region.

At a disadvantage from below the German forces, the American troops fought back the attack and liberated Clervaux. In the town square, a statue of an American soldier reminds inhabitants today of their liberation and expresses their gratitude.

Encircling the memorial is the shape of a star edged by beautiful flowers. The American flag waves reverently in this quiet corner of respect and honor. Now gone but never forgotten, the emblems of the defending troops are displayed on the statue's base.

Being of curious mind, a trip further down the road to Diekirch in Luxembourg, unfolded an extensive visit to the Military Museum. Safeguarding thousands of photographs and memorabilia from the liberation, one can truly experience the essence and importance of these battles.

www.luxembourg.co.uk/NMMH

MUSEE NATIONAL
D'HISTOIRE MILITAIRE
DIEKIRCH

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connect following link to this picture please]

http://www.luxembourg.co.uk/NMMH/

Dioramas are expertly recreated from photos and made realistic by many visiting veterans to the museum. Many extras are added from memory, details not captured by the pictures but by the reality of experiencing it first hand. Autographs and identifications of nameless faces line the walls beneath each photo. Cooking and camping gear as well as the ancient boxes and amenities from the Red Cross are carefully sealed inside show cases. Hand written letters to and from home, some on the military letterhead told of missed loved ones and lost sons and heroes.

Throughout the whole museum the efforts, planning and execution of military maneuvers are explained. The orders from the generals, down to personal accounts are documented. One general in particular, General George Patton, is epitomized in a special park and museum in Ettelbruck, Luxembourg.

General Patton
Memorial museum
Ettelbruck

5, Rue Dr. Klein
L-9054 ETTELBRUCK
tel (352) 810322

(Connect the following link to the image above please) http://www.luxembourg.co.uk/NMMH/patton.html

The park lies in a beautifully landscaped area, hidden behind tall hedges to create a quiet atmosphere. Two large memorials are displayed, one of General Patton himself in full military dress. The other, a memorial dedicated to the man's leadership, heroism and to his memory.

These are just a couple of historic places that cause the heart to draw tight. The displays and stories bring tears to the eyes. There is no one to turn to and say I am so proud of being an American, so grateful to these warriors and heroes of freedom and peace.

The language barrier is difficult here, but the monuments, memorials and gestures shown throughout Belgium and Luxembourg continue to express the gratitude felt by the liberated countries. Even in our time of American crisis today, the support and encouragement remain steadfast. Our heroes and soldiers did not die in vain for freedom in these lands.