

Retired Luxembourg NCO finally awarded Korean War Bronze Star

By Tom Larscheid

CASERNE GRAND-DUC JEAN, DIEKIRCH, Luxembourg — Raymond Beringer, a retired Luxembourg army sergeant major, was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device here earlier this month by Maj. Gen. Buford C. Blount III, commander of the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Stewart, Ga.

Beringer, 70, was recognized for his heroic actions during the Korean War while serving as a machine-gunner with the heavy weapons company of the Belgian United Nations Command (B.U.N.C.), 7th Infantry Regiment, U.S. 3rd Infantry Division.

Beringer, an infantry corporal on his second tour of Korea, was manning a machine gun on the "White Horse Mountain Line" during the night of April 7-8, 1953, when the Chinese communists launched a heavy assault in an attempt to break through the United Nations' lines.

"They came in waves," Beringer recalled of the attack. "They didn't have any brains. They reminded me of the old Soviet army. There was someone behind with a machine gun. If you didn't go forward, they shot you."

The forward positions were pushed back but the line did not break. The battalion's right flank was under heavy pressure when Beringer's streams of bullets started to hit home.

Operating a water-cooled .30 caliber machine gun, Beringer fired belt after belt of steel into the charging enemy.

Unable to get a clear field of fire, Beringer lugged his 80-pound machine gun out of his sandbagged bunker and placed it on top.

From this exposed position Beringer's accurate fire, despite heavy enemy mortar and artillery fire, broke the back of the attack.

"The M1917A1 was a good machine gun," Beringer said. "Since it was water-cooled, we could shoot the whole night."

Beringer received a battlefield promotion to sergeant for his actions.

"My commander said he was putting me in for an award. He asked me if I wanted a Belgian or American one," Beringer said. "I wasn't familiar with the Belgian one so I asked for the American one, the Silver Star. It was an honor for us to serve under United States command."

Beringer returned to Luxembourg and remained in the army until he retired as a sergeant major in 1986.

But he never quite forgot about the promised award.

"An error of command, I think they call it," he chuckled. "I have a copy of the documents submitted in June 1953. Only in 1991 did they discover the initial document. It was put in another file that no one saw."

The original Silver Star recommendation from Beringer's company commander was never placed into U.S. Army personnel administration channels.

In 1988, then Lt. Col. Thomas Fosnacht, a U.S. Army Reserve officer who periodically drilled as the Army attaché to Luxembourg, was approached by friends and former comrades of Beringer and asked to assist in reprocessing the award recommendation. He readily agreed.

It took Fosnacht two years searching U.S. military archives to confirm there was no record of any recommendation.

He also contacted the headquarters of the 3rd Infantry Division, then located in Wuerzburg, Germany, to see if that commanding general was

still authorized to issue decorations.

"At that time there was a requirement that if a recommendation was over three years old, or if the incident was over three years, the time had elapsed," Fosnacht said. "The law has changed since then. That's why you see Medals of Honor and other decorations being issued for World War II and Korea."

Fosnacht left Europe in 1991 thinking the award recommendation would be processed and Beringer would finally receive his medal.

"I thought the matter had been settled, but when I came back for Memorial Day last year, I found out it had languished again. I was terribly disappointed," said the colonel, now the senior U.S. Army liaison officer to the Germany army in Cologne, Germany. "They were honoring Korean War veterans and he wasn't recognized."

This time the Luxembourg Ambassador to NATO, Jean-Jacques Kasel, approached Gen. William F. Kernan, the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic for assistance. Senator John Warner, Va., and Congressman Michael Oxley, Ohio, pledged congressional support to waive the long-expired time limitations.

"With congressional support you can get a waiver to that time restriction and resubmit the paperwork," Fosnacht said. "It went into Army personnel command awards and decoration branch that has a special board that reviews old recommendations and resubmissions. They recommend to the G-1 of the Army, who makes the final decision."

"All teams have leaders,"



PHOTO: Tom Larscheid

Retired Luxembourg army Sgt. Maj. Beringer salutes during the playing of the American anthem after receiving his Bronze Star.

Blount said just before the award ceremony. "One of those remarkable NCOs was Cpl. Raymond Beringer. His single act of bravery saved his unit and the situation."

"We in the 3rd Infantry Division are proud to have had these brave men in our ranks. . . . They are part of our division and its glorious history," he said. "They are proof that the multinational unit can be successful and vic-

torious."

Of the 228 Luxembourg soldiers who volunteered for service in the B.U.N.C., only 85 were selected. Two were killed in action and 13 wounded.

The U.S. Army awarded the unit a Presidential Unit Citation for its actions during the Korean War in addition to the coveted Combat Infantry Badge.



PHOTO: Archives

A water-cooled .30 caliber machine gun in a bunker overlooking the "White Horse Mountain Line" in 1953.

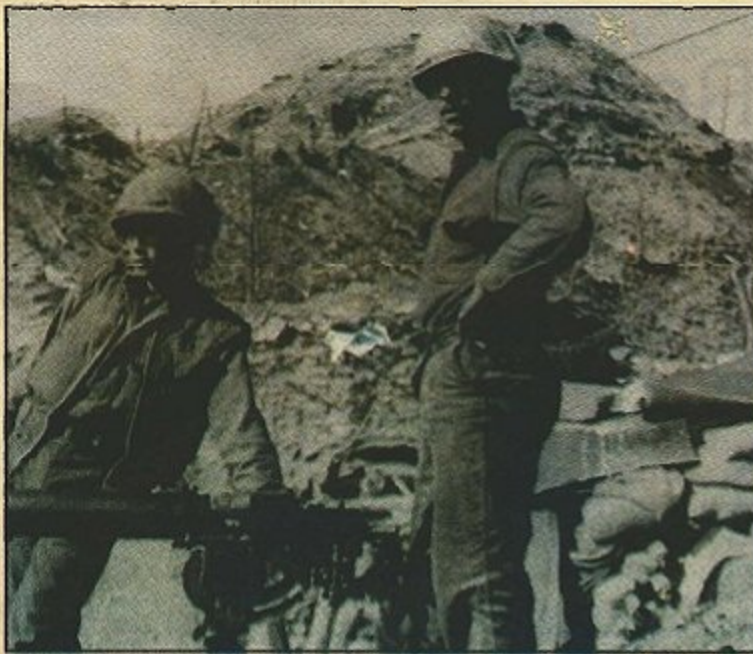


PHOTO: Archives

South Korean soldier Kang-Yun-Sup and Cpl. Beringer. Beringer manhandled his machinegun to the exposed hill behind him.