

La Roche January 1945.



wall.

This is the “*arranged meeting*” of 1st Black Watch and the 635th Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the 84th US Infantry Division “*Rail Splitters*”. It is the image used on the plaque now on the wall of the house behind them on Rue de la Gare in La Roche en Ardennes. The personnel involved are on the left Sgt. Harris McAllister, Cpl. John Donald, and Sgt. Richards 1st Battalion Black Watch. On the right Sgt. Ray Stangler, Cpl. Harlem Mathis and Sgt. Max Beal of the 635th US Tank Destroyer Battalion. If you go onto google earth you can enter the street view of Rue de la Gare and see the plaque on the



This is the real meeting. The house is out of shot on the right but behind is the large building and the end wall of Hotel de Luxembourg which is now the location of the Musee De La Bataille Des Ardennes. If you are ever in Belgium it is well worth a visit and the owner Michel Bouillon is a very nice man and very helpful. He deserves a credit for what his late father and he have done to maintain the memory and honour of those allied servicemen that took part. You can also navigate via google earth and see the museum front on Rue Chamont 5 6980 La Roche en Ardennes.



This view is of the troops sharing a heat and no doubt a stiff drink and is taken from inside the house of where the plaque is mounted on the outside wall. The view looks down the street where the museum is located.



This photo shows the 1st Black Watch clearing mines but I think it is a staged photo. If you were to carry on straight over the bridge to the left of the photo it goes into Rue de la Gare. Go back right on the bridge it is the main road to Hotton where the 1st Black Watch broke through the German lines and cleared the villages of Wardahay, Cheoux and Hampteau.

The following is a section from my record about my father Leslie Milne Johnstone LMJ

Ardennes Offensive. “ *Battle of the Bulge* “.

The German Wehrmacht launched the Ardennes Offensive with over a ¼ million men on December 16th 1944 in weather conditions which favoured the surprise offensive as the Allied airforce was grounded due to bad weather.

Field Marshal Montgomery had been planning the assault on the Ruhr but with the news of the German penetration in the Ardennes worsening by 19th December he decided to send his reserve Corps for that assault, that being 30th Corps under General Brian Horrocks to support the American troops in the Ardennes. On the 19th December 1944 the 51st Highland Division and 1st 5th and 7th Black Watch Battalions were moved South in reserve under command of 30 Corps when the news

of the Ardennes Offensive came through and they travelled by way of Grave, Eindhoven, Moll and Louvain then East to Maastricht and onto Liege where they were billeted in snow covered villages around Liege which was still under attack from V1 rocket bombs. 1st Black Watch celebrated Hogmanay in Soheit Tinlot just South of Quatre Bras where the Scottish Regiments had served well halting the French advance a day before Waterloo on June 17th 1815.



In atrocious weather conditions the 51st Highland Division were moved to Hotton in Belgium in preparation for the advance to La Roche-en-Ardenne on the Ourthe river to provide support to the 1st US Army forces on 7th January 1945. Their objective was to relieve the battle weary 53rd Welsh Division and then attack and repel the Germans between Dinant and Marche-en-Femme and they advanced to their start line area on a freezing January 5th during which bare skin stuck to the freezing metal of their weapons. On the 7th to the 11th they assaulted and cleared the villages of Jemelle, Marloie, Hedree,

Hodister, Warizy, Genes, Rochampay and Ligniere with a stiff action at Bande. On January 11th the 1st Battalion Black Watch broke through the German lines at Hotton in what was a rough action against elements of the 116th Panzer “ *Windhund* “ (Greyhound) Division and 560th Volksgrenadierdivision.



“ *Windhund* “ Half Track. ↑



“Windhund” advance map. ↑

A fortified house on a spur of high ground blocked the advance from Hotton to La Roche and LMJ was seen crossing bullet swept ground to assault the house as it was holding up the advance whilst his platoon fired on it with Bren guns and a PIAT which set the house on fire. Convinced by a German speaking soldier, some 10 Germans surrendered out of the burning house, others not. As they were clearing the village a Belgian lady offered them hot soup !.

I have an article on this from the Forfar Dispatch.

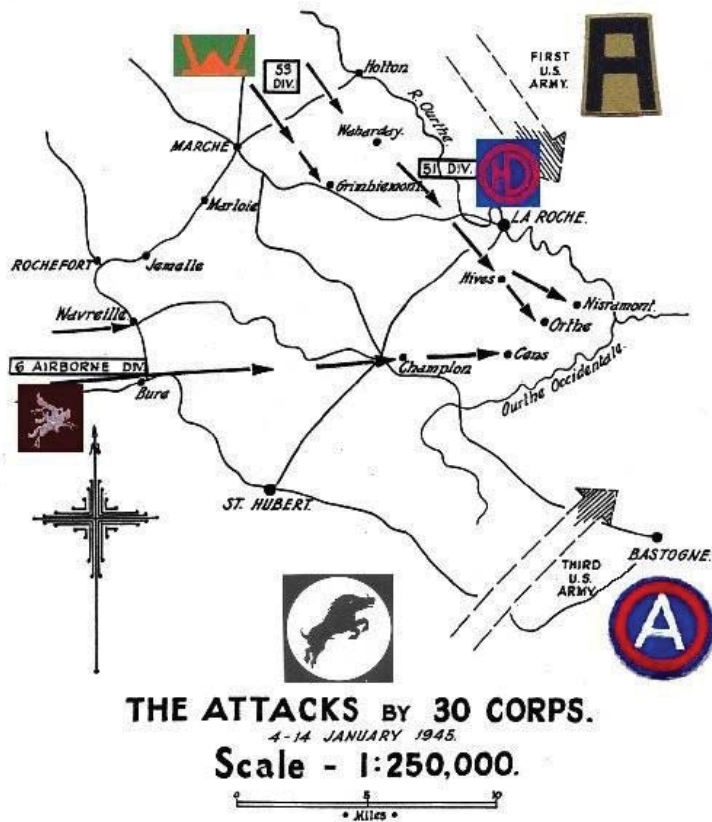


The 1st and 7th Black Watch, following the precipitous main road from Hotton to La Roche and the banks of the Ourthe river through the villages of Waharday, Cheoux and Hampteau, which were all abandoned arrived in La Roche where the streets were littered with German dead from a heavy artillery bombardment. However, hold out snipers shot two platoon commanders before the 1st's B Company cleared the streets and occupied the old fort on the high ground and 7th Black Watch passed through towards the villages of Hives and Lavaux with a stiff fight against self

propelled guns at Hives.

Just before noon, 1st Black Watch met American troops from the 653rd Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the 84th US Infantry Division advancing from Samree. The meeting pictured above is commemorated on the wall of a house close to where they first met on the corner of Rue de la Gare and Route de Cielle, with a plaque depicting the event. By 14th January 1945, the 51st Highland Division had cleared the villages of Hives after another stiff fight, Hubermont, Mierchamps, Erneuville, Ortho and Nisramont and with all objectives met, was by the 22nd back on “The Island” in Holland in their original billett areas left just over a month before. The 51st Highland Division had lost 54 men of whom 41 are buried in the British and Commonwealth War Cemetery at Hotton, some just 19 years of age. **Note:-**There is also a memorial to the Black Watch

on the ridge overlooking La Roche on the road to Hotton. By the end of the assault at La Roche the only part of the town standing mainly intact was the old Fort built over an old Roman site that dominated the heights above the town.



30 Corps route of advance in the Ardennes.



La Roche-en-Ardenne after the Ardennes Offensive with the old fort on the hill top.



War Cemetery at Hotton.



Division Monument La Roche.



A captured German Half Track is re-decorated. The Sergeant in the foreground could well be LMJ. Some 13 new half tracks were captured in the action.

Distinguished Conduct Medal Citation.

Johnstone, Leslie Milne, Sergeant

2766113, 1st Bn. Black Watch (Forfar) (Periodic)

Throughout the campaign in N.W. Europe, since early June 1944 this NCO has either led a section or acted as Platoon Sjt, on occasion commanding a Platoon. Throughout he displayed absolutely outstanding courage and leadership. In Holland, in October, after the crossing of a river, he personally led an assault on an enemy post and killed the occupants, and later used an abandoned wasp flame thrower with great effect. At Laroche in January he personally led an assault across bullet swept ground to clear a strongly held house, the capture of which was vital to the attack. After the Rhine crossing, he took over a Platoon and held out in a house for several hours against the most determined enemy attacks accompanied by bazookas and S.P. guns. At one time, he personally climbed onto the roof in full view of the enemy and from this position was able to shoot and kill a bazooka party who were infiltrating and endangering the whole position. During the whole campaign, it is difficult to speak too highly of this NCO's conduct. Throughout his entire Company, his courage is a bye-word, and it is difficult to overestimate the tremendous value of his splendid example to the men around him.

The 1st Battalion Black Watch recommended only five DCM's throughout WWII. Leslie Milne Johnstone received one of them with the recommendation cited in the London Gazette Issue 37442 Supplement 640 on 9th August 1945 and the decoration of the award by The King on 24th January 1946. The medal is awarded For Distinguished Conduct in the Field. **It is second only to the Victoria Cross.**
