

**E.T.O. Echoes**

CHRISTMAS in SAINT NICHOLAS -- as remembered by  
Walter Owens, 2" Section, 1st Platoon, Recon.

After dark on Christmas Eve, 1944, the badly-slipping clutch of M-8 R-15, "Rhumba", barely brought us to St. Nicholas, somewhere west of the Arlon-Martelange road. We had received word late in the afternoon that 126" Ordnance was set up there, and CC A, Fourth Armored, had directed us to take the M-8 back there for repairs.

When we arrived, we were assigned to a house in the village occupied by an elderly man and his wife. They welcomed us and showed us where we could sleep. We dragged in our bedrolls and the remains of the 10-in-1 rations from our last issue in Alsace about four days before. Coffee made on the kitchen stove, a few cast-iron crackers, and little else made our evening meal. We bedded down about 9:30, glad to be inside with ordnance personnel pulling the guard. Hundreds of big guns were singing Christmas carols as we made good use of our first chance to sleep in four days.

It seemed that morning came instantly, and we were up before daylight to be ready to head back to the front when the M-8 was ready. While our 10-in-1 rations were being heated on the kitchen stove by the housewife, we became curious about a chair in a corner covered with fine white crystals and wet in spots. "Doc" Kamp, the M-8 driver, spoke with the man in what he called "low German" to ask about the chair. The old man's answers were evasive. After we had eaten, "Doc" asked the woman about the chair. The story she told sounds grisly today, but we applauded it at the time.

It seems that during the early days of the Breakthrough German Recon had stopped in the village. Among them was a corporal who was very greedy and made her prepare most of her food for him to eat. As he was sitting at the table gorging down the food, one of his men shouted that American tanks were coming. He continued to eat as the others started their vehicles and drove out of town. The woman told us that when they were sure that the other Germans were gone, her husband slipped outside and returned with his axe. While the German continued to eat, the old man split his head down to his shoulders.

As quickly as possible they dragged the body on the chair back behind the barn, and the old man dug a grave while she washed the chair and sprinkled it with salt. Her telling of the story finished, she offered to show us the burial spot. We had to pass that up, however, as the M-8 had been returned and we had to load our effects before taking it out to check the clutch and the 37-mm gun, which had also required repairs. We were directed to a field where we fired the gun three times and decided that it was OK.

About 10:30 Christmas Morning we were on our way to rejoin the lead elements of CC A on the way to Bastogne. Our Christmas in St. Nicholas was over.

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LEFT: Ken Robinson's Recon jeep  
"at lunchtime near Luneville".  
Note that fierce 50-calibre and  
the cutter bar for across-the-  
road German wires. [Photo from  
Robinson via Walt Owens.]

