

# Hillside Highlights

*By, For and About our Hillside Communities*  
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**Editors Note:** What more fitting way to recognize both Veterans Day and Thanksgiving than the story of one of our residents. We are thankful for the service and sacrifice during our wars. May we need no more.

## **BATTLE OF THE BULGE: EMERSON WOLFE'S STORY**

The Ardennes Salient, or Battle of the Bulge (mid-December to mid-January, 1944-45) was the last major German offensive of the Second World War. It caught the Allies by surprise. Before their generals could restore order, ten days of confused fighting had tested the mettle of the combat soldier.

Emerson Wolfe, Captain, commanding Company B, 40th Tank Battalion, 7th Armored Division, narrated to the author his experiences ending with a memorable Christmas Day: "Our whole division was north of where the Germans struck," he began. "I had just returned from a 3-day pass to Paris. We got sudden orders to move out. We went south, not knowing where we were going. We knew nothing of what was happening."

His unit turned east toward the town of St. Vith, one of the Germans' objectives. "We ran into American troops of all sorts heading west, panicking. We continued east. One of our combat commands [that of Brigadier General Bruce C. Clarke] entered St. Vith and set up a defensive position in a sort of horseshoe shape. Clarke held out for about four days. Germans were battering us with tanks, infantry, artillery. My combat command was ordered to form a line of defense running west on the north flank. We held that flank against probing attacks by the Germans. We stopped them from encircling the town, but they did pass on by us, heading west."

With no reinforcements in sight, the order to evacuate was finally given. Emerson's battalion moved about 20 miles west to the village of

Manhay, a strategic crossroads on the main road from Liege to Bastogne. The troops arrived exhausted. Then began the Battle of Manhay.

December 23. "Dead tired. We stopped, and all tried to get some sleep. I don't think I'd lain down more than two hours, when I was ordered to take Company B south to the village of Malempre, about 2 miles away and slightly east of the main road. There I waited, not knowing where the other companies of our battalion were."

December 24. "During the day I was given a rough idea of where our companies A and C were, astride the main road from Liege to Bastogne. I did not like my position and figured out a better way back to Manhay in the event we had to retreat. Orders came, the battalion was to move out and go back through Manhay, start at night, be silent.

Information arrived - an American column would be coming north, and when it approached, to let it pass through. We started in the dark, shortly before 11. I got word the column was approaching. I suddenly heard the commander of C company shout, these were German panzers, not Americans! He panicked - abandoned tanks - the least glorious episode of our whole battalion. [The battalion commander, Lt. Col. John C. Brown, was wounded and put out of action.] I kept going along the route I had figured out. I came to a bridge where some American troops were planning to blow it up. We got across just before they did. I joined some other American units and saved all my company. I got back to the point where we were supposed to be, on a high ridge north of Manhay. We were the only company of the battalion intact."

December 25. "We sat there most of the day. The Germans had stopped in Manhay and did not attack the hill where we were. We waited for orders, and in mid-afternoon received them, to take the company to a safe point on the main road and report to General Clarke. I reported to him. He was waiting for me. He told me one of the parachute battalions was dug in close to Manhay; it had tried to get into Manhay and had been forced back. I was to take my company and make a mad dash about a mile down hill into the town; the paratroopers would get up and follow me. This looked to me like a suicide mission. Clarke told me to give the orders and return. I did so, but when I returned, I asked him if it was o.k. to ask questions. He said yes. I described the situation: German tanks with 76mm and 88mm guns; no way to go except by the exposed road and in column formation, not knowing exactly where the paratroopers were dug in. He said, wait here, I'll be back. For 20 to 30 minutes I waited while he

went into a nearby woods and talked with General Hasbrouck [Brigadier General Robert W. Hasbrouck, commanding the 7th Armored Division] and General Ridgeway [Major General Matthew B. Ridgway, commanding the XVIII Airborne Corps].

Then he returned and told me "turn your company around and wait where you are for further orders." I did this. The rest of the afternoon heavy American artillery started blasting Manhay, using the deadly proximity fuse. That night the paratroopers and others retook Manhay with few casualties."

Later, George Winter wrote in a memorial brochure, *Manhay: The Ardennes, Christmas, 1944*. "When Wolfe, a first-class officer, came on to the ridge that morning his ten armored vehicles represented save two the only operational tanks which remained to the 40th Tank Battalion. All others that had reached Manhay the previous day were either destroyed or captured." (p. 21)

Emerson concluded: "The Germans had disgraced us. In two or three days we went back on the attack and began pushing the German forces back to where they came from"

(Emerson Wolfe holds two silver stars, a bronze star, a *croix de guerre* and two purple hearts.)

--Ross Yates