

Captain Herman Bottcher

A Brief Account of His Services to America

Prepared by
The Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

(It is hoped that all or part of the following account will be useful and used, for quotation or reference, in paying tribute to one of our country's outstanding heroes.)

When Captain Herman Bottcher was killed on December 31st by a Japanese mortar shell on Leyte Island, America lost one of the greatest heroes of the war, a man who is forever identified with the crucial Buna action, the turning point of the entire New Guinea campaign.

All accounts from the Pacific theatre agree that he exhibited there those same qualities for which his fellow members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade admired him in Spain. He was modest and quiet in manner, but he was singularly courageous and resourceful in action.

His greater experience, his level-headedness, his determination, his warm understanding of men all combined to inspire the confidence of those who worked with and under him. It is small wonder that he was the idol of his men, that he captured the imagination of the American people, that he quickly became something of a legendary figure.

* * *

When Franco, with generous assistance from Hitler and Mussolini, rose in revolt to overthrow the democratic government of Spain, Herman Bottcher, at the age of 26, was living in New York and was in the process of qualifying for American citizenship. In the place of his birth, Landsberg, Germany, he had had a militant democratic upbringing, and had good reason to hate Hitler and all that he stood for and supported.

Bottcher's understanding of fascism told him that Spain would become a bloody testing ground, that this was the first bold step in the ruthless Nazi march toward world power. He knew that the Spanish people, given any reasonable amount of reasonable aid, could indeed carry out their slogan: "Make Madrid the tomb of fascism." But he saw that the western democracies were suicidally denying the Spanish government even the right to buy arms for its defense.

It was natural, therefore, that Bottcher should be among the first Americans to volunteer for service in the International Brigades. He was a member of the first group of men who sailed for Spain from New York harbor on Christmas eve, 1936.

Because of his German birth, Bottcher served first in the famous Thaelmann Battalion. With that heroic detachment he took part in the bitter fighting of late February, 1937, at Jarama and was there for the long front-line vigil that followed, until forced out of action by a wounded hand.

Upon leaving the hospital, he organized and was in command of the 3rd Auto Park, which serviced the International Brigades with transportation in preparation for and throughout the great Brunete offensive of July. Thoroughly exhausted by sleepless days and nights of hard work in this important post, he was sent again to a hospital, this time Villa Paz, for recuperation.

Following this, Bottcher achieved his desire to be assigned with the other Americans in Spain. He became a member of the staff of the 15th Brigade as Commissar of Communications, with rank equivalent to that of a Major. It was in this post that the Lincoln men first got to know him well.

Many stories are told of his efficient and responsible service, during the Belchite action and the first part of the Ebro offensive in July, 1938. Of how, for example, John Cookson, Assistant Commander of Communications, was shot down at his side and of how Bottcher, himself wounded, carried the dying Cookson to a dugout through heavy, enemy fire. And of how Bottcher, forced to requisition two burros for emergency transportation of wire and telephone sets at the front, refused to rest with the other men at the end of the march, but tramped back 10 miles to return the burros to their owner.

Later, in the grim defense of the Ebro positions against the counter-attacks of the fascists, casualties were very heavy and replacements, as always in Spain, very few. Bottcher, like a number of other officers, went into the front lines with a rifle, in the thick of the action in the Sierra Pandols. Thus he ended his service in Spain as he began it, as a front line soldier.

When the International Brigades were withdrawn from Spain, Bottcher, without citizenship papers, had great difficulty in returning to the United States. Americans today are not proud of such injustices and do not like to recall them. When he finally succeeded, he went to San Francisco to be near his aunt and to work as a seaman and in the labor movement with some of his former comrades-in-arms of the Lincoln Brigade.

But the betrayal of Spain and the cynical farce of Munich had their inevitable results. Franco was recognized with a prompt enthusiasm never extended to the legal Spanish Republic, and fascist aggression, thus encouraged, plunged ahead.

Herman Bottcher was not surprised by these developments. He waited only for his next opportunity to strike at fascism. It came with Pearl Harbor and immediately he again volunteered his services.

* * *

In training, the experiences of Spain at once became of value, and, despite the rather more than suspicion with which men with Spanish records were treated in the early part of America's participation in the war, it was as a sergeant that Bottcher left for the South Pacific with the 32nd Division.

The 32nd Division landed at Port Moresby in Oct. 1942 and saw its first action shortly thereafter. Trekking northward, along the single native trail across the Stanley mountains, the Americans soon contacted the enemy and the struggle for Buna was under way. The Japanese held two strongly fortified positions on the north coast, Buna village and Buna Mission, only a few miles apart. The sea behind them was at that time controlled by the Japanese Navy, and the enemy could be driven from the Buna area only by land and from the South.

It was in this campaign that Herman Bottcher won the Distinguished Service Cross and promotion in the field to a Captaincy. In command of a small group of men, with great boldness and even greater skill in jungle warfare, he was able to drive a small corridor to the sea between the two Japanese strongholds, thus dividing and isolating them from each other.

George Johnston, writing in Life Magazine, describes how Bottcher, "Papua's Sergeant York," "established a tiny salient with 12 men right in the Jap positions at Buna, fought off two full-scale counter-attacks, killed more than 60 Japs for certain, and probably killed and wounded nearly a hundred more. In the face of terrible fire from the Japs he held his salient for seven days and nights and paved the way for the capture of Buna Village." (Life--Jan. 4, 1943 P. 24)

The end of this salient, so bravely held against the enemy, promptly became known as "Bottcher's Corner."

"Although wounded in this action," reads his official citation, "he remained with his unit until it was relieved. His outstanding leadership and personal heroism inspired his men and were primarily responsible for the success of the action."

"In this sort of warfare," observes George Johnston, "individual example means everything...Morale is upped 100% whenever a story of a feat of individual gallantry travels from man to man by 'grapevine telegraph.'" "

The news of Bottcher's heroism travelled, of course, far beyond the men at Buna and his fame became known the world over, the Australian Government's official "News and Information Bureau" referring to him, for example, as "America's one-man army."

Bottcher himself went to a jungle hospital, where occurred the scene described in "Bottcher's Christmas" in the December 1944 issue of the American Legion Magazine. Lying there on Christmas eve, wounded in arm, hand and chest and with an eardrum destroyed by a Japanese concussion grenade, "sensitive of distrust for being German-born on one hand and having served with the Spanish Loyalists on the other, Bottcher listens to the men singing "Holy Night, Silent Night." The author, Charles Edmundson, foresees "re-education and redemption" for a people who produced such a song and such a man.

The Buna action was the first American land victory in the Pacific and marked the turning point of our fortunes not only in New Guinea, but in the entire Pacific area. The Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade are exceedingly proud that one of their members played such a key role in it.

* * *

Following Buna, the 32nd Division was withdrawn to Australia for a period of rest. Bottcher followed them when he was released from the hospital. They returned to New Guinea late in 1943. Landing at Aitape they pushed down the coast for the wiping out of 60,000 Japanese who were bottled up in a pocket of ever-decreasing size.

At first Bottcher, now a Captain, was in command of a rifle company. But later he returned to his old type of fighting, this time in command of the company-strength Division Reconnaissance Troop, a position he held up to the time of his death.

The patrols were frequent and extensive. It is said that he spent more time behind Japanese lines than behind his own. Often they took him on a six or seven day march into enemy territory, during which time he and his men lived off the land on which the Japanese themselves starved, with only a minimum of supplies dropped by plane.

His men followed him with devotion and complete confidence. One of them recently made the following striking comment: "People may think I'm crazy but it's actually fun working out there with him. It's like playing cops and robbers. I never feel safer out in the jungle than when I'm with Captain Bottcher."

When the Americans invaded the island of Leyte in the Philippines, Bottcher landed with his division and promptly took his men once again behind the Japanese lines.

In the course of action, he personally captured a Japanese Captain, the highest ranking officer taken on Leyte. Before dawn on Dec. 31, Bottcher and his men were fighting off an estimated 300 heavily armed Japanese. A burst of mortar fire shattered his arm and leg, and he died a few hours later.

* * *

Captain Herman Bottcher was a great man and a great soldier. He was sustained in his heroic deeds by a clear understanding of the cause for which he fought. For five years -- two in Spain and three in the South Pacific -- he fought the good fight against our fascist enemies.

The Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade join all America in paying tribute to his great services and in gaining inspiration from the devotion with which he was resolved upon the total victory of our cause. We mourn his loss and take strength from the example of his great conduct.

During my 16 months in the South Pacific, I was constantly hearing stories of Herman Bottcher. Men who learned that I too had fought in Spain, sought me out, wanting to talk about the man they were proud to know.

It was after I was wounded that my Attending Surgeon, upon learning that I had served in the Lincoln Brigade, told me of Bottcher's death. It was as unbelievable to me as it was to the thousands who had more recently grown to know and admire him in that part of the world.

My Surgeon had not known Bottcher personally, but he spoke of him with the highest respect, for he had heard a great deal about him from the officers and men of the 32nd. He realized that the 32nd had lost not alone a great soldier and an able officer, but also a friend, a leader, a sort of living symbol of what they were fighting for.

After that, throughout my stay at the Leyte hospital, many men, from private to colonel, visited me. They all wanted to meet and speak with a man who had known and fought with Bottcher in Spain. They wanted to exchange experiences in their relationship with him. It was very good. It gave me a fine feeling, a feeling of warm pride in the Lincoln Brigade and in having been associated with a man who was so widely loved and respected.

They told me many stories, stories of Bottcher's great endurance, of his thoughtfulness of others and his care for their safety and welfare, of the strictness of his discipline and the fairness
(more)

Morris Brier O-2043121
1st Lieutenat, Infantry

Detachment of Patients Ft. Dix 2, N.J.
Filton General Hospital

of his orders and his demands of his men, of his outstanding courage in action, which they all greatly admired. Most of all they spoke of the confidence they had in his leadership, how, with him, they were certain of victory.

Through all these stories, it was easy for me to see the Bottcher I had known in Spain -- Bottcher, the anti-fascist German-American -- Bottcher, the lover and defender of democracy. In Spain too, his courage, his unflinching understanding and hatred of fascism had made him a leader. He would have been the first to celebrate the destruction of the Hitler regime and the unconditional surrender of his mother country.

For when he first came to the United States, after the rise of Hitler, he foresaw the havoc the Nazis were to bring to the world. He went to Spain with a little different feeling than the rest of us. He felt that his German birth gave him a special responsibility to help in the wiping out of fascism. I think our 100th Infantry Regiment must feel the same way -- those wonderful Japanese-American fighters who have battled so valiantly in the mud and mountains of Italy. They too must bear the debt of a deluded and corrupted people.

Herman Bottcher was a great soldier and a great man. Maybe the word Hero is used too loosely and too often, but this time is used right. Bottcher was a true hero, a hero from the ranks. He
(more)

Morris Brier O-2043121
1st Lieutenant, Infantry

Detachment of Patients Ft. Dix 2, N.J.
Tilton General Hospital

made great contributions to our final and inevitable victory in the Pacific, contributions that will not be forgotten, and he will not be forgotten. He will not be forgotten particularly because he helped so many men to understand what it is all about -- why we are fighting and what we are fighting, and why we must win and why we will win.

Herman Bottcher, I pledge for us, the living, that we will win. The soldiers of the great Allies -- the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and China -- the guerrillas of the Philippines -- the proud Japanese-Americans -- the soldiers of all the United Nations -- will fight on to total victory. Fascism will be wiped out everywhere. And I mean everywhere. And all freedom-loving people will, together, build the free and democratic world for which you gave your life.

Morris Brier O-2043121
1st Lieutenant, Infantry
Detachment of Patients
Tilton General Hospital
Ft. Dix 2, N.J.

CASE HISTORY NO. 2

New Guinea

In contrast to the preceding situation on Guadalcanal, I would like to tell you of a situation that happened in New Guinea. Before going into a detailed account of this operation I would like to go back and give you the big picture.

Of the two divisions stationed in Australia, E Company of one regiment was alerted and told that it had been selected for a special mission. Very little information was given as to the exact type of mission. Early one morning this company was marched to an air field, loaded in C-47's and 18 hours later landed at Port Moresby on the south coast of New Guinea, still not knowing their mission. The men then were loaded into trucks, taken down the jungle trail to the end of the road, and unloaded. Then the company commander gave them this order:

"E Company will spearhead an advance across the Owen Stanley Mountains to capture Buna Village. Later the rest of our battalion will land by boat at Port Moresby and will eventually catch up with us. After the Owen Stanley Mountains have been crossed, two battalions will land by boat at Point "A" with the mission of knocking out the two air strips "1" and "2". Our mission is not only to capture Buna Village, but also to protect the left flank of the Division."

They were told that due to the distance (130 air miles) and nature of terrain, the equipment they would carry with them would be very light, but that rations and equipment would be dropped daily by air. Men were then issued 3 days' ration consisting of rice, tea, and some bully beef. Then they started through the jungle. They had to cut their way through most of this dense jungle growth. They swam rivers and waded swamps. Due to weather conditions the supplies and rations that were to be dropped could not be delivered. Someone had forgotten to take into consideration that it rained every day, and while the men on the ground could hear the planes over them, it was impossible for the planes to see the panels that had been laid out to mark the place for the drop. Their 3 days' ration had to be stretched to 10 days or 2 weeks.

Their clothes were torn off. Their shoes rotted. When they arrived on top of the Owen Stanley Mountains they did not dare sit down as they would have frozen to death. Then men became sick with dysentery and malaria. Medical supplies were short. Men had to be left along the trail either to die or get well. Days later this unit came out on the other side of the Owen Stanleys at Point "B." As yet they had made very little contact with the Japs. Morale was low. Men wanted to ~~know why they could not~~ be relieved, but the answer was simple -- there was nobody to relieve them. The remainder of the battalion, which had been following the same trail, caught up and joined B Company at Point "b." Two sergeants and a native guide were ordered to cut across the Jap-held territory to the east and try to contact the two battalions which were to land on Point "A." At daylight the fourth morning it was evident that the native guide had deserted them. The sergeants then wondered whether to continue or turn back, but their pride finally got the best of them. They realized their whole battalion was depending on the information they could bring back so they continued on. Four days later they came out on the coast. The two battalions had landed. They then returned to their battalion with this information. In the meantime, their battalion had tried to attack Buna Village but had been unsuccessful. They were told that the Japs defending Buna village had malaria and dysentery and that they were inferior troops. This proved false. The Japs at Buna Village were well trained, clothed, and fed and had a very good defensive set-up around Buna Village.

I would like to talk now about another platoon of another company in this same battalion. The platoon leader had been wounded a day or two before and had been evacuated. The second-in-command, a young sergeant, immediately took command. He had made a reconnaissance along Entrance Creek to Point "C." He reported back to the company commander that he would like permission to take his platoon of twenty-five men, try to work through the Jap line, and establish himself on the beach between Buna Village and Buna Mission. This permission was granted. He moved his men under cover of Entrance Creek to Point "C" where he came under fire from two machine guns. Seven of his men were hit. This left him only 18 men.

He immediately established a base of fire with half of his group and personally led the other half to the flank and rear of the enemy position, captured the two machine-gun positions, and killed all the enemy. He immediately picked up both the Jap guns with what ammunition he could find and continued his advance. Shortly before dark his men were firmly entrenched at Point "D". He checked every man's position, and told his men to get set for a counterattack. He did not have long to wait. Just at dusk about 20 Japs tried to rush his position. The Jap attack failed, but the sergeant was wounded. He refused to be evacuated, but stayed with his men. That night this platoon was attacked two different times, the Japs coming in from both flanks. Both attacks were repulsed. The sergeant was wounded again, but still refused to go back. On the third night the Japs left Buna Village by boat. The sergeant sent word back to his company commander informing him of the situation. The remainder of the company moved up that night and for the next five days mopped up around Buna Village. They had completed their mission 70 days after they left Port Moresby. E Company was relieved. When relieved, E Company had only 7 men available for duty.

Let's talk about this platoon leader. We know very little about him. He was hit pretty early, but it is obvious that he had all of the qualities of leadership and he had trained his men. When he became a casualty someone could take over. This platoon leader had been known throughout the regiment for the way he had trained his unit. In their training he was always taking his platoon out on small problems and working out little SOP's within the squads in his platoon. He would declare himself a casualty on these problems by dropping out to see what would happen. He would have squad leaders drop out to see if the second-in-command would take over. In this manner he had developed the leadership of every man in his platoon. When the time came for the sergeant to take over he did so with courage and resolution and produced one of the finest acts of leadership that has been recorded in this war. He was immediately decorated with the D.S.C. and given a battlefield promotion from sergeant to captain.

Hermon Bottcher liked ice cream. He liked it very much. And in his 35 years, he sampled ice cream in many different parts of the world.

First in the place of his birth and childhood, a town not very far from Berlin named Lansberg, which the Red Army only recently stormed and captured. Then in Australia, where he went to live at a quite early age. In the early nineteen thirties in the United States, in San Francisco and New York.

A couple of years later, he was searching for ice cream in the stores of Barcelona and Madrid, while on leave from the fighting front, where he was serving with the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, in the struggle to save Spain from fascism and the world from a gigantic and horrible war.

Ice cream was not plentiful in those days in Spain. Nor later at Buna in New Guinea. But it was at an ice cream bar that Mrs. Roosevelt found Bottcher when she made a point of looking him up in Australia, during her visit there. And it is reported that in the later New Guinea campaign, Bottcher, now a captain, secured an ice cream machine for the use of himself and his men.

Interspersed in all this were many other happenings. Hermon Bottcher twice rose in rank from private to captain, once in Spain and again in the South Pacific. He was wounded in the hand and the leg in Spain and, much more seriously, in the head and chest in New Guinea. He won two Distinguished Service Crosses and three Purple Hearts and a reputation as America's "one-man army," and the respect and veneration of the whole army and the admiration of the whole country.

It was at Leyte in the Philippines that he was killed, shredded by a Japanese mortar shell. A most unlikely place for ice cream.

But, you see, Hermon Bottcher also liked democracy. He liked it very much. And he had no use at all for fascism.

-- David McK. White

A LETTER ABOUT CAPT. BOTTCHER, FROM PVT. GEORGE HAUFFMAN TO STEVE NELSON

Dear Steve:

No doubt you have heard the news of Bottcher's death. Have written to "Yank Far East" suggesting they have a testimonial page, and enclosed some remarks we had together while his outfit was staging in New Guinea for the Drinimoor River Campaign. His work was of a nature that merely marked his time before he got it; he was promoted from his Company to the 32nd Division Recon. outfit and spent most of his fighting combat time behind Japanese lines; now, in the jungle this is ten times as risky as say in France, because each step means you have to think twice. Was talking to a GI in the 32nd Div. while I was working on a dock which was loading this guy's outfit; he said that on the drinimoor River (this is where the Japanese tried to break out of Wewak last year) Bottcher and about 38 men crossed the river and went straight into Japanese positions; that afternoon he radioed back from his walkie-talkie that he was going off the air . . . too many Japanese about; so HQ figured he was cut off and done for. The spent (Bottcher's recon. platoon) over a week behind Japanese lines and came back, accounting for 900 enemy dead and lots of valuable information. After the Japanese push had been neutralized, our forces began to evacuate back to home area; as always short of water transportation, so Bottcher suggested to the General to put some of them "on ducks and alligators" water trucks, and go up the coast. The General said that the enemy was well put in along the shore and could shoot at them; so Bottcher said: "Things have been kind of slow and the boys want a little excitement."

While in New Guinea, had occasion to talk with various people and officers who came in; when officers from the 32nd Div. came in would ask some of them about Bottcher. One day a Lt. Col. came in and I asked him if he knew Bottcher; he said: "Yes, he had a company in my regiment, but Division HQ pulled him out to work for them; he was a good man, but they had higher claim."

Here are some of the things we talked about when I saw him a few times down there. After he was given a direct Captaincy in the field, General Eichelberger came up to him and said: "I never knew you fought in Spain." Bottcher replied: "Yes, sir" and he told the General in detail what he did for the Loyalists. The General said: "It's nothing to be ashamed of, but now that you're a officer, don't talk too much about it."

The Army wanted to send him home while convalescing from his wounds and malaria of the Buna campaign; he was in Australia at the time; as he put it: "They wanted me to go home and hand out shoe-strings." He refused and they insisted, so he said: "Let me see the General." He got to see General Eichelberger, and the General said: "You can have anything you want." Bottcher said: "I want a Company in my old outfit."

The day after Pearl Harbor he joined up, like you tried to do. "After finding out I was a Spanish Vet," he said, "they sent me over here -- as far from Europe as possible." He was quite pleased that the Vets of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade pointed out that because of his work and Bob Thompson's work (another Vet, you know) in the 32nd Div., other Spanish Vets were being given a better break.

Bottcher told me this about Bob; one day during a break in a Reg. con-

ference, the Colonel came up to Bottcher and said: "Have you read Bob's article on jungle fighting in the Infantry Journal?" Bottcher said he had. The Col. said: "I would like to have him back with me, wouldn't you?" Bottcher said: "Sure would, Colonel." The Capt. of Bob's outfit was there and said: "If Bob came back, I would turn over the Company to him right away!"

Bottcher said it was quite amazing, but the boys in the 32nd Div. did not share this high-blown cocky attitude that some civilians on the West Coast had against the Japanese-American internees; that all this race-hatred being generated by the Daughters of the American Revolution and some posts of the American Legion has no support whatever of these veterans of Buna, Aitape, and now, Leyte.

He was extremely popular with the men. I would bring him clippings and comments from home which often he didn't get. While eating chow with him, he would talk about bumming around Australia, and how he found the Aussies so hospitable in his "sundowning days" in Australia just after coming from Palestine after fleeing from Germany; then we talked about being on WPA and working in canneries on the West Coast.

So Bottcher finally got it, and way over here, in the same battle but far from the native fields of his homeland.



The National Order
of
Battlefield Commissions



610 Montana Street
Bethalto, Illinois 6201
13 May 1986

Mr. John Tisa
226 C-1 Pine Hov Circle
Lakewater, Florida 33463

Dear Mr. Tisa:

Received your book, "Recalling the Good Fight", from your publisher, read and enjoyed every bit of it.

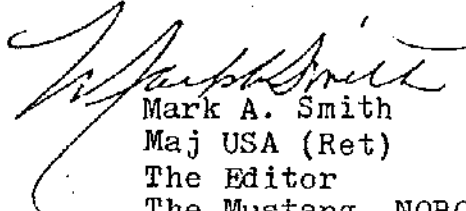
In appreciation of your assistance I am sending the Spring 1986 issue of the Mustang to you, under separate cover.

On page 2 of the issue you will find an article on Captain Bottcher and the other soldiers of the 32d Division, who made that long climb, over the Owen Stanley range, those many years ago, in New Guinea.

Our August 1986 issue of the Mustang will have more about Captain Bottcher and his combat experiences and subsequent death in the Philippines in World War II. I intend to send you a copy of that issue upon publication.

To-date I have been unable to verify that Captain Bottcher served in the Republican army in Spain during the Civil War there, and for that reason may have to drop any articles dealing with that period of his life. (The U.S. State Department and other departments of the government having information on Captain Bottcher, quote always the privacy act as a barrier to providing any material on an individual, therefore facts in their files are not available without a long legal procedure, which can be quite expensive).

Sincerely yours,


Mark A. Smith
Maj USA (Ret)
The Editor
The Mustang NOBC

**The National Order
of
Battlefield Commissions**



610 Montana Street
Bethalto, Illinois 62010
20 May 1986

Dear John,

Thank you for the post card and for your valuable suggestions.

Wanted to let you know that I recently received a letter from a friend of mine who lives in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He had written to the Military Field Branch, Washington D.C. In an effort to find out more if possible about Captain Hermann J.F. Bottcher's service in Spain.

They referred his letter to the National Archives, which holds all out dated State Department files and documents. The National Archives provided a list of the following:

852.2221/303 Bottcher, Herman March 6, 1937. Departure from New York for France on the SS Manhattan for enlistment with Spanish Government forces.

852.2221/1456 Bottcher, Herman February 2, 1939, Alien resident of U.S. at present in Spain; consideration of visa application.

150.06 Reentry Permits/301 Reentry permit.

811.111 Bottcher, Hermann Johann Friedrich March 4, 1939. Visa case.

In a letter from the National Archives they inform us that the above information is from their index name file of members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, they also advise that the document designated 150.06, as a routine administrative matter was destroyed by the State Department before its central file were transferred to the National Archives.

To make a long story short, I have sent a check to the NA for copies of the two files they still have on hand, and have written to the National Record Center for the one file that they may have on hand. They want a death certificate at the National Record Center, however, they may send the document after all as I explain that Captain Bottcher is interred in the National Cemetery, Manila, Republic of the Philippines, and as his death did not occur in the U.S., I doubt that there is a death certificate.

I keep working away and hopefully one of these days I will strike gold.

Sincerely,



The National Order
of
Battlefield Commissions



610 Montana Street
Bethalto, Illinois 62010

4 April 1986

Dear Mr. Tisa,

A note to thank you for your assistance. I intend to write to Mr. Berch, at Brandeis University today, and also send to letter to VALB. As I stated in my last letter to you, I have a great deal of material for the articles dealing with Herman J.F. Bottcher's service with the 32nd Infantry Division in the South Pacific in World War II, but need more material on his service in Spain during the Civil War there..

I have also written to your publisher and ordered a copy of your book, "Recalling The Good Fight". I am sure that I will enjoy it. Once again thank you for your assistance and I will send you copies of my articles on Bottcher as they appear in our newsletter.

Sincerely yours,

Mark A. Smith
Editor
The Mustang
NOBC

BULLETIN BOARD

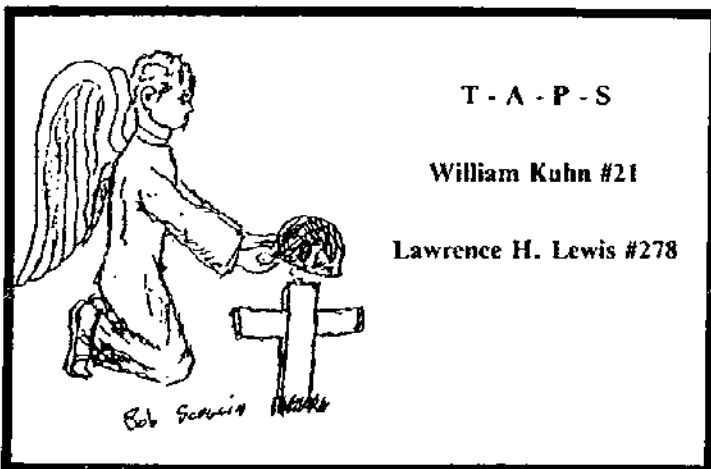
Annual Dues — July 1 is the date for payment of annual dues (\$10.00) for all regular members (excluding Honorary and Life Members). For July 1986, member #'s through 415 are eligible. Dues paid July 1, 1986, cover the period — July 1, 1986 through June 30, 1987. Make checks payable to NOBC and send to current Secy/Treas, Jim Plate, 1304 Arden Avenue, Rockford, Illinois 61107.

New Cards are not issued each year.

For new members, since July 1, 1985 — those with cards issued before December 31, 1985, pay first annual dues at July 1986; all others pay July 1987.

Dues and donations to NOBC are deductible for Federal income tax purposes. Prompt payment is important so that NOBC can pay bills on a timely basis.

Attention: — Your attention is invited to the Commander's Message, especially that part which pertains to delinquent dues, the wearing of the uniform, and the wearing of medals on civilian clothing.



T - A - P - S

William Kuhn #21

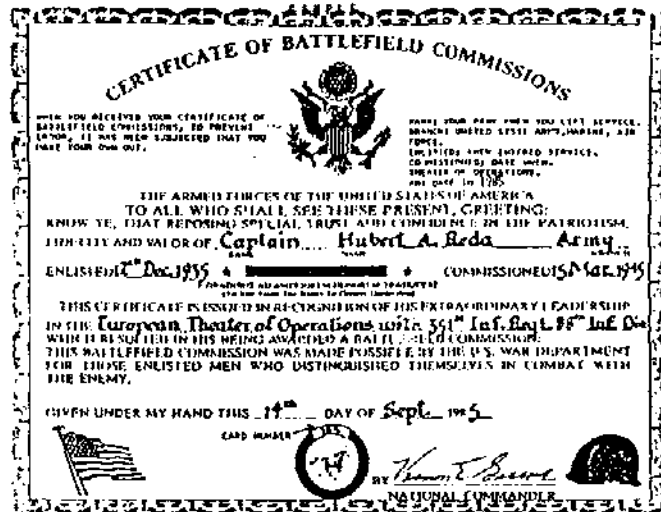
Lawrence H. Lewis #278



Kay and Larry Lewis (#278) - our only member from World War I. The photo was taken in February 1986 at the Texas NOBC Quarterly Brunch and Larry was celebrating his 90th birthday. (As this went to press - notification came of the death of Larry - details in next issue).

Hobbies... John W. Turner (#23) has a unique hobby — gardening and the making of wine. John has won ribbons at the Atlantic Botanical Gardens Flower Show and in annual competitions of the Southeastern Winemaker's Circle Association. Anyone with like tastes (no pun) contact John and compare notes.

Certificate of Membership. A Certificate of Membership is available (see sample enclosed). The certificate is in "blank" to be completed by each member. It is multi-colored, with many overlays, on quality parchment paper, 8½ x 11. Send \$1.00 to Bert Reda, 1013 Ironwood Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89108 for postage and handling. If you would like the calligraphy (as shown) send \$1.50 and appropriate information: rank, name, date enlisted, etc.



PART II CAPTAIN HERMAN J. F. BOTTCHER: OVER THE OWEN STANLEY by MARK A. SMITH

Acknowledgment: I wish to thank the many members of the 32nd Infantry Division Association who submitted material in the form of photographs, letters, tape recordings and telephone calls about Herman J.F. Bottcher, when they found out that I intended to write several articles about him. There is a common factor about all this. These veterans after some forth-two years demonstrate the deep affection and respect that they hold for this man — "a leader on the battlefield."

I also wish to thank Representative Melvin Price, of the 21st Illinois District, Chairman Emeritus of the Committee on Armed Forces, House of Representatives, for his continuing assistance. Over a period of many months, Melvin Price and the members of his staff, searched out from the many governmental departments information that was needed for these articles. Without his assistance the articles could not have been written.

The Author.

Herman Bottcher: Over The Owen Stanley

We found this part of our story of Herman Bottcher in correspondence with Harold E. Hantelman, who was a young officer in the 32nd Division.

In the week of his 18th birthday, Harold Hantelman joined the 133 Infantry Regiment of the Iowa National Guard. This was in April of 1928. He then graduated from the University of Iowa in June of 1932, receiving a commission of 2nd Lieutenant in the Organized Reserves after serving two weeks active duty with the Citizens Military Training Camp at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. He was then employed by Personal

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Finance of Dubuque, Iowa in 1933.

Eventually in April of 1941 he was called to active duty and assigned to the Service Company of the 126th Infantry Regiment.

This is his story. The 32nd Division departed Camp Livingston in February 1942, for Fort Devens, Massachusetts, to await shipment out of Boston. Meanwhile, the Japanese were rampaging the Western Pacific areas: Australia, whose three



Pvt Bottcher while taking Amphibious Training in Newcastle, Australia — 1942

Regular Army Divisions were fighting in the Middle East, was threatened.

It would seem that the War Department deemed it more practical and expedient to move a couple of United States Divisions to Australia rather than to withdraw the Aussie Divisions to fight in their own back yard. The 32nd which was in transit was one of the United States Divisions designated. Of course at about that time, the most schooled Officer Mechanic in the Division, the one who knew the minimum about mortars, BAR's anti-tank cannons and machine guns, was made Commanding Officer of H Company, which was experiencing discipline problems.

A few days later movement orders were changed and soon the 32nd was detained in San Francisco, ultimate destination unknown. Proper staging facilities in San Francisco were non-existent. Our part of the 126th Regiment was bedded down in the Cow Palace waiting to board ship.

To bring the division units to full strength before sailing, Captain Dixon, 126th Regiment Personnel Officer, arrived from Camp Roberts, California, one evening with a detachment of draftees and selectees who had just completed their basic training. Captain Dixon gladly granted Herman Bottcher's request that he be assigned to a machine gun outfit and he was assigned to H Company. Fortune smiled on our unit that day.

Before I continue with my part of the story I would like to tell what I found out about Bottcher in the weeks that we served together.

Herman Bottcher was an unmarried man about thirty years of age (in 1942), of medium height, weighed about 165 pounds (pre-Owen Stanley Mountain Days), with brown hair, hazel eyes, and spoke with a slight German accent. His parents were dead. His nearest of kin were a sister and an aunt who lived in San Francisco, California. His grin was broad and his sense of humor rare. He loved a friendly argu-

ment and kidding. I never heard him swear, brag or complain. He made the best of what was offered or available. Honesty and integrity were two of his many virtues. He detested Nazism, Communism and all other "isms," dictatorships and tyranny. He was willing to fight and die for the cause of democracy and freedom.

We finally sailed from San Francisco in a huge convoy, escorted by two Navy Destroyers, arrived at Adelaide, South Australia on May 22, 1942. The 126th was sent to Camp Sandy Creek which was about 25 miles out of Adelaide. Aboard ship Bottcher had made many friends who were enthralled with his tales of his fighting days in the Spanish Civil War. I was impressed with his intelligence, combat experiences and knowledge of warfare. During later beach defense exercises near Adelaide, Bottcher's terrain sketches were masterpieces showing every landmark and gun emplacement.

In July of 1942, the 32nd Division moved around to Camp Tamborine, Queensland, Australia, near Brisbane. Bottcher's knowledge and abilities were recognized and promotions were frequent. During this time the Heavy Weapons Companies were allowed a Reconnaissance Sergeant, the second highest NCO rating in the Company. For this job I designated Bottcher, which caused much talk and consternation among the Ionia, Michigan, non-coms who thought one of their fellow townsmen should have had the distinctive promotion. Here, too, he rendered valuable aid in helping me lay out courses for night compass exercises. One incident of a non-military nature stands out in my memory regarding this unusual man. During a two-day march from the ocean shore back to Camp Tamborine a huge carpet snake almost eight feet long and three inches in diameter was killed. Acting as butcher and chef, Bottcher offered the other men baked snake for supper. Some deigned to eat it, but all were impressed by his culinary efforts! He also was fearless in capturing bare-handed the dragon-like Iguana and the poisonous Gila Monsters which were native to this sub-tropical area.

In September 1942, Liberty ships carried us to Port Moresby, Papua, on the southeast coast of New Guinea. The Japanese pushed over the Owen Stanley Mountain Range on the main Kakoda Trail, which runs between Port Moresby and the north coast of Papua, to within 30 miles of Port Moresby where they were turned back by the Australian Militia soldiers. Another lesser used route, the Kappa Kappa Trail, extends from a coastal village of that name, about ten miles east of Port Moresby, over the Owen Stanley Range on a more arduous and higher terrain (over 7,000 feet elevation). There existed the possibility the Japanese might send a force via this route. To forestall this happening it was deemed necessary to send a United States combat unit that way. Our 2nd Battalion of the 126th Infantry Regiment was chosen to make the long tortuous trek. Elements of the Service Company and the Anti-tank Company, with Papuan natives as guides and carriers, went first to establish and man dropping grounds in villages along the route every two or three days apart. C-47 Cargo planes free dropped boxed C rations, rice, Spam, Aussie biscuits (a hard cracker) and other supplies. These items were collected (as many as could be retrieved in the dense jungle) and issued to Companies E, F, G, H and Battalion Headquarters Companies which later followed on successive days from the bivouac area near Kappa Kappa Village. Of the more than 1200 men who made the march we lost only one man, an American Sergeant who died of Black Water Fever at Natunga, near the north coast of Papua.

Another nine consisting of Colonel Quinn the Commanding Officer of the 126th Regiment, an air force Captain, an Australian pilot, and six soldiers were killed instantly when the lead C-47 crashed during a three plane drop at this same village.

A landing strip was established in a large Kuni Grass area near Oro Bay and C-47's were able to land as the ground was hard preceding the monsoon rains. The aforementioned Kappa Kappa Trailers were the only U. S. troops to slog over the Owen Stanley Mountains. All others enjoyed the luxury of air travel. Soon the fighting began without any rest from the six weeks on the mountain trail. Our 2nd Battalion of thin, underfed, heavily whiskered, foot weary, and malaria ridden men were ordered to attack Buna Village unassisted. Buna Village sat on the east side of the mouth of the Girau River which flows northward into a small bay. The south side of the bay is a sand beach which extends about three hundred yards eastward to the mouth of Entrance Creek which also empties into this bay. North of the creek's mouth and on the east side of the bay is Buna Mission, in a coconut palm forest of many acres. The Pacific Ocean is its north boundary. A single narrow plank bridge, supported by pilings, carried a foot path across Entrance Creek from the Mission. The path then ran westward, high on the bay beach sand, along the thick jungle into Buna Village. The briny waters of the river and creek flow and ebb with the changing tide. The Japanese had strung a telephone line along this path. They also had encircled the Village perimeter from the river to the beach with ramparts about four feet high made by planting post like palm tree trunks which they had covered with dirt.

Our initial attack was launched the night of December 3, 1942, with much hollering and firing, disorganized and uncontrolled. The enemy was safe behind their barricades, except one who was found the next day hiding under a tent floor. We had many casualties. The next two days were stalemates. The Japanese enjoyed their dug-in advantage, and their snipers menaced anyone on our side who attempted to move. In short, we scored nothing but casualties.

However, on December 6th the tide turned, Sergeant Bottcher and I had reconnoitered the jungle areas well. We felt that the beach could be reached by penetrating the jungle east of the village. On December the 5th, Bottcher's request that he be permitted to try was granted by Lt. Colonel Herbert Smith, the Battalion Commanding Officer. Bottcher collected a patrol of several H Company volunteers. The breakthrough was accomplished. He severed the telephone lines and dug-in for the attack which might come from the village or the Mission, or both.

Lt. General Herbert L. Eichelberger in his book, "Our Jungle Road To Tokyo," presents his version of those first positive strikes by Bottcher and the remnants of his platoon which forced the Japanese from Buna and from that part of New Guinea.

"Bottcher had found a fault in the Japanese lines and had driven thru all the way to the sea on a narrow section of land existing between Buna Village and the Mission."

Bottcher had only a volunteer group of about eight men from H Company. Due to the size of his force he was quite sure that his position would be attacked by the Japanese. All night they worked to strengthen his defenses, digging in. Before day light a few more men were sent to Bottcher along with additional ammunition. The one machine gun was emplaced so that it would have the best field of fire.

Bottcher believed that they might hold the Japanese off in the area they were defending was small and the Japanese had no communications suitable for coordinating an attack. His estimation turned out to be right. The Japanese lodged in Buna Village attacked his small force shortly after dawn and the machine gun took care of that threat. A while later the Japanese from the Mission attacked in force but again he was able to beat this attack.

A letter from Captain H. Bottcher, O 888451, Company A 127th Inf., APO 32, San Francisco, California to Major Harold E. Hantelmann, Hq. USA SDS-SWPA, AKPO 501 from New Guinea, dated 29.1.44, and received by Major Hantelmann on 8 February 1945.

Dear Handy:

The arrival of your letter of well wishing was a happy surprise indeed. I am really greatly indebted to you for anything that I achieved.

Without your help I would not have amounted to anything.

Well I finally got my c papers (referring to his citizenship papers). I had almost given up hope. The little dramatic conversation that Lt. Col. H. Smith, you and I had near Buna in relation to my status is still vivid in my mind. This time however, I stand free, because I can proudly raise my head and exclaim that I fought for my right to call myself an American.

Conditions up here are incomparably better than we experienced. Just imagine regular roads, decent tents and extraordinary good food. We hardly ever get bully beef, only twice a week C-ration. The remaining meals consist of various canned or dehydrated vegetables, Spam, hot dogs and twice weekly fresh meat, (frozen of course).

Yesterday we had delicious fresh tomatoes, the first since Australia.

With time we learn more and more about the jungle. Whereas it was a formidable obstacle and a horrifying place for us last year, it has now become a friendly place with a beauty and charm all its own. It is still a dangerous place where it is permeated with and polluted by the enemy.

You probably gathered from news reports our whereabouts. Well, so far my lucky star hasn't forsaken me. Let's hope for the best though. If my time should come to go, it will be in the happy realization that it was for an ideal, for justice and freedom for all. At least my conscience is clear.

The news from all fronts is very encouraging, although I can't possibly share the optimism of most newspaper correspondents and radio correspondents. The hardest and most bloody battles are ahead, I am convinced of that.

In regard to the personnel going home after 18 months, I decided to stay on for a bit longer, but if I should be ordered home I'll volunteer for China or Europe and I am quite sure certain I will be accepted.

And now, how about you! I bet it is pretty tough on you sitting in an office. I would give anything to be able to fight under your company and alongside of you. Well, perhaps with time your leg will be all right again and you'll be more fit than ever.

(That darn candle flickers so much, I can hardly see what I am writing).

We are here in the relative comfort, while a heavy rain beats down upon our tents and you must well remember how it can rain in N. G.

Well Handy, enough of my prattle for today. The best of health and happiness to you and May God Bless You.

Sincerely,
Herman

(Roland Acheson reminiscences about his walk over the Owen Stanley and his friendship with Herman Bottcher:)

The first time I saw Bottcher was on the USAT Lurline. We were assigned four to a room on that ship and our party consisted of Bottcher, George Walker, Rushford and myself.

It was good to have Bottcher with us as he was the complete extrovert and kept things going. He talked about his combat experience in the Spanish Civil War. One of the incidents that he related was that they would dig in and then when darkness fell would move their positions, and the Nationalist would shell the empty spaces.

We loaded up the Lurline on April 22, 1942. We left sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge.

It was a good trip but zig-zaggy. We had an escort until the Coral Sea battle, then they pulled out all escorts but did send two Australian Corvettes to bring us into Port Adelaide, South Australia. We landed on May 14, 1942. They put us in a camp called Sandy Creek. The Aussies were very gracious to us, after all the Japanese were getting close to their homeland.

We were at Sandy Creek for quite some time then again moved to Camp Cable, which was located some thirty miles south of Brisbane. When we were in Sandy Creek and Camp

(X)
Cable, we were allowed passes to town, but it was quite a distance. Besides the canteen always had Pilsener beer. Under certain circumstances you could buy the same beer by the barrel provided you had permission of the first sergeant. Usually on Saturday night some of us bought a barrel of beer instead of going to town and arranged our own entertainment. For example, we had several men who were good with the guitar, another man was good with the mouth organ and a fourth had a horn. The two men who could play the guitar were Clat Williams and Ed Hayes. All this made for merry times on a Saturday night. Herman Bottcher was usually around that barrel, for which we were glad as he was a good story teller. Often his stories dealt with his experiences in Spain. He was the complete extrovert but he was never inebriated.

In the middle of September 1942, E Company, of the 126th Regiment, was flown to Port Moresby. (Port Moresby, South east New Guinea, located on the gulf of Papua. In World War II this became the chief allied base in New Guinea). Company E, became the first unit flown into combat. Company H, our company, rode to the same port by liberty ship. We landed on the beach at Port Moresby and were there for about forty minutes before the Japanese planes attacked. They never hit the one we were on but did get one right next door. We lost some supplies as a result. After some organizing we were transported by trucks for about seventy miles to what was called the "base of the trail" (The Kappa Kappa trail). It was there that we first heard Tokyo Rose, who said, "They will be bombing in twenty minutes." By that time she was right. They did. She also said that wives and sweethearts were at home having a ball and Yankee blood would be flowing down the streets of Moresby.

In October 1942, we started the march over the mountain, a trail of about one hundred miles, to a rubber plantation. We arrived by truck and picked up native bearers. The units involved consisted of the following: E, F, G and H, plus attached medics and 2nd Battalion Headquarters. It was up and down all the way, and we finally reached altitudes of over 9,000 feet. It was real eerie up there but there were no mosquitoes and flies in the mountains. Each night we stayed in the valleys, and the water was so pure we did not have to chlorinate it.

We were not really equipped for jungle warfare as our equipment and weapons were designed for the war in Europe. Some of the equipment was heavy. Some men threw away raincoats and blankets were cut in half to save weight. The BARs were the only automatic weapons and these were turned over to the bearers. We also had Garand rifles but no carbines. It was a rugged trip even for those in good physical condition. Many men had dysentery and the altitude made it difficult to walk and breath. Conditions seemed to encourage a sense of being comrades. For this reason men helped each other and we struggled together.

Most of the time we were short of rations as they had been unable to make any drops. There was a thick moss that covered everything. Of course everyone lost the heels off of their shoes from climbing over roots and things. Everyone cut a stick to walk with, it helped when you were hobbling along with no heels.

We reached the top, the area of the mountain was called, "Ghost Mountain." At that point you could poke a stick down thru the moss and hear streams of water running.

Everybody had stopped shaving. After a few days we all lost weight and had long hair and beards. Also due to the moisture the clothes were mildewed and half rotted and none of us smelled too good. It took us forty-two days of hiking to cross that mountain. On November 20, 1942, we came to Sepuda and the long march was over but Buna still lay ahead.

In looking back one of our men said, "There was no rest or better living, no clean clothes or better food, planes tried to drop food but were not always successful. The Japanese had supplies, fresh troops and were well dug in with lines of fire cut in the heavy undergrowth and within hidden trees and stumps they had pill boxes."

At about that time we were in contact with the 127th Infantry and found they were pinned down at a road block. Our battalion went around to the left of them, along a stream, and came out in a bunch of Kuna grass that was literally loaded with Japanese. They had the usual fire lanes cut in the high grass and other means of defense, so Sergeant Terry said, "Let's burn the grass." It sounded like a good idea. We burned the grass and that drove the Japanese out. We gained a half mile, but then we ran into a swamp. The burning had destroyed our cover. So we were stalemated and tried different tactics. None worked. We lost a lot of men from E and F Companies. Then on December 5, 1942, E Company took off for what was known as the coconut grove. Meanwhile, back at the road block E, F, and G Companies of the 128th were still held up. Now this area also contained the old road that went to Ango. Also the river at that point contained a bridge, but the Japanese had it well zeroed in. It was possible to cross the river at low tide. G Company crossed and Bottcher's platoon was part of that group. As he had taken over the heavy weapons platoon after Lieutenant Wood, the original commander had been killed, G Company got part way up toward the village of Buna, then was stopped by heavy fire. At that point there was a large number of coconut trees and it appeared that the Japanese were directing fire from there. Bottcher suggested that they spray those trees with machine gun and tommy gun fire. When this was done, the Japanese came falling out of all the trees. Bottcher led them toward the beach. They made it with the exception of the riflemen who weren't well organized and ready. The Japanese closed the gap behind them. The next day they cleaned the Japanese out and followed the same route that Bottcher had laid out. These same rifle men had also survived two attacks on their positions during the evening hours the previous night.

There was a Sergeant Dolick with Bottcher. He manned one section and a Corporal Mitchell and Sergeant Redd manned the other section. The Japanese managed to hit Mitchell's machine gun and wounded Roman Babcock. Bottcher's platoon had enough machine gun ammunition but it was loaded in metal links with 200 rounds to a belt. So they hooked the belts together and in that manner managed to have belts consisting of two or three thousand rounds to a belt. When they commenced firing they could maintain fire for a long period with an assistant gunner feeding it out of the box at a rapid rate.

The first night the Japanese attempted to take the two machine guns out, but the gun crews fought them off. The next morning the Japanese dead were laying around the gun so thick it was necessary to clear them before the fire

lane, more visible. Bottcher had some thirty one men in the platoon with him and it was a sufficient number to cut off Buna village from the Mission. As was said later, the break thru was luck but it was held by sheer intelligence and sheer guts. Only twelve men of the thirty-one walked away from the battle. Nineteen were killed or wounded. Bottcher was among the wounded but refused evacuation at that time. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and promoted from Staff Sergeant to Captain for his leadership in battle.

During that same period I was also wounded. On the 15th of December, they had some B17's that had been shot up and were sending them back to Townsville, Australia. We got a ride back on them. At Townsville, we were taken to a rest center or resort that had been taken over as a hospital. All the cottages there had been built up on stilts and connected together with walk ways. Apparently they were built up high to catch any circulation of air. It was very warm.

As soon as they could they sent us on. Our next trip was on the TSS Canberra, the 15th of January 1943. The Canberra was an Australian Hospital Ship that had been in service in the Middle East. Staffs of medics were mostly Australian with a few Americans. They doctored us every day. As Bottcher and a Lieutenant Swartz were classified as walking wounded they came to see us every day. Swartz was from Recon and had been wounded on the same patrol with me. Bud Jackson and I were in this one ward along with two other men from the 128th Regiment. They were on top bunks which meant they could get around pretty good. We landed at Sydney, Australia, and were taken to the Prince Albert Hospital, the 4th General Hospital and staffed with doctors from John Hopkins, Baltimore. It had a fine reputation among its patients. Bottcher and Swartz would come up to our ward every day and we would all go down to the Officers Row. Some of the nurses frowned on this practice, but Bottcher would say, "Oh, they are friends of ours," and this seemed to be sufficient. Finally I went to a rest camp that was in the mountains, and there I lost contact with Bottcher. Finally I heard they had transferred him to the 32nd Reconnaissance Company.

The Point Man in Teheran

by

David C. Martin

(Published by permission of NEWSWEEK. The article originally appeared in the July 12, 1982 issue of NEWSWEEK. It deals with Richard J. Meadow, NOBC Member #415.)

When Dick Meadow joined the Army at 15, lying about his age to escape the poverty and cruelty of his Appalachian upbringing, he boasted with adolescent bravado that he would be dead before he turned 19. During more than 30 years with the Army, from Korea to Vietnam to Teheran, Meadows seemed to court that death assiduously. His military record is one of unstinted daring and bravery. During two tours in Indochina, he led more than two dozen missions behind enemy lines, four into North Vietnam and the rest in Laos, calling in air strikes on the Ho Chi Minh trail, capturing North Vietnamese soldiers for interrogation, killing others at point blank range... and he never lost a man. "He made people

feel they could do anything and goddam do it," says Billy Joe Anthony, who followed Meadows into both North Vietnam and Laos. "If he went out with us, he was coming back with us."



Richard J. Meadows being commissioned by the late Arthur D. Simons, at Ft. Bragg, NC, April 14, 1967.

Meadows extraordinary combat record earned him a rare battlefield commission to Captain and virtually every decoration a U. S. soldier can win, except the Congressional Medal of Honor and, because he was never gravely wounded, the Purple Heart. "If he hadn't done so many things that are classified, he'd have been the most decorated soldier in the Army," says retired Col. Elliott Sydnor, who joined Meadows on the abortive attempt to rescue POW's at Son Tay, North Vietnam. Those who know Meadows were not surprised to learn he was point man in Teheran. "I can categorically say Dick Meadows is the finest soldier I have ever served with," says Col. James Morris, director of Special Forces training at Fort Bragg, N.C. "I'd follow him anywhere."

Violence: Iran is a far piece from the hollow near the junction of Johnson and Ugliest creeks in the Virginia hills where Meadows was born in 1932 in a one-room, dirt-floor shack without plumbing or electricity. His father, a moonshiner, was violence-prone. Meadows still remembers when he went for a man with an axe handle. Meadows quit school after the ninth grade and had his mother lie about his age so he could join the Army. "I wanted a home," he says, "and I thought it was a pretty good profession to be a soldier."

The scrawny country boy was a natural. After a stint of KP to fatten himself up to the 120-pound minimum, Meadows earned his parachute wings and joined the 82nd Airborne Division. In Korea he became the youngest Master Sergeant in the war. But it was in Vietnam, as a member of the innocuously named Studies and Observation Group (SOG), that Meadows discovered his true specialty—operating behind enemy lines. On his first mission into Laos in 1965 his reconnaissance team uncovered a cache of 75-mm Howitzers on their way to the front from North Vietnam. Meadows brought the percussion mechanisms back to Saigon and personally delivered to Gen. William Westmoreland the first hard evidence of large-scale North Vietnam infiltration into the South.

Meadows pursued the enemy with such ferocious single-mindedness that he once fired at a fleeing North Vietnamese soldier, then tossed his weapon aside and swam across a river in pursuit. "I couldn't stop myself," he said. Finding his quarry dead, the unarmed Meadows took the dead man's knife and went in search of other hostages.

PART III

CAPTAIN HERMANN J. F. BOTTCHEER: DEATH OF A HERO

by Mark A. Smith

On the 28th of December 1944, Captain Bottcher left Mambajao, leading most of the troops of the 32nd Reconnaissance Troop.

On the previous day, Lieutenant Royal Steele, had taken an eight man patrol from the same unit into a valley near Silad Bay. He reported back that there were about 1,000 Japanese in disorganized units moving about the area.

By this time the 32nd Division had about reached the sea on its drive across Leyte. The 32nd Division had already campaigned for 117 days at Buna; Saidor 119 days; Aitape 125 days and before the war ended it was to record combat days of 654, the most combat time for any United States Division in history.

Bottcher had been with the Division for its initial combat at Buna, and from his lengthy combat experiences in Spain and in the Pacific had reached the conclusion that there was only one way to fight the Japanese behind their lines, and from that position he fought them.

In the late afternoon of the 28th, Bottcher and his patrol of about forty men joined Steele's patrol. Shortly after this, a Japanese came in bearing a surrender leaflet. He represented the first voluntary prisoner they had taken.

On the morning of the 29th, the troop noted the presence of two enemy patrols, both heavily armed, and from this observation decided to move their Command Post. On this patrol they had carried only one machine gun.

Late in the afternoon, a regiment of the 32nd, came thru their area. This regiment had the intention of thrusting all the way to the sea and thus blocking off the attempt of Japanese units to escape by way of the sea.

It was an uneventful night. Nothing disturbed their sleep except the subdued sound of the men exchanging guard.

On the 30th, Bottcher sent out two patrols. These patrols returned with the observation that they had seen no Japanese. Bottcher also received a radio message from the Division G-2, telling them to be back no later than January 2nd. Bottcher also brought a carabao to roast on New Year's Day. Everyone in the troop was looking forward to it as their diet among many things lacked variety.

Thus many months, Bottcher had built up a great deal of respect among the men of the troop, who felt that he would not send them on a mission that he, himself, would not undertake. He had expressed his belief that the war did not consist of fighting the Japanese people but was a war against their government. Later one of his men stated the following, "He was a great man, fearless of bullets, and he did not get rattled easy." One also said, "he always made his own bed."

People no matter where they came from liked him. In one Philippine Village, they gave a party for Captain Bottcher. They had roast chicken and native food. Also a drink called "Tuba," made from fermented coconut juice. Shortly after the party began the villagers warned Bottcher there were, "Many Japanese ahead of him." "Well," said Bottcher, "we'll stay and tease them a bit." The American patrol moved out in the road in plain sight. The Japanese mortar squad set up and fired at them — too far away to be effective. An American BAR soon scattered the mortar squad.

But to return to the patrol of the 30th, as dusk fell, they

camped on a small plateau which contained a shack built on stilts. They placed two men on guard at each end of the plateau.

At about 2:30 in the morning, the shooting started. At this time Bottcher was standing about 40-50 feet away from his radio operator, Edwin Essman, and Harry Mervine and George Hooten. The three men had bedded down under the house. There were about four mortar rounds fired, the fragments from the 4th round hit Bottcher in the leg, and also wounded Mervine in the leg, and Essman near one ear. Bottcher at the time called out that it had blown his leg off.

When the barrage had first started Bottcher had run out into the open and called on the Japanese to surrender. To add to the confusion there was enemy rifle fire and it was very dark.

The men got to Bottcher as soon as they could. At that time he was bleeding heavily. Lieutenant Steele devised a tourniquet from his belt and applied it above the wound. Their medic, Tony Gaidosik, gave Bottcher a shot of morphine.

The Japanese were gradually closing the circle around their perimeter. By this time it was about 5:00 A.M., and the Reconnaissance Troop started a withdrawal thru the one end still open to them.

They finally came upon the rear echelon of the regiment that had laced it's way to the sea. At that point a radio message was sent to division forward for blood plasma. It was sent immediately but it was one half an hour since they had escaped the Japanese attack and by this time Bottcher had lapsed into unconsciousness. By the time the plasma accompanied with much medical advice, he was too far gone to take it. His pulse beat had become lighter and lighter. By 6:00 A.M., he was dead.

Hermann J.F. Bottcher had left his home in Germany at the age of 20, this was in 1929, because he disagreed with the National Socialist Party of Germany. Although that party had not assumed power it was obvious that within a few years they would have a voice in the government. In short he hated Facism.

In March of 1937, he left New York City for France on the SS Manhattan, with the disclosed intention of enlisting with the Spanish government Forces. In February of 1939 he asked the State Department for a visa to re-enter the United States. By this time he was on the Department's list of members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade file. After lengthy consideration he was permitted to enter the United States.

He had fought Facism with the Loyalist in Spain, during this entire period, but in so doing had jeopardized his chance of becoming an American citizen. This was true as certain departments of the government believed that only Communists or Communist sympathizers had been active in assisting or fighting on the side of the Loyalists. Many young Europeans regarded the Spain of the 1930's as the place where they could poke the Facist in the eye. Politically sophisticated as young Bottcher was, Spain at the time was the place to go and the place to fight.

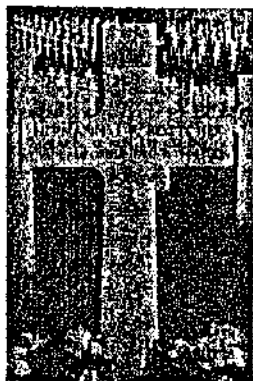
After Buna, which was covered in our first article, Bottcher remained a Captain and corresponded with his friends in the United States in a continuing effort to obtain his United States citizenship.

The 32nd had been decimated with tropical diseases and casualties in fighting in New Guinea. In Australia they rested and received replacements for the forthcoming campaign in

Papua. In that campaign, Bottcher was wounded three times. He ended by shooting his rifle with his right middle finger as the trigger finger could no longer be bent, due to the injuries it had received. Bottcher for this reason alone was very likely a 4-F.

Despite all this he stayed with the 32nd. When his company of the 127th Regiment was pulled out of the line at Aitape for a rest, he stayed on in combat as the Commanding Officer of the Reconnaissance Troop.

It was once observed that he had the appearance of a Wisconsin dairy farmer, but the instincts of an experienced fighter. He patrolled frequently behind the enemy lines, at time some 25-30 miles into enemy territory.



Captain Hermann J. F. Bottcher, 0888451, is interred in the Manila American Cemetery, Manila, Republic of the Philippines.

Captain Bottcher, a battlefield commissioned officer, was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross with an Oak Leaf Cluster, a Silver Star, a Legion of Merit, and a Purple Heart with three Oak Leaf Clusters.

COMBAT LEADERSHIP:
 'ultimate satisfaction' for Marine Gunner
 by

Corporal Kathleen A. Ramsay
 Staff Writer
 Combat Experiences
 of
 Lt. Gilbert H. Bolton
 Company M, 7th Marines
 1st. Marine Division

San Onofre - As enemy forces began to overrun his position, it seemed the only way out was to call in artillery fire on his own position. Without regard for his personal safety, then Staff Sergeant Gilbert H. Bolton did exactly that. When firing stopped and the count was taken, 34 enemy casualties were found inside the perimeter of his post.

Because of his heroic actions, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal and was recommended for a direct combat commission.

Eighteen years later, now Chief Warrant Officer Bolton believes that those times were the best of his life. "The ultimate satisfaction is leading Marines into combat," he said. "It was the greatest challenge of my life."



Nowadays, Chief Warrant Officer Bolton is the OIC of the weapons section at the Infantry Training School here.

"Today, I enjoy what I'm doing. I'm responsible for teaching new weapons to infantry battalions on the West Coast," he said.

Chief Warrant Officer Bolton began his career as an infantryman in 1959. "It's what I wanted to be since I saw my first John Wayne movie," he said as a smile flashed in his blue eyes. "And when you say Marine, the image that comes to you is of an infantryman."

During his early years with the Marine Corps he served with both the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions - assigned as a rifleman, automatic rifleman, fire team leader, rifle squad leader and a machine gun squad leader.

During his second tour, Chief Warrant Officer Bolton served as a drill instructor at MCRD, San Diego, until he reported to Vietnam in 1966.

It was there that Chief Warrant Officer Bolton joined the ranks of the 63 Marines who were recommended for battlefield commissions during the Vietnam War.

Returning from Vietnam a staff sergeant, Chief Warrant Officer Bolton served as a drill instructor at MCRD, San Diego, until he received his commission as a second lieutenant. He became a recruit series commander and the assistant director of the recruit special training branch. "I've gone the whole pipe line, from recruit to DJ, to platoon commander," said the 44 year old Marine. "I've been everything but a recruiter."

After being designated a Marine Gunner — 0302 Infantry Warrant Officer-Chief Warrant Officer Bolton was assigned as a recruit rifle range officer until being reassigned to ITS in 1975. Later he organized and developed the weapons training section.

In 1979 he served as the assistant officer and OIC of the Northern Training Area on Okinawa before returning to ITS in 1980, when he resumed his job as OIC of the weapons training section. Chief Warrant Officer Bolton is the last 0302 gunner on active duty.

As an infantry warrant officer, Gunner Bolton is part of a tradition that began in 1916 when the warrant officer grade of Marine Gunner was first authorized. It was abolished in the middle of World War II. When restored in 1956, the word "male" was inserted in the title to make sure that only males would bear the title of Marine Gunner. In 1959 it was again discontinued, then revived in 1964 in the infantry, artillery, tank and amphibian tractor, and operational communications fields. There haven't been any new Marine gunners since 1972.

For Gunner Bolton, there's been changes in the almost 26 years he's been in the Marine Corps. "There's been complete

While in New Guinea, had occasion to talk with various people and officers who came in; when officers from the 32nd Div. came in would ask some of them about Bottcher; one day a Lt. Col. came in and I asked him if he knew Bottcher; he said: "Yes, he had a company in my regiment, but Division HQ pulled him out to work for them; he was a good man, but they had higher claim."

Here are some of the things we talked about when I saw him a few times down there. After he was given a direct Captaincy in the field, General Eichelberger came up to him and said: "I never knew you fought in Spain." Bottcher replied: "Yes, sir" and he told the General in detail what he did for the Loyalists. The General said: "It's nothing to be ashamed of." *But now that you're an officer, don't talk like a soldier about it.*

The Army wanted to send him home while convalescing from his wound and malaria of the Buna campaign; he was in Australia at the time; as he put it: "They wanted me to go home and hand out shoe-strings." He refused and they insisted, so he said: "Let me see the General." He got ~~him~~ to see General Eichelberger, and the General said: "You can have anything you want." Bottcher said: "I want a Company in my old outfit."

The day after Pearl Harbor he joined up, like you tried to do. *"After finishing with my work, I was in a position to go back to Europe as soon as possible."* He was quite pleased that the Vets of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade pointed out that because of his work and Bob Thompson's work (another vet you know) in the 32nd Div., other Spanish vets were being given a better break.

Bottcher told me this about Bob; one day during a break in a Regt. conference, the Colonel came up to Bottcher and said: "Have you seen Bob's article on jungle fighting in the R.I. and said 'Haha?'"

Bottcher said he had. The Col. said: "I would like to have him back with me, wouldn't you?" Bottcher said: "Sure would, Colonel." The Capt. of Bob's outfit was there and said: "If Bob came back, I would turn over the Company to him right away!"

Bottcher said it was quite amusing, but the boys in the 32nd Div. did not share this high-blown cocky attitude that some civilians on the West Coast had against the Japanese American~~s~~ internees; that all this race-hatred being generated by the Daughters of the American Revolution and some posts of the American Legion has no support whatsoever of these veterans of Buna, Aitape, and now, Leyte.

He was extremely popular with the men. I would bring him clippings and comments from home which often he didn't get. While eating chow with him, we would talk about bumming around Australia, and how he found the Aussies so hospitable in his "sundowning days" in Australia just after coming from Palestine after fleeing from Germany; then we talked about being on WPA and working in canneries on the West Coast.

So Bottcher finally got it, and way over here, in the same battle but far from the native fields of his homeland.

of the transportation unit that serviced the International Brigades throughout the great Brunete offensive of July, 1937. Thoroughly exhausted by sleepless days and nights of hard work in this important post, Bottcher was sent to a hospital at Villa Paz for recuperation. When he was released for duty, he achieved his desire to be assigned with the other Americans in Spain, becoming Commissar of Communications of the 15th Brigade. Many stories are told of his remarkable qualities of leadership and courage, by men who had the opportunity of observing his work. No one can forget that memorable incident during the Ebro offensive in July, 1938 when John Cookson, Assistant Commander of Communications, was shot down at Bottcher's side. Himself wounded, Bottcher carried the dying Cookson to a dugout through heavy enemy fire. During his 25 months of service in Spain, he was wounded three times and decorated twice, rising to the rank of major.

Upon returning from Spain in 1939, Bottcher was held at Ellis Island because he still lacked his final citizenship papers. At his hearing, the judge said: "Why don't you go back to Germany? We don't want your kind here." Bottcher replied: "I'm fighting against the very things Germany represents." Luckily for America, Bottcher managed to obtain re-admittance to our country. He returned to the pursuits of peace, working as a cabinet-maker in a department store in San Francisco and shipping out as a seaman. But the bitter defeat of the Spanish Republic was always with him and his consuming hatred of fascism was unabated.

So it was that the day after Pearl Harbor found him at the army recruiting station, eager to take up arms again against his old enemy. Assigned to the 32nd Infantry Division, he was shipped

to the Pacific a year later with the rank of sergeant. From the moment of his first engagement, his extraordinary military exploits won him widespread recognition and honors. The story of "Bottcher, the Jap-killer" was told and retold in newspapers and magazines of all nations--in the pages of "Stars and Stripes", "Yank" and "Lifo" magazine. Medals and citations came thick and fast. By the time of his death, he had received the Distinguished Service Cross and Oak Leaf Cluster, the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, and the Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf Clusters.

In the words of a "Yank" reported, "He turned out to be a terrific jungle fighter. He knocked out enemy machine-gun nests single-handed, slaughtered Japs by the half-squad and rescued wounded comrades with utter disregard for his own safety. When all the ranking officers were knocked out, Bottcher took command and drove a wedge to the sea between two Jap groups at Buna Village and Buna Mission. He held this dangerous position for a week until the battle was won."

They wanted to award Sgt. Bottcher a battlefield commission as captain, but he wasn't a citizen. So he was made a citizen by a special Act of Congress. Upon receiving one of his citations, he was interviewed by a CBS correspondent who wanted to know whether he didn't tire of fighting sometimes. Bottcher replied: "Very often, but I've been fighting Hitler since 1929 and perhaps I have a better reason to know what fascism means. My younger brother is in a Nazi prison camp."

Perhaps the best clue to his deep anti-fascist conviction is expressed in a letter he wrote a few months before his death, in which he said: "While others were born unto it, I acquired

my right to America with sweat and blood. Sometimes, I could cry out when reading about the injustices perpetrated on the minorities or the profits derived from human lives. Crying won't help, but the realization will steel us for further struggle, make us more determined."

This was Captain Herman Bottcher, democracy's hero, a German-American who belongs to all progressive mankind and whose memory will be cherished forever. That is why New Yorkers will look forward eagerly to the TRIBUTE TO CAPTAIN HERMAN BOTTCHEER, to be held on May 17 at Manhattan Center. It will be a time for homage to a great man, a time for rededication to the vision of a better world for which he gave his life.

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