

Outpost Flanders

Ten soldiers from a Crookston-based company of the 34th Brigade Combat Team (BCT), fought one of the most decisive battles involving Minnesota National Guard soldiers in the Iraq War. The 34th BCT spent 16 months in Iraq (March 2006 – July 2007), providing convoy and base security. Company B was attached to a unit of US Marines at a remote outpost south of Fallujah when all hell broke loose.

By SFC Cliff Wood

Being a truck driver back in Minnesota assisted a Minnesota Guardsman in saving the lives of his fellow Soldiers and the possibility of a forward combat outpost south of the camp being overrun by insurgents.

It was the early evening of Aug. 12, 2006. Two dump trucks pulled up on the only road in or out of the outpost named Flanders. But when one of the



Specialists Domingo Augilar and Jasen Klimek, both from a Crookston-based company, stand by this bullet-proof glass that they used for protection during the battle of August 12, 2008, at Outpost Flanders. (U.S. Army photo)

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trucks suddenly accelerated, Spc. Billy Feragen, manning an M-2 50-caliber machine gun in one of the outpost's towers, knew something was amiss. And this member of Crookston-Minn.-based Company B, 2nd Combined Arms Battalion, 136th Infantry, was right.

An insurgent jumped up from the truck and started firing his AK-47 machine gun at Feragen. Seconds later, insurgents in both of the sandbag-reinforced trucks attacked the outpost. In addition to small arms fire, the insurgents threw about 40 grenades over the barriers.

"Feragen immediately engaged the attackers and their trucks, slowing them down," said Staff Sgt. David Hammac of Lino Lakes, Minn., the outpost's noncommissioned officer in charge. "We put bullet holes left and right in that thing."

By the time the battle was over, an hour later, 20 insurgents were killed, a Marine and a Guardsman were injured, and Hammac and four members of his squad had earned Bronze Star Medals with Valor, the nation's fourth highest award for bravery. The other recipients were Sgt. David Olson and Spcs. Jasen Klimek, Charles Knetter and John Olson.

"It was pretty intense," said Hammac, who served with the 1st Infantry Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom II. "My adrenaline was pumping!"

The actions of these soldiers will go down in 1/34 BCT history. They defended an outpost -- that provides water to Camp Fallujah -- from an estimated 30 insurgents.



A view from tower two of Outpost Flanders. The insurgents were hiding in and behind these two trucks during the attack in 2006. Camouflage netting and a machine gun barrel are in the foreground. (U.S. Army photo)

During the attack, Feragen said he had to duck incoming fire but still fired his machine gun until it ran out of ammunition. He then left his tower, falling back to another fighting position. There he grabbed his M-16 rifle and successfully engaged an insurgent standing up in one of the trucks.

Spc. Joseph Melhorn of St. Paul was in a tower manning the radio. He witnessed Feragen "unleash hell" in a battle that often had enemy fire coming from both east and west.

Meanwhile, Hammac maneuvered outside the perimeter walls twice to engage the enemy while under withering small arms fire. He checked on his soldiers in every tower and personally engaged the enemy from two of the outpost's towers with a variety of weapons. At the height of the battle, he called in a mortar strike that broke the enemy's attack. And, after defeating the enemy, he coordinated an evacuation mission to transport the wounded, carrying one of them to the ambulance.



Staff Sergeant David Hammac of Lino Lakes was one of five members of Bravo Company who received Bronze Stars for their response when their outpost in Iraq was attacked in 2006. Hammac left the outpost twice to engage the enemy.

Klimek's was at one of the towers where he threw hand grenades and fired his 50-caliber machine gun and M-16 rifle. Once the attack started, he immediately ran towards tower one to gain a better firing position. Maneuvering past grenades, he climbed the ladder while under fire. Once on top, Klimek leaned his weapon over the sand bags, in direct sight of the enemy, to destroy an exposed enemy position. When he was firing the 50-caliber, he also was only protected by a sheet of bulletproof glass.

John Olson, an elementary education major from Moorhead State University, and Knetter were very busy in the early minutes of the attack. When the firing began, Olson had no sooner opened the door of his sleeping quarters when wounded Spc. Jared Moe was being assisted by Knetter into the room. The building was being peppered by enemy fire. Olson immediately applied a field dressing to the shrapnel wounds on Moe's legs and side.

As Olson was treating Moe, Knetter laid down covering fire to allow Spcs. Justin Dunn and Domingo Augilar to "join the fight."

As Olson finished attending to Moe, the squad's medic, Spc. Matthew Generux, opened the room's door to repel the attack. He, Knetter, and Feragen immediately caught a wounded Marine about to fall into the room. Once the Marine was moved to safety and received first aid for a gunshot wound to his side, the three soldiers rejoined the fight.

John Olson wasn't done yet. He delivered ammunition while under fire to tower one where he also accurately engaged the enemy with his M203 grenade launcher. Olson then ran to tower three where, while climbing its ladder, he was again engaged by the enemy. From this tower, he suppressed the enemy using his M203 and a 50-caliber machine gun.

"Both times running out to the towers, you could hear rounds pinging off," he said. "You had to de-

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fend what you were out there to defend."

Besides assisting with the wounded, Knetter also grabbed a M249 Squad Automatic Weapon and charged to tower two. Just as he was about to reach the tower, he was engaged by enemy fire from two different locations. He made it up the ladder in time to lay down fire on the enemy in the gravel trucks in front of his tower.

David Olson provided ammunition to tower one and two. Upon learning that the Soldiers in tower two needed ammunition, he ran back to the ammunition room. While he was there, he was told to take cover because of the imminent mortar fire that was going to be within 50 meters of their outpost. Ignoring the warning, Olson delivered the ammunition to tower two and informed the soldiers there and in two other towers of the incoming mortars.

"It was really scary at first because as I was running down there, there were rounds ricocheting off the walls next to me," he said. "My biggest concern was my guy's conditions."

All the soldiers were concerned about the incoming mortars. The rounds were to be fired by their fellow mortarmen stationed nearby at Camp Fallujah.

"Soon as I knew we needed mortars, we were pretty rattled," said Melhorn. "Everybody was nervous because our forward observers told us they weren't zeroed in very well."

"As soon I heard those mortars pop out from the south gate, I was like 'Here they come everybody!'" said Melhorn, "Everyone got down immediately."

He said once the rounds hit, he felt dirt hitting the towers "all over the place."

The mortars did their job and broke the attack, though.

"They had them on like you wouldn't believe," Melhorn said.

New Website for Online Giving in Minnesota

Making donations to non profit organizations like the museum took a revolutionary step into the future in November. GiveMN.org is a new website where non profit organizations can receive donations from their supporters through online giving via credit or debit cards. It's a smart way for Minnesotans to discover, support and engage with the charities that are right for them.

Check out the museum's page on <http://www.giveMN.org>. There is a search box on the GiveMN.org home page, and if you type in "MN Military Museum," the link to our page should come up. There is a special page there dedicated just to information about our upcoming Civil War Sesquicentennial Exhibit for which we are actively engaged in a fundraising campaign.

At the present time, there are no credit/debit card processing fees due to support from several foundations that have made donations to cover those costs. Therefore, 100% of your donation will go directly to the non profit organization of your choice. It is unclear at this time how long this will continue, so if you're considering making a donation to the museum, doing so in the near future will make your dollars go further—both for you and the museum.

Check out GiveMN.org. It's definitely worth a look!

Curator's Notes By Doug Bekke



As usual many important projects are underway simultaneously at the museum.

Work continues in the storage areas to develop the space to make it a more usable workspace and a more functional storage space for the museum's very large and growing collection. Within the collection work continues to separate the collection into three primary categories. One primary collection area for items from World War II to the present day. A second primary collection area, for pre World War II items and foreign items and a third area for items that are reproductions or that have no specific historic significance to the collection and which are available to loan to other institutions or to theater groups or school plays etc. Because of the large amount of investigative and conservation work that is necessary on most items to determine their status and because of the huge size of the collection this process will continue for many years.

Within the collection are many sub-categories, each requiring special knowledge and expertise. Some of these categories are, by era, unit, branch of service, and nationality and include insignia, field equipment, unit equipment, head-gear, shoes, uniforms, flags, documents, photographs, books, individual or unit histories, personal effects and hygiene items, guns, edged weapons, vehicles and crew served weapons etc. etc. etc. The collection's artifacts range from tiny buttons and pins, to postcards, to aircraft and main battle tanks weighing many tons.

Work continues to move forward on the Museum's upcoming Civil War exhibit which will open in July of 2011. At this phase much of the work still relates to planning but fundraising continues and artifacts are being acquired. The estimated cost of this exhibit is about \$100,00.00. To date we have received over \$15,000.00 plus several thousand dollars in artifact donations which we will now not need to purchased. Through the effort of Steve Osman a disbanding Civil War reenactor group donated its treasury and much of its equipment to the museum. The money was used to purchase a very expensive fiberglass horse to be used in the exhibit with a Civil war cavalryman. All of the horse equipment and some of the cavalry clothing items were donated last year by Gene Henrickson from Civil War this reenactor group. Several people have contacted the museum to volunteer their service in the construction of the exhibit. As construction starts in the spring and summer they will be contacted, but in the meantime everyone's help is needed in our fundraising effort and in locating appropriate artifacts. This will be the Minnesota's primary Civil War exhibit and it can only happen with the support of the people who care about Minnesota's Military history. Many thanks to those of you who have already donated! Your support is greatly appreciated!

This past October the collection of 37 Spanish American War and Civil War flags stored at Cp. Ripley were moved to the Minnesota Historical Society where they will in the future be conserved, stored, and on a rotating basis displayed in the rotunda of the State Capital. Fund raising is underway to obtain the needed money for this conservation project. The 21 flags that were on display in the capital rotunda are currently being conserved with money MHS obtained through a "Save America's Treasures" grant. All of these flags were formerly property of the Adjutant General of the Minnesota National Guard under the care of the Minnesota Military Museum, but were legislatively transferred to the Minnesota Historical Society in 2007. The storage place formerly occupied by these flags will soon be filled by the museum's collection of 1900-WWI Minnesota unit flags.

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Artifact Donation Honor Roll (Aug. 1 – Dec. 15, 2009)

The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:

Robert Anderson ▪ Clint Beckstrand ▪ George J. Britton ▪ John Bromberg ▪ Sandra Buch ▪ Linda Cameron ▪ Kenneth V. Deans ▪ Mickey Ferguson ▪ Don Frederick ▪ George Glotzbach ▪ Ronald Hallin ▪ Linda Hitchcock ▪ Steven Johnson ▪ Laudie Kacalek ▪ Marian Karhula ▪ Eugene Krueger ▪ Harriet Maselie ▪ Bob Mendenhall ▪ Daniel Ojeda, Jr. ▪ Dennis Ollum ▪ Steve Osman ▪ Charlie Pautler ▪ Jenelle Pitlik ▪ Kevin L. Rofidal ▪ Ella Strand ▪ Ron Struss ▪ Darol Studer ▪ Michael D. Treinen ▪ Dennis Van De Linde ▪ Richard Weiss ▪ Ron & Dorothy Williams ▪ Howard Wilson

Artifact Donations (August 1 – December 15, 2009)

Uniforms: Belt, web, USAF (2) ▪ Belt, USA web ▪ Beret, USA Airborne ▪ Blouse, USMC female ▪ Blouse, USAF blue ▪ Boots, combat pr. (2) ▪ Boots, vapor barrier black ▪ Breeches (Pinks), USA officer ▪ Cap, Misc (8) ▪ Cap, garrison (7) ▪ Cap, jeep ▪ Cap, USMC service dress ▪ Cap, USA winter ▪ Coat, service, USA, dress (2) ▪ Coveralls, USA green (2) ▪ Field jacket, USA green ▪ Flight Suit, WWII ▪ Gloves, Japanese ▪ Hat, Coast Guard ▪ Hat, Visor USA officer (8); Hood, sleeping bag ▪ Hood, USA cold weather parka ▪ Jacket, USA repro USA WWII paratrooper ▪ Jacket, USA “Eisenhower” ▪ Jacket, leather A-2 ▪ Jacket, USMC female; Jacket, Coast Guard female ▪ Jacket, USA BDU (4) ▪ Jacket, repro Civil War Cavalry shell ▪ Jacket, USA TW ▪ Jacket, USA officer (greens) ▪ Jacket, USA officer (AG344) ▪ Jacket, USAF with liner ▪ Jacket, USA dress blue (2) ▪ Overcoat, USAF with liner ▪ Parka, USA cold weather w/liner ▪ Pea Coat, USN ▪ Scarf ▪ Service cap, USAF ▪ Shirt, USA green fatigue (2) ▪ Shirt, USA wool (2) ▪ Shirt, USN (blue) ▪ Shirt, USAF dress blue LS (3) ▪ Shirt, USAF dress blue SS ▪ Shoes, low quarters pr (2) ▪ Skirt, Coast Guard ▪ Skirt, USMC; Sweater (3) ▪ Tie ▪ Trousers, repro USA M1941 paratrooper ▪ Trousers, mounted (CW Union) ▪ Trousers, USA green fatigue (3) ▪ Trousers, USA dress blue (2) ▪ Trousers, USA TW ▪ Trousers, USA, Tan cotton ▪ Trousers, USA Tan wool ▪ Trousers, USA “Pinks” ▪ Trousers, USA AG344 ▪ Trousers, USA wool ▪ Trousers, USAF blue ▪ Trousers, USN blue

Equipment: Canteen, USA (2) ▪ Canteen, German WWII ▪ Canteen Cup ▪ Cup, mess ▪ Flashlight (2) ▪ Headband, Japanese ▪ Helmet, pith ▪ Helmet with liner ▪ Mess kit ▪ Pack, canvas ▪ Pistol belt, USA (3) ▪ Poles, tent ▪ Pouch, first aid ▪ Saddle, Japanese with cinch and saddle bags ▪ Shelter half (6) ▪ Shovel with cover ▪ Stakes, tent ▪ Telephone, field, Japanese

Miscellaneous: Banner, blue star ▪ Books ▪ “C” Rations ▪ Cigarettes, pack ▪ Coin (5) ▪ Digital Camera ▪ Dog tags ▪ Flag, BG with Pole & Stand ▪ Flag, US with pole and stand ▪ Handkerchief, souvenir ▪ Insignia ▪ Manuals, field ▪ Maps ▪ Mess kit, USA w/utensils ▪ “Yank” Newspapers ▪ “Stars & Stripes” Newspapers ▪ Papers ▪ Photos ▪ Pillow, souvenir ▪ Pillow top, souvenir ▪ Plaques ▪ Plates, machinery ▪ Postcards ▪ Propaganda leaflet, Korean war ▪ Ribbons ▪ Signal cricket, repro WWII ▪ Statue, bronze ▪ Straps ▪ Template, marking, 75mm artillery gun ▪ Toilet paper, ration ▪ Toothbrush, Japanese ▪ Trench art ▪ Veterans’ histories

Weapons and related items: Clip, ammunition, .45 revolver ▪ Clip, Japanese rifle ▪ Ammunition, Japanese rifle ▪ Japanese artillery shell (2) ▪ Artillery shell, USA 76mm ▪ Artillery shell, USA 105mm ▪ Holster ▪ Pouch, ammunition

Memorials

August – December 15, 2009

Given by:	In Memory of:
Sidney K. Schmuckler	Sam Rosenthal
Allan Meixner	Edmund Tiemann
Richard and Betty Hayes	Edmund Tiemann
Allan Meixner	John Cox
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Ray and Shirley Lunde	John Cox
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Contributions Honor Roll (Aug. 1 – Dec. 15, 2009)

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Donations: Neill & Patricia Carter ▪ Kenneth Digre ▪ Theodore S. Storck ▪ Ken Streiff ▪ Kenneth R. Swanson ▪ Stan Turner ▪ Al Zdon

Notes

- ◆ The Minnesota Military Museum has a new email address: mnmuseum@yahoo.com
- ◆ Mark Muesing, a member of the MMHS for nine years, has passed away. The board offers condolences to the family.

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Membership Application for the Military Historical Society of Minnesota
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All memberships are annual except Life, Organization and Corporate Memberships. Contributors of \$350 or more will be recognized on a plaque in the museum lobby.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible check for \$ _____ made payable to the Minnesota Military Museum.

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Thank You for your Support!

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