

Travel



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Luxembourg — 40 years after the 'Bulge'

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge this week.

Loving hands will lay fresh flowers at the foot of the American Infantryman who stands in bronze above the ancient plaza at Clerveaux and around Eisenhower Square in Wiltz, where they raise the American flag in gratitude 365 days of the year.

In the American Military Cemetery at Hamm, Albert Wagner has been clipping the grass all week around the white marble crosses, getting within a few centimeters of George Patton's grave and trimming around the war memorial.

Wagner has been clipping the grass around the graves for 15 years, so that the setting will always be "exactement" for Sunday, but he gave it special care this week because a representative of the Grand Duke Jean will be present to commemorate the 40th anniversary.

Luxembourg is a tiny but important country, once one of the most powerful forces in Europe, and only slightly bigger than the tri-county area of metropolitan Detroit. Its 30 by 50 miles of mountains and river valleys are bordered by Germany, France and Belgium in the heart of western Europe.

THIS CENTRAL location makes it an ideal base for anyone who wants to do the grand tour of Europe without sitting on a tour bus. It is also a good destination for travelers who would like to see Europe "in a nutshell."

It is only an hour's drive from the historic walls of Luxembourg City to the medieval mountain castle of Vianden in the north, to the vineyards of the Luxembourg Moselle on the west, or to dozens of villages with their own town squares, historic churches and sidewalk cafes throughout the country.

Prices are very reasonable, especially now that Iceland Air, the only airline that flies directly from the U.S. to Luxembourg, flies weekly non-stop flights from Detroit to Luxembourg City, with free or low-cost bus and rail connections to several other European countries.

Car rentals are less expensive in Luxembourg than in most of Europe so many people fly into the Grand Duchy, tour the country by car, visit several neighboring countries and return their car to the airport in Luxembourg.

All of those are perfectly sensible reasons for visiting the Grand Duchy, but there are other more sentimental reasons represented by the 40th anniversary celebrations being held here this week.

The people in Luxembourg really love and honor Americans. They have built monuments in what seems like every corner of the road to commemorate the servicemen who freed them. A little history shows why this is true, in spite of the fact that the Battle of the Bulge decimated several parts of the country.

LUXEMBOURG didn't have an army when the Germans annexed the country in May, 1940. Not "occupied," but annexed as part of Germany. Most of the country was intact even after the Allied forces liberated it from Nazi occupation in September, 1944.

Luxembourgers thought the war was over, and were preparing for Christmas, when the Germans began a counter-offensive across the Moselle River on the night of Dec. 16, 1945. Within days they had punched a huge bulge in the Allied line that extended across northern Luxembourg into Belgium.

Patton and the Third Army literally rode to the rescue in the forested mountains of the Ardennes, but the north of Luxembourg was severely damaged and tens of thousands died before the Germans were driven out again several weeks later.

I TOURED MANY of the memorials to men of the Third Army when I visited Luxembourg last summer with a group of American journalists and a cheerful Pennsylvania veteran called Ike. "Not to be confused with other Ike," he said, referring of course to Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower.

Ike Recife went into Omaha Beach a few days after the Normandy landing and was a seasoned staff sergeant when he drove with the 80th Division into Luxembourg during the Battle of the Bulge. "It was so foggy we thought the Germans couldn't see us, so we drove with our lights on," he laughed.

We teased Ike a lot, and he answered most of our questions with jokes, but most of my memories of that trip have Ike in them. Ike pointing at a photo in the museum at Clerveaux, where special memorial services will be held this Sunday.

"That's my gang, the 80th division." Ike in the graveyard of a tiny church in the village of Oberwampach reading a plaque to an American infantryman called Hassel C. Whitehead, who died trying to save a child during heavy shelling. Or in the church at Eschweiler where U.S. Private George O. Mergenthaler is memorialized in marble as one of the figures in a stained-glass window.

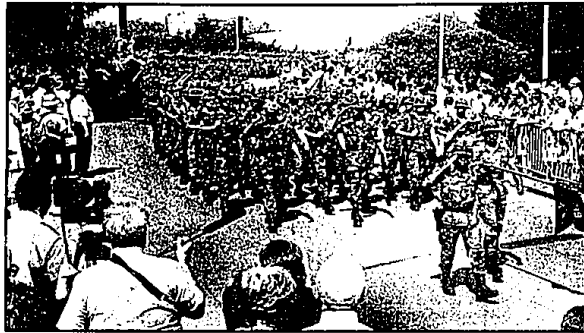
I REMEMBER Ike at the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies held every summer in Ettelbruck, where Patton Square overlooks John F. Kennedy Ave. Ike was wearing his blue 80th-division cap so I could spot him easily as he moved with his camera from the U.S. Army tank, to the 10-foot statue of Patton to the wall where he could photograph the American Ambassador laying wreaths on the cenotaph.

Most of all I remember him in Hamm cemetery the day I met Albert Wagner. Ike was looking for the grave of his friend, Medal of Honor winner Sgt. Day Turner.

The sprinklers made wet white arcs against the sky, greening the circle of grass around the monument and the green blanket that hosts the 5,076 white marble crosses. There were many more dead, but most of the bodies were taken home by families.

TWO WORKMEN were sanding a cross at the back of the cemetery so that it would always be clean and sparkle in the Luxembourg sun.

Gardener Albert Wagner was hand-clipping the



Luxembourg has many memorials to the country's liberation by Allied soldiers during World War. Scenes include: The annual parade in Ettelbruck to commemorate the American War dead. A bronze statue of an American soldier in Clerveaux. A worker polishes an American grave stone. A display in the war museum in Clerveaux.

grass around one of the crosses, keeping every centimeter neat. He told me that on Wednesday he runs the "grand machine" between the rows, within 30 centimeters of the crosses. On Thursdays he cuts around General Patton's grave. On Friday, he makes everything neat and green around the chapel.

He was telling me all this in French, of course, repeating over and over again "exactement par Di-manche." What he was trying to say was that he did these things every week on the same day so that every Sunday, 52 weeks a year, the whole cemetery would be perfectly groomed for those who came to see it and for those whose crosses they came to see.

Next week contributing travel editor Iris Jones will discuss what it is like being a tourist in Luxembourg.



Ike Recife

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Special shows to be at Disneyland

During the Dec. 22 to Jan. 6 holiday season, Disneyland will become a Christmas-time wonderland with seasonal decorations and musical entertainment added to the normal festivities.

Fantasy on Parade will be showcased daily, featuring marching toy soldiers, prancing reindeer, snowmen and snowwomen, and scenes from favorite Disney motion pictures.

During the Christmas season the Magic Kingdom will display its holiday centerpiece — a 60-foot-tall tree in Town Square embellished with 3,000 sparkling lights and 2,800 ornaments.

A turn-of-the-century Christmas will be re-created along Main Street, U.S.A., with strands of garland arched over the street and with lamp posts, doors and windows trimmed with wreaths. Strolling Dickens carolers will entertain visitors.

Disneyland's annual New Year's Eve Party will be held on Dec. 31 from 8:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. Helping

to ring-out-the-old and ring-in-the-new will be special entertainment, complimentary hats and noisemakers distributed to partygoers and a spectacular fireworks extravaganza presented at the stroke of midnight.

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