

A Christmas long ago

Remembering the heroes of the Battle of the Bulge

It was December 1944, 75 years ago, and American forces were guarding the Ardennes Forest in Belgium. Very little fighting had been going on in what was believed to be the closing days and months of World War II in Europe. The lull came to a wrenching halt on Dec. 16, however, when the German Army launched a surprise counterattack, now known as the Battle of the Bulge, with about 200,000 troops and 1,000 tanks.

The goal was to break through the American lines and cut the Allied Forces in half, opening the way to control the supply port of Antwerp, Belgium. As portrayed in the popular HBO series *Band of Brothers*, the German forces succeeded in surrounding Allied Forces located at Bastogne. The siege began on Dec. 20 and ended Dec. 27. At one point, the Germans sent a request to General Anthony McAuliffe of the American forces, asking him to surrender, noting that their situation was hopeless.

McAuliffe replied: "To the German Commander, NUTS! — The American Commander."

"And with that, the Battle carried on. For those entrenched in this war, there would be no Christmas truce like there had been during WWI," wrote Kaitlyn Crain Enriquez, an archives specialist for the National Archives in the archives *The Unwritten Record* (unwritten-record.blogspot.com).

Some of the soldiers were able to attend Christmas services held by Army chaplains, while others were invited to spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with families in Belgium. For the frontline soldiers, there was no break from the misery of the frigid temperatures and tension of war.

Those who survived and the veterans of the other battles of World War II would return home in the next year or two to begin making new lives for themselves. With their return, the rural electrification movement, which had begun with President Franklin Roosevelt's signing of an executive order creating the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935 and slowed during the war, was poised to once again grow. The veterans of World War II were key in forming and building the electric co-ops that serve our state and nation today.

This Christmas, as we mark the 75th anniversary of this most important battle, let's pause to remember those brave servicemen who gave their lives for our freedom and to honor those veterans who fought and then came home to make life better for all of us. We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



A Belgium family welcomes an American soldier into their home for Christmas.

COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES



American soldiers pause during the Battle of the Bulge for a Christmas service.

COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

80 years in the making

In 1937, when power companies would not supply electricity to sparsely populated areas, the citizens of Cleveland and Lincoln Counties who wanted electricity organized the non-profit business known today as C & L Electric Cooperative Corporation.

The new business was incorporated on August 16, 1938, as C & L (Cleveland & Lincoln) Electric Cooperative Corporation. A request for a loan to build a line of 90 miles with 350 signatures was first sent to Rural Electrification Administration (REA). The directors were notified that 100 miles of line would be required for approval. So they extended the line into Jefferson and Grant counties. REA approved the new plan — having 161 miles of line and 437 signatures.

The beginning of the 161 miles of line approved by REA, tapped into a section of line north of Star City on highway 81. That line was owned by Star City Light Company, which provided electricity for the incorporated town of Star City. Marked as Section A, Line A, the new C & L line began near Mt. Nebo church and school and ran east toward Grady. On December 19, 1939, section A, line A was energized.

By the end of that first year, C & L was serving 370 members, who used an average of 39 kWh and paid 7.9 cents per kWh.

The Pace Act of 1944 made a covenant with C & L that

if they would extend area coverage in its allocated territory, they could get loans for 35 years at 2% interest.

C & L expanded rapidly after this, and soon, C & L's lines went into eight counties; Cleveland, Lincoln, Grant, Jefferson, Bradley, Drew, Desha and Dallas.

In 1955, electric cooperatives in Arkansas were given legal rights by legislation to generate electricity. C & L and other cooperatives in Arkansas organized Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC), a cooperative which now provides all of C&L's power at a wholesale cost.

Today, C & L serves over 22,192 members and owns and maintains over 4,420 miles of distribution power lines and 20 substations.

A lot has changed over the past 80 years. For instance, you no longer have to provide a list of what you have in your home that will be using electricity when you apply for membership. You no longer have to list your assets — for example, one milk cow, five laying hens, one rooster, etc. The times have changed, but C & L's mission is still the same; providing safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to its members to enhance their quality of life since 1939.

General Manager/CEO, Gregory S. Smith, would like to invite C & L members to stop by the Star City office, Thursday, December 19, 2019, from 2 p.m.-4 p.m., for refreshments, as they commemorate their first energized line 80 years ago.