

Personal history: Finding my grandfather's monograph

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Contributing writer

This quote is from a monograph written by my grandfather, "The Operations of the 2D Battalion, 310th Infantry (78th Infantry Division) in the Attack on Kesternich, Germany, 14-16 December 1944":

"The early morning of 14 December was extremely cold and the snow that had fallen during the past four days was glazed and deceptively deep. The troops had spent a miserable night. Every man was tense and excited. Feet were half frozen and fingers brittle. The need for arctic overshoes was certainly apparent. Rest was almost impossible during the night because of intermittent artillery and mortar fire. Consequently these non-battle wise soldiers spent most of the night improving their individual positions."

When I first began my genealogy research, I knew military history and military records would be a big part of my search, as my family has a rich history of military service.

I just never imagined how personal

those records would be.

Boldly googling my grandfather's name, Niram L. Sauls, I stumbled upon a monograph written by him on the 78th Division Veterans Association website. Well ... almost. My grandpa's report had just been removed by the webmaster because of storage issues. So admitting defeat, I bookmarked the site and moved on to "easier" research.

Two years after that initial search and a few half-hearted glances at the association's website later, I found myself wanting that report. I typed my grandfather's name in the Association's search box once again — this time with more determination.

Surprisingly, in recent months there were posts from another researcher on the message board requesting various reports including my grandfather's. So, sheepishly, I posted a request and emailed the webmaster Tom for a copy of the monograph my grandfather had written 60 years ago. With little hope of a response, I once again moved on to "easier" research, so much for determination.

A few hours later, while on a break

from my "easy" research, I opened my inbox hoping to find a response — and there it was. Tom had emailed me the report.

He also had supplied me with additional information about the monograph and had provided a link to his Wikipedia site. Kesternich is a personal research project of his.

While reading the report with its descriptions of military maneuvers and strategies, I realized most of the footnotes were "personal knowledge."

Although the purpose of this monograph was to train military officers for battle, it was a record of my grandfather's experience. This genealogical treasure I had determined to find now became more personal. A piece of my grandfather's life was playing out on a PDF file on my computer. Suddenly, my genealogy research was alive.

My grandfather died in 1990 and never talked much about his experiences in the war. However, thanks to genealogists and history enthusiasts like Tom, I now hold a piece of personal history. The heroic acts of my grandfather and the men of the 78th Infantry will live on.