

## The New Florida Southeast Chapter of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge Hold First Meeting

by Betty Thomas

World War II had many bloody battles and claimed many lives on both sides. One battle — The Battle of the Bulge — also known as the Battle of the Ardennes, the bloodiest of the war, remains fixed in the minds and on the souls of those who survived it. It was December 16, 1944. Hitler launched what was to become his last attempt to stop the Allied invasion, driving a wedge into the Allied lines creating a "bulge" through the Ardennes in Southern Belgium, taking the American forces by surprise, trapping

the American troops. Allied aircraft were unable to offer air support due to the inclement weather while Eisenhower's 48 divisions were caught unprepared in bitter cold in the hilly, wooded region. Gen. Gerd von Rundstedt's 5th and 6th Panzer Armies launched two attacks to retake Antwerp; Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel bypassed the 101st Airborne-held Bastogne advancing to within four miles of the Meuse River by Dec. 24th. The 101st Airborne had become trapped in Bastogne and were surrounded and cut off by the Germans from Dec. 19th to

the 26th, when Gen. George S. Patton's 3rd Army, 4th armored division, freed them. On Jan. 3rd the U.S. 1st Army began the counteroffensive and the Germans withdrew in an orderly fashion from Jan 8th to 16th. The Battle of the Bulge crushed the German's last desperate attempt to regain the upper hand in the West.

Statistically, there were 600,000 troops in the Battle of the Bulge, 80,000 casualties including 19,000 deaths, in the 30-day period

History recounts the facts of this historic, decisive battle. Our story lies with the men who fought it.

On Thursday, December 16th, 1999, on the 55th anniversary of the battle, one hundred thirty (130) of these brave men met for the first annual luncheon of the newly formed the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge of Southeast Florida, Chapter 62, at the 391st Bomb Group Restaurant located on Southern Blvd., just east of Military Trail. Each one of the forces was represented — infantry, tanks, paratroopers, air support, etc. Many had not seen



Photo by Betty Thomas

Annette and George Fisher, organizer of Chapter 62, Southeast Florida Battle of the Bulge Veterans, with the Honorable Clay Shaw, member of congress from the 22nd District. The Fishers are residents of the Claridges Condominium in Palm Beach. George is past president of the condominium's Board of Directors.

each other since the war. Some had spent much of the time in a fox hole together. Some widows of veterans who fought in the battle came — to learn about what their husbands had gone through.

Seated at tables arranged by division, they sat long and talked much. They had been to hell and back. They opened their wounds and cleansed them. Some shed

tears. They were the survivors. There was a common bond in the room. It was real, it was strong, I felt it.

After the welcome address by George Fisher, organizer of the chapter and luncheon, and following lunch, District 22 Congressman Clay Shaw delivered an address. Then, Brig. Gen. Albin Irzyk, the ranking member of the chapter, traced the famous Battle

of the Bulge, (name coined by Winston Churchill), step by step, choking when he related what the Christmas season has meant to him with the memory of all those who didn't make it back from the battle, an emotion that was felt throughout the room.

Read about some of the local Battle of the Bulge veterans in this and future issues of *the Condo News*.