



HISTORY

>> Historical Information

BRUYERES AND BIFFONTAINE

A 7th Army report said, "Bruyeres will long be remembered, for it was the most viciously fought-for-town we had encountered in our long march against the Germans." After arriving in France, the [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#) joined the 36th Division, as part of the 7th Army. In October 1944, the 442nd reached the outskirts of Bruyeres, a quaint little town in northeast France. The [Allies](#) were only 40 miles from Germany. But standing in the way were the Vosges Mountains and a cornered, yet determined German army.

The town lay in a valley bordered by four conical hills that the Allies named A, B, C and D. To take Bruyeres, the [Nisei](#) had to take the hills. On October 15, under the command of Major General John Dahlquist, the 442nd went into combat. The [100th Battalion](#) attacked Hill A. The 2nd Battalion attacked Hill B, but after a day of heavy fighting, the [Nisei](#) had only advanced 500 yards.

The Germans had the terrain and the weather on their side. The mountains were more than 1,000 feet high and were covered with tall pines. The fog and the thick underbrush limited visibility to a dozen yards. A cold rain poured down, soaking the men's uniforms, socks and boots. Artillery barrages and "screaming meemie" rockets pounded continuously. Almost every shell the Germans fired, burst in the trees and showered hundreds of jagged steel fragments and wood splinters on the men below.

For three days, the infantrymen fought back repeated German attacks. With the help of artillery fire from the [522nd Field Artillery Battalion](#), the 100th took Hill A, and the 2nd took Hill B. The 3rd Battalion routed the enemy out of Bruyeres but the Germans still held Hills C and D.

During the fight to take Hill D, the Germans wounded a soldier from F Company. As the litter bearers carried him away, the Germans fired at the stretcher and killed him. Infuriated that the enemy shot an unarmed, wounded man, the F Company men charged up the hill and annihilated the Germans. Nearby, the Germans shot at another [Nisei](#) carrying party. This time [Staff Sergeant Robert Kuroda](#) killed three Germans with a grenade and killed or wounded three others with his rifle. The carrying party was rescued, but Kuroda was killed by a sniper. He was awarded the [Medal of Honor](#) for his actions.

Finally, the 442nd captured Hills C and D. The men began pushing the Germans north, across a railroad embankment and toward the forested area of Belmont. It was here, that a K Company soldier shot a German officer and captured a complete set of German defense plans.

Using the information in the defense plans, F and L Companies, led by Major Emmet O'Connor, infiltrated the German lines during the night. At dawn they attacked the enemy from behind, while the 2nd and 3rd Battalions attacked in front. The men were aided by the pinpoint artillery fire of the 522nd. By late afternoon on October 21, the O'Connor Task Force and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions had captured the hamlet of La Broquaine as well as 54 prisoners and a supply of German arms and equipment. The action earned a [Presidential Unit Citation](#) for F

and L Companies.

Meanwhile Dahlquist ordered the 100th Battalion to march east, more than a mile from the nearest friendly troops, and take the high ground overlooking the village of Biffontaine. The men reached the ridge and dug in, but soon they were being hit from all three sides with German artillery, rockets and anti-aircraft fire.

Although they held the ridge, the men were critically low on water and supplies. Five tanks loaded with ammunition and water and accompanied by a platoon tried to reach the 100th. But the Germans ambushed them, killing three and wounding several others. Meanwhile, German bicycle troops attacked the 100th along the right rear flank. The 2nd Battalion beat off the attack, but the 100th still needed supplies. Finally soldiers from G and L Companies, carrying water and ammunition on their backs, found their way through the thick forest with the help of the French resistance and relieved the beleaguered 100th Battalion.

Dahlquist then ordered the 100th to descend the ridge and take Biffontaine, an objective that many men thought was tactically worthless. The 100th climbed down and quickly captured 23 Germans, some enemy arms and several houses. But soon the Germans re-grouped. They surrounded the town and blasted the 100th with anti-aircraft cannons and tank fire all through the night. Exhausted, the men in the 100th huddled in the cellars of ruined buildings. Many had not slept for eight days. The casualties were piling up. Their cache of captured weapons had run out and the supply lines were again cut off. The Germans swarmed among the houses yelling, "Surrender," but the 100th held the town.

The next day the *Nisei* attempted to carry out some of the wounded, but a German patrol captured them. Only three of the 20 were able to escape.

On the afternoon of October 23, the 3rd Battalion finally broke through to free the 100th. Biffontaine, a farming hamlet of 300 people, with no rail line, was now in Allied hands. The cost for the 100th: 21 killed, 122 wounded and 18 captured.

The 100th, 2nd and 3rd Battalions were finally ordered back to Belmont for a well-deserved rest.