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January 26, 2010

Dear Mrs Martin,

Received with pleasure your letter with the draft. To make it easier I retyped the enclosed text.

Enclosed please find 7 photos with a number on the back. The suggested captions if convenient for eventual publication are as follows:

- 1- Innsbruck, Austria. May 5, 1945. Reddition of the German garrison. A Luftwaffe officer who~~s~~ surrendered is being disposed of.
- 2- Garmish-Partenkirchen, Austria. May 1945. In front of the very first jet plane Messerschmit ME 262.
- 3- Saint-Dié, France. June 15, 1999. Maurice Lipka near the 103d div. monument holding the "Never Again" plaque to be erected at the Landsberg-Dachau sub camp discovered by the 103d div.
- 4- Dallas, Texas. 1995. Bob Bottenfield, Simon Dargols, Bill Chuchna meeting again 50 years after the dramatic ambush at Saulcy-sur-Meurthe, France.
- 5- Near Saint-Dié, France. 1990. (l to r) Simon Dargols, George Davis.
- 6- Paris, France. June 1945. Simon Dargols.
- 7- Near Innsbruck, Austria. May 1945. Group on a armored Scout Car M8 (Simon Dargols top row on the left).

*It was a pleasure to compulsse
the profusion of "Yank" "Stars
& Strips" among other nostalgia
in the Historian Room.*

Sincerely
MDL

I was born in Paris, France in 1925 of a Russian father and English mother, which was the worst thing in Nazi occupied France.

On December 1941 I was arrested by the Vichy police in Marseille but managed to escape from confinement and made it to North Africa and arranged passage to Casablanca on a Portuguese (neutral) cargo ship bound for Havana and New York.

On January 1943 I enlisted in the US Army. Legally ~~legally~~ a foreigner is not entitled to join the US Army. My Certificate of Naturalization was issued at my discharge at the Fort Dix, NJ Separation Center on June 26, 1946.

After basic training at Camp Blanding in Florida and assignment to the 103d Division Company A, 411th Infantry Regiment at Camp Howze, Texas, I was back in Marseille in October 1944 at the same spot out of which I escaped from France 3 years before.

On November 8 1944, as the Division entered combat near Saint-Dié I am transferred from "A" Co 411 Rgt to the 103d Reconnaissance Troop to provide interpreting services.

My first incursion into enemy territory was with a motorized patrol of 2 armored cars and 4 jeeps at Saulcy-sur-Meurthe. We stopped in front of a large house with all shutters closed. A civilian German spokesman came toward us and announced: "40 or so Germans are in the house and decided to withdraw when they saw you."

When I translated this message to the Lt in command of the patrol, the Lt indicated skepticism, and demanded that he return and confirm that it was clear of all enemy soldiers. The civilian returned to inform us that the house was now clear, however, the Lt ordered the patrol to return immediately to our headquarters in Rougville, as the mission was only to detect enemy presence and determine their combat potential.

While driving back toward our lines we came across two lines of GI's moving on each side of the road toward the enemy. It turned out to be Co A 411th Inf, my originally assigned unit. Among the men I recognized Robert Bottenfield of Phoenix, AZ, who in turn recognized me.

Co A's first contact with the enemy was dramatic and tragic due to the loss of eight men killed-in-action. Their names are engraved on a commemorative monument erected at the location of the action, near the Saulcy-sur-Meurthe Cemetery.

Some 50 years later I heard about the existence of a 103d Division Association and I attended, for the first time, a annual reunion in Dallas, Texas. Somebody came up to me and said: "You were driving in a jeep when we crossed each other, you remember?". It was Robert Bottenfield from Phoenix, Arizona. I answered: "Of course I remember. I have never forgotten".

Among several hectic missions, a memorable "close shave" during a foot patrol as we entered Germany toward Wissembourg on a snowy weather: A dozen of us making a dash, one by one, from one house to the other. The Germans had zeroed in the open space between the two houses and started shooting with tracing bullets and mortars..

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One of us, surrounded by tracing bullets, fell down in the snow and remained motionless for a long time while we fired back at the Germans. When things quieted down we picked him up, he was unhurt. Later on he told us: "That snow felt good when I realized I wasn't hit." We took cover, stayed overnight and sneaked away to our lines. The password changing every day we had to find a fast and convincing answer to the: "Halt, ! Who goes there?".

George Davis (C Co 409th Regt.) and I made an incursion in ~~Steige~~ Steige. It was the village where a girl told me: "- You are the first American I see. You speak french perfectly." About a week later, on December 1944, George Davis with a group of GIs was captured by the Germans in Selestat.

In case of capture the instruction was to divulge exclusively our name, rank and ASN (Army Serial Number). On every dog tag the religion ~~is~~ is identified by an engraved letter ("H" for Hebrew). About to be captured all the GIs threw away their dog tag by solidarity for those concerned.

George Davis was severely beaten by the SS while being grilled. They broke his nose and teeth. He swore to himself - if he ever got out of it - to walk from Marseilles to Saint-Dié. He held that promise involving about 800 kilometers, an average of 30 kilometers a day. Maurice Lipka, our friend from Saint-Dié, walked along with him for some time.

Ever since George Davis and Maurice Lipka kept contact. Maurice and I visited George before attending this Nashville reunion. Very regretfully George couldn't join us.

Maurice Lipka, owner of a foundry, supplied and donated many artworks to the 103d div. Association, among them the "Never Again" commemorative plaque erected at the infamous Dachau's Landsberg sub-camp discovered by the 103d div. end of April 1945.

Sometimes when air support was requested the US Airforce missed their targets. We had to spread a red fluorescent cloth on top of our vehicles to prevent the Americans to shell their own troops.

We did not wear overcoats even during that very cold winter. We wore two or three pairs of socks. For camouflage in the snow we had a white drape.

To continue the story of that girl for whom I was the first American she met, end of November 1944 in Steige. I asked her to write down her name. "who knows, after the war we might meet again".

Some fifty years later I managed to find out that she was married and left Steige to settle down not far from Paris. I called her number and got her husband on the phone.

He was puzzled when I told him I wanted to talk to Jeannette Quevauviller. He thought it was a joke and asked me what I wanted. I told him that during the war she wrote her name on a postcard for me, a proof that could be shown to him. He was convinced and I talked to Jeannette. She remembered and invited me at their home. She told me that a few days before she first met me her brother called up the German recruiting office in Colmar about reporting for induction in the Wehrmacht but, due to the lack of transport, he will not be able to make it.

He was amazed to hear the answer: "You are talking to the French Army of General Leclerc!"

Effectively the Americans allowed the French Army to be the first to enter in Strasbourg. They were anxious to be entitled to be present with the allies when Germany surrenders. A GI told me - "Good! After all it is their country, let's hope they succeed!".

The 103d div. remained for about 3 months in a defensive position allowing the French Army to take over. I am transferred during that period at the "Civil Affairs Section" in Imbsheim.

Original the name of "Civil Affairs Section" ^(WAS) "Gouvernement Provisoire" (Temporary Government). At that time the authority of General De Gaulle to represent France was not yet recognized. So, for a while I was attached to Captain Charles Leatham as interpreter.

We kept in touch after the war exchanging letters. He lived in Jackson, Michigan, I was back in Paris. Once, while visiting Paris he dropped in my business office. It was funny to see him for the first time in civilian clothes, without a holster hanging on his belt.

He invited me at his home town in Jackson, Michigan. In a restaurant I looked at the menu and asked him what a certain item was. He said to the waitress a clever comment: "During the war he was my interpreter and now, in the States, I am his interpreter."



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