

RECONNECTING WITH A BELGIAN FRIEND, 72 YEARS LATER

by David Ray Hubbard, HQ Co, Adv Section,
Comm Zone, Signal Section

The beginning of a very enjoyable few days with two very lovely Belgian sisters, Louise (20), and Edmée (18) Van Espen, as described in the letter below, written to my Father while my unit was stationed in Flawinne Barracks, Namur, Belgium for several months in 1944-1945. Units under our command supplied all support functions required by the advancing Armies, beginning on D-Day.

23 February 1945

Dearest Daddy,

Want to tell you about the most wonderful experience I've had while on the Continent. It came by sheer luck, I guess. Yesterday was my afternoon off and I spent it with my newly found acquaintances from a nearby hospital (Derrick is from Johnston, S.S. and is a very good friend of the Steadmans. The other boy is from Philadelphia). We had tramped around all afternoon taking pictures and had just sat down in the Red Cross Club when one of the American RC girls came over and asked the three of us if we'd like to visit in a nice Belgian home for the night. She pointed out the young girl who was there with the invitation and this convinced the three of us that we'd be delighted to accept the invitation. Directions were given to us and 7:30 was set as the time that we should make our appearance. From the very moment we stepped in the house, we were entirely at ease because of their very good hospitality. Both M. & Mde. Van Esman speak fluent English—in fact they speak much better than lots of Americans I know. The two daughters, Edmée, who is 18, and another whose name I can't recall (she doesn't interest me because she's engaged to be married) is 20. Both speak very good English, especially since they couldn't speak a bit prior to our arrival in the city.

All in all we had a most enjoyable time, since there was absolutely no trouble to converse with them and we learned many very interesting facts that we did not know previously. The three of us plan to return tomorrow night since there is a standing invitation for us to come at any time we wish.

I have about three other letters that I must get off tonight, so I'll sign off for now and will resume again very soon.

Lots of love, David Ray

P.S. The picture is especially for you.

Through all these years, I have often wondered if the Van Espen sisters were still alive. I had kept pictures and memories of the pleasant times my buddy, Jim Derrick and I spent with these lovely girls. Mathilde Schmetz and her husband Marcel have established the Remember Museum 39-45, located in the Belgian town of Thimister-Clermont. This museum is recognized as one of the finest World War II museums in Europe. At our December 2016 meeting of The S. C. Chapter Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge at Fort Jackson, SCI Matilde was our featured speaker, in which she gave many details of the Museum. Afterward, I asked if she could possibly check on any information concerning the Van Espen Sisters. She eagerly agreed to help, since she and



John A. Pildner, Sr. saluting the grave site of Dalton D. Raze, platoon leader in the 290th Regiment, Anti-Tank Co, 75th Infantry Division.

TRIP OF A LIFETIME

John A. Pildner, Sr., a veteran of the United States Army who fought in the Battle of the Bulge, attended the Inauguration of President Donald J. Trump, Sr. He was accompanied on this trip to Washington D.C. by his son, John A. Pildner, Jr., a veteran of the United States Navy and daughter, Pamela J. St. Angelo. The Pildners' experience of attending a Presidential Inauguration Ceremony together was a rare opportunity to witness a piece of American history.

The Pildners' trip to Washington, D.C. was highlighted by a side trip to Arlington National Cemetery. They visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where the Pildners witnessed the changing of the guard. Here the Pildners were greeted by Marty McFarlin, a Tomb Guard who served in 1973 – 1974, and who emotionally thanked Pildner, Sr. and all of the WWII veterans who fought to preserve, protect, and defend the freedoms of many around the world.

Another highlight of this occasion was locating the burial spot of Dalton Raze, who was a platoon leader in the 290th Regiment, Anti-Tank Company of the 75th Infantry Division. (Pildner served in the same units, in the mine platoon.) Raze rose through the ranks from a 2nd Lieutenant to a Full Colonel at the time of his retirement from the military. At one time during his military career, he had carried the codes for the U. S. President.

—Submitted by John A. Pildner, Sr., 290th Regiment,
AntiTank Company of the 75th Infantry Division

DO YOU KNOW ANY OF THESE MEN?

They are medics of the 1st Battalion aid station of the 328th Infantry Regiment in the ETO at Bohmisch Rohren, Czechoslovakia, probably in 1945. The 328th regiment was part of the 26th Infantry Division (Yankee Division) that was part of Patton's Third Army. My Dad, 1st Lt Robert T Marshall, and Staff Sgt Walter German, wrote a frontline account of their work from Normandy Beach through the Battle of the Bulge. I am publishing their story as a book, *Healers and Heroes*, scheduled for Fall 2017 release. I welcome contacts and/or information about any of these men. Contact: thea@thea-marshall.com or go to: www.facebook.com/HealersandHeroes/



Front row, left to right: Albert Daigle, Herbert Scheinberg, John Warzasz, Edward Geisler, George Trabucco, Samuel Melnicoff. Back row, left to right: Milky (?), Martin Cohen, Angelo Nicolo, Frank Valiga, Daniel Chacchia, James Rullo, Henry Menard, Charles Touchette, Walter German.



David Hubbard with Louise (left) and Edmée Van Eppen (right), March 1945.

Marcel have a son living in Namur. Through the efforts of Mathilde, from Belgium, I was able to get in touch with Edmée. I have been thrilled to regain the friendship that began 72 years ago. Modern means of communication, such as e-mails, have made this possible.

I had asked Edmée to write a synopsis of her life, and posed some specific questions. Her response follows:

It is me behind the desk in the picture at the Red Cross Club. I really don't remember when we met in the Club. You know, I met thousands of GIs while I worked at the Club. We were there to give informations when the soldiers asked what was interesting to visit in town, or what films to see in the cinemas, and how to go to the Citadelle, for instance. Louise and I went only two times walking at the Citadelle with you and James. And another walk with

one girl and 2 boys. I never saw them but I know they are colored. Philippe got married and has a boy Nathan and a girl Nina. He divorced, and he just had, a few months ago, a baby girl Clara. He lives in Brussels.

Louise's husband died (cancer) in 1987. And she died in June 2016. My brother Roland died in 1995—he was young, he was born in 1928. I don't know the story of the Citadelle. It is a fortress build many centuries ago. To protect the country I suppose. One of the architects is French Vauban. And soldiers lived there—German during the last war, then the Americans and Belgian after the war, and still now, I think.

I got married in 1951 to an architect. My husband died in 2005. We have 5 children: Michel, Dominique, my daughter who died in 2014 in a plane crash in Mali, Etienne, Olivier, and Jean Paul, who lives in London. He is Blue Badge Tourist guide. I have eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

That's all I can relate to you about me and my family. I hope you will get this mail soon.

Sincerely yours, Edmée



Mathilde Schmetz (left) found Edmée Van Eppen (right) for Hubbard in early 2017.

John S. Twaddell and Ralph K. Younger. I still have many addresses from GIs I met at that time. Maybe I hoped to go once to the States and meet some of them!

Louise got married in 1947. With a "pharmacien" druggist or chemist. They had 2 children, a boy Philippe and an girl Chantal (she still lives in Montreal (Canada.) She got married and adopted 3 children,



WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: The American Red Cross Casino Club in Namur, Belgium, 1945, where Hubbard and 2 other American soldiers were invited "to visit in a nice Belgian home for the night."