

Gustave R. de Marcken

Associate Member of the 106th Division Association
A Diary Worth Reading - A Civilian In the Hand s of the Nazis.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A YOUNG AMERICAN BOY AND HIS FAMILY IN BELGIUM DURING THE NAZI OCCUPATION YEARS. 1940 to 1945.

Written by Christian W. de Marcken- 244 Richards Avenue, PAXTON, MA.01612-1121

Dad, Gustave R. de Marcken, was raised in Chicago, Illinois, where my Grand Father settled when he emigrated from Charleroi, Belgium in 1895. Dad worked for various American companies, Celanese, Arthur Rock International, and Hammond Organ, whose headquarters were located in Chicago.

In 1939 the U.S. Embassy in Brussels notified Dad that as an American, he was advised to take his family back to the States, the Embassy felt that the War was eminent. Dad had been a Captain and was injured in combat on the Yser River in 1918'. He felt that the Germans had been dealt a stunning defeat, and could not cross the " Ligne Maginot and the Albert Canal". In addition, his job and livelihood was the result of his position as general manager Hammond Organ Europe and Africa. His office was on Place Rouppe, Brussels, Belgium.

On the 10th of May 1940 the German Army invaded Belgium, we experienced our first strafing by the screaming Stukas. Dad never bought a home in Belgium, he always rented very large home, which were not occupied by the owners because the houses were too large and too difficult to heat. On the other hand these homes were usually very inexpensive to rent, at the time we lived at Chateau de l'Etoile, Bierges-lez-Wavre, Brabant, Belgium, the place was in the middle of nowhere, it was in the wood and it had a quarter of mile driveway. The little church and the surrounding houses were at least a mile from our temporary home.

The property had 800 hectares or roughly 2000 acres, it was part of the famous Belgian second line of defense called the K-W Line, which stood for Koningsooikt- Wavre line. It was made of hundreds of pillboxes located behind a continual line of dragon teeth (similar to the Siegfried line) and roller type steel gate called "Barrieres Cointet" for the French inventor Mr. Cointet. These barriers were taken by the Germans and installed on Utah and Omaha beaches to stop the Allies from landing.

On the property we had eighteen pillboxes, which were manned by the Belgian Army, in the mean time the Senegaleese and Algerian soldiers were literally running to the front shouting in French:"Where are the boches". I remember these soldiers as tough looking wiry, and eager to fight. They did not wear combat boots, they were running bare feet, and their combat boots were tied together by the bootlaces and hung around their neck. Something else, which impressed me very much as a twelve-year-old boy, was that some of these African soldiers were wearing a string around their neck. On this string they threaded the ears of every German soldier they killed, it did not take long for the ears to shrivel and become dark brown, must admit it was quite a sight.

Within three days the British took residence around the house, they installed a battery of huge and old 16 inch guns, which they had taken from an old cruiser; we as curious and inquisitive young people were fascinated by these monsters. We did not know

that navy guns did not have casing, no brass container full of powder, the shell was inserted into the breach, then a felt pad was rammed into place, and finally the powder bags were inserted. In these bags the explosive material was in the shape of our present spaghetti, but the color of these thin sticks was brownish. I will get back to what we devils called "Spaghetti". When these guns were fired you had the impression the roof of our home was going up and dropping back down.

On May 13th. 1940 the British Troops forced us out of the area. Dad put half of us in the Pontiac, which was pulling the Hammond Organ trailer full of food and clothing for all of us. The other half of the family was placed into the Opel, which was driven by poor Mother, who was pregnant with number nine at that time.

We drove to Buysinghen near Hall Belgium, then to Lille, France, where we experienced our first night bombing by the Germans. We were very lucky, the German Stukas never strafed us, they strafed the civilian column ahead or behind us, we saw a great deal of destruction, but God was watching us because we escaped the horrors of a bombing or strafing. We left every morning hoping to reach Southern France and be able to escape to the United States. The Germans were going faster than we did and on the morning of Tuesday June 18th, we got up to find ourselves surrounded by the Wehrmacht green uniforms. They caught us in Azy-le-Vif, France; we were only fourteen miles from the French demilitarized zone, called the "Vichy Government zone", which the Germans occupied later. The Germans shipped us back to Belgium, I do remember on our way back we had to go through a battle field area near Soissons, France, the bodies of the soldiers killed in combat were still on the field in full sun, the smell was awful.

I have inserted the notes found in Dad's Diary dating from May 8th 1940 to June 30th 1940.

Personal Diary of

Gustave R. de Marcken de Merken

May and June 1940

At Dad's death my sister Myriam received all his diaries dating back to the 1920.

Every day Dad last minutes before going to bed was devoted to recording the events of the day. At her death in November 1997, Myriam asked that Dad's diaries be brought back to the oldest boy, so I have all these exceptional records, except for his time in concentration camp. The Germans would not allow such incriminating records to be kept by the American prisoners.

The following are copies of all entries dating back to two days before the Germans attacked Belgium on May 10, 1940.

Wednesday May 8, 1940-Bierges, Hermoye (where Mothers oldest brother lived) his name was Baudouin de Kerchove d' Exaerde.

Thursday May 9th. Monseigneur Picard comes to Bierges.

Friday May 10th. 1940-WAR! Brussels, Lilly (mother) at Maredsous to pick up Christian, Gembloux to help Baudouin.

Saturday May 11, Chateau de l'Etoile, Bierges-lez-Wavre, alert etc... French Troops are coming, British Troops arrive.

Sunday May 12th.-Mass at 7:30 AM, Belgium and British Troops are preparing for the alert.

Monday May 13th.- Alert, forced to leave the house at 4:00PM- we go to mother-in-law's Home in Buysinghen. (Grand mother's name was Jeanne de Kerchove d' Exaerde)

Tuesday May 14th.- Leave Buysinghen at 9:00 AM, Tournai, Lilles (France),night alert in Lilles while at the Hotel Moderne.

Wednesday May 15th.-Leave Lilles at 10:00 AM, Arras, Ahy le Haut Clocher.

Thursday May 16th,-Leave at 10:00AM, Neuchatel, Ronan, Evreux, (The British troops are every where.)

Friday May 17th.- Leave Evreux at 9:30 AM.-Chartres, Orleans, (Bought a tire) – Bourges, St. Amand, Hotel de la Poste in Guignard.

Saturday May 18th.-See the Notary Public, La Rochefoucault, leave at 11:45 AM, go to Sancoins, La Barre at 3:00 PM.

Sunday May 19th.- Mass in Sancoins, Issoire with Aunt Marie-Josee, de Lattre, night in Veyre.

Monday May 20th.-Back at La Barre, Clermont-Ferrand.

Tuesday May 21st.- Aunt Monique (Mother's sister, who was married on the same day as Mother) and her husband Luc Iweins d' Echoutte arrive at 5:00 AM with the balance of their children.

Wednesday May 22nd.- Sancoins sent telegram to Carlow, Ireland. (Dad wanted to let the parents of Miss Doyle know she was alive and well)

Thursday May 23rd.- Uncle Fernand and Aunt Paula Dellicourt arrive. (Paula is Dad's sister, who was twelve years older than Dad).

Friday May 24th.-Etienne de Kerchove d' Exaerde arrives (He is Mother's youngest brother, who was not allowed to fight because he had lost an eye),went to Moulins.

Saturday May 25th.Mr.Maurice, Lurey...

Sunday May 26th.-Mass at 10:00AM in Sancoins, Mr. de la Rochefoucault after lunch.

Monday May 27th.-Moulins with Fernand Dellicourt.

Tuesday May 28th.- Belgian Army capitulates.

Wednesday May 29th.-St. Pierre and Azy le Vif, Mr. de Chauvigny.

Thursday May 30th.- Clermont Ferrand with Lilly (Mother) and Rene Iweins d'Eechoutte (brother of Luc), met Baudouin and Germaine de Kerchove d' Exaerde in Issoire.

Friday May 31st.- Mrs. De Chauvigny in Azy le Vif, visit her castle at La Prole with mother-in-law and Monique Iweins d'E.

Saturday June 1st1940- St Pierre see Notary Public, Insurance for rental.

Sunday June 2nd.-Mass at 8:30 AM.

Monday June 3rd.- Moulin with Fernand Dellicourt and Rene Iweins d' E.

Tuesday June 4th.- Castle of La Barre, where we were temporarily living.

Wednesday June 5th.-St Pierre.

Thursday June 6th.-La Barre.

Friday June 7th.- Sancoins.

Saturday June 8th.- Moulins.

Sunday June 9th-Mass at 10:00 AM, Beatrice (My sister number seventh of the family) sick, Doctor Canton.

Monday June 10th-Lurcy-Bery, Gendarmes for cars, Dr. Canton for Beatrice.

Tuesday June 11th- Italy enters the War. (Typical Macaroni move, wait for the War to be nearly finished, then enter to make sure to be with the winner).

Wednesday June 12th- St Pierre, Azy le Vif, pick up trailer and cars.

Thursday June 13th-Leave the castle of La Barre for La Prole in Azy le Vif.

Friday June 14th- St Pierre.

Saturday June 15th- St Pierre.

Sunday June 16th- Mass in St Pierre.

Monday June 17th- Armistice- Battle is at two and a half Kilometers from La Prole in Azy le Vif.

Tuesday June 18th- See first Germans- SAD.

Wednesday June 19th- La Prole, St Pierre.

Thursday June 20th.- Germans leave Azy le Vif, St Pierre and Nevers.

Friday June 21st.-Get our hunting guns back from the Mayor's Office.

Saturday June 22nd.- The Germans reappear, Nevers for trailer.

Sunday June 23rd.-Mass at 10:30AM in Azy le Vif. Germans insist on seeing the castle.

Monday June 24th.- German Colonel wants to occupy the castle of La Prole.

Tuesday June 25th.-Discuss our departure with the Germans, trailer? St Pierre, telephone installed by the Germans.

Wednesday June 26th.- Scheduled to leave tomorrow, see the priest of Azy le Vif.

Thursday June 27th.- We leave La Prole, spent the first night in Vezelay in a barn.

Friday June 28th.- Vezelay, Sens, Montmirant where we sleep, reported to the German Captain Eisendick.

Saturday June 29th.- Chateau Thierry, Soissons where the corps of dead soldiers stung to high heaven, Maubeuge, France, we cross the Belgian Boarder, Mons, Belgium, Buysinghen, the poor region is devastated!!! Arrive in Buysinghen at 9:30PM, condition ???

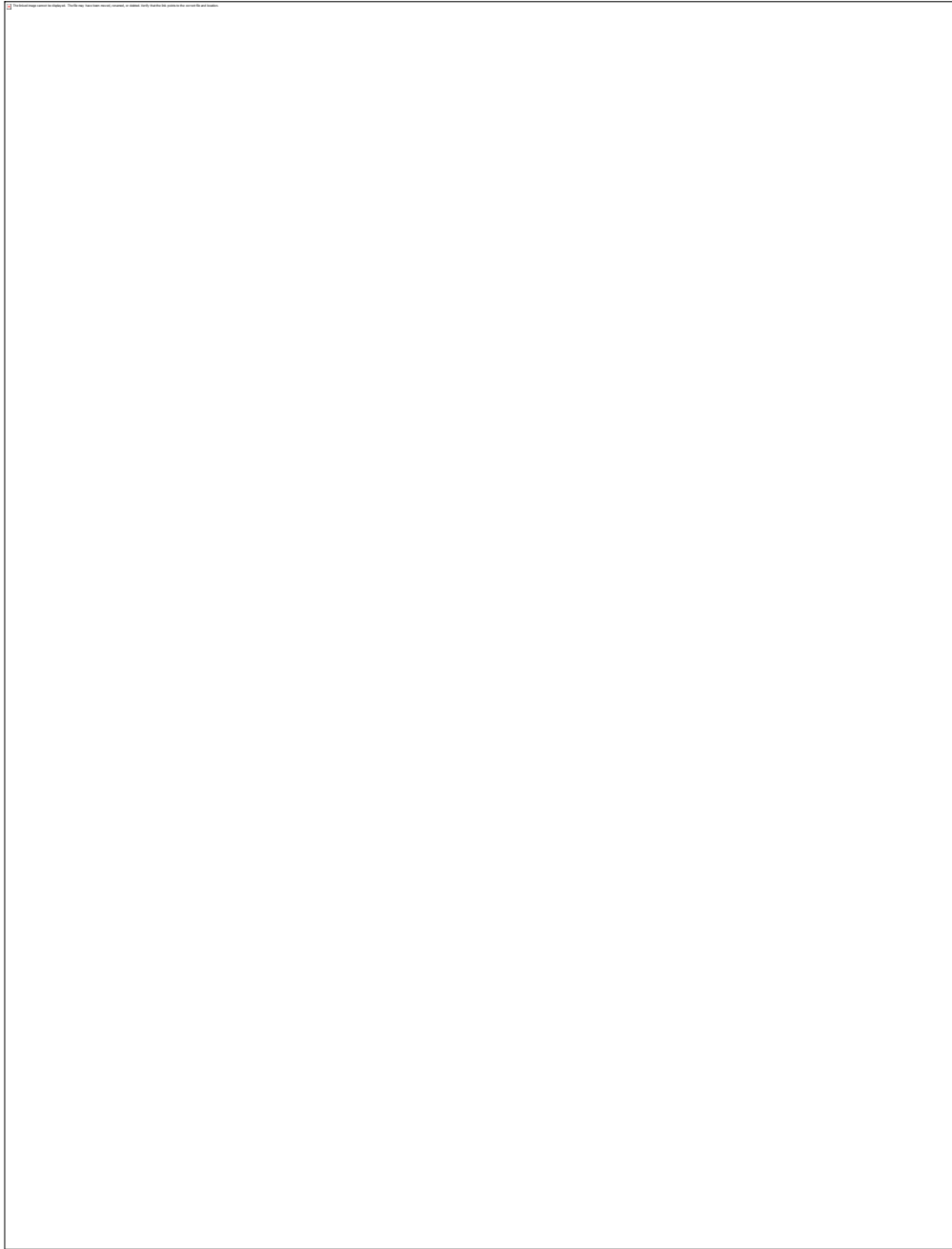
Sunday June 30th 1940- Mass at 9:00AM in Buysinghen, Brussels with Paula and Monique. Bierges with Christian, told by the Germans we could not enter our house.(I will never forget the little scheinster, a little Luftwaffe Lieutenant standing on the steps of our home. He looked at Dad with a sarcastic face and said:" Amerika a kleine land, Deutschland a grosse land" then pointing towards the driveway he shouted: "Raus"

In other words America a small country, Germany a big country, get the hell out. I would have given a great deal to meet the little bastard after the War. I would have made him creep on his belly, just to show him how " big" Germany turned out to be.)

Note: I added some comments these are within parentheses (.....)

This was done on purpose so as clarify names or events

Respectfully submitted
Christian W. de Marcken



The Luftwaffe had taken our home as a motor pool area, where they were repairing engines and maintaining trucks, which were attached to the Air Base of "Le Culot" later called the Military Air Base of Beauvechain, Belgium. When we arrived home a little German lieutenant stood on the steps of the main entrance and while pointing towards the driveway, he shouted to Dad in German: " Deutchland a grosse land, America a kleine land, raus" (I do not know German therefore the spelling of this sentence is probably incorrect) However we all understood that "Germany was a big country, America was a small country, get the hell out of here" (Boy do I wish I could have met the little bastard after the War!

It took a full week for the U.S. Embassy in Brussels to force the German Luftwaffe out of the house. Before leaving the Germans defecated in every bed, they did on purpose to plug and see to it that all the toilets were literally overflowing, they urinated on all our furniture and relieved themselves on every floor, the stench in the house was simply unbelievable; in some areas like my parents' room it took years before the smell disappeared. The Germans stole for \$52,000 worth of antiques and furniture; this was in 1940 dollars! Our Government refused to help recuperate the damages from the German, and of course our Government would not help us, yet at the same time and for the past 55 years our Government (our taxes) have allocated \$1,000 per year to the citizen of a foreign country, who were not even born before the War. Try to explain this situation to your children. By the time December 7th. 1941 came about, Dad became the enemy number one, he was an American and in addition his Grand Father had escaped out of Germany on political reason, he escaped to Belgium, therefore his family had betrayed the fatherland in early 1800.

The Wehrmacht took Dad away, and typical German manner, they would not tell Mother where he was or what happened to him. Poor Mother she went for days from one office to another and from German police station to another before she found out that Dad was first interned in the infamous prison of Saint Gilles in Brussels, Belgium. After a month he was transferred to Beverloo concentration camp; after a few months the whole camp was moved to the Tittmoning concentration Camp in Germany. He later was sent to a reprisal camp because he had played fun of the Germans. He had asked Mother to sent him a pack of macaroni, he was like all Prisoners starving, he left home weighing 182 pounds and came home weighing 109 pounds, however he never ate the macaroni, he kept it hidden for the right occasion. It should be known that Italians, living in Italy, are not known for being good fighters, the Belgian call them: "Macaronis"" Granted it is a pejorative word, however you seldom heard Belgian mention the words Germans or Italians, they would refer to the " Boche" and the "Macaronis". So the day the Italian Army capitulated Dad took out his pack of macaroni, he cut it in little pieces and every prisoner fell out for morning roll call with a piece of macaroni stuck in their lapel. The Germans were livid; it did not take long for them to find out who did this funny deal. So Dad landed in the dark cell for three day. This was a dark whole in the ground, and just water to drink. After that he was transferred to **ILAG VII**, Laufen Concentration Camp in South East Germany.

It should also be known that the Germans seldom beat the American civilian prisoners, they would not feed them, and hundreds died of malnutrition. However as the War started to turn sour for the Germans and they had lost in Africa and were losing in Italy, the Germans became deadly afraid of reprisal by the U.S. Government, so every time an American was ready to die, he or she was sent back to the country, where their family was living, so most of them were returned to Holland, France, Luxembourg, or Belgium.

Dad had a kidney removed in 1936, he had lost a great deal of weight, his liver was in bad shape, very often he would fall on the ground and roll in pain. So in late October 1943 the Germans were convinced he had only a few weeks to live and he was sent home.

We were all at Church when he sat down next to Mother, who did nor recognize this little shriveled up and very skinny man, the very old looking man had a dirty looking beard and a big mustache, which Dad did not have when he left home two and a half years before;

his voice betrayed him, and it is impossible to describe the emotional scene which followed this reunion.

During the entire War the SS were very suspicious of our family, they always suspected that Mother was involved in the underground movement, they were right mind you, but they never caught her. One because they did not know how to count and two because they were never smart enough to come and search our home with sniffing dogs.

The SS would often come to search the house and the whole area. Sometimes it was an all effort to catch U.S. Airmen by sweeping the woods and searching the house during the day time, in Summer the people we were hiding would simply climb in a huge chestnut tree and stay there until night. At night the SS would surround the house and lay low in the bushes for hours hoping to catch the Airmen coming or going out of the house. Usually around one or two A.M. they would crash in the house rush in every room on every floor, pull every one out of bed regardless of age, force all of us in the dining room. The SS would count the number of warm beds and count the number of people in the room, luckily for us the count was always correct; the Airmen never slept in a bed and the little Jewish boy, namely, Teddy Graymeyer, had his own bed; he was two years younger than me, the stupid Germans never realize that the family had ten (10) rather than nine (9) children. Dad had built a specially well hidden chute in the rafters, it really blended with the color of the wood supporting the slate roof, and the SS never found the place, which saved many lives. The greatest risk were the small children, would they show fear and respond to the SS rough questioning, guess Mother and Dad had trained all of us, this was war, the Germans were the enemy, and one never helped the enemy. We may count our blessings.

It should be mentioned that the Germans were very short on manpower to occupy and control Belgium. The SS had devised a way to keep the population under semi-control. They had issued a formal letter to the five most prominent people in town, namely the Mayor, the local Lawyer, the Doctor, the local head of industry, the engineer, etc....They issued these letters usually in groups of five. The letter stated that if a German was killed in your area, the SS would shoot the first five people listed; if two Germans were killed the SS would assassinate ten (10) Belgian. As soon as Dad came out of concentration camp he was added to the list of potential hostages.

On August 2nd. A Spanish woman living in the village saw Dad helping U.S. Airmen in our woods, she called the Germans, they immediately came to pick up Dad, and they never found the Airmen. Dad was taken to the infamous prison of Saint Gilles in Brussels, the next day he was court martial and sentenced to be shot on the 13th. of September 1944 at the Tir Nationale on the outskirts of Brussels. Dad was placed with three (3) other men in a small cell originally built for one prisoner, all these men were on death row for various crimes against the Grosse Reich and the Nazi regime.

On August 4th., a German soldier was killed in the area, the SS picked up the Mayor of Wavre, and three other well known Belgian citizen, then they came to our home and asked to see Dad, Mother told them that the SS had picked him up two days before. Sadly enough Hitler's butchers took the men to a nearby ditch and put a bullet in each prisoners' head, and left them there so every one could see that the SS really meant what they had written in their letter. Today you will see a monument on the road from Wavre

to Chaumont-Gistoux in honor of these Belgian. Every time we passed there it put a tear in our eyes, just to think that Dad was saved because of the lousy Spanish traitor.

The reason the Germans disliked Dad so much was multiple. One he was American, two he was highly educated, beside his English, Dad was fluent in French and German, three the German keep very good records, they knew that Dad was of German ancestry, his Grand Father (my great grand father) was kicked out of Germany for political reason, and the German mind if you or your ancestors have left the father land, in this case Germany, you were traitors; in addition you must understand that Dad was very well known in the area and the Belgian had a great respect for him, the Germans knew just that and they feared that Dad would become a leader in the Underground Movement, which he did and I will talk about that in my many future e-mails.

Dad was a colorful individual, afraid of nobody and nothing. He and Mother were a good pair, they took risks, they were very patriotic, always ready to help other people. Both of them were crack shots, I cannot remember Mother ever missing a pheasant or a rabbit, and I cannot remember Dad ever missing a wild boar or a deer.

Dad was on death row until September 2nd. 1944, when at 2:00 AM the 1200 women and men, who all had been condemned to dead by the Germans for sabotage, helping our airmen escape, passing messages to the Allies, and organizing the Underground Movement, were suddenly removed from the Saint Gilles prison; they were packed up to 110 people per little Belgian box cars, called the "40 and 8"(40 hommes ou 8 chevaux) in other words these railroad box car were marked by the sentence in parentheses, which means 40 men or 8 horses. They had been two other trains similar to this one, which had left for Germany only a few days before Dad's train. All these trains were called the "Phantom Trains" because of what happened to the two-first trains. In every case the Underground Army called "Armee de la Liberation", which consisted of Belgian women and men, who had organize in a military manner to coordinate their efforts to help the Allies win the War, had been able to radio the U.S. S-2 branch of the Service, which in turn had notified the 9th. Army Air Force to be on the look out for these trains and not to bomb or strafe them, thinking they were German troop trains. As a result the p-47 Thunderbolts managed to cut the track ahead of the trains to stop them from reaching Germany.

Unluckily the first two trains were guarded by SS Storm Troopers, who were so upset at the American success that in both cases they machine gunned the box cars and threw hand grenades to finish their murderess task of getting rid of prisoners. Only eight men came out alive out of the first train, I cannot remember how many people came out of the second train. Therefore the trains were called by the Belgian : "PHANTOM TRAINS". Again Dad's luck held, this time the Germans were literally running out of men, so this train had two flat bed cars, mounted with German machine guns, which were manned by much older Wehrmacht soldiers.

As the P-47 Thunderbolts did their usual fantastic job, the train tried various different routes to reach Liege and then Aachen, Germany. Every time the U.S. fighter/ bomber pilots stopped the train on its tracks, finally the train got stalled on a side track at the Petite Isle near Brussels; by that time some of the prisoners had managed to remove some of the flooring planks, they snuck out from under the box cars, jumped the German

guards and removed the locks on all box cars. The 1200 or so prisoners did not waste a minute and scattered into the town of Brussels, making sure to hide from all Germans.

Dad had two sisters living in Brussels. Aunt Paula married the Governor General of the Belgian Congo, his name was Uncle Fernand Dellicourt; while Aunt Rita married Edouard de San, who was the Attorney General of the Belgian Congo. Dad hid and snuck to Avenue Moliere where Aunt Paula loaned him her son's bicycle so he could try to reach home. Now I told you that Dad was a very lucky man, as he was pedaling down rue de Tervueren, an elderly lady frantically called and stopped him from going further, she told Dad that the Germans were requisitioning all the bicycle and that their road block was just around the corner. As Dad was entering her very modest house she said: "I know you, you are an American" You imagine Dad's surprise to find out that the lady remembered him from three years earlier. She had received permission from the Germans to go and see her husband, also an American veteran of World War I, whom she had married in 1919, at the time her husband and Dad as well as hundreds of other prisoners, were interned at the Beverloo concentration camp.

So Dad left the bicycle with her and headed for the Forest de Soignes, which was only two miles away. Dad was very slow, he had not been fed for days, and the time spent on death row had not helped his poor physical condition. A group of Belgian women were trying to walk from Brussels to Genval. Dad told them that he had escaped from a German train leading to Germany, he had no identification what so ever, which is a violation of the Belgian Law, which was strictly enforced by the Krauts. Again Dad was most lucky, all of a sudden a German patrol sprung from behind some bushes, these Wehrmacht soldiers shouted: "Papers." One of the Belgian ladies did not hesitate, she gave her papers and then pretended to search all over her large hand bag all that time she continually talked to the Germans, she said 'I really do not know what I did with my husband's paper, as you can see he is quite sick and we need to get him to a Doctor' Finally the Germans had enough of listening to her and told all of them to get out of the area. All his life Dad felt bad that in all the commotion, he had forgotten to ask for her name and address. He felt bad that he was never able to thank this fantastic lady, who never lost her cool, she was a very courageous woman to take the risk of protecting a complete stranger. Dad hid in the Forest of Soigne, and very cautiously managed to avoid a great number of German patrols. As he approached our home in the woods of Bierges-lez-Wavre he could hear what seemed to be a major battle, it made him very anxious to the point of being sick, he had gone through a full month on death row, had just walked twelve miles on a real empty stomach, and he thought that maybe his family was being subjected to the ravages of war. In reality we were witnessing a beautiful sight! I had snuck through the woods towards the small cobble stone road going from Genval-Rixensart to Bierges-lez-Wavre, and saw a convoy of Germans, I went back home and told Mother that the end must be near because the Germans were running away, the convoy consisted of cart drawn by horses, which they had stolen from Belgian farmers, so my Sister Myriam, brother Peter, and I convinced Mother to accompany us through the woods to see the bastards run away. All well and good, we took a small narrow path through the woods, we were probably a hundred feet from the convoy, when I shouted to Mother: "P-47". She said what is that? I quickly told Mother that I could hear "Thunderbolts", with time I had managed to recognize the sound of most engines, the planes could be hidden by trees or clouds, but I could predict what type of plane was coming. So Mother took Myriam and I took Peter and we beelined back to the house, we did not go too far, the P-47's were peeling of and coming straight down at the convoy, the sun was shining, it was beautiful, the canons were blazing, you could see like a shiny rod coming out of the gun, the planes were passing right over our head, took Peter

behind a large tree and Mother took Myriam behind the garden wall. You could hear the Germans scream, but much worse was the sound of the poor injured horses crying, for a half an hour we could hear explosions and ammunition blowing up. Boy what a beautiful job the 9th. Air Force did that late afternoon, I have a saying: "There is only one good German, he is six foot below, eating the dandelions by the roots" And I can tell you those P-47's made a great number of good Germans in a very short time. As things calmed down a little, Mother took all nine of us in the Kitchen located in the cellar. We were all there when Dad came running in, he looked awful, we all thought he was going to die, he collapsed on the floor and Mother had a hard time bringing him back. No need to tell you that we all were white as sheets and scared to death. Mother hid Dad for two more days before the U.S. Army liberated us. Dad was in very bad shape and it took months to get him back to a half normal life.

Now a few words about the real hero of the family. Mother was born a Belgian in Ghent, which in French would be called Gand, in 1903. Both her parents were very patriotic, grand father was the Mayor of Buysinghen so the Germans did not take him to labor camp in Germany when they ran over that part of Belgium in 1914. Mother must have done something real special, we believe she was involved in passing messages to the British, which helped the Allies know more about the whereabouts of the German troops.

At the time she lived along a major railroad line, this gave the family a great deal of information concerning troop movement. In 1919 Mother was decorated by the King of England for act of Valor, she was only fifteen years old when the War ended in 1918.

Our son Allen de Marcken has his Grand Mother's decoration and certificate properly displayed in a frame in his home in Oviedo, Florida. Mother really suffered during World War II, she was pregnant with Number nine (9) when the Germans attacked Belgium on May 10th. 1940; brother Baudouin (always called Butch) was born on October 21st. 1940. Mother suffered a great deal, not only of seeing the devastation done to her Country and family, but also from the hardship of having to drive a car full of children in the full heat of Summer and having the constant fear of seeing the German Stukas come and strafe the long columns of civilians, who were fleeing towards France. Mother was the driver and whenever we stopped she suddenly became the food provider, later in the day she tried to reassure all of us that the Germans were not going to bomb us during night. We were very lucky, the Germans bombed Mons a few minutes after we left, they Bombed Arras, France an hour before we arrived. The Stukas strafed the civilian columns in front and in back of us, God must have been keeping an eye on these little Americans.

We were in Nevers when the sirens blew during night, it was funny the French were all running like chickens without their heads, while the British troops stayed calm and took everything in stride. Again the Germans bombed the Town however no bombs fell in our area. We were on the road for many day; Dad made the mistake of thinking that the British, French, and Belgian troops were going to hold a line, so in central France he stopped for a few days. He took his family out of the Department of the Allier when he realized that the Germans were not being stopped. We got back on the road hoping to reach the Puy-du-Dome Department, however one very early morning we found ourselves surrounded by the Wehrmacht soldier in Azy-le-Vif, France. We were only fifteen miles from the Vichy demilitarized zone, if we had ever reached past this

temporary boarder between France and Germany, we would have been able to go to Marseille to take a boat to the good old United States of America.

The Germans sent us back to Belgium, I mentioned previously what we experienced on our return. Let me go back to mother. There she was in an occupied country, she had nine children, no husband (Dad was in concentration camp), no income because Dad worked for a U.S. Company, which paid him in dollars deposited to his account at the Morgan Guaranty Trust in New-York City, N.Y. So suddenly she went from one day to another from being a fairly well to do person to a person struggling to put food on the table.

There she was with nine children all too young to be of great help. I was only twelve when the War started, Mother had no financial support, she lived far away in the woods, and the Germans placed a Wehrmacht soldier in one room to keep an eye on her family. In addition the Germans took all our vehicles, took our telephones and radios away; so the only means of communication was her bicycle, which had two small side bags to carry any food she could find.

We lived in a big home with very high ceilings, they were five meters high or roughly fifteen feet high. Of course there were no fuel available for the furnace, therefore not only no heating, but also no hot water. We lived, ate, studied, and played in the dining room, It was the only room with a wood stove, which kept us warm all through the War. Wish we had a picture of our dining room! Over the mantle piece we had a little AMERICAN Flag, which fluttered whenever the wood stove was on, the rising heat made our FLAG float. It is important to note that not once did the Germans, not even the SS, remove the FLAG from our dining room. Guess their sense of patriotism made them unconsciously admire our display of Patriotism.

No need to tell you, that for all of us old enough to realize the seriousness of the situation, the name of the game was "Survival." We grew all kinds of vegetables, especially leeks, which do not freeze in winter, leeks can be used as vegetables and are excellent in soups. We grew rutabagas because the Germans did not like them, so they would not take them away from us. If you grew more than a certain amount of potatoes, the Germans would steal them from you. We grew a little wheat, again the Germans had placed strict restrictions on growing wheat, barley, or oats, from which Mother did not lose one ounce, and she would grind the wheat and make whole brown bread out of it. We, like everybody in Belgium, were on a very rigid and strict rationing program. For instance the German rationing program allocated the following: bread 225 grams per day, cereal 20 grams per day, sugar 90 grams per day, meat including 20% of bones 90 grams per day. Note that one gram equals 0.0353 ounce, therefore 20 grams equal 0.706 ounce, or 100 grams equals 35.3 ounces. Nobody was fat in Belgium during the War. We of course never saw chocolate, oranges, sweets, etc.

The so-called flour provided by the Germans was made out of dried up sugar beet pulp. Before the War the farmers would bring their sugar beets to the sugar factory, where the beets were sliced into very thin and long strips, after the boiling process, the pulp was placed in a spinning machine to remove the sugar and water content, the pulp was then reallocated to the farmer based upon the tonnage of beets he had originally delivered to the plant. The farmers would make a mixture of pulp and beet leaves, you must remember this huge out door piles the stung to high heaven, this mixture was fed to the cows in Winter. During the War the Germans took a portion of all the pulp, which

they dried and mixed with a little flour, they then sold this mixture back to the Belgians as "flour." You should have seen the bread made with this mixture, it would not rise, it made a bread which was brownish/black, when you wanted to slice the bread, you had to have two knives; one to slice the bread and the other to scrape the first knife after each cutting, the reason was that the inside of the bread was gooey and sticky and the knife got stuck and covered with a glue like brown sticky stuff.

We were hiding a little pig in the woods, it was in an area we knew our old Wehrmacht guard did not like to go. Mother took every peel of rutabaga, potatoes, and other vegetables and boiled them for the pig, she would add some of the so called flower supplied by the rationing program thinking it would make his meal more consistent. That was a mistake and any one with a Doctor's Degree in Veterinary Medicine will have a chuckle to hear this part of our story. The little pig started to have convulsions and during these spells he would squeal as only a pig can do, this of course was a catastrophe; we could not afford to have him discovered, Mother would have been sent to jail by the Germans. So she took her bicycle and pedaled four miles to the nearest little town of Wavre, she paid a visit to the Veterinarian, who she knew would not betray her to the Germans, and explained to him what was happening. The Vet had a good laugh and said: Mrs., de Marcken, the so-called flower provided by the Germans can only be absorbed by human beings; this type of food is not assimilated properly by animals". No need to tell you what happened next. We took a sledge hammer hit the little pig between the eyes to knock him out, then slit his throat with a big sharp knife, in the process we made sure to collect all the blood, In time of War nothing was lost, we even made blood sausages. We ate our little pig and the German guard never saw or heard a thing.

At age thirteen I became a very good poacher. Since the Germans forbade us to have a telephone, a radio, a vehicle etc. it was quite obvious to me that telephone wire were useless, however they could be put to good use! So I climbed the telephone poles and cut the copper lines, then I annealed the copper to make it flexible enough to make snares. The only thing I had to fear was the German guard, with a little patience and a great deal of observation, I figured out his routine and I knew when it was more or less safe to go along the wood bordering the fields and pastures to hook up the snares, which would catch rabbits and hare going from the wooded areas to the open space where they fed during night. It was then a question of getting up when it was still dark to go and check the lines. Pheasants and wild pigeons were also on my list of good meat to put on our table; those I also caught with a noose, however in this case it was made of thin string. I would dig a little hole with a spoon, at the bottom of the hole I place a few grains of wheat or corn, towards the top of the hole I would stick three little pieces of wood in the earth, these little supports would hold the noose around the entrance of the hole; as the pigeon or pheasant would go and peck at the grain the feathers of their neck would smoothly slide in the noose, however on the way up the feathers would grab the small noose and the string would tighten around their neck, the poor soul would flutter for a short while and die. I would make sure to check all my little holes in the evening, so as to pick up the birds before any fox or dog would have a feast.

Each of us "older" children had chores, we had animals to take care of in order to bring more food to the table. Starting with the oldest, I took care of the rabbits, these were huge "giant of the Flanders", I would go along the ditches and around the garden to find dandelions and other grasses to feed all of them. Since I was the oldest and the "boy" of the family, the next three children are girls, I had the dirty job of killing the rabbits, then had to skin them, making sure not to nick the pelt, these were very precious, we used them to make blankets and fur jackets, we also had a rabbit skin on

each hand grip of all our bicycle handle bars, the fur was on the inside and we kept our hands warm while pedaling to get food. I would take a rabbit skin, stretch it on a board, it would be held all stretched out by a great number of little nails; then I would make a mixture of charcoal, alum, and salt, which I would rub into the skin to keep it from decaying and also hardening. We ate rabbits all through the War, guess the Germans felt that there was not enough meat and it was too much work to prepare a rabbit, so they never registered these animals.

My sister Francoise, whom we always called "Pop", for Poppy, she always had a ruddy complexion, which reminded us a red poppy of Flanders, was responsible for a few geese; those birds are good watch dogs, they are also not very difficult to raise, four geese eat as much as a cow. We had plenty of grass around the house, so Pop did not have much work, she never liked animals in the first place. Sister Myriam, whom we always called "Pest" because as a child she was very difficult and we remembered her as just that a pest! Poor Pest she passed away in 1997 due to a cancer, which spread all over her body, she took care of two goats, which produced milk for the little ones. We also had fifteen chickens, which provided eggs and some meat. Wonders why I always landed with the task of cutting the chickens' head and plucking then, what a dirty job.

The girls were home schooled, while the boys were permitted by the Germans to be sent to a school in Basse-Wavre, it was run by the priests. I will never forget the school, we had very little food, it was cold, and we were treated worse than animals, we were very often beaten because we had disobeyed or had not completed our homework. We were happy that this did not last too long. In 1943 the school fed us one sardine per boy, what was in my lousy little sardine I will never know, however the next morning I woke up swollen from head to toe, there was not one square inch of my body which was not deformed due to the swelling, worse than that the swelling extended itself to some internal swelling, I had terrible headaches, which would last for days. The local Doctor said to mother that there were no medicines available, and he was not sure I would survive the next two-year. Thank God the old drunk made a mistake. On the other hand there is a saying in French, that bad weeds do not croak, guess I must be a bad weed. It took seven (7) years to fully recover from that awful SARDINE. If I had the misfortune to eat any spice or any fat I would immediately swell. The worse was any canned food, no one could try to sneak canned food at any meal, even years after the War, if I had the misfortune to eat out and the food had been prepared with canned food, I would immediately swell to the point where I could not see because the swelling literally closed my eyes. The hitch was awful. So for years I ate boiled vegetable and I ate as many fruits I could put my hands on. This sad situation made me drop out of high school, for two years I could not even read the newspaper without having a terrible headache.

How did we all come out alive from these war years is a miracle. As mentioned earlier trenches, barbed wire, "C" Barriers, and pillboxes surrounded the house; the British used our lawn to install a battery of 16-inch guns. So when we came back to Bierges we found the potato smasher type hand grenades mixed with all kinds of broken weapons, how ever the greatest thrill was the "Spaghetti" the bag of British powder used to propel the huge 16 inch shells. It did not take long for this crazy boy to figure out how to use the "Spaghetti". I would dig a deep hole in the ground,. I would go four feet deep, then I would dump a wheelbarrow full of "Spaghetti" into the hole, would place a steel pipe in the hole, fill the steel pipe full of "Spaghetti" pack the earth back in the hole, spread the "Spaghetti" at least twenty feet from the pipe to the nearest trench, put a can or a box over the pipe, the everything was ready for the show. Of course being the oldest and having dug the hole, I allocated myself the right to light up the end of the "Spaghetti"

I was always careful to protect all my little brothers and sisters, I would make sure they were in a trench before I would set fire to the end of the powder trail. It was fun to see, all our heads were peaking over the trenches, then when the flame reached the pipe you would hear a whistle and all of us would duck, the tin can or the box would fly sky high, of course I never even thought of the possibility that the box, pipe, or can could land back on our head, thank God it never happened. The next episode was much less funny.

This time my brother Peter was seriously injured. He was five (5) years old, he had found a number of 50 caliber shells, from which I had removed the head in order to obtain the powder to be used in a noise-making contraption I had made. As a stupid twelve-year-old I thought that the shell was not dangerous, the bullet had been removed, the powder had been used, however I forgot the primer. Well poor Peter was driving a fifty-caliber shell in the dirt driveway at the back of the house, he was using another fifty-caliber shell as a hammer to drive the first one in the ground. We say in ballistic that one in a million times the primer has a delayed action, God was with us that afternoon, Peter's shell had a delayed firing, for one reason or another he became tired of hitting the shell, he spun around and that exact time the primer of the shell protruding out of the earth blew up. Two pieces of the shell caught Peter in the back calf and thigh, a third piece injured Myriam's leg just above the knee. I was fooling around carving a piece of wood in my room, which was just above the scene of the accident. I heard a loud bang, an awful scream, and Myriam crying for help. I ran down the stairs, by that time Peter and Myriam had run all around the house and were at the main entrance of the hall, Peter was in a pool of blood.

Mother tried to stop the blood while one of us went for help. The only person authorized by the Germans to have a vehicle, to be used only for emergency, was the Mayor of Wavre, he is the poor fellow the SS assassinated later in the War, he drove Peter and Mother to the Hospital in Louvain, which was twenty-five mile from our home. Doctor Debeyeux told Mother that Pete was very luck because the brass fragments had not gone through any clothing, it was Summer time and Pete had no socks and his shorts were very short. Apparently all the War clothing were dyed with a poisonous material, which would have killed Peter. I remember making two crutches out of a piece of board, the under arm pads were two little cloth bags I scrounged from somewhere, and I filled the bag with hay from the goats. Peter could eve run with the crutches. The funny part of this story came years later, as Peter and Louis graduated from M.I.T. in Boston, they both were R.O.T.C. Officer and went in the U.S. Air Force, the first time the cadets in flight training saw Peter very large scars, they asked him what had happen and Peter answered: "Fifty Caliber during WWII". You picture the face of the young future pilots, they could not remember the War.

Liberation was a very special time! We all became a little crazy at the thought of getting rid of the oppressors. Mother had sewed an American flag during the War, she would sew very late at night when the German guard was asleep. Mother being a Belgian National did not know the fine details of our flag, she managed to find linen of Red, White, and Blue colors and she went to work. She had loosened a floorboard under the heaviest clothes closet in her bedroom, she would hide her work under the floor. Poor Mother did not know that the stars on our Flag all point up, she sewed them in a tilted position.

On September 4th. 1944 she was shopping in Wavre, when someone came from Louvain and said that the Americans are coming. Mother pedaled her bicycle back to

Bierges and told me to get the Flag from under the floor in her bed room and to place it on the flag pole I had made six months before; at the time I had gone in the woods to cut down a nice and straight sapling, I had taken a reinforcement bar found in the garage, after forging the two ends flat and drilled two holes on the flattened area, the bar was again heated to twisted into a loop, which would support the sapling. It was not the greatest work of art, however it did the job and our flag flew at the third floor level just over the main entrance of the house. I still have a picture taken by Mother of our Flag floating over our home. Within an hour Mother, who had gone to see if she could find American Troops, came back pedaling her bicycle as fast as she could, she shouted: "Christian, take the Flag down, there are two German tanks at the end of the driveway". I can tell you that never in my life did I climb the two sets of long stairs at a faster pace, the Flag came down in a hurry, and it was not folded according to protocol, it was rolled in a tight ball and shoved back under the floor. Again we were lucky, the two tanks ran out of fuel and the crews sabotaged the tanks, I have pictures of some of the brothers and sisters playing on the tanks. Thank God our driveway was very long and winding, it was impossible for the Germans to see through the forest, if they had seen the U.S. Flag on the house, we might not be here to talk about it.

The next day on September 5th. 1944 Mother offered the three oldest children to accompany them to Wavre to see if we could find our first American. We were most excited and very happy, Wavre being four miles from Bierges is located on the main highway going from Brussels to Namur, Marche, Bastogne, and Arlons; it is also located on the main road and railroad going from Louvain to Nivelles, therefore it was a heavily defended area, the Germans SS troops backed up by Panzers, were still fighting in the town, but we did not know this was happening when we entered the small town. As we approached the Town Hall we heard a loud detonation at the end of the main street leading to the Highway, when we approached the intersection a British Cromwell tank was burning, one of the crew members was dead next to tank, The tank was burning, come to find out that a German tank destroyer was at the crossing of the two main highways and he had unluckily a clear shot at the British tank coming from Brussels.

We really did not know what we were doing, we found ourselves in no man's land; both the British and the Germans retreated out of the small valley, the German tank destroyer ran out of fuel as it was climbing out of Wavre, the last SS Stormtroopers were shot by the Belgian Underground Resistance men.

Mother took us across the Dyle River to reach the rue de Louvain,;we were not there more than ten (10) minutes, when two (2) Harley Davidson roared in from the Louvain area, the two young American Path Finders were feeling no pain, the Belgians were so happy to see them and every one wanted to give them a drink, I will never forget one of these men putting his finger on our Sister Myriam's head and he said: " Pig tails". Myriam had braids crossed over her head. The two men were happy to find a civilian who spoke English. Mother asked them when they had eaten last, the answer was: " We do not know".

Mother offered to cook them a real meal, they accepted with pleasure. The next thing Pop and I saw was Mother and Pest handing us their bicycle, Mother hopped on the back of one Harley and Pest on the other and the two GIs were gone across Wavre.

Pop and I were used to help our younger siblings and we could ride our bicycle while holding a second bicycle by the middle of the handle bar. Obviously a much slower

process, however riding two bicycles at the time was surely not new to both of us. We arrived home to find our two Pathfinders sitting at the dining room table talking to both Mother and Dad, who had really perked up at the sight of two of his compatriots. Nobody ever thought of asking for names and addresses, when the two men left the house we felt bad, we would never know what happened to them.

Later in the Fall we had a Battery of Ack-Ack guns manned by the British, they had chosen the field in front of the house as a location suitable to try to bring down the V1, buzz bombs, which were aimed at Brussels. The weather was awful, the rain made the field turn into a mud hole. So Mother asked the Major if the Troops, which were not on duty, could be lodged in our home. The tall and very young British Officer was very suspicious to see a woman come on bicycle to offer her help. His first question was: "Where do you live?" Mother told him that the house was less than a quarter mile in the woods. He took his map and said: "There are no houses in these woods". Mother laughed and told the young man that he had a map dating back to before 1927, that was the time the house was built. He did not believe Mother, so she suggested that he hop in a Jeep and follow her. So a sergeant-major and the Major followed Mother, to their astonishment they found a three story house with an additional full size attic, and a full size basement, the house was one hundred meters long and forty meters wide. Major John Spence realized that this was an ideal home for his men. He divided the Battery in two twelve hour shifts, around seven in the morning British flat nose lorries would take out half of the rested men and a little later the other half came back to the house. The British kitchen was in the basement, the main hall, which was huge, was equipped with a very high pot belly stove, where the men could dry themselves, play cards, write to their families, etc. The second floor was reserved for our family and all the Officers, the third floor and the attic and fourth floor was occupied by the men. This house was like a beehive, men all over the place. They staid with us for more than two months. At the Battle of the Bulge the British were convinced that the Germans were going to reach our area, so they dug pits and placed these large guns in such a way as to make them anti tank guns. We each were give and empty shell as a souvenir, each shell is twenty-six and three quarter inch high, the base is five and three-eighth inches in diameter and the open end is three and seven-eighths inches in diameter.

At the back of the house we had a similar Battery located at approximately one mile from our home; this Battery was strictly a women run organization, they were tough and just as good as the men. The first day nearly turned out sour; the women had the same map as Major Spence, and the house was not shown on their map, so this Battery decided to clear their gun by firing over our woods, all of a sudden a rain of shrapnel pieces came falling down over our heads, not a pleasant surprise. The Major took his jeep and went to pay a visit to his counterpart, this little incident never occurred again. However whenever a Buzz Bomb (V1) passed by we were in between two Batteries firing, it was very noisy times!!, at night the sky would light up and it was impossible to sleep.

Before Dad was taken away by the Germans and sent to concentration camp in Germany, he had dug a long and wide trench in the hill not too far away from the house, I would say that this shelter was approximately one hundred and fifty feet from the house. Dad had the trench dug into the clay hill, the trench was ten (10) feet wide, eight (8) feet deep, and probably forty (40) feet long, it was covered with logs, on which the excavated clay was replaced. Dad had built benches in the shelter, which was to be used

in case of a bombing. He was afraid that the cellar of the house would be buried under tons of bricks, if the house ever turned out to be a target.

One Summer night, and I cannot remember the date the British Air Force decided to destroy the very important Rail Road crossing of Ottignies, which was not too far away from our home. I never understood Montgomery and the British leadership, or the lack of it, they surely did lack some common sense. This time the British sent a group of Mosquitoes, which were twin engine night fighters, these were made of plywood and were difficult to detect on any radar screen; the Mosquitoes dropped a square of very bright flares above the Ottignies Rail Road Station, it was an unbelievable sight, the dark sky was lit up to the point we could practically read a news paper. When Mother saw this unusual occurrence, she woke all of up, and put the oldest four children in charge of the next four, while she took the baby, who was only three (3) years old, we left in pajamas, bare feet, and never asked a question. I had made a point of trying to recognize the most commonly used airplanes by the sound of their motor, by the way I still to day can recognize a B-17 from a B-24, and a P-51 from a P-47, that night I told Mother that the incoming planes were Lancaster Bombers, which meant that we would witness a heavy bombing over Ottignies. The British forgot one very important factor, namely, the wind.

By the time the bombers arrived over the pathfinders flare, the square of very bright lights had been blown over the little village of Limelette; the twenty or so Lancasters dropped many tons of bombs over the village, which was literally blew away. More than three hundred (300) people were killed, and the wounded were only found at day break; the problem continued, the flares slowly were blown over the village of Limal; as you can see on the map the bombers are approaching our area; so when the second wave of bombers arrived , they dropped their bombs and completely destroyed the little village of Limal. More than three hundred and fifty people were killed in Limal, it was a disaster. Mother and I took our bicycles at the crack of dawn we were in Limal to find Mother's Aunt and Uncle. What an awful sight! The first thing we encountered was a moon like terrain, no more roads, we often had to carry our bicycles across bomb craters. At the cemetery the bodies and bones were scattered everywhere. Bombs were still blowing up six hours after they had been dropped. Rescuers were trying desperately to dig out injured and dead bodies from every house. You will not believe it! Four houses had been spared near the center of the village, and Aunt Marthe and Uncle Fernand de Fierlande lived in one of these houses. They were very shook up but in good spirit for two elderly people, they were in their seventies at the time. I will never forget Limal. The third British group of bombers dropped their bombs into the square of flares, which by that time had moved over the fields of Bierges. The last bomb fell six (6) hundred yards away from our home. Was God on our side? You better believe it!

When we got home that afternoon, Mother sent us to retrieve some clothing left in the so-called shelter. What a surprise to find out that way at the end of the shelter the earth had collapsed due to the vibration caused by the bombing. Did we say a prayer of thank you when we saw this space full of earth, where only twelve hours earlier we had been huddled, while listening to the explosions and feeling the earth tremble.

Another example of the difficulty of aiming bombs from high altitude was experienced by Jeanne Guillemine Moncheur, who on April 14, 1955, became my partner in life, my financial adviser, my best counselor, the Mother of our five children, and the

best Grand Mother in Massachusetts .She is always called: "Bonne Maman." by all the grand children.

Jeanne and her sister Marguerite were 13 and 14 years old at the time, they had taken the "tram", which is a small electrically driven train found all over Belgium. The trams usually had two passenger cars and many open or closed box cars to transport grain and sugar beats from the very little villages to the main train stations; the two girls had left their home in Avin, they walked to the nearest tram stop, and were heading for Namur to go and see an older sister, who had married an industrialist, who like every man in Belgium had been drafted in the Army. Camille de Paul was a major in the Belgian Artillery and was taken prisoner and sent like all the other men in concentration camp in Germany. To reach the home of their sister the girls had to take the tram line, which literally passed on a high bridge, which went over the Rail Road Station of Namur. As the tram was on the overpass it suddenly stopped, the sirens were blasting and the town of Namur was in full alert. Every one got out of the tram, they knew that they were in an awfully dangerous location, no one in his or her right mind wants to be over a main RR Yard during a bombing. In this case it was determined later that the American B-17 Fortresses were told to aim at the Rail Road Station which is located between the junction of two major river, namely the Sambre and the Meuse. The two wide Rivers meet right at the center of Namur, the lead navigator must have gotten confused to see three nearly identical location, from the high vantage point it must have looked like three slices of a pie. Luckily for Jeanne the Americans bombed the wrong point and sadly many Belgian civilians were killed, while not one bomb fell on the Rail Road targeted by the bombers. Jeanne always said it was an unbelievable sight, to be way above the roofs of Namur and see the waves of bombers come and drop their load only a mile away. Guess if it had not been for that very big mistake, I would not be here today typing this e-mail.

After these two major mistakes by the Allies over friendly territory, a decision by the High Command in England was made, no more bombings by four engine planes over Belgium. In fact the British never had another night bombing after the Ottignies fiasco, the U.S. Air Force had only one saturation bombing on the Beauvechain Luftwaffe air base. We were only nine miles from the base when the bombing occurred, the vibration could be felt in Bierges; after an hour or so a huge cloud of dust covered our home, it was the Summer of 1944, the soil was dry and the thousands of bombs falling on the air base churned the earth and created a very large cloud of dust, which drifted towards our area.

Now a funny story. One must understand that during the war a bicycle was the most precious means of communication, rubber was non existent, so the tires were made with some kind of synthetic material, which was very vulnerable to the sun rays; we all had been properly trained by Mother, first your bicycle was precious therefore you kept an eye on it at all time, and it was always to be brought back into the house at night. Secondly you never left your bicycle in the sun for fear of destroying the tires, which by the way were impossible to find, except on the black market and for an exorbitant price.

One needs to understand another fact of life, namely, most of the key Rail Road Stations and power stations were destroyed by a small group of P-38 Lightnings; these twin boomed, single seat fighter/bombers would come extremely low to avoid the German radar, they would literally drop their bombs with the greatest accuracy on any small target.

This bright and shiny afternoon of the Summer of 1944, I took Myriam, Louis, and Peter for a bicycle ride towards Limal to go and pay a visit to Aunt Marthe, whom we all liked very much. She was in reality our Mother's aunt and she was a very old lady, but she had a very young mind and knew how to handle the crew of very wild and rambunctious little Americans. We were in the middle of the wide-open fields between Bierges and Limal, when all of a sudden four P-38 Lightning came swooping in to bomb the Rail Road Station of Ottignies. I shouted to the three brothers and sister to lay low on the edge of the dirt road and to wait for the action to be over before continuing our little ride. Now picture this, the P-38's are flying very low over our head and a very anxious voice shouts: "Christian, my bicycle is in the sun". Peter was not concerned about the U.S. planes; he was very concerned about the tires of his bicycle. We always had a good laugh about that little incident. Guess Mother had really brainwashed us about the need to take good care of our bicycle.

This is another example of the euphoria created by the possible arrival of the American Liberators. My Father in law was a reserved, if not taciturn Ardennais, (Person born and raised in the Ardennes Provinces of Belgium). He had lost his wife due to cancer in 1942, and that time he still had many teenagers at home, the youngest girl was only twelve when the U.S. Troops liberated Avin, Jeanne was fourteen and her sister Marguerite was one year older; as the local farmer came to report that he had taken a German prisoner and had locked the kraut in the cellar of the farm, he also said to Jeanne's Father that the Americans were approaching the area. Apparently all the children were so excited that they managed to persuade their Dad to take them to see the Americans. It was nine o'clock at night, it was pitch dark, yet dear old Father in-law took his four teenage girls through the field to Acosse, then taking a dirt field road they headed towards Burdinne, all of a sudden they found themselves in the middle of a fire fight, the Wehrmacht on one side, the Americans on the other, hay stacks and farms buildings burning on both side; Jeanne remember being scared but the desire to see the Liberators was so prevalent that they stayed put, they hid along a hedge row and in the dirt ditch, she said it was odd to find out that we were not alone in the ditch, the bodies of dead German soldiers were also along the same ditch. She remembers that a Belgian fellow was removing the boots of one of the Germans, while she was hidden in the ditch.

Just to show you that we really had lost all common sense, the urge to see our liberators was unbelievable, many Belgians did a great deal of very foolish things at the time of the liberation.

Jeanne remembers, that shortly after that the Americans installed a Field Hospital in the fields along the road going from Hannut to Namur; her sisters and Jeanne would go to visit the poor GI's who had been injured and were on cots placed in big tents, which had been set up in the field.

On Christmas Eve 1944 we had an exciting time, no Christmas tree! The tension in the house was mounting, the news were not good, the German advance in the Ardennes was confusing every one; the British were nerves on edge, Dad knew that he could no risk being captured by the SS, all in all the atmosphere was tense. The two ack-ack batteries were very busy trying to shoot down the German V1 Buzz bombs.

Sometimes after supper, it was pitch dark at the time, we heard the distinct sound of a V1 coming towards our home. The flying bomb was much noisier than any thing we had ever heard before. We presume that due to the humid and yet very cold

weather, this BUZZ bomb's wings were loaded with ice, it was firing at a regular rate, however it was coming slowly down, to the point that neither Batteries were able to fire on it.

We could hear the V1 approaching, the engine was banging louder and louder, it was definitely coming closer and closer to earth. The British soldiers were shouting: "Get along the walls, lay flat along the walls, line up along the walls!" The Army was trained to react to emergencies in order to save lives. We of course were a bunch of wild children, too dumb to know when to take cover. Our brother Louis jumped on the very wide windowsill and pressed his nose against the window, these windows were taller than an average man; in the mean time Peter and I ran through the main hall and out the front door to have a better view of the monster. We saw the contraption fly right over our head, the V1 could not have been more than fifty feet higher than the roof, it was skimming the top of our tall trees, the noise was tremendous.

The V1 power plant was designed to create a series of explosions, which would propel the flying bomb forward. Normally the contraption would fly between fifteen hundred and three thousand feet, it would only plunge down when the fuel control would shut off. At the very tip of the nose of the Buzz Bomb, one could see a little propeller, which was approximately six inches long; the Germans would calibrate the fuel shut off to coincide with the number of revolutions of the little propeller. I never was able to find out the ratio of propeller revolutions to the number of miles flown by the V1.

A few seconds later the Buzz Bomb (V1) exploded into three little Belgian houses on the edge of our woods; the gamekeepers' houses were not more than a half miles from our home. Nothing was left of the three little houses, except a huge crater, I do believe that the authorities never found the occupants of these three houses. Sadly enough all the gamekeepers and their families were killed.

The blast was unbelievable, it really shook the area. Pete and I ran back in the house, the British soldiers were still flat on the floor along the walls; while Louis was standing in front of a wide open space, He was white as a sheet, his head and shoulders covered with broken glass, and damp cold wind blowing through the now non-existent window. Miracle! Louis came out of this sad experience without a scratch. This is a Christmas Eve we will never forget. Again we were lucky, the deflagration only broke the windows at the back of the house.

The British Troops has buried the guns into pits, they were firmly convinced that the Germans were going to break through the Bulge and head for Brussels and Antwerp. So Bierges-lez-Wavre was right on the path of the possible advance of the SS Troops; the British ack-ack Battery was ready to become an anti tank or Field Artillery Battery. I must admit that Dad and Mother were not looking forward to see the Germans take over the area; however there was not much one could do to change the course of events.

Thanks to the American troop and the sacrifice of 19,648 men killed in action during the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans were never able to cross the Meuse River and were pushed back to the Siegfried line by early February 1945

Father was in very bad shape. For years I helped him do all the hard work around the house. I took care of stoking the coke into the large heating boiler. I maintained the

long eight hundred foot gravel driveway. Another duty was to drive Dad all over Europe to carry the heavy Hammond Organ components up hundreds of church lofts.

As my baby sisters and brothers were getting out of high school and the two older sisters married, I helped pack all of Mothers and Dads furniture and had it shipped to the States.

Dad bought a house in Connecticut. My first task was to unload the containers and reassemble the furniture. Then I painted the house. On December 7, 1953 I was drafted and spent my first night in Fort Dix, New Jersey as a member of the 1st Platoon, Company A, 364th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division.

Respectfully submitted.

Christian W. de Marcken

244 Richards Ave.

Paxton, MA 01612

Recollections of Christian W. de Marcken

September 6, 1998

The Foolish Things We Did During the War

When Dad finally got the Germans out of the house, thanks to the help of the U.S. Embassy in Brussels, we found the property littered with weapons and ammunition. We had 18 pill boxes around the house and we had anti tank barriers all across the fields in front of the house. The Germans fought the Senegalese soldiers for a whole day; the fighting was fierce—hand to hand combat with bayonets. Not far from the house we had a small military cemetery. Ninety-nine Senegalese soldiers and one French Captain had died fighting in the fields between Limal and Bierges.

When we were forced to leave the house, the British had installed four 16 inch guns on our lawn. These guns were removed from an old World War I cruiser. They were antiques—you did not have a shell. The head with the detonating charge was shoved into the breech, then you placed a felt wad, then you packed bags of powder. The powder looked very much like spaghetti; it had the same hardness, the same diameter and the same color, so we called it spaghetti. The bags were odd in shape. The shell of course was 16 inches in diameter—these were huge heads.

The British Artillery took the guns when they were pushed back by the Germans. They left all the "spaghetti". We had tons of powder all around the house, we had hundreds of grenades, especially the potato-smasher type used by the Germans.

We would go to the garden and throw hand grenades over the wall. I would dig a deep hole roughly three feet deep and 2 1/2 feet in diameter, drop a wheelbarrow full of

powder (spaghetti) in the hole, shove a steel pipe full of powder in the hole, and repack the hole full of earth.

Then I strung a trail of powder from the pipe to about six feet away. I would set a match to the end of the trail and run for the nearest trench; there were plenty of those around the house. The flame would creep to the entrance of the steel pipe, then we would hear a whistle and then a loud boom. Was that fun!

However, one day I made a little of miniature of the above, with no pipe, of course. I knew that my sister Anne was very gullible and I called her to tell her I knew where a mole hill was. As she was looking at the fake mole hill, I set fire to the little mound of powder. It blew up in Anne's face and burned all her hair. I got a royal chewing out from my Mother.

One day, my brother Louis, who was only five years old, came back with a land mine telling everyone, "No danger—I hit it, I dropped it, nothing happened!" You can imagine how lucky he was. Louis also took a box of Belgian matches and he was looking for gasoline by dropping a match in each container. After awhile he found gas; the explosion burnt his face.

June 20, 1996
244 Richards Ave
Paxton, MA 01612-1121
U.S.A.

TO: Whom it may be of interest

FROM: Christian W. de Marcken - born January 24, 1928
Oldest son of Alix and Gustave de Marcken de Merken

Dad was on death row at the Brussels Belgium prison of Saint Gilles. He had been condemned to death by the SS Storm Trooper, the black uniform special guards of Hitler, because he had been caught helping American and British Airmen escape back to England.

Dad had been picked up at home in a large raid run by the Wehrmacht on August 2, 1944 and was to be shot by a firing squad on September 13, 1944.

While in Belgium on Friday, September 2, 1994 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, I read the article "Odyssey of the Phantom Train, Which Never Went Further Than the Town of Malines" in the well known newspaper called Le Soir. I thought it would be worth trying to translate this story because Dad (Gustave R. de Marcken de Merken) was on the infamous "Phantom Train" and he escaped from it with all the other prisoners.

[The Odyssey of the "Phantom Train", Which Never Went Further Than the Town of Malines](#)

Liberty was nearly a done deal for Belgium, however 1500 political prisoners, who were held in Saint Gilles, nearly lost their liberty forever, if it had not been for the "Phantom Train Odyssey"...they would also have known the horror of being deported like so many of their comrades, who were headed for the Reich, within the past months.

The SS Gruppenführer Richard Jungclaus was in desperation taking the risk of losing his life. He who was in charge of both the Police force and the Wehrmacht during the

summer of 1944, was finally going to leave Brussels precipitously.

Himmler did not appreciate this exodus and his concessions, so he demoted Jungclaus before sending him to Slovakia, where he was killed.

On August 30, 1944, convoys of prisoners were still being shipped to Neuengamme and Ravensbrück despite viscount Berryer's efforts, and the attempts by attorney Eickhoff and other diplomats of neutral countries such as Sweden and Switzerland, who stayed in Brussels to negotiate with the German's ambassador Meyr-Falkenberg.

The "Difficult Cases"

The Gruppenführer (translation, group leader) Jungclaus could have backed down; however, in his mind he could not accept to release the "schwere falles" the difficult cases, meaning the people who were more actively involved against the Reich.

On Saturday, September 2, 1944, at 3 o'clock in the morning, an unusual activity was in order within the hallways of the Saint Gilles prison.

In some of the cells the prisoners were thinking that their final hour had arrived: it was always in the early hours of the morning that the executions were held...on the other hand, there was a certain hope in the air. Even though the prisoners were not permitted to communicate with the outside world, they had heard a few days earlier from one of the female guards, who was a Belgian who married a German, that Paris had been liberated. This created quite a stir.

One of the prisoners, namely, Minouchat Jadoul, could not contain his emotions and had shouted the information from the door of the cell: "Hello, Hello, this is radio Saint Gilles. Paris is liberated. Do like I do: bah, bah, bah, bah." And everyone started to kick the steel doors with their heels. Facing such a noise the Germans thought it was a mutiny, they invaded the hallways, weapons in hand and dogs...

However, in the middle of the night of September 2, 1944, pessimism had again crept in: the prisoners were herded together and each were given two Red Cross packages. This latest detail made the prisoners believe they were heading for the Reich (Germany).

Loaded on trucks, while a few family members were looking on in anguish, the prisoners were transported to the South Station, where the Germans had assembled a train of cattle cars and three passenger cars. To say the truth, these were animal box cars rather than means of transportation. While the train personnel were busy greasing the wheels they were also attempting to reassure the prisoners that the train would never reach its destination.

It became very evident that at all cost it was necessary to slow down the departure of the train, at least until the Allies could arrive...

A String of Unlikely "Delays"

Despite the nervousness of the Reichsbahn (German Railroad) personnel, who were supervising the maneuver and who had finally gotten involved to expedite the activity, the slowdown operations seemed to progress. Problems seemed to occur one after

another: pumps failed, railroad personnel felt sick and had minor falls, and wrong maneuvers suddenly happened.

One of the deliberate errors brought the steam engine in front of the fire pit (area where the fire boxes of the locomotives were emptied) rather than at the head of the string of box cars.

The assistant superintendent of the railroad station namely, Mr. Petit and the train engineers Verheggen and Pochet, could no longer delay the train movements and it left the station around 3:30 PM. According to a statement made by Melly Mouteau who was a prisoner on the train, someone started singing the Belgian National Anthem (La Brabançonne) and all the prisoners followed the lead.

The switch man in the Forest switch house directed the convoy towards Ruisbroek's cul de sac (a suburb of Brussels) After a great deal of discussion, the train was headed back out of its location, but this time the train headed for a track occupied by a transport train coming from France and heading for Germany.

More discussion and finally the train headed back to its departure point. After a flat bed car carrying an anti-aircraft gun was hooked onto the train, it left, but not before the engineer Verheggen had done everything possible to slow down the process.

As a result, it was 5:45 PM when the train finally moved out of the station. It took the train two hours to reach Schaerbeck (another suburb of Brussels) where delays again reoccurred.

In the boxcars the prisoners did not know where they were but the slowness of the train gave them hope. It was 11:00 PM when the train arrived in the town of Malines, however another technical problem occurred: the steam engine ran out of water.

Early in the morning, the assistant station master of Malines, Mr. Maurice Laporte, was going to succeed in performing the impossible: "Make the train head back for Brussels". He explained to the German in charge of the train, that the train was much too long, therefore it would jam all the switches on the lines heading for Antwerp and Louvain. Mr. Laporte told the German that blocking the switches would stop all other trains from reaching out the station. At that time the German shouted: "Let's head for Germany via Schaerbeck!"

Uneasy Silence

The Railroad engineers did not follow the German orders. The train went past Schaerbeck and found itself in a dead end section of the Petite Isle Rail Road Station.

At 10:15 AM on September 3, 1944, the train was totally immobilized. The prisoners could peek through the small vents--they saw that no German guards were around. Some feared that it was a sign that the Germans were planning a general execution; however, the train personnel and representatives of the Red Cross reassured the prisoners that they were free to go.

A success for the negotiators: the diplomatic representatives had finally convinced their German hard heads to assure similar treatments for the German soldiers who had

been injured in combat and left behind by the retreating forces.

A few hours later Brussels was liberated by the British, however as William Ugeux wrote: the train engineers never paraded while the crowd cheered, and the women were kissing the troops, and flowers were thrown in a glorious rain...Nevertheless, the train personnel had written a new page in the history of the underground Resistance.

Written by Christian Laporte for Le Soir

As Dad (Gustave R. de Marcken) got out of the Phantom Train at the railroad station called la Petite Ile, he walked to L'Avenue Molière to his sister's home, Aunt Paula Dellicourt. He borrowed a bicycle and headed for Tervueren and le Château de l'étoile in Bierges lez Wavre. On the outskirts of Brussels, an elderly lady called him and told him the Germans were taking all the bicycles going down the boulevard. She also said: "I know you, you are an American, where did you escape from?" Dad was worried to be betrayed again, so he denied knowing her. To that the elderly lady said: "I was at the Beverloo concentration camp to see my husband in 1942 and I remember you were the American Camp Senior. My husband was an American serviceman who fought in Belgium during WWI and I married him after the First World War."

You imagine Dad's surprise to find out that he knew her husband very well. Dad left the bicycle with her and hiked his way back home. He met other people also trying to reach home in Rixensart, Genves, etc...he told them he had no identification papers and was an escaped American prisoner who had been condemned to death for helping Airmen escape back to England.

In the forest of Soignes, the group was stopped by a German patrol who wanted to see identification papers. In Belgium you may not leave your property without your identity card, which has a photo, date of birth, address, etcetera. One of the ladies in the group pretended she could not find the papers of her husband (Dad for the occasion) and when the German looked at Dad, who was very skinny and looked very sick, he let Dad and the group go. Another close call for Dad!

After hours of hiking, roughly fourteen miles, Dad arrived in our woods at the particular time the American P47 Thunderbolts single seat fighter bombers were strafing the street in front of our property. The German convoy was a horse drawn convoy of four wheel wooden carts carrying ammunition and German infantry soldiers trying to get back to Germany.

You should have seen the beautiful sight-bright blue sky, P47 at tree top level all guns blazing, the fifty caliber guns located in the wings of the planes were spitting bullets at such a rate that we could see like a copper bar going from the gun towards the ground. The horses were crying of pain, the German soldiers were screaming, the ammunition was blowing up, the airplanes were roaring at tree top level, there were at least twelve planes in flights of three. What a racket!

The Germans tried to take all their wounded and dead soldiers with them. We found a few that were blown to pieces and we also had to bury the horses; but not before we cut big steaks out of the horses. It was the first time we could eat as much meat as we wanted.

Poor Dad was overtired and when he reached a mile from the house he was scared as to what he was going to find. Were we still alive? Was it a bombing he could hear? He of course, could not know that Molly Doyle (Bain) had taken Pop, Louis, Bea, Jackie, and Butch in the cellar to get them out of the firing line.

Mother, Pest, Anne, and Pete had accompanied me to see the Germans run away. We wanted to see the arrogant Wehrmacht crawl back to the Reich. We were real close to the road when I luckily recognized the sound of the big radial engines powering the P47 Thunderbolts, and we quickly retreated in the woods. We were four hundred feet from the road when the first American planes started strafing the German column. Mother ran towards the barn with Pest and Anne. Pete and I hid behind a large tree; we could not resist looking at this beautiful sight-the Germans being shot at-it was real music to our ears.

Dad arrived in the house as the last flight of P47s were making one last pass over the street. Dad was green, drawn, he looked awful, he had been on death row for more than a month. He was in a one man cell, however, due to lack of space the Germans kept four prisoners per cell.

He had also gone through the ordeal of the Phantom Train, those covered cattle cars, which were marked "40 hommes et 8 cheveaux" (forty men and eight horses). This was the way the Belgian army moved its troops. In the prisoners case, there were between 90 and 115 men and women in each boxcar. The doors were padlocked, the two little openings barely moved the hot air out of the boxcars. Of course, no toilet facilities, no chance of getting out to stretch. It was an awful situation where people collapsed and passed out. The other two trains made it across to Germany. One of them, the Germans threw hand grenades and machine gunned every box car; only one out of eight prisoners came out alive from that ordeal, according to the article attached to these notes.

On the fifth of September we heard that the Allies were on the outskirts of Wavre, a little town four miles from our home. We hiked over to see what was going on. At the corner of the rue de Bruxelles and rue de Nivelles, a British Churchill tank was burning. It had been hit by a shell fired by a German tiger tank located only six blocks away.

At that time we saw our first two American Harley Davidson riders. Both of them looked tired and you could see they had taken many spills; they each had a carbine in the holster hanging along the front wheel fork and both carbines had no stock. These had been broken off during one of the spills.

Mother spoke English fluently and she talked to the two GIs, and to show you how foolish and hysterical we were to see our liberators, the two Americans offered to take Mother and my sister Myriam back home, and both Pest (Myriam) and Mother got on the steel frame mounted over the rear wheel mud guard, and the next thing you know all four of them were gone in a typically Harley Davidson rattling roar. We hiked back home, happy to see our first liberators.

A few days later we had 1,000 American soldiers putting up their fort in the woods all around the house. They were signal corps men. They had been shot up so often by German snipers that none of the non-commissioned officers and none of the officers were wearing insignias. You must understand that the Germans thought that if they killed the leadership the men would give up in disarray. This, of course, would be true of the German Army, but we all know that in the US, men are trained to be independent

thinkers. As a result, even the lowest private was always ready to show initiative and ingenuity and to lead a group out of any tough spot.

After a few days, the mass of GIs simply folded their tents and moved on. I remember helping a handful of the signal corps men retrieve telephone wires all over our 900 acres of woods. Driving on a 2 1/2 ton truck was sheer pleasure for a young boy who had not seen or ridden a vehicle for the last four years.

In October 1944 we had the 364th British Ack-Ack Company settle in front of the house and another similar unit settle on the outskirts of our woods at the back of the house. The second unit was strictly run by WAAFs; they were not equipped with good maps, and the first day else women decided to clear these big guns. (Each empty shell was 26 1/2" high, 5" in diameter at the base, and 3 1/2" diameter at the mouth. We had sixteen of these guns on each side of the house, and every time a V1 Buzz Bomb was passing overhead coming from Southern Roer area and heading for Antwerp, both the men and women would let every gun roar-you could not hear yourself.) They decided to shoot over our property because their map did not show our house and the farm. The result was a rain of hot shrapnel all over the roof and the lawn. Dad and I quickly ran in the chicken coop for protection. During the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, the 364th Ack-Ack dug their guns into the mud, and they were ready to use them as antitank guns if the Germans had reached Bierges lez Wavre.

On Christmas Eve, we had as usual 146 British soldiers in the house at all times. They manned the guns on a two 12-hour shift basis, so our home turned out to be a huge barrack, with Tommies all over: in the cellar they had their kitchen and mess hall; on the first floor the recreation area and rest area, where the men read, wrote, and played cards; the second, third floor and large walk-in attic were turned into a dormitory. We had men all over the place.

I should mention that our home was unusually big. It measured 100 meters long by 50 meters wide, the ceiling was 5 meters from the floor. This translates to 328 feet long, 164 feet wide, and 16.4 feet from floor to ceiling. We lived in the dining room at that time to give more space for the troops; however, they respected our bedrooms. These men were really nice to us. It should be noted that our home was not heated and we only had running water in one bathroom downstairs.

That Christmas eve 1944 it was snowing, it was cold, and the news was not encouraging. The German Wehrmacht and the SS Panzer Divisions were heading back for our area, while trying to cut off the British and Americans by reaching the port of Antwerp in Belgium.

The V1 Buzz Bombs seemed to come in more frequently. These flying bombs had short little wings, a stubby fuselage and on top of the back end of this funny looking plane was mounted a rocket engine. The exploding fuel made a terrible racket-it was like a continuous string of explosions. The Germans would estimate the amount of fuel to put in their flying bomb, so when it ran out of fuel it would drop out of the sky. So as you can understand, these were very inaccurate machines, but they were deadly. The whole fuselage was full of explosives and when these hit the ground it created a huge crater and damaged everything around. It would take a block of houses down within a few seconds.

The British Spitfires, single seat fighter planes, would pursue the V1 and place one wing of the fighter under the stubby wing of the Buzz Bomb and slowly tip the V1 towards

the ground. Many V1 were dipped into the Atlantic Ocean in this manner. The British Ack-Ack was another method of getting rid of these awful bombs.

This Christmas eve we presumed that the V1 coming towards our home had ice on its wings. It was slowly coming down, its engine was firing at a normal rate. When the Buzz Bomb passed over our home it was at tree top level. We heard the British shout: "Take cover, line up along the walls, get out of the building..."

My brother Louis jumped on the window sill in the dining room and placed his nose against the large window to see the bomb pass overhead. It was roughly 7 PM and pitch dark; you could clearly see the flames coming out of the stove pipe type engine. Pete and I ran out through the front door to look at the monster pass right over our heads. It could not have been more than 30 feet above the tower of the house. The V1 unluckily crashed into three little game keepers' houses, which were located on the edge of our woods not too far away from the WAAF batteries. The houses were destroyed and everyone was killed. We were only a quarter of a mile away and we had many windows broken, but that was the extent of the damage.

As Pete and I ran back into the dining room, we found Louis still standing on the marble window sill. He was white as a sheet and the window was in little pieces all around him. His hair was full of glass, and by a miracle, he had not a scratch. At that time we thought it was funny. Of course, we had no idea that our neighbors were all dead.

It was a gloomy Christmas-cold, miserable, and far from being cheerful. We were all very anxious. We had no idea where the Germans were and we were expecting to be in the battle zone at any time. We again were very lucky the German push stopped about 30 miles from our home.

Recollections of World War II
Christian de Marcken

March 1994

What did it do to all of us? It scared all of us, it made us experience hunger, cold, lack of electricity, lack of communication, but it forced us to become more self-reliant. We became more patriotic and the family became a team. Before the War we did not know our parents they entertaining, hunting, traveling, while we were either in boarding school or, like the girls, were taught at home by a governess. We had our own dining room with a dumb-waiter (monte-plat) going directly from the downstairs kitchen to our children's dining room. The grownups had their meals in the large dining-room facing the back of the house. This room became the only occupied room all through the war. It was the only place we could warm up with the only wood stove available, the only room big enough for all of us and the only room with thick curtains, which would not allow the candlelight to be seen from the outside. All through the War the Germans enforced total blackout.

In 1999 Bon-Papa was told by the American embassy to go back to the Stares with his family; he chose not to! So on May 10, 1940, we saw our first Stuka dive bombers and the first parachutists. I will never forget that day. Dad and I were in the garden (vegetable garden, 100 meters by 100 meters). With the first Stuka circling above the house, Dad would quickly go to the center door of the walled garden and he would drag me from one side of the wall to the other, depending on where the German plane was

located. Now I often laugh at the whole exercise because I understand planes, combat, strafing, bombing, etceteras; but at that time I was just a scared twelve year old boy.

Within a day we saw the Senegalese and Tunisian soldiers. They were running towards the combat zone, their shoes tied around their necks. The North African soldier hated to wear boots or shoes; they were never carried in trucks, they always ran wherever they went. They were fierce fighters and loved close combat bayonet conditions.

Then the French tanks started rumbling up the road from Rixensart towards Wavre. These fragile little tin boxes were a two man contraption that must have made the Germans laugh themselves silly. Then came the Belgian infantry, which was supposed to hold the second line of defense. We were the second line of defense; on the property the Belgians had built eighteen small blockhouses out of concrete. These had a sealed door, a small machine gun porthole, and quarters for four men. The air vents were simple pipes sticking out of the flat concrete block. You can imagine, one hand grenade into the vent and goodbye blockhouse occupants!

Between the blockhouses was stretched barbed wire and behind them the Belgians had dug trenches, World War I style warfare. Towards the enemy and beyond the blockhouses were two types of antitank barriers: the concrete spikes that were poured into the ground or the steel gates mounted on heavy rollers. The idea behind these interconnected steel gates was that as the tank would push against the barrier the gates would wrap around the tank and entrap it. Again, the Germans had a good laugh. They came with cranes, lifted the gates and the tanks would roll under the antitank barriers. We have pictures of these barriers with all of us kids playing and climbing on them.

The Belgian officer was an old "gaga" who was going from man to man, asking, "And you Henri, what would you do?" "How about you, Paul?" etcetera. It did not take long for chaos to settle in.

Around the 15 of May, the British Artillery drove in—typical British, everything in order, all by the book, no screams, just orders given, received, and executed. The British had taken 16 inch guns off an old cruiser and put them on wheels. These guns had very interesting ordnance. No outer casing with primer, the shell was massive, 16 inches in diameter and roughly two feet high. The breech of the 16 inch barrel was huge. One soldier would open it, four other artillery men placed the projectile on a stretcher and presented it to the entrance of the barrel, to other men pushed the projectile into the barrel with a special wad (a soft mass of some loose fibrous material, used to keep the powder close together and avoid windage in any muzzle-loading cannon or gun) into the muzzle. Then the explosive was pushed in (we called it spaghetti because it was bagged and shaped like straight spaghetti, the color was a light brown, the smell was very special, I am sure that Anne and I will never forget it). After many bags of explosive were packed in the breech, the latter was closed and finally the gun was fired. No need to tell you that the noise of a battery of cruiser guns, blasting on the lawn near the children's playroom, was more than one would ever expect to experience. A small spotter biplane also was landed on the lawn. Its mission was to go out and locate the German convoys of tanks to be used as targets.

One would have a difficult time understanding what was going on. The milling around of hundreds of Artillery men, the tracks bringing in ammunition, explosives,

supplies, etc, small airplanes landing and taking off from the lawn. All through that time Dad and Mother were preparing to leave. We had been told that due to the Second Line of Defense status of our property we were going to be forced (no choice) to evacuate. We all were given a little plastic like pouch to hang around our neck. In the pouch was a paper with your name, address, parents' names, medical information, etc. This was to make sure that if you were separated from your family, people would know a little about your background.

BonPapa was very cool and businesslike compared to all the other members of the family (Uncles and Aunts). As a result, he was looked upon by everyone as the leader, guide, and coach. BonneMaman (who was definitely and visibly pregnant) loaded the Pontiac, which was pulling the trailer loaded with clothes, food, and even people. They loaded the little beige Opel to the gills and on May 16, 1940, the Germans were spotted four miles from the house. They were in Wavre when BonPapa drove away with the Pontiac and Mother followed with the Opel. Of course, they headed in the opposite direction; we were leaving Bierges for Rixensart and finally Buysinghen, where we spent the first night at Beuze Beuze's (my grandmother) house. There we were met by Uncle Luc Iweins d'Eeckhoutte and his wife Aunt Monique (BonneMaman's sister who married the same day at the Buysinghen castle) and all their children, Christianne, Marc, Germaine, Nicole, René, and Ives. Uncle René Iweins d'Eeckhoutte, brother of Uncle Luc, was part of the convoy. So was Uncle Fernand Dellicourt and his wife Aunt Paula, who was BonPapa's sister. They lived only a couple of blocks away from Uncle Luc on Avenue Molière in Brussels, Belgium. Future Uncle René was driving Beuze Beuze's car and I cannot remember who was driving Uncle Fernand's car.

We left Buysinghen the next day and drove to Tournai. We were always lucky, the German Stukas were strafing the civilians who were being evacuated, in order to create havoc and confusion so as to slow down the British and French reinforcements from reaching the combat zone. Our lucky star or your Grandmother's prayers saw to it that the Germans would strafe and bomb ahead or behind us. We never saw or were subjected to a bombing although sometimes we could hear the bombs. Sometimes we saw the horrors of the war actions as we were continuing our trek through Belgium and France. The total blackout, the mass confusion, the milling around of thousands of civilians and military people, the searchlights scanning the sky—all this after a long slow drive—did not make things easy for BonPapa and BonneMaman. The Uncles and Aunts were very demanding and in a total state of panic. As a result, BonPapa and BonneMaman were organizing everything, answering all questions, calming down grownups and children alike; they were admirable! They kept their cool and used common sense.

The next stop was Arras (which was bombed only a few hours before we arrived), then Amiens, then Evreux (NE of Paris). There, I remember Louis playing with the British soldiers and being all excited because there was no toilet in the room used for the purpose of having bowel movements. The French very often do not have sitting type toilets; they replace the latter with a formed ceramic slab, with a hole in the center and two foot shaped protrusions, usually serrated. Soone steps into the room, places on foot on each of the two serrated pads, squats and does his/her thing. Ho! I forgot, first you remove your pants, then squat, etc.

Then there is a blank...I cannot picture anything but Dad leaning on the black Pontiac steering wheel and getting very frustrated as we got tied in massive traffic jams. The next thing I can remember is being in Chateau, a small village in the Allier Department South of Paris. I remember shopping in Sancoins and Saint Pierre-le-Moutier

(just South of Nevers).

The last time we went to bed free was in Azy le Vif. The little castle was called "La Prolle"; it was built on a slope overlooking a very large lake. I remember catching one hundred small fish without using a hook. I would let the poor little fish swallow a great deal of line, then I would yank the fish out of the water.

The next morning we woke up with Germans all over the place; they had caught up with us. They sounded awful, guttural, vulgar. After all, they were the "Boche" we had heard so much about; they were cruel, nasty, and even when you opened their belly they smelled of sauerkraut.

It did not take long before the Germans forced BonPapa to drive back to Belgium. If my memory serves me right, we spent one night in a haunted house near Montargis. The adults were all concerned because they could hear noises and could not find the cause. I remember finding rifle bullets left behind somehow by a French or German soldier. I would jam the projectile part into the jamb of a door, then with a back and forth movement I would force the projectile part away from the shell. I would use the explosive powder to make fire crackers (typical 12 year old boy).

From there I believe we went through Melun, Meaux, and I know we were in Soissons (NE of Paris) when I had terrible headaches due to an awful earache. BonneMaman could not find medication for my ear, so BonPapa saw a German nurse on the street of Soissons and in German explained my problems. It did not take long for the little, ugly, roly-poly nurse to return with ear drops; that made a great deal of difference. The next thing I remember is reaching Buysinghen in the dark. We had reached a home we knew—that of Beuze Beuze.

The next day BonPapa took me to see if Bierges still existed. The rest of the family stayed in Buyzinghen. The Château de l'Etoile was crawling with Germans. The house was surrounded with huge gray trucks with two trailers and these large half truck personnel carriers. The little German "Ober" (I believe a second lieutenant) stood on the steps at the main entrance, pointed to the driveway, and in German told BonPap that Germany was a large country while America was a small country. He finished by saying, "get out of here". BonPapa then went to the US Embassy in Brussels and after a few days the Germans were forced to leave the house and a letter, with a big red official looking stamp was placed on the window of the main entrance door. It proclaimed that this property was owned by an American and was under the protection of the American government.

Before leaving the house the bastards had broken every piece of furniture they could not take away, such as the billiard and large cabinets, etc. They had drunk themselves silly and vomited and defecated all over the house and in BonPapa and BonneMaman's bed. Every toilet was literally overflowing; the whole house stunk to high heaven. It was so bad that in 1949, when we left the house, you could not sleep in the master bedroom with the windows closed. The wood floors and the wall continued to smell the lousy German smell.

I cannot remember the date BonPapa was arrested the first time by the Germans; however, I remember that he drove away in his car, an Italian "Lancia", to do some shopping in Wavre and he never came back. He explained to us afterward that as he got out of the Lancia, the Germans arrested him because he was an American citizen,

and right then and there they confiscated his vehicle.

He was placed temporarily in the jail cells of the Gendarmerie (police station) in Wavre. (The Gendarmes are Military Police Officers who by law are on loan by the Belgian government to the local Provinces.) Because BonPapa was very well known and respected, the head of the Gendarmes dispatched two men (by law the gendarmes have to travel in pairs) to Bierges to notify BonneMaman that her husband was in their temporary custody. As soon as it was dark, she should come through the back door of the Gendarmerie and they would allow her to see Dad and bring him the necessary clothes and toiletries in expectation of his departure for a German concentration camp.

It was a fairly mild concentration camp. BonPapa was allowed to go out accompanied by a German guard to buy supplies and a stove. The prisoners would sneak out at night and sabotage the German motor pools. BonPapa told us that one night they sneaked out of the camp, removed all the distributor rotors and threw them in the local river. Obviously the German trucks were all marooned in their motor pools.

One day Uncle Charles Merckens arrived with the Swedish Embassy to have their Embassy car come to Bierges and take all of us to Beverloo and we spent the whole day in the concentration camp. I remember the guard saluting (military salute) when he passed in front of BonPapa. I asked Dad what was the man doing and who was he saluting? BonPapa laughed and answered, "Me! He saw my personnel folder and saw the title of Baron and the von Marcken zu Merken background." The poor slob of a German had been brainwashed about the aristocracy and he was even saluting his prisoner; only a dumb German would do that!

Another day the Germans had medical and food packages sent from the States for the women prisoners, who were interned not too far away from Beauvechain, which is close to Grez-Doiceau. To please Dad, the Germans allowed him to be one of the prisoners chosen to carry the parcels. After the delivery of the Red Cross packages, the German guard allowed BonPapa to go to Bierges and spend the night at home. All BonPapa had to do was give his word of honor that he would get back to camp the next morning.

Recollections of Christian W. de Marcken

Written while flying from Newark, NJ to Seattle, WA

September 2, 1998

World War II – in Bierges, Belgium

World War II started on May 10, 1940, when the Germans attacked Belgium. As American citizens we were really three times the enemy: first, we lived in Belgium; second, our Great Grandfather skipped out of Germany in the early 1800s; third, we were Americans.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Hawaii and President Roosevelt declared war on both Japan and Germany. On that day, we became enemy number one.

The Wehrmacht placed a German guard in the house at Château de l'Etoile, Bierges-lez-Wavre, Brabant, Belgium.

Dad (Gustave R. de Marcken) was taken prisoner while shopping in Wavre. Luckily the local gendarmes liked Mother and Dad, and they dispatched two gendarmes to notify Mother (Alix U. de Kerchove d'Exaerde) that she should get warm clothes and some food for Dad, because the Germans were transporting him to the infamous prison of Saint Gilles in Brussels. Mother snuck in through the back door at the "Gendarmerie"; this was at night and it was dark, the Germans never saw her.

The next day Dad was sent to Brussels. It took twenty-four hours for Mother to go from one German officer to another. Finally, after three days she found out that Dad was in Saint Gilles—he stayed there for a month; he was then transferred to Beverloo, Belgium.

Beverloo was a decent concentration camp. In fact, the Swedish Embassy managed to get Mother, Françoise, Myriam, and me (Christian W. de Marcken) to visit Dad at the camp. The Germans locked us up in the camp with all the American and British prisoners. I remember being at Beverloo for a day. Kind of odd for a young boy (I was thirteen at the time) to be behind barbed wires and looking at German Wehrmacht armed guards patrolling the perimeter of the concentration camp.

Dad met Joe Nassy, Edward Grey-Meyer and Bill Kydd, as well as many other prisoners. Dad became Assistant Camp Senior because of his age and because he knew English, French, and German. While at Beverloo, a small group of American prisoners were able to escape one night. Dad and a small hand picked group of men snuck out of the camp and went to sabotage a German motor pool. They removed all the distributor rotors from as many trucks as possible and threw them in the canal, which was flowing nearby.

Mother was able to send food parcels to Dad and to communicate with him through letters and cards. I have not yet found Dad's diaries, which were given to my sister Myriam (Pest) in Avin. Before her death on November 22, 1997, she asked that the diaries be returned to me in Paxton, Massachusetts. Unluckily, I have not found the 1942, 1943, and 1944 diaries.

Dad asked Mother to take in Edward Grey-Meyer's son, Teddy. He was a little Jew, who was two years younger than me, and was vulnerable in Brussels. Hiding him in Bierges was quite easy; he simply blended in among all the nine children. By the way, I am the eldest of nine children and was born in Uccle, Belgium on January 24, 1928. I am including a letter of Edward Grey-Meyer, written from Tost concentration camp near the Polish border with Germany. This letter was written on June 28, 1943. Since it is written in English I will not spend time commenting about the letter.

I do not remember when the Germans moved all the British and American prisoners to Tittmoning, a concentration camp Northwest of Salzburg. This camp was in Germany and it was a rough camp; very little food, very crowded and cold quarters. Many Americans died in camp, especially the younger men. It seems that the older men did not need as many calories to maintain their bodies and therefore they had a better chance to survive.

While in Tittmoning, Edward Greymayer (Teddy's father) was transferred to Tost, where my cousin Billy Merckens was a prisoner. Billy was twelve years older than me, so he must have been twenty-five years old at the time.

While at Tittmoning, Dad had managed to hide a box of macaroni; you must understand that in Belgium the Italians are called "Macaroni's" because of their love of pasta. So when one wants to be negative and wants to refer to Italians, the favorite statement was and still is: "He is nothing but a Macaroni". You must also understand that the Italians were fighting with the Germans against the Allies. It should also be said that the Italian Army was not known for its courage. We always said that the Macaroni's were better lovers than fighters, and that the Macaroni's had one slogan: "Fight and run away in order to be able to fight another day!"

The day the Italians capitulated, Dad took his pack of macaroni, broke it up in little pieces, and gave a piece to every prisoner, with the instruction to stick the piece of macaroni in the buttonhole of their lapels. When the Germans saw this at "reveille" (morning head count), the Krauts were furious and they found out who had initiated this insult to their ex-ally. They took Dad and placed him in the "dark cell"—a very small cell with no windows. He was there for three days as punishment for his nasty deed.

Later he and other prisoners were transferred to what the Germans called a "reprisal camp", it was supposed to be a tougher than average camp, reserved for prisoners who had a history of rebelling against Hitler's regime. So now Dad was transferred to Laufen, located slightly Northwest of Salzburg.

While in Laufen, Dad asked Mother to send a parcel of food to Edward Greymayer at Tost in Silasia, and as you can see in Ed's letter, Mother did not put a return address for fear that the Germans would trace the parcel to Bierges. She did not want to have the Germans get wind of little Teddy. If the Germans found out, we were all at risk of being shot; hiding a Belgian Jew was a crime punishable by death.

Mother was a very courageous woman. She was afraid of nothing—she would fight with the Germans, give them a hard time. By the way, she was decorated by the British government in 1918 for helping the British Army during WWI. She could not have been very old, since she was born in November 1903 and WWI lasted from 1914 to November 1918. She could not have been older than fifteen years when she did whatever she did, that deserved a medal and commendation from the King of England. My son, Allen C. de Marcken, of 712 South Lake Claire Circle, Oviedo, FL has the medal and official certificate of his grandmother.

For the record, it should be stated that Teddy, the little American Belgian Jew, (his father was a U.S. Citizen and his mother was Belgian), survived WWII but unluckily was killed in a tram (city rail car) accident in Brussels, Belgium in 1947.

Going back to the Laufen concentration camp...Dad had also asked Mother to bring food to Joe Nassy's wife. She was a Belgian citizen in Brussels, Belgium. So poor Mother had to find food for her as well as for all nine children, for Mollie Doyle (Allen Bain of Brule, Wisconsin) and Andrée Kremers (Albert Jamotte of Antheit, Belgium). Mollie was an Irish nurse who was at home when the Germans overran us in Azy le Vif, France and

Andrée was a teacher. We lived far away in the woods and the one room school house in Bierges could not provide a decent education.

Somehow as Assistant Camp Senior, Dad (Gustave R. de Marcken) was able to help many prisoners—his full knowledge of German was very helpful. The German Commander of the concentration camp was young and very well educated, he had graduated from Oxford, England and of course knew English fluently, he was not a bad man. Also what was not known is that through some pull and connection, Dad was able to convince the German Commander to allow the Swedish Embassy to provide paint and canvas for Joe Nassy. Joe did numerous paintings of prisoners and camp scenes, some of which Dad bought from Joe Nassy after the War.

Whenever the Germans captured more prisoners, Dad was always called to be the interpreter. One day as Dad was helping the Britishers caught on the Isle of Sark, a British prisoner was asked by the Sauerkraut: "What is your profession?" The Britisher answered, "Professional safe cracker." Dad immediately told the man not to fool around because the Germans were not in a mood to accept a joke. The prisoner said to Dad, "I am sorry but this is my profession!" The German interrogator said in German, "That is right", he had the official British records of the British prison of the Isle of Sark, so he knew the facts.

The Britisher was very grateful to think that Dad tried to help him avoid a confrontation with the Nazi guard; in the evening he came to Dad's cell and said, "Gus, I checked all the doors and locks and there is not a door I cannot open." So Dad told him that he knew of a German warehouse next to the camp where blankets were stored. Dad knew that some of the prisoners were cold, so he asked the British prisoner to go and steal blankets, which he did.

Another day the same Britisher came and said to Dad, "You, I really trust! I would like to have you as my partner, when I escape." Dad explained that he had a wife and nine children under guard in Belgium, and he feared that the Germans would retaliate against the family. So Dad had to decline the offer.

It should be known that as long as the German army was winning the war, the Krauts (Boches) did not care if Americans died in camp, and many died in Tittmoning and Laufen. However, as the War progressed and the British and especially the American Armed Forces started to win in Africa, Italy, and Normandy, the Germans were afraid of reprisals and did not want to be accused of having American civilians die in camp. Note that Dad, who was born on May 2, 1892, was fifty-one years old in 1943 and he had a major operation in 1936—he had a kidney removed. When he was in Laufen as a prisoner Dad was down to 109 pounds and his second kidney was giving him trouble. The Germans thought he was dying and unbeknown to us he was escorted back home by a German guard. It was a Sunday and Dad thought he would find Mother at church so he stopped at the church of Bierges. You must understand that Dad was wearing a large Army trench coat, he had a big gray beard, he was extremely skinny, and he walked bent forward; he was a totally different man than we had known two and a half years before. In fact, at first Mother did not recognize him and my brother Baudouin (Butch), who was only two years old when Dad left, refused to go close to his father.

Dad was so sick. I remember that quite often, everyday, he would become completely green and would roll on the floor in pain. Mother took real good care of him and Dad recovered slowly but surely.

On August 2, 1944 we had a major sweep all through our area. The Germans were lined up side by side. They swept through the woods and fields, and searched every house. This lasted all day. The Wehrmacht took Dad away and he was handed over to the SS. He was betrayed by a Spanish woman, who apparently had seen him helping American Airmen escape back to England. He was again sent to the infamous prison of Saint Gilles in Brussels, Belgium and was condemned by death by firing squad by the SS storm troopers (Hitler's special guards). He was to be shot at the Tir National in Brussels on September 13, 1944. We had no idea where Dad had disappeared; the Germans refused to let Mother know where her husband was detained.

One should know that the Germans had most of their troops fighting on the Russian front, in Italy, and in France, so in order to keep the population under control, they resorted to wholesale threat of murder. They would send a letter to the most influential members of the community—for instance, the mayor, selectmen, doctors, attorneys, engineers, etcetera—to notify them that if a German soldier was killed by the underground movement (Maquisars), the Germans would kill the first five civilians on their list. If two Germans would be killed, then they would shoot ten of the leading members of the community.

Dad had received a letter. So had Mr. Bosch (the mayor of Wavre), and three other men. Unluckily, someone shot a German soldier on August 3, 1944. The Germans picked up Mayor Bosch and three others, then they came to our home in Bierges to pick up Dad. Mother told them that the SS had picked him up the day before. The Germans took the Mayor and his buddies and put a bullet through their heads in the ditch of the highway going from Wavre to Gistoux. I took pictures of the granite monument when I went back for the first time to Belgium in 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Belgium by the American troops.

In a sense Dad was lucky to have been picked up by the Waffen SS; he was on death row in St. Gilles. On September 2, 1944 the Germans woke up all the prisoners on death row around 2:00 a.m. and loaded them on trucks and drove the prisoners to "La Gare du Sud" (South Station) in Brussels. The prisoners were packed between 90 and 110 people per cattle carriage. These are small European boxcars marked "40 hommes ou 8 chevaux" (40 men or 8 horses).

Again, Dad was very lucky. The "Phantom Train" as it was named (see my translation of the Belgian newspaper article) was headed for Germany; however, the underground was able to notify the Allies not to bomb or strafe the train full of prisoners.

Once the American P47 Thunderbolts bombed the tracks only a half mile from the train, which was forced to back track to Brussels. After many attempts to reach Germany, the train landed at the "Petite Isles". There the prisoners were able to open up one boxcar and liberate everyone. The German guards threatened to shoot them all. Dad told them that the handful of guards had not enough ammunition to kill all 1200 prisoners, and that those who would survive would literally tear the German guards apart. The Germans panicked and unhooked the flat bed with their machine gun post and the second class car

they used as office and sleeping quarters; the Germans left and the prisoners scattered into Brussels.

Dad went to Avenue Molière to the house of Aunt Paula and Uncle Fernand Dellicour. He borrowed a bicycle and took off for Bierges. In Turvueren an old lady called him and advised him to stop, because the Germans were requisitioning all the bicycles to escape back to Germany. Funny as it may be, the old lady said to Dad, "I remember seeing you! You are an American! I saw you at Beverloo two years ago, when I went to say goodbye to my husband, who was an American soldier during World War I in 1918." She was right, Dad remembered her husband. Dad left his bike with her and then started walking through the Forest de Soignes. It was a dangerous situation; by law all people living in Belgium must carry a photo identification card. Of course, Dad had escaped out of the Phantom Train and he had no papers whatsoever. He teamed up with eight or ten Belgians, who were trying to reach Ottignies and Genval. They were also walking through the woods. He told the Belgians of his escape, when suddenly a German patrol came out of the woods and asked for identification papers. One of the ladies pretended to search her purse and told the Germans "I do not know what I did with my husband's papers." I guess the "Boche" looked at the very old looking man (Dad had been a month on death row, this did not make him look younger) and he did not feel threatened, so he let everyone pass the checkpoint.

Dad then got into the woods of Rixensart. By that time he was alone and he could hear the combat activities towards our area. The Germans were trying to retreat and the Americans were progressing from West to East. Two German Tiger tanks ran out of gas on the corner of our property and the German tank crew sabotaged the guns before leaving. As Dad approached the house he could hear awful explosions a half mile ahead, in fact right at our house; he was not sure he would find us alive.

What had really happened was the result of the American P47 Thunderbolts strafing a column of horse drawn convoy loaded with Wehrmacht soldiers and ammunition. Pete (my brother born in 1934) Mother, Myriam (born in 1930), and I had walked through the woods to see the Krauts running away. All of a sudden I heard the sound of P47 Thunderbolts and I told Mother that we better run out of the area. Sure enough, we were barely in the clearing near the farm when all hell broke loose. The P47s had peeled out of formation and were diving, all guns blazing at the Krauts (Boches). Pete and I dove behind a big beech tree and we observed P47s following one another—the sun was shining and the brass bullets coming out of the 50 caliber guns were like shiny rods. You could hear the Germans scream, the horses cry of pain, the ammunition carts exploding; what a noise!

Dad arrived at home during that engagement. Later, when the Germans had picked up all their wounded and dead people, we took a sharp knife and went to cut good pieces of meat from the dead horses. That was good! Later we regretted it. The sun hit the dead horses and wherever we had cut. The flies and the stench made our lives quite miserable, because we had to go and bury the horses for fear of having diseases spreading all over the area.

After the liberation and after the Battle of the Bulge (Bataille des Ardennes) also known as the Battle of Bastogne, the Americans liberated Tittmoning and Laufen. Joe Nassy came back to his white wife in Brussels. He was down and out; he could not sell his

paintings and he had a real hard time surviving. Dad bought some of his paintings from camp, and he brought Joe Nassy home so Mother could feed him.

Joe lived at Bierges in 1946 and 1947 and he also came to the Côteau, Grez-Doiceau, Brabant, Belgium to recuperate from the three years in German concentration camp. During that time he painted a portrait of Mother, Dad, the nine children, Grandmother (Jeanne de Kerchove d'Exaerde, my Godmother), and Mollie Bain (who later married Allen Bain). [By the way, Allen Bain received the Medal of Honor in combat during the Battle of the Bulge. This is the highest and most prestigious award any military person can earn in combat.] Joe Nassy also painted the Castle of Bierges and also "Le Côteau". We all remember Joe Nassy as the most courteous, most respected, and most correct black person we ever met.

In 1997 Christopher Neil (my sister Anne's oldest boy) who is a reporter in Hawaii, saw an AP release from the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. stating that Joe Nassy was a black Jew, who pretended to be an American citizen, but who was really a Jamaican. Nassy did not reveal his ancestry, so as to be taken as an American citizen by the Germans. Being Jewish was not what you wanted to be under the Nazi regime. Joe Nassy died in Brussels, Belgium in 1977. We have each of us a portrait painted by this now famous artist, who will have his paintings exhibited at the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. in the year 2000.

Scary Times – During World War II in Belgium.

We knew that one day the Americans and British troops would retake Europe. The British had a small test debarkation in 1942 made in the Pas de Calais, France. Then in 1943 we started to see a few bombings and of course, in 1944 the bombing of Namur and Ottignies were real wake up calls.

We had a shelter dug on the side of the hill between what we called la "grande cote" and "le passage"—in other words, a steep hill and a small narrow passage used to go on bicycle. The shelter had a bench on each side and the entrance was open and facing the house, which was approximately two hundred yards away.

Before we could cut a path through the thorns and the bushes to reach the shelter, we had to use it. It was in the middle of the night. All of a sudden the sound of a multitude of airplanes were firing parachute supported flares. The sky was so lit up that you did not need a flash light to find your way. We all had our chores and being the oldest I was responsible for Louis. I went to his bedroom, picked him up and carried him to the shelter. In the rush I did not put on my shoes, yet I got to the shelter without a scratch or a prick from the thorns. The earth shook, the noise was deafening. When all the noise and trembling of the earth subsided, we found our way back home. The next day we went to the shelter to pick up sweaters, blankets, and other items; we found out that we were extremely lucky, the far end of the shelter had collapsed, we could have been foolishly crushed by the earth. Then we built a new shelter much closer to home. It had two entrances and was built to resist shells falling real close.

What had happened that night? The British, who did all the night bombings, had decided to bomb the main railroad crossing Brussels to Namur and Louvain to Nivelles at Ottignies, which was five miles as the crow flies from our house. The British fighters first dropped a large square of flares over Ottignies; the intent was to have the three waves of

four engine bombers called Lancasters drop their bombs in the square of flares made by the fighters. Each wave of bombers consisted of twenty-four bombers each carrying a half a ton of bombs. Therefore, 72 bombers were carrying 36 tons of bombs.

Big problem! The British Royal Air Force (RAF) forgot that it was windy that night. By the time the first box of bombers arrived the flares had drifted over the outskirts of Ottignies, the second squadron of bombers dropped their bombs within the flares, which by that time had drifted over the little village of Limelette, which was obliterated—more than 300 civilians were killed. By the time the third squadron arrived on the scene, the flares were over the little village of Limal where my Uncle Ignace and Aunt Marthe de Fierland lived. The bombs completely destroyed the hamlet—three hundred people were killed and more than 300 were injured.

Early the next morning, Mother and I took our bicycles to go to Limal and see what happened. On the outskirts of Limal the cemetery was plowed; skulls, bones, and pieces of caskets were all over. The road simply had disappeared; all the houses were gone. Mother looked at me in horror and said, "you go back home, I do not want you to see this." I refused and we progressed, very often having to carry our bicycles over bomb craters.

Uncle Ignace's street was nothing but rubble, yet miraculously, at the very end of the street three houses were still standing. Their roofs were damaged, they had no windows left; one of them was Aunt Marthe's home. We found them scared, but alive and well. They had taken refuge in their cellar all through the ordeal. One woman in Limal was asleep when the bombs fell. Her house was leveled and she found herself screaming on the roof of another damaged house. The last bombs fell only 400 yards from our house.

After such a disaster, the Allied high command decided that Belgium would never be bombed at night again; therefore the Americans, who did all their bombings in the daylight, would be responsible for all bombings of Belgium bridges, railroads and airfields. So one day, my wife-to-be, Jeanne Guillemine Moncheur de Rieudotte, and her sister Marguerite, decided to go and see their oldest sister Françoise, who lived with her husband Roger de Kerchove d'Exaerde in Wierde. Both Marguerite and Jeanne were in the tramway, which at that time was on an overpass over the main railroad from Brussels to Luxembourg, which is located near the Namur Railroad Station.

At that particular time the American B17 Fortress four-engine heavy bombers were approaching with the intent to bomb the railroad station of Namur. Jeanne and Marguerite were extremely lucky; the inexperienced young bomber pilots knew that in the town of Namur two rivers come together—the Sambre joins the Meuse—and they knew that the railroad station was located between the Sambre and Meuse, which were very wide rivers. However, from the air they never aimed for the railroad yard but dropped the bombs on the other side of the Sambre.

For clarification, think of the two rivers forming a "y", the lower portion of the "y" heading South, the left leg heading Northwest and the third leg heading Northeast. The railroad station is located between the two upper legs, however the US bombers dropped their bombs in the area West of the town. The railroad station (°) did not have a scratch , however the bombs (*) fell on the heavily populated area, killing

hundreds of people. Jeanne, perched on the overpass, saw the whole thing happen and could not believe her eyes.

This made a great deal of noise in Belgium, and the Allies decided that never again would they have a heavy bombing using B24 or B17 over Belgium. These bombings were much too destructive and were reserved for the Krauts in Germany. I say it could not have happened to nicer people. You should have seen the destruction we caused to Cologne, Dresden, Bremen, Munich, Stuttgart, and other big cities. It was beautiful.

From then on any bombing in Belgium was done by small flights, usually four or eight planes, consisting of B26 Mitchells or P38 Lightnings. These planes came extremely low, hugging the ground. The German ack-ack had no way to shoot them down. Their aim was very accurate and the bombings were always very successful.

P47 Thunderbolts were also used to bomb German convoys. These huge radial engine equipped planes were very powerful and had good machine guns, so they not only bombed but they also strafed the German columns. It was P47 Thunderbolts who attacked the German column in front of our property on September 3, 1944, and pulverized the Wehrmacht soldiers.

In the Spring of 1944, four – twin engine, twin boom P38 Lightning, a single seat fighter/bomber, attacked the railroad station of Ottignies. The planes flew right over our house at treetop level, and passed right over our heads in the field in front of the house. Peter, Myriam, Anne, and I were pedaling our bicycles heading for Limal when we heard and saw the US planes. I told my brother and sisters to drop down and hug the ground. It was a beautifully sunny day, you could see miles away. We knew where the planes were heading.

As we were on our bellies in the field, all of a sudden I heard Peter shout, "Christian, my bicycle is in the sun!" You have to understand that a bicycle was very precious—it was our only means of communication. Mother had literally brain washed us—we had to keep an eye on our bicycle at all times, we had to bring it in the house to make sure it would not be stolen, and you never, never left your bicycle unattended in the sun, because the sun rays dried the synthetic rubber of the tires. The tires would crack and explode; tires were just about impossible to purchase. So poor Peter, who was only nine years old at the time. When I urged him to hug the ground for fear of being a target, all of sudden he saw his bicycle unattended a few feet away, and the bicycle was in the sun, which according to what he had been told for as long as he could remember, was a No No!

These are the humorous moments we went through during our scary times.

World War II – 1940 to 1945 - Belgium

(Stories gleaned in Belgium)

Why we were often very scared; death was always on our minds.

The Waffen-Schutzstaffel (Waffen SS) such as Joachim Peiper, Major Gustav Knittel, and the Führer Begleit Brigade. These units were formed by taking common

criminals out of jail to create Hitler's special guard, or escort Brigades. These people enjoyed torturing and killing. Examples:

1. On December 17, 1944 Privates Roy Anderson and Samuel Dobyns were driving their ambulance and a round from a German tank set it on fire.
2. On December 17 at the junction of the road going to Ligneuville and Stavelot, American soldiers emerged from the ditches, their hands in the air. The Germans herded them together in small groups, the Germans took their rings, watches, gloves, etc. A German SS with a pistol went down the line of men, putting the barrel first to one man's forehead, then another.

The Germans forced all the prisoners into the field near Mrs. Bodarwé's house. She observed the carnage in horror. There were approximately 130 men from Battery B, MPs, medics from the 26th Infantry Division, and others. The Germans forced the men tightly together only six feet from the highway. The GIs had their hands over their heads, their hands grew numb from the cold.

The SS Major Werner Poetschke, who was commander of the 1st SS Panzer Battalion, stopped two Mark IV tanks and ordered them to open fire on the prisoners. Private First Class James P. Mattera and an a medical officer Lt. Carl R. Guenther were killed. Then a German shouted, "Machen alle kaputt!" (Kill them all!) and machine guns from both tanks opened fire.

Those who survived the first fusillade fell to the ground, burying their faces in the mud and trying to hide under dead bodies. There were screams, groans, cries—the machine guns continued to fire for fifteen minutes. SS passing on the highway two full hours later amused themselves by firing at the American bodies. The survivors did not dare move. Much later German SS came back, they were engineers of the 3rd SS Pionier Company. They came into the field to finish off anybody who might have survived.

One German allowed a medic to help one of the wounded GI, then shot them both. Another medic named Dobyns tried to run but got shot down by a machine gun. Men were trying to contain their breathing to prevent vapor from showing in the freezing weather. Germans systematically kicked them in the head or the groin. They would shoot the body in the foot or leg to see if they would react; if they did, the SS would shoot the American in the head. The Germans were laughing and talking to one another and enjoying their murderous game.

Sergeant Ahrens, Corporals Sciranko and Valenzi survived. They were critically injured but managed to escape and were found by the U.S. Colonel Pergrin and Sergeant Crickenberger found the three injured GIs and took them by jeep to Malmedy.

Others who survived were Medics Anderson and Dobyns, Corporal Paluck and the MP Homer Ford, also Corporal Schmitt. General Hodges immediately ordered his inspector general to begin an investigation. Master Sergeant Bart Zanarini of Ft Myers, Florida was one of the first to investigate.

I will show you the numerous letters I received from Mr. Bart Zanarini telling me some of the awful facts he discovered. He found 72 bodies in the field in Baugnez,

Belgium and another 14 behind Mrs. Bodarwé's house. She was taken away by the Germans and her body has never been found.

Other atrocities were perpetuated by the Germans all over the Belgian Ardennes. I could spend a whole hour talking about the murderous rampages of the Nazi troops. In the village of Honsfeld, eight sleepy GI prisoners were mowed down by the SS. In another area, five American soldiers with a white flag were killed and run over by a German tank. In another place, four GIs with a big white flag were all killed.

Early on December 18, 1944 on the outskirts of Stavelot, the SS of Kampfgruppe (Colonel) Peiper pulled Madame Régine Grégoire and her two children out of their cellar. They also pulled out from the same cellar 23 other women and children, including two old men. These civilians ranged in age from four years old to 68 years old. The Germans forced the whole 23 of them to come in the garden, made them kneel down along the hedge and then with rifles and pistols shot all of them. This is only one example amongst many, which were part of an orgy of killing in Stavelot, Trois-Ponts, Ster, Parfoudruy, and Renardmont.

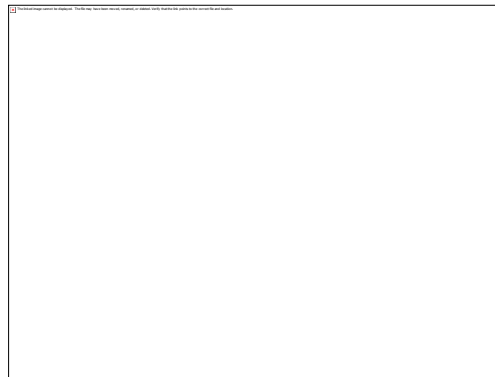
In one of these small villages they took twelve civilians, put them in a house and set fire to the house. As the people tried to escape through the windows the Germans would shoot them. In Parfoudruy there were less than one hundred people living in this very small hamlet. The Germans murdered 26 of them.

August 21, 2006 - 11 forgotten soldiers honored - Memorial recognizes black men

WINCHENDON— Although it took 62 years, America finally stepped forward yesterday in an attempt to right the wrong committed in 1944 when it ignored the service of 11 black men who were killed during the Battle of the Bulge.

The men, who were part of the 81,000 Americans who fought in the Ardennes region of eastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg, were honored with the placement of two memorials at the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery on Glenallen Street.

While the first memorial stands for all those who served in the battle, the second one was placed to specifically honor the men who were captured and then murdered by the Nazi SS in Wereth, Belgium, on Dec. 17, 1944.



The people of Belgium are still grateful for what the

Americans did.



Brig. Gen. Dany Van de Ven,
OF THE BELGIUM EMBASSY

This second monument is the first known American public recognition of the massacre.

The facts surrounding the deaths of these soldiers were kept under wraps by the U.S. government until a few years ago, according to historian [Christian W. de Marcken](#), a Paxton resident.

"Until the Freedom of Information Act made the facts public, nobody really knew about it," Mr. de Marcken said, adding that in the hundreds of books written on the war, he has not found one published account of the events that took place that day.

According to de Marcken, the 11 soldiers from the [333rd Field Artillery Battalion](#) were trying to escape capture when they were found hiding in the house of a farmer who had taken them in and fed them.

The SS soldiers tortured the men and killed them in a nearby pasture. Their bodies were left in the snow, unclaimed for months.

The reason their deaths were ignored was because of the color of their skin, Mr. de Marcken said.

Yesterday's ceremony finally provided the recognition the soldiers deserved as well as an opportunity for closure for family members, some of whom were in attendance.

Elsie Pritchett, daughter of slain soldier William Pritchett, attended the ceremony with her uncle, McArthur Pritchett, and her children Zena, Quinton, Montrise and Jasmine Williams.

"This day has been a long time in coming," she said, adding that she had mixed feelings about the memorial ceremony.

Because of the war, Ms. Pritchett said, she grew up never knowing her father. Born in 1943, Ms. Pritchett said that her father only saw her once, when he was on furlough in 1944.

"He never got to come back home again," she said. "He was only about 21 or 22 when he died."

Ms. Pritchett and her uncle together unveiled the memorial honoring her father.

[Stanley A. Wojtusik](#), [106th Infantry Division](#), and [national president of the Veterans of Battle of the Bulge](#), spoke of the hardship all the soldiers suffered in battle. Fear, hunger, death and cold were only some of the daily realities these heroes faced, he said.

"I call them heroes because they kept fighting when all seemed lost," Mr. Wojtusik said.

"The circumstances are what made their actions so heroic," agreed John E. McAuliffe, president of the Central Massachusetts Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge.

Made of granite, the two monuments are the first to be placed on the monument path, which was completed just last week. While monuments can't change the events of time, event organizers agree that it does bring recognition and dignity to those who served.

Brig. Gen. Dany Van de Ven, defense attaché of the Belgium Embassy, traveled from Washington, D.C., to speak at the ceremony, stated that when he was asked to attend, his response was that when it comes to doing what can be done to help the Americans, the word impossible does not exist for Belgians.

"The people of Belgium are still grateful for what the Americans did," Mr. Van de Ven said. "We are free because of them, we don't ever forget that."

Members of the 333rd Artillery Battalion who were killed in Wereth, Belgium, Dec. 17, 1944:

Staff Sgt. Thomas Forte, Cpl. Mager Bradley, technicians William Pritchett and James Stewart, Privates First Class George Davis, James Leatherwood, George Moten, Due Turner and Privates Curtis Adams, Robert Green and Nathaniel Moss.

Gail Stanton, Worcester Telegram (subscription) - Worcester, MA, USA



Page last revised
James D. West
www.IndianaMilitary.org