

## HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY, BURT MARSH!

### Battle of the Bulge Hero Celebrates a Century of Life and Legacy

ON APRIL 3, 2026, PNC CPL Burt R. Marsh celebrated his 100th birthday—a remarkable milestone honoring a life defined by service, resilience, and enduring legacy. Family, friends, and the extended 80th Division community join in recognizing not only this special day, but the extraordinary journey it represents.

Burt celebrated his birthday with the members of the Aloha Bridge club, where he has played since 2008 three days a week, and competes quarterly with his Friday partner for master points. Members filled the club for a festive birthday lunch before the bridge game. Known for his pleasant demeanor and love of the game, he is described as “a welcome presence at the club,” where he brightens every table he visits.

The celebration was continued with his family at the Scioto Downs Racino for a night of slots and dinner.

Born on April 3, 1926, in Seneca Falls, New York, Burt grew up on a farm during the Great Depression. While his family always had food, there was little else. At the age of ten, he lost his mother, and for several years lived at home with his father and twin brother. When he began high school—where he was active in sports—he moved in with his older sister. Evenings were often spent gathered around the radio, where he first heard news of the attack on Pearl Harbor at just fifteen years old. Like many, he assumed the war would be over by the time he came of age. He graduated from Mynderse Academy in 1943.

Drafted in 1944, Burt shipped overseas aboard the RMS Queen Elizabeth, departing January 10, 1945, and arriving in Liverpool four days later. From there, he traveled across England to Southampton, crossed the English Channel to La Havre, and continued by train to Luxembourg City before being transported by truck to Dahl, Luxembourg. On January 20, 1945, he joined the 80th Division as a replacement and was assigned to the 1st Platoon of M Company, 319th Infantry Regiment.

That same day marked his entry into combat during the Battle of the Bulge. In his first two battles, he served as an ammunition bearer before being advanced to first gunner on a .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun within three weeks—after the original gunner was killed and the second wounded twice. Burt stepped into the role without hesitation, embodying a willingness to serve wherever needed. In one intense moment, lacking a tripod, he braced the machine gun against a tree and fought alongside riflemen during a German attack.



He later described the Siegfried Line Campaign as the most difficult fighting he experienced, citing the formidable German pillboxes. From there, Company M advanced into central Germany and beyond. His unit also played a role in the liberation of Buchenwald concentration camp, though he noted they continued moving forward as combat operations persisted.

Burt was honorably discharged on June 27, 1946. On November 1, 1952, he married his sweetheart, Barbara (née Stahl), at the First Presbyterian Church in Seneca Falls. He went on to work as a customer service supervisor for New York State Electric and Gas in Hamburg. In 1957, at age 26, he moved to Ohio, where he and Barbara raised two daughters, Tammi Marsh and Tina Marsh Barton.

Today, his legacy continues through his granddaughters, Heather Nisbet and Lindsay Trombola. Barbara, his beloved wife, passed away in 2015.

A lifelong sports fan—especially of the Buffalo Bills—Burt has been honored by both the Columbus Blue Jackets and the Bills. He also threw out the ceremonial first pitch at a Cleveland Indians vs New York Yankees game July 3 2022. In his free time, he enjoys puzzles, card games, gardening, bridge, and sharing stories from his wartime experiences.

Those who know Burt describe him as “the most kind and giving man anyone has ever met.” He especially enjoys receiving mail—particularly when it includes a bit of candy.

As we celebrate Burt’s 100th birthday, we honor not only a century of life, but a legacy of courage, humility, and service that continues to inspire all who know him.



*Burt Marsh as a young soldier and celebrating his 100th birthday*



# Blue Ridge Service Magazine

To submit articles contact:  
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(through April 2026)

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Christine Guidry Law



### Greetings Readers,

AS I PRESENT the Spring/Summer 2026 issue of *Blue Ridge Magazine*, I am reminded once again that the story of the 80th Division is not confined to history books—it lives on through the people, families, and communities who continue to preserve its legacy.

This issue is especially meaningful as we celebrate the 100th birthday of Battle of the Bulge hero Burt Marsh. His remarkable life and service embody the courage, sacrifice, and enduring spirit that define the veterans of the 80th Division. I am honored to feature his story on this issue's cover and to recognize a century of leadership, resilience, and patriotism.

Throughout these pages, readers will find a rich collection of stories that connect generations through remembrance and discovery. Lee Anthony's historical feature, *A Tale of Two World Wars, Three Families, and The 80th Division*, offers a compelling look at how military service shaped families across decades. My own moving article, *Echoes of the 80th: The Child My Grandfather Liberated*, reminds us of the deep human impact left behind by the Division's actions during World War II.

This issue also highlights preservation efforts both at home and abroad. From the memorial dedication in Saint-Avoid honoring the men lost in the 1944 explosion, to Andy Adkins' reflections in *Standing on Sacred Ground* and updates to the Association website, we continue to see how remembrance evolves while remaining rooted in respect and gratitude.

In addition, I am pleased to include reunion information and registration materials for the upcoming gathering of the 80th Division Veterans Association. Reunions remain one of the most important ways I strengthen old friendships, welcome new members, and ensure the stories of the Division continue to be shared.

As always, I encourage readers to contribute stories, photographs, documents, and memories for future issues of *Blue Ridge*. Every submission helps preserve the remarkable history of the 80th Division for future generations.

Thank you for your continued support of the Association and this publication. I hope you enjoy this issue and carry forward the legacy of the Blue Ridge Division with pride.

With respect and dedication, Christine Guidry Law  
Chief Editor, *Blue Ridge Magazine*

## HOW TO SUBMIT STORIES

Are you a veteran or a family member of an 80th Division veteran? Are you currently serving in an attachment to the 80th Training Command (TASS)? Are you a historian with a connection or interest in the 80th Division during any wartime campaign?

Then you have a story to tell. Help keep our magazine alive—share your experiences, memories, and insights by submitting your story to: [blueridge.editor@gmail.com](mailto:blueridge.editor@gmail.com).

*We need your voice! Together, we'll keep history alive—one story at a time.*

**Next submission deadline: August 25, 2026**

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# COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Brian Faulconer, National Commander

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## *Hello, Blue Ridgers!*

AS THE DOGWOODS bloom and the season of renewal begins, we are reminded of the resilience that defines the 80th Infantry Division. Spring is officially here, and with it comes a fresh energy for our community.

## Strength of the Mountains

Our division has always been anchored by the slogan "Strength of the Mountains." Just as the Blue Ridge peaks stand unyielding against the elements, our legacy is built on an immovable foundation of courage and grit. That strength wasn't just found in the terrain they traversed; it was found in the character of the men who served. As we look toward the future, we lean on that same mountain-strong resolve to keep our history alive.

## The "Only Moves Forward" Legacy

From the battlefields of World War I to the present day, we live by the motto: "The 80th Only Moves Forward." First declared by MG Adelbert Cronkhite in 1918 after the division seized every one of its objectives, this motto is more than just words—it is the 80th DNA. It defines the drive to overcome obstacles and ensures that our story never retreats from the pages of history.

## A Centennial Celebration: Burt Marsh

We have a truly extraordinary reason to celebrate this season! One of our remaining World War II veterans and Past National Commanders, Burt Marsh, celebrated his 100th birthday this year. Burt's life and service embody the very spirit of the Blue Ridge, and we invite you all to come help us celebrate this incredible milestone at our 105th Reunion. Reaching a century is a testament to the "Strength of the Mountains," and we are honored to have him in our ranks. See Burt's story on page 1.

## A Warm Welcome to Our Growing Digital Community

We are thrilled to see our ranks growing in the digital space. However, this growth brings a unique challenge. While our digital presence is flourishing, our official Association membership has remained stagnant. We are now at a crossroads where we must rely on our digital community to take that next vital step: joining the Association as official members. The "likes" and "shares" keep us connected day-to-day, but it is the formal membership that provides the lifeblood for our archives and reunions. I invite you to join us in preserving the legacy of 80th and become an official member today! Find out membership application on page 19 or join online at [www.80thdivision.com](http://www.80thdivision.com).



## The Road to August: Our Biennial Reunion

The highlight of our calendar is fast approaching! As a reminder, our 80th Division Reunion is a special event held every other year. This biennial tradition makes our time together even more meaningful. This year's reunion will take place from August 5–9, 2026, at the SpringHill Suites in Chester, Virginia. See registration details on pages 4 and 5.

## A Legacy Remembered: A Personal Journey

The 80th is built on individual stories of courage, and this season, I'd like to share one close to my heart. For a long time, I reserved my father's story, holding back from putting it in a magazine until now.

Like many of us, I didn't truly understand the deep impact the war had on my father until I was an adult. It was then that I realized he was just a young boy facing the horrors of a truly terrible war. My path to this Association began when I was encouraged to join the membership after attending one of our reunions. It was there that I saw firsthand just how impactful these gatherings were to my father.

This journey eventually led our family across the ocean, where we retraced his steps until we found his exact foxhole. To give you a deeper look into this journey, this newsletter contains a full description written by my sister-in-law, Jeanne Faulconer. Jeanne is an accomplished author who penned this account shortly after our trip took place to capture the experience as it happened. See the full story on page 9.

## A Call to Action for the 80th Training Command

We also look to the 80th Training Command to continue its proud tradition of support. We encourage current members to join the Association and take an active role in preserving and strengthening our shared heritage. By bridging the gap between those in active service, our growing digital community, and the Association, we ensure that the story of the 80th truly "Only Moves Forward."

We look forward to seeing you there and continuing this proud tradition together. See Command (TASS) News on page 7.

## How to Join and Support

To make it easy for everyone to get involved, please check the back of this newsletter (page 19) for membership applications. You can also reach out to our contact people directly (listed on the directory page 19) if you have questions. Your support is the only way to sustain our mission.

The 80th Only Moves Forward!  
See you in August!

# CALL TO REUNION

Lindsay Marsh Trombetta, Sr. Vice Commander & Reunion Coordinator

**T**O ALL THOSE who plan on attending in person, as well as our 80th Division supporters joining us from afar,

It is my great honor to serve as organizer of the 105th Biennial Reunion of the 80th Division Veterans Association, a responsibility I have proudly undertaken on behalf of my grandfather. Preparing this gathering has been a privilege and it is my sincere hope that each of you finds enjoyment, connection, and reflection during this time together.

This reunion represents far more than a scheduled event. It is a longstanding tradition that brings together individuals from across the country to renew enduring friendships and to strengthen the bonds formed through shared history. Though our time together may be brief, its significance is lasting. Opportunities such as this remind us of the importance of coming together to reflect, to reconnect, and to create memories that will endure well beyond our time here. For those of us of a younger generation, these moments are especially meaningful, as they allow us to listen, to learn, and to carry forward the stories entrusted to us.

I would also like to extend our sincere acknowledgment to those who are unable to be with us in person. Your presence is felt in spirit, and your continued support and encouragement remain deeply appreciated. In many ways, the spirit and memory of those who came before us continue to live on through all of us.

These reflections bring us to this year's theme: Legacy.

Legacy is the enduring impact of service, sacrifice, and shared experience. It is not confined to history books or distant memory. It lives on in the stories we tell, the traditions we preserve, and the relationships we continue to build. Within this community, legacy is both inherited and created. Each of you, through your service, your presence, and your willingness to return year after year, contributes to something far greater than any one individual.

In the context of military service, legacy carries profound meaning. It is reflected in the courage of those who served, in the sacrifices made by their families, and in the lives of those who did not return home. The freedoms we enjoy today stand as a testament to that legacy, one built through dedication, resilience, and an unwavering sense of duty. It is a legacy that

calls upon us not only to remember, but to continue to honor it through our actions, our words, and our commitment to one another.

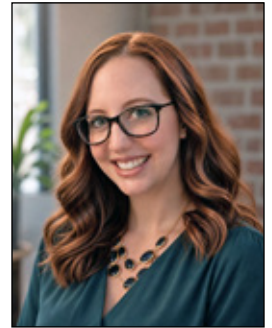
On a personal note, I wish to express my deepest appreciation for my grandfather, Burt. Over time, he has come to represent many things to many people: a mentor, a friend, and a source of joy and camaraderie. While I have always known him in these ways, it was only in later years that I began to fully understand the depth of his experiences and the significance of his service. Through the stories shared at gatherings like our upcoming reunion, I have come to see his journey more clearly, not as a collection of moments, but as part of a larger legacy. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to learn from him and to carry that understanding forward.

In many ways, that is what brings us all here today. Each of you is part of this legacy, not only as individuals who have served or supported, but as members of a community bound by respect, remembrance, and enduring connection. What we share here ensures that this legacy will continue, not only for us, but for those who will follow.

Thank you for your presence, for your contributions, and for your role in sustaining this remarkable tradition. It is a privilege to stand among you and to count you not only as members of this association, but as friends and extended family.

In closing, I extend my sincere thanks to each and every one of you. I encourage all who are able to attend to join us in reconnecting with fellow members and in preserving and strengthening the legacy we share.

See you at Reunion, Lindsay M. Trombetta



*Below left: The Marsh Family celebrates Burt's 100th birthday with a special dinner.*

*Below right: Burt Marsh (80th ID Bulge Veteran)*



# 80TH DIVISION VETERANS ASSOCIATION 105TH ANNUAL REUNION

## AUGUST 5 – 9, 2026



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← Use this QR code to book our rate (\$110) or call 804-777-9598 and mention our event.

**PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION AND RETURN BY JULY 2, 2026**

FIRST REUNION:     Yes     No

Name of Veteran or Attendee: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of Spouse or Guests: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Unit Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Handicap: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address if available: \_\_\_\_\_

REGISTRATION FEE: \_\_\_\_\_ x \$35 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

PRIZE TICKETS: (\$2 each or all 12 for \$20) \_\_\_\_\_ x \$2 per ticket = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

WEDNESDAY NIGHT WELCOME DINNER: Fried Chicken Dinner \_\_\_\_\_ x \$32 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

THURSDAY TRIP – Canal Cruise Boat Excursion and Arts District \_\_\_\_\_ x \$40 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

THURSDAY DINNER – Commander’s Reception \_\_\_\_\_ x \$40 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

FRIDAY TRIP – Virginia Holocaust Museum \_\_\_\_\_ x \$35 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

FRIDAY NIGHT VETERANS BUFFET \_\_\_\_\_ x \$45 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SATURDAY NIGHT DINNER: (Indicate choice for each person) \_\_\_\_\_ x \$50 per person = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ x Grilled Chicken Breast    \_\_\_\_\_ x Beef Tips    \_\_\_\_\_ x Vegetable Lasagna

Program Listing: (PRINT NAMES) \_\_\_\_\_ x \$5 per name = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

PROGRAM ADS: Check Desired Size. **NOTE: Ads Cost Reduced 25%!** = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

3.625” W x 1” H: \$10     3.625” W x 2” H: \$20     7.5” W x 2” H: \$30

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Additional Commemorative Reunion Programs: (mailed to address above) \_\_\_\_\_ x \$7.50 each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL ENCLOSED**    \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**REGISTERED ATTENDEES RECEIVE PROGRAM BOOK IN REUNION PACKET.**

*NOTE: ALL MEAL PRICES INCLUDE TAXES AND GRATUITIES.*

**Make Checks Payable to: Lindsay Trombetta OR Use the QR Code to pay via PayPal.**    →



**MAIL FORM & CHECK TO:**

80th Division Veterans Association • c/o Lindsay Trombetta • 1792 White Pond Rd. • Athol, MA 01331

# A TALE OF TWO WORLD WARS, THREE FAMILIES, AND THE 80TH DIVISION

by Dr. Lee Anthony, WWI Historian

RECENTLY, I WAS invited to visit a small but growing museum in eastern Montgomery County, Virginia. This museum is located in Shawsville, near Elliston. Both are east of Christiansburg and west of Roanoke. After a very friendly reception, I found a great variety of artifacts, many of which were related to the area.

The people of this area are understandably proud of the contributions made by their ancestors to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Many of the families are of Scottish-Irish and/or Welsh ancestry.

As I walked into one of the rooms which held some military artifacts, I noted a cardboard box lying on the floor. The box contained a recently received World War One gas mask and its storage bag. The veteran, of course, was long ago deceased, but he had written his family name—Ellis—and his unit identification.

My Barn Museum staff, Rosemary Brown and Frank Campbell, were able to track the wartime trail of Ellis' artillery unit throughout the War. Their further research led to a fascinating history of area families, and their contributions to the Commonwealth and to the Nation. Prominently among these forefathers were the Tyler family, which gave rise to governors and the U.S. presidency. It is interesting to note that President John Tyler was the only U.S. President whose coffin was not draped by a U.S. flag, but rather by the Flag of the Confederacy.

A number of these family members served in the 80th Division. Serving in WWI were: Pearl Tyler Ellis, who served as a nurse at Base Hospital #45 Toul, France, and retired as a Lt. Colonel; John Tyler Ellis, 2nd Lieutenant who was a member of Company F of the 305th Engineers, 80th Division; and Gardiner Tyler Ellis, 10th Balloon Company. In WWII, Lyon Alexander Ellis served in the 382nd Infantry Regiment, 96th Division.

Another Christiansburg/Montgomery County family were the Montagues. Major James Lewis Montague brilliantly led the 2nd battalion of the 319th Infantry Regiment of the 80th Division in WWI. Specific references to this unit and its Commanding Officer appear numerous times in Stultz's *History of the Eightieth Division A. E. F. in World War I: The Blue Ridge Division*.

Interestingly and sadly, Montague's son Willjohn served in the very same unit in WWII, and was Killed in Action east of Pont-a-Mousson.

Also serving in WWII in the same 2nd Battalion of the 319th Infantry Regiment, 80th Division was a Lieutenant Franklin Clarke Retchless of New York State. There were a father and son, Franklin Clarke Retchless Senior and Junior.

From WWI until WWII, Retchless Sr. was in the Motor Transport Corps, rising from Sergeant to Lieutenant. He did not serve overseas in WWII because of his age. However, Retchless Jr. did receive a commission and served on active duty overseas with the 2nd Battalion of the 319th, as did Billy Montague.

Retchless Jr. was a "Hard Charger," who performed aggressively, both as an individual and as a leader. He took a group of U.S. soldiers, parachuted two miles behind German lines, then

fought their way back to the U.S. lines. Retchless Jr. received the Purple Heart a total of four times. He went forward and personally rescued a wounded U.S. soldier under direct enemy fire. His exploits would fill a book if the details were known.



William Munford Sr.  
with the Ellis children



MAJ James Lewis  
Montague



Grave of SSG Willjohn "Billy"  
Grubbs Montague



SSG Willjohn "Billy"  
Grubbs Montague



LT Franklin Clarke  
Retchless Jr.

continued on page 7

# TASS NEWS: 80TH TRAINING COMMAND

## UPAR Training Workshop Conducted by TASS

OVER MARCH 19-22, 2026, LTC Tom Piernicky and MSG Crystal Harlow visited the Texas Army Reserve Center in Grand Prairie, TX. During this time, they engaged with Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) from the 94th, 100th, and 102nd Training Divisions and Unit Public Affairs Representatives (UPARs) from various divisions and Army Reserve Readiness Training Centers.

The 80th TC Public Affairs UPAR Training Workshop is designed to teach assigned unit UPARs how to capture photo and video content and how to facilitate Subject Matter Expert prep for media engagements or community relations events in the absence of a 46 series NCO or officer.

The 80th TC Public Affairs shop conducted a UPAR Training Workshop over two days to develop critical video and photography skills among appointed UPAR personnel at brigade and below echelons. Each 80th TC PAO and MSG Crystal Harlow taught at least one class to the students, leveraging their individual professional experiences to enhance learning through PowerPoint classes and practical exercises. The training was conducted in person, with no virtual attendance, to facilitate UPARs and PAOs putting faces to names and building a network so individuals can share experiences and coordinate. The result was that students felt confident taking proper photos and videos, writing AP-style captions, and understanding the purpose and process of sharing content captured at their schoolhouses' IOT. The goal is to help tell the 80th Training Command story at all levels.



## Chaplain Performs Brit Milah for Service Member's Family in South Korea

ON MARCH 20, CH (MAJ) Elisar Admon conducted a Brit Milah ceremony for the family of a Jewish service member stationed in South Korea, providing a meaningful connection to faith and tradition far from home. The ceremony, held in a synagogue setting, brought together the family and members of the military community to mark this important milestone.

A Brit Milah—the traditional Jewish circumcision ceremony performed on the eighth day of a baby boy's life—includes prayers and blessings for the child and parents, symbolizing the covenant between the Jewish people and God. For families serving overseas, access to such religious observances can be limited, making occasions like this especially significant.

CH (MAJ) Admon is one of only three mohels—rabbis specially trained and certified to perform circumcisions—currently serving in the U.S. military, all of whom are Army Reservists. His unique qualifications allow him to support Jewish service members and their families in deeply personal ways that extend beyond standard chaplain duties.

The ceremony was conducted for CW2 Wilson, a pilot, and his wife Alyse, celebrating the newest addition to their growing family alongside their twin daughters. Through prayer, tradition, and community, the event underscored the military's ongoing commitment to supporting the religious needs of its service members, no matter where they are stationed.

*Chaplain Admon feeding the baby after the Brit Milah ceremony.*



*SSG Kayla Lyon and CPT Nathaniel Patterson, 94th TD, film 80th TC UPAR students during a video exercise.*

## Historian's Report... continued from page 6

### Here is a list of his awards:

- World War II Victory Medal
- American Campaign Medal
- Presidential Unit Citation
- Legion of Merit
- Honorable Service Lapel Button
- Combat Infantryman Badge
- European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
- Bronze Star Medal with two Oak Leaf clusters (Three awards)
- Silver Star received 5 Feb 1945, near Wallendorf Germany

- And last but not least, he was awarded the Purple Heart four times, almost on a monthly basis: 25 Nov 1944, 27 Dec 1944, 11 Jan 1945, 15 Feb 1945.

He probably would have received the Congressional Medal of Honor if his superiors had requested that recognition. After the war, he was treated for head wounds and right leg injuries. He probably had PTSD to deal with as well. However, his records show that he lived the remainder of his life as a professional public figure. He was the sort of fighter which maintained the reputation of the 80th Division.

Thus, we are overawed at the stories of what others have done for this nation since its founding.

May we follow "God, Country, and Family."

# WWI UNIFORMS OF THE 305TH ENGINEERS

Recently added to the private collection of Lew Dominick, Fayetteville, Pennsylvania

## CPL Jacob Thomas Shaffer

**T**HIS UNIFORM GROUPING is attributed to CPL Jacob Thomas Shaffer, Serial No. 1838509.

CPL Shaffer was born in Red Bank Township, Armstrong County, Pennsylvania, in 1895 and was inducted into the U.S. Army on September 18, 1917, at Kittanning, Pennsylvania. He served with D Company, 305th Engineers, 80th Division until his discharge.

He departed Newport News, Virginia, aboard the *Huron*, destined for France. He later departed Brest, France, on May 22, 1919, aboard the *U.S.S. Troy* arriving in New York on June 3, 1919.

CPL Shaffer was honorably discharged on June 11, 1919, at Camp Dix, New Jersey. He passed away in 1992, in New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, at the age of 97.

## SGT Peter Henry Backstrom

**T**HIS UNIFORM GROUPING is attributed to SGT Peter Henry Backstrom, Serial No. 1837815.

SGT Backstrom was born in Collinsburg, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, in 1896, and was inducted into the U.S. Army on October 6, 1917, at Monessen, Pennsylvania. He served with A Company, 305th Engineers, 80th Division until his discharge.

He departed Newport News, Virginia, aboard the *Huron* destination France. He later departed Brest, France, on May 22, 1919, aboard the *U.S.S. Troy* arriving in New York on June 3, 1919.

SGT Backstrom was honorably discharged on June 11, 1919, at Camp Dix, New Jersey. He passed away in 1983 in Latrobe, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, at the age of 87.

## Helmets from Several Soldiers

**T**HE HELMETS SHOWN belonged to four soldiers on whom complete historical information is still being researched.

The first image is of a helmet and mess tin attributed to PVT Edward A. Bubel, Serial No. 2667321. PVT Bubel served with C Company, 305th Engineers, 80th Division.

The second image is of a helmet and dog tags attributed to CPL George Earnest Traxler, Serial No. 1838789. CPL Traxler served with E Company, 305th Engineers, 80th Division.

The third is a helmet and gas mask attributed to CPL John Joseph Beigle, Serial No. 1841892. CPL Beigle served as an Engineer with the Engineer Train, 305th Engineers, 80th Division.

The fourth is a helmet attributed to SGM Arthur Jacob Yost, Serial No. 1839256. SGM Yost served with D Company and HQ Detachment, 305th Engineers, 80th Division.



Above: Helmet belonging to SGM Arthur Jacob Yost

Left: Items belonging to CPL John Joseph Beigle



Uniform and items belonging to CPL Jacob Thomas Shaffer



Uniform and items belonging to SGT Peter Henry Backstrom



Items belonging to CPL George Earnest Traxler



Items belonging to PVT Edward A. Bubel

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# WORLD WAR, TOO

by Jeanne Potts Falconer ©2026

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FOR DECADES, MY father-in-law, Charles Falconer, did not talk about being wounded as one of the first Americans to cross the Our River between Luxembourg and Germany on February 7, 1945. [In the summer of 2024], fourteen Falconers went with him to Europe and found the curve in the river that has been in his mind's eye for sixty years.

More improbably, it's almost certain we found the very foxhole he dug, sheltered in, and fought from in the last hours before he crossed the river.

In 1945, my then-future father-in-law was an 18-year-old from a small Virginia train town who found himself on the very front lines of World War II's European action. The German offensive that resulted in the Battle of the Bulge into Europe had been pushed back during the last months of 1944, and in February, 1945, the Allies were poised to cross into Germany proper, where they would ultimately fight their way through heavily protected German positions at the border, on their way to Berlin and defeat of Hitler and the Nazis.

During the trip, Charles told us what he remembered. His foxhole, he said, was a rectangular hole dug long ways—with the long sides parallel to the river and the high ledge above the river—contrary to how he'd been instructed to dig it and contrary to the orientation of the other foxholes in the line. He described the bombed-out bridge and the bend in the flooded Our River in the village of Wallendorf below his position on a high Luxembourg Hill.

We toured The National Museum of Military History in Diekirch in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Roland Gaul, founder and curator of the museum, led us on a tour of WWII

sites in Germany and Luxembourg. And then he took a look at the Google Map Charles had with him.

"I think we can find this," he said.

The bus full of Falconers (many of whom might never have been born had things turned out differently) traveled through the hillsides of Luxembourg and Germany on narrower and narrower roads. We rolled to a stop beside a lush cow pasture that did not look much different from Virginia cow pastures. The printout of the Google Map was consulted. There was nodding, discussion. We picked our way across an electric fence and began making our way up the long grassy grade. About two thirds of the way across the steepening field, PawPaw turned around, breathing hard, and looked back at the village of Wallendorf.

Turning back toward the hill, he said, "This is it. My foxhole was right up there." He pointed further up.

We caught our breath and listened as he told us about the screaming mimis shrieking over head from the German side, landing somewhere amidst the Allied troops behind his foxhole. He pointed to where the German pillboxes and bunkers were down below, part of the heavily armed and fortified Siegfried Line at the German border.

He wasn't sure he wanted to go the rest of the way up, and that was fine, he said. He was basically seeing from here what he had seen when he was 18; he was understanding where he'd been that night without sleep or comfort. The steepest part of the hill was between us and the foxhole. It would be too hard to climb.

And then my brother-in-law Brian said, "Dad, you've come this far, thousands of miles. You can make it up that hill. We can make it up that hill."



*Far left: Charles Falconer's position (80th Infantry) in February 1945, Luxembourg from the Wallendorf, Germany side of Our River. His foxhole was just inside the main (top) tree line, just left of center in this photo.*



*Top left: Charles Falconer with his sons at the edge of his foxhole, along with historian and museum curator Roland Gaul (center).*

*Bottom left: Charles visits the place where he fought and was wounded during WWII.*

*continued on page 11*

# ECHOES OF THE 80TH: THE CHILD MY GRANDFATHER LIBERATED

by Christine Guidry Law

I HAD NO idea what I was walking into when I drove to Williamsport, Maryland, to meet Eliane “Lily” Ambrose. All I knew was that she had grown up in the French town of Toul—a place my grandfather once knew in a very different way. In September 1944, as a soldier in the 80th Infantry Division, 319th Regiment, Company I, he helped liberate that town.

That single thread of connection was enough to pull me forward.

What I found on the other end of that drive was not just history—it was memory, living and breathing, seated across from me.

## A Child's War

Lily (as she was known throughout her childhood) did not begin her story with soldiers or liberation. She began with hunger.

She described a childhood shaped by scarcity so profound that even bread—swept together from flour deliberately spilled on a bakery floor—was a gift. The Germans would watch everything so the baker would purposefully spill flour and at the end of the day, scrape it up to bake food for the poor. Hair and debris baked into it did not matter. It was food, and food meant survival.

Her grandmother, widowed after World War I, became the anchor of that survival. Resourceful in ways that feel almost unimaginable today, she cut open the toes of shoes when the children outgrew them, traded ration coupons for livestock, and turned whatever could be found—dandelions, wild carrots, scraps—into sustenance.

War, through Lily's eyes, was not strategy or movement on a map. It was powdered milk handed out at school after liberation to rebuild undernourished bodies. It was wooden shoes, patched clothing, and the constant, quiet calculation of how to make it through another day.

## The Sound of Sirens

As a child, Lily carried a responsibility no child should bear. Her mother was deaf, so Lily became her ears.

When the air raid sirens sounded, it was Lily who counted the signals—three, four, five—each number carrying a different meaning. It was Lily who signaled when to run. And when they ran, they ran together into shelters beneath churches or basements, joining crowds of women, children, and the elderly.

Down there, in the dim glow of candles, distinctions dissolved. Wealth, class, status—none of it mattered. Lice and fear did not discriminate. Days could pass underground, waiting, listening, hoping the world above still existed when they emerged.

For Lily, even danger carried a strange innocence. She admitted that as a child, death did not feel permanent. War was terrifying—but also, somehow, survivable in the way only a child can believe.

## Occupation and Contradiction

The German occupation was not a single story, but many. Some soldiers shouted and chased children away. Others, seeing a hungry girl, quietly offered bread.

Lily remembered both.

She watched the German soldiers wash in their helmets; she was curious and unafraid one moment, then running in terror the next. She remembered their songs echoing through the streets, their columns marching past her home.

War, in her telling, resisted simplicity. There was cruelty, yes—but also moments of unexpected humanity. For a child, those contradictions became part of the fabric of daily life.

## Liberation

Then, one day, everything changed.

The Americans came.

Lily remembered the movement before she understood its meaning—tanks rolling, trucks rumbling, her mother running toward the road despite falling and injuring herself in the rush to see them.

She remembered the soldiers not as liberators in the abstract, but as men who handed out gum, chocolate, and kindness. To her young mind, shaped by her first encounters, America itself seemed warm and generous—defined by the smiling faces leaning down from the trucks, offering treats and laughter.

She remembered sneaking onto American camps, trading tomatoes for discarded coffee grounds, and standing in line at mess halls for food she had never tasted before—meatballs, Hershey bars, things that felt almost magical after years of deprivation.



Lily (Eliane) as a young child in Toul.



Eliane “Lily” Ambrose shares her story with Christine Guidry Law (Blue Ridge Editor)

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## ECHOES OF THE 80TH... continued

Once, she and her siblings fell into a trench in the dark near an American post, screaming until GIs pulled them out and sent them home. Even that moment—frightening as it was—became part of the story of liberation, of a world slowly returning to something like life.

### A Soldier's Legacy

As Lily spoke, I found myself searching for my grandfather in her memories.

He had been there—in those streets, on those roads, among the soldiers she watched roll into Toul. He was part of the force that pushed forward, that helped turn occupation into freedom. And yet, hearing Lily, I realized how incomplete any single perspective is.

For him, Toul may have been a mission.

For her, it was home.

For him, liberation was movement.

For her, it was survival finally giving way to hope.

Decades later, when I stood in Toul myself—80 years after its liberation—I saw how deeply those stories endure. The town had not forgotten. There were exhibits, ceremonies, even a monument honoring the 80th Infantry Division. My grandfather's story had been preserved there, just as Lily had preserved hers.

### Only Moves Forward

The motto of the 80th Infantry Division is simple: Only Moves Forward.

Sitting across from Lily, I understood that motto in a new way.

It is easy to apply those words to soldiers advancing across Europe. It is harder—and perhaps more meaningful—to see them in the life of a child who endured occupation, hunger, fear, and loss, and still chose to build a future.

## WORLD WAR, TOO... continued

And so Brian, my husband Rick, and my other brother-in-law Charlie began shepherding their 80-something-year-old mom and dad up the steep hill. They somehow got them and the rest of us through a barbed wire fence—a strand to go over and a strand to go under at one of the most difficult parts of the hill, which at this point, was more like a cliff. Tree roots, rocks, a bit of erosion—all easily obscured from view by the line of woods if you're standing along the roadside below. One son occasionally pulling, one son supporting, one son sometimes pushing each of their amazingly agile and definitely determined parents up the last yards of ground and onto the wooded plateau at the peak of the hill.

And there it was. A sixty-year-old depression in the ground—not dug regulation, but dug longwise, parallel to the river below.

Something he'd not talked about but never shook. He was standing right there. We—his wife, sons, their wives, grandchildren—were standing there with him.

"About two o'clock in the morning, they moved us from here. We went around the edge of the town. The river was so flooded we had trouble crossing, but we went across in wooden boats into the edge of Wallendorf, Germany. I got hit. When I came to, I threw my gun and my ammo away from where I was lying, like they told us to. One of the times I came to, I thought I was a pris-

*Eliane's book about her life as a child of war, Lily's Saga (available on Amazon).*



Lily eventually came to America with little more than a suitcase and determination. She built a life, raised a family, and told her story—not just as history, but as testimony.

Her journey, like my grandfather's, moved forward.

### Full Circle

When I began that drive to Williamsport, I thought I was going to meet a woman connected to my grandfather's past.

What I found instead was a living bridge between two sides of the same story.

The soldier and the child.

The liberator and the liberated.

History often feels distant, reduced to dates and divisions. But in that room, it became something else entirely—personal, human, and deeply intertwined.

I went looking for answers about my grandfather.

I left understanding something far greater: that the true legacy of service is not just what is fought for, but who is still here to tell the story.

### For More Information

To listen to and/or view the interview in its entirety, see *The Poppy Files Podcast* with Christine Guidry Law coming soon to YouTube, Spotify, and Apple in May 2026.

oner; the people carrying me were all speaking German."

It turned out the people carrying him were German prisoners of war carrying wounded American servicemen to relative safety, under American orders.

We took our time picking and sliding our way back down the hill and made an easy crossing over the Our River into Wallendorf, Germany, where we examined the remains of those German pillboxes and bunkers.

This gave us some small insight about being part of the army that was up against the machine guns and determined German soldiers in these positions.

And then, young Nick, who worked out this summer back in Virginia with a professional soccer player who's from Germany, got out his backpack size soccer ball. There, on the bridge over the Our River, he kicked his ball around, in the spot his grandfather remembered seeing from the hill above, when he was only five years older than his youngest grandson. He was under fire and only a few hours from being wounded, possibly by someone quartered in the bunker we were now examining with our flashlights and cameras.

Roland Gaul said of the battles that took place along the snowy Our River, "Today it's so green and peaceful. Then it was white and hell."

# 80TH DIVISION VETERANS ASSOCIATION – WEBSITE UPDATES

by Andy Adkins, WWII Historian and Webmaster

SEVERAL PEOPLE HAVE asked during meetings, conferences, and emails how the 80th Division Veterans Association website began. It's been quite a journey and yes, I'm still on it and adding it to the site.

My father, Captain A. Z. Adkins, Jr., served with the 317th Infantry, Company H, as a Heavy Weapons (mortar) platoon leader. He kept a journal, which I was fortunate to research and write a book, *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This*, which was published in October 2005. Unfortunately, my dad died in 1989 from cancer and never saw the finished book. Though I did take the first copy out to him (and my mom) at the cemetery.

I'd attended several 80th reunions and met with many of the soldiers my dad had fought with. During one of these reunions, I learned that the historian had a microfiche cabinet of Morning Reports... from July 1944 through May 1945... for every unit in the division.

At the time, I was working at the University of Florida College of Law (I created the Legal Technology Institute and was the IT Director), so I had access to a microfiche reader. I asked the 80th Division leadership if I could digitize the Morning Reports and put them online.

It took about three years, but that's how it started. I also began finding other reports: After-Action Reports, Unit Histories, Operational Reports, and a ton of Miscellaneous Reports. It didn't end.

But you get the picture. That was more than 20 years ago. I still receive information, reports, photographs, and oral histories. If it's 80th-related, I want it and I'll get it online.

Someone asked how much information is online. I honestly can't tell you, but I do know I quit counting when I hit 200,000 pages.

## Morning Reports

In the last issue of the Blue Ridge magazine, I reported uploading 80th Infantry Morning Reports before the division left to join the war in July 1944. These included the morning reports of July 15th, 1944, at which time the 80th Division was reestablished at Camp Forrest, Tennessee. If you have time, it's worth reading how the various units within the 80th came together in those first few days. Note that these Morning Reports are in the old WWI format and handwritten, but very readable.

The National Archives has yet to digitize the Morning Reports for the entire war; for most units, the National Archives "catalog" ends December 1944. Thank goodness, one of the earlier 80th historians had all the Morning Reports (July 1944 through May 1945) in microfiche format. That's why we have one of the most extensive collections online.

Still, when I come across additional reports or reports in "better shape," you're darn-tootin' I'm going to download them from the Archives, clean them up on my end, then upload to the 80th site.

For those of you who have had to use a magnifying glass for the November 1944 Morning Reports (me included), I "found" cleaner copies on the Archives site; they are now uploaded to the website. And, for the most part, much cleaner than the original ones.

## Photo Collections

SFC Kenneth Norman (Ret) served with the 80th Division in Iraq as a Mitt team member, 2005-2006. He is also one of our historians and an avid collector of everything 80th. We have several photo collections on the site, provided by Ken. These include the following:

- Photos from Tec5 Donald E. Levan (PA) of the 319th Infantry, Medical Detachment (WWII).
- Photos from SGT Leonard P. Maslowski (PA) of the 319th Infantry, Company A.
- Photos from Benjamin Freedlander, grandson of SSG Morris Freedlander, 317th Infantry, Company B.
- Miscellaneous photos from World War I and World War II.

## Miscellaneous Items

I received several older Blue Ridge Service magazines. After scanning & digitizing, they are now available online in PDF format:

- 1968 80th Infantry Division Reunion Edition (Cincinnati, Ohio)
- 1968 80th Infantry Division Spring Edition
- 1967 80th Infantry Division Autumn Edition
- 1966 80th Infantry Division Reunion Edition (Cleveland, Ohio)
- 1957 80th Infantry Division Autumn Edition

## Army Abbreviation Guide

Jennifer Holik from the WWII Research & Writing Center put together this comprehensive list of abbreviations commonly used during WWII.



## We Want You!

...to help research and write the stories of all 421,000+ World War II fallen American service members.

**The Stories Behind the Stars** project currently has nearly 1,000 volunteers, from all 50 states and more than a dozen countries, but to accomplish this ambitious goal, we need many more volunteers.

**The Stories Behind the Stars** project was created to organize a central digital location to collect the stories of all of the WWII American service members represented by the Gold Stars. These stories are being digitally linked to war memorials and cemeteries so that visitors to a fallen's grave site or memorial can read his or her story on their smartphone.

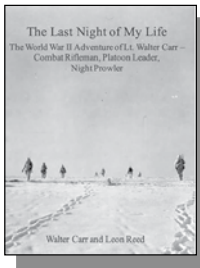


★  
**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:**  
[www.storiesbehindthestars.org](http://www.storiesbehindthestars.org)  
or scan the QR code right.



# BLUE RIDGE BOOK REVIEWS

by Andy Adkins, WWII Historian



## **The Last Night of My Life: The World War II Adventure of Lt. Walter Carr, Combat Rifleman, Platoon Leader, Night Prowler**

by Walter Carr & Leon Reed

Captain Walter Carr served with the 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th Division during World War II. In January 2023, a friend of Captain Carr's family posted on the 80th Division Veterans Association Facebook page, "We have a box of WWII stuff."

Leon Reed, who had just published Bob Burrow's memoir *With Patton's Army in World War II: Stories of a Young GI*, checked into the message. There had been some attempt at writing a book based on the materials, but it was far from finished, and the family friend was looking for someone to complete the book.

Leon will be the first to tell you that when the box arrived, he took a deep breath, not knowing what to expect—perhaps a few scraps of handwritten notes along with some photographs. But he was overjoyed not only with the prospect of writing about one of the most beloved commanders in the 80th Division, but with so many "high octane accounts" he'd never read.

Like most books, it takes time to research, write, and publish. It was worth the wait. Leon's finished product is one of the gut-wrenching accounts I've read. As Leon so well states, "no fluff, no USO shows or dances, no furloughs in Paris. Just grinding action: foxholes and K-rations."

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## **Too Many Memories: The Recollections of an Infantryman Who Served Under General Patton from Normandy to Austria**

by James O. Smith & Charles M. Smith

James O. Smith was an infantryman serving with Company D, 319th Infantry Regiment during World War II. He was also a prolific writer who penned dozens of letters during his time overseas. He kept notes of his time in service, but stayed away from the worst aspects of war, except to mention someone who was killed or wounded.

James' nephew, Charles Smith, wanted to see his Uncle James' memoirs published, deserving more than just a quick glance. Based on his uncle's memoirs, letters, and photographs, Charles began the long journey of researching, writing, and finally publishing his book. Much of the information he garnered came from the online Morning Reports, After-Action Reports, and other Miscellaneous Reports.

But Charles did not rely solely on the reports or letters. His writing style of combining the letters, intertwined with his uncle's stories and the action of the 319th, provides the reader with a first-hand look at what an infantryman in a frontline battalion Heavy Weapons company does.

It's not easy reading, as with most realistic memoirs, but it is well-researched and well-written. My own father served in a Heavy Weapons Company (317th/Co H), so I was familiar with

the unit's actions and movements. Another "must-read" for your 80th Infantry Division bookshelf.



## **The Valiant Die Once**

by Colonel James H. Hayes

Col. James Hayes was assigned to the 80th Division at Camp Forrest, Tennessee in September 1942. Originally a platoon leader in 317th/Co G, he assumed command of Company G in December of that year. He was later assigned as the 317th Regimental S-2 (Intelligence) and promoted to Major in March 1944.

Col. Hayes assumed command of the 2d Battalion, 317th Infantry in September, 1944 and commanded it during the fighting in and around the Pont-à-Mousson/Metz area. He became the 317th S-3 (Operations) during the Battle of the Bulge and subsequent fighting leading to the victory in Europe. He stayed in the Army after the war and retired as a Colonel with 27 years of military service. Col. Hayes was also a veteran of the Korean War.

Hayes wrote *The Valiant Die Once* as a memoir. We are fortunate enough to have "The War Years" portion of his memoir on the website, free to download in PDF format. The book is well written with a "no-holds-barred" approach. Col. Hayes tells it like it is from a front-line battalion commander. While not everyone agreed with his decisions, they were made with thought and insight from his commanders. If you're a WWII historian, specifically researching the 80th Infantry Division, this is a must-have for your bookshelf.



## **Stories of the Men of the 80th Infantry Division World War II**

by Robert T. Murrell

Bob Murrell served with Company M (Heavy Weapons) in the 318th Infantry Regiment during World War II. He was a machine gunner. A former National Secretary of the 80th DVA, he wrote six books about the 80th. Three were Regimental Histories

(317, 318, & 319); one was the 80th Operational History; and two were stories from men who served during the war. All are available from our website.

*Stories of the Men of the 80th Infantry Division World War II* provides a first-hand look at what it was like on the front lines. These 40 individual stories capture the action, the emotions, and the scars that war leaves on men who survived and came home to make a life for themselves and their families.

In Bob's own words, "For many years, I remained silent on my experiences while with the 80th Infantry Division, a division that made a name for itself in both World War I and World War II. After a conversation with my daughter Gayle, and of my telling how others were remaining silent on where they fought and what they did, I was told, 'Dad, you are one of them. How many times did I ask you what you did, only to be told, I don't want to talk about it?'"

"In 1973, while attending an 80th Division Veterans Association Reunion at Columbus, Ohio and listening to others tell of their experiences and not knowing where I had fought, I became interested in where I had been and began to accumulate the history of the 80th Division during World War II. It is now my desire to have these men tell their experiences in their own words, and what they witnessed before it is too late."

# HONORING THE MEN OF THE 80TH

## Saint-Avoid Installs Memorial at Site of 1944 Explosion

by Simon Petitot, European Correspondent

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2025, the City of Saint-Avoid commemorated the 81st anniversary of its liberation by the infantrymen of the 80th Infantry Division. On this occasion, a solemn tribute was paid to the twenty-two American soldiers who were tragically killed on December 4, 1944, in the explosion of the building they were occupying.

When the “Blue Ridge Men” entered the town on November 27, 1944, they encountered no resistance. German troops had withdrawn, abandoning Saint-Avoid without a fight. But behind this apparent ease lay a hidden threat: several buildings had been rigged with time bombs.

Very quickly, suspicion spread among the American soldiers. The danger was all the greater as the headquarters of General Horace L. McBride was to be established in the town.

Each day, teams inspected buildings. Two bombs, loaded with 90 and 272 kilograms of explosives, were discovered and neutralized by men of the 305th Engineer Combat Battalion and the 1117th Engineer Combat Group. Both were set to detonate on December 4, 1944.

On that same day, at around 11 p.m., a violent explosion occurred at the De Brack barracks, located in the northern part of the town, inside a building occupied by the command post of the 633rd Anti-Aircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons) Battalion, attached to the 80th Infantry Division. A carefully concealed time bomb had escaped detection.

The explosion was devastating: nineteen soldiers from the anti-aircraft battalion, including four officers, lost their lives. Three other soldiers from the 299th Ordnance Maintenance Company, who were staying there for the night, were also killed. Twenty-three men were wounded, some buried under the rubble for several hours before being rescued by soldiers of the 305th Engineer Combat Battalion and the 167th Engineer Combat Battalion.

This year’s commemoration ceremony included the installation of a new memorial plaque at the very site of the explosion, honoring the twenty-two men of the 80th Infantry Division who lost their lives on that tragic night. More than eight decades later, their sacrifice continues to resonate, reminding us that even in moments of liberation, danger and loss were never far behind. The plaque stands not only as a tribute to their memory, but also as a lasting symbol of vigilance, gratitude, and the enduring cost of freedom.



*Destroyed De Brack barracks on December 4, 1944*



*De Brack barracks, December 1944. Men search rubble for survivors.*



*New Commemoration Plaque dedicated to the men of the 80th Infantry Division tragically killed December 4, 1944.*

# STANDING ON SACRED GROUND

by Andy Adkins

**M**ANY OF US had fathers, grandfathers, and uncles who fought with the 80th Division in World War II. Like you, I can't imagine what they experienced during those 270(ish) days of the war.

For Christmas 1984, my dad, A. Z. Adkins, Jr. gave me and my sister a 200-page, 3-ring binder notebook titled, "A World War II Diary." Like many in his generation, he rarely talked about the war. Growing up, we knew he'd fought with the 80th Division, but no real details... just a few humorous stories that seemed to embellish each time he retold them.

Here we were, holding a memoir that recounted his tumultuous time as a mortar platoon officer with Company H, 317th Infantry Regiment.

A few years after my dad died in 1988, I began work to publish his memoir. *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This: Combat with the 80th 'Blue Ridge' Division in World War II Europe* was published in 2005 by Casemate Publishers.

I've been active in the 80th Division Veterans Association for many years and built—and continue to update—the website, [www.80thdivision.com](http://www.80thdivision.com). It's not just a hobby. It's a passion.

As I write this article, my wife and I are in Germany on a Rhine River cruise. We spent a few days in Nuremberg prior to boarding the ship. And yes, we visited a several WWII historical sites, including Hitler's parade grounds and Courtroom 600, the site of the Nuremberg trials.

I wasn't really intending to cover the same ground as my dad—his unit spent six days in Nuremberg during the latter part

of April 1945. But as we were walking through the plaza next to the Saint Lorenz church, I recognized the site from one of my dad's original photos.

Back when I wrote the WWII book, I had scanned photos from his WWII album (you know those small 2" x 4" black & white shots) and uploaded them to the cloud.

I pulled it up on my phone and sure enough, I was standing in basically the same location my dad had stood 81 years earlier. I took the shot with my phone, not knowing how close I was.

When I compared the two, side by side, I realized I was in almost the exact same spot.

I'll be honest, a few tears streamed down my cheek. I choked up when I told my wife, Becky, "My dad was here."

She understood. Her father served with the 82nd Airborne and jumped in on D-Day. And we've also been to Normandy. So, yes, she knew the emotions I was experiencing at that moment.

Of course, there were several additions since April 1945, like the rebuilt plaza and the Five Guys restaurant and much less rubble, but it wasn't hard to imagine.

On top of all that, my dad had been part of the Buchenwald liberation a couple of weeks before that. And a week later, the end of the war.

I can tell you from an 80th Division soldier's son, these journeys and the experiences I've had continuously remind me of what these courageous men went through.

We must never forget.



Photo taken by A.Z. Adkins Jr. in 1945 during WWII.



Photo taken by Andy Adkins, May 2026

# KEEPING LORRAINE'S MEMORY ALIVE

## Inside the Work of Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine

IN EASTERN FRANCE, where the scars of the Second World War still echo through villages and family histories, one local association is ensuring those stories are not forgotten.

Founded in 2018, Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine has become one of the region's most active historical memory organizations, combining preservation, exhibitions, reenactments, and education to reconnect modern audiences with the realities of wartime Lorraine.

Led by historian and collector Anthony Guerin, the association recently organized an ambitious exhibition titled “*Résister*

*pour renaître*” (“Resist to Be Reborn”) at the Ferme du Charmois in Vandœuvre-lès-Nancy. Timed with the 80th anniversary of the liberation of France and the defeat of Nazi Germany, the exhibition focused on the liberation of Nancy and the surrounding region by American forces in 1944.

Particular attention was given to the U.S. 80th Infantry Division, the 35th Infantry Division, and the 4th Armored Division—formations whose sacrifices played a decisive role in freeing Lorraine from German occupation.

*All photos courtesy of Guillaume Jolivet*

*Right: The “Résister pour renaître” exhibition recreated scenes from wartime Lorraine using authentic uniforms, artifacts, and immersive displays focused on the liberation of the region in 1944.*



*Left: A restored American officer's uniform displayed before a captured Nazi banner symbolizes the liberation of Lorraine by Allied forces in 1944.*

### A Museum Experience Built by Passion

What makes the association remarkable is that these are not institutional museum displays assembled behind closed doors. Nearly every object in the exhibition has been researched, restored, and curated by volunteers and collectors passionate about preserving local history.

Visitors encountered immersive wartime scenes featuring American field camps, medical stations, communications equipment, archival photographs, and original uniforms arranged among personal stories from the liberation of Lorraine.

One of the exhibition's most striking centerpieces featured Allied uniforms displayed before a captured Nazi banner—a dramatic visual reminder of both occupation and liberation.

The displays included:

- Original American and German uniforms
- Battlefield relics recovered in Lorraine
- Medical and communications equipment
- Archival photographs from the liberation of Nancy
- Personal artifacts connected to individual soldiers

### Personal Stories Behind the Artifacts

The exhibition emphasized the human stories behind the objects. One exhibit highlighted Sheldon Dewitt Walpole of the U.S. 80th Infantry Division, killed near Blénod-lès-Pont-à-Mousson in September 1944. His memorial display included photographs, military details, and his original identification tag.

Rather than presenting anonymous military relics, Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine ties artifacts directly to the men who carried them. A uniform becomes the story of a young soldier. A dog tag becomes the memory of a fallen serviceman.

That approach transforms remembrance into education.

*An exhibit dedicated to Sheldon Dewitt Walpole of the U.S. 80th Infantry Division tells the story of the American soldier killed during the Lorraine Campaign in September 1944.*



*continued on page 17*

## KEEPING MEMORY ALIVE... continued

### Preserving Local Memory Before It Disappears

The association's mission extends far beyond exhibitions. Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine participates in commemorative ceremonies throughout the region, often appearing in authentic period uniforms during events marking local liberation anniversaries and the end of World War II in Europe.

The group also conducts historical research, interviews families and witnesses, and preserves wartime objects connected to the Lorraine region.

Their work is especially important in eastern France, where many towns around Nancy, Metz, Toul, and Pont-à-Mousson still carry traces of combat, occupation, resistance activity, and liberation.

The association also works with schools and municipalities, helping younger generations understand how global events shaped their own communities.



*Glass cases throughout the exhibition contain wartime relics, documents, photographs, and personal effects preserved by collectors and historians from the Lorraine region.*

*Exhibition spaces at Ferme du Charmois guided visitors through the wartime history of Lorraine, highlighting the experiences of both soldiers and civilians during the liberation of the region in 1944.*



### The Liberation of Lorraine Through American Eyes

A major strength of the recent exhibition was its attention to the American experience during the Lorraine Campaign of 1944.

The 80th Infantry Division—known as the “Blue Ridge Division” because many of its soldiers originally came from the Appalachian region of the United States—featured prominently in the exhibition.

The 35th Infantry Division and the legendary 4th Armored Division were also represented, illustrating the combined effort required to break German defenses in eastern France.

For American readers, particularly those connected to the Blue Ridge region, the exhibition creates a powerful historical bridge. Thousands of young Americans crossed the Atlantic during World War II and fought in places whose names remain unfamiliar to many Americans today—Nancy, Metz, Arracourt, and Pont-à-Mousson among them.

Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine helps reconnect those histories.

### A Living Connection Between France and America

In an era when the Second World War is passing from living memory into recorded history, organizations like Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine play a crucial role.

Their work reminds visitors that liberation was not inevitable—it was fought for town by town, village by village, often at extraordinary human cost.

For American readers, especially those connected to the Blue Ridge heritage of the U.S. 80th Infantry Division, the association's efforts offer a moving reminder that the legacy of those soldiers remains alive in the very communities they helped free.

And in Lorraine today, volunteers like Anthony Guerin continue ensuring that memory endures.

For more information about the association and future exhibitions, visit <https://memoiredesguerresenlorraine.fr/> or follow Mémoire de Guerres en Lorraine on Facebook.

# TAPS

*The men of the Greatest Generation, who saved the world from Hitler's tyranny,  
are facing their last muster with grace and dignity.*

**Booth, Mike, SFC (R) 80th Div Band**

Ashland, VA  
DOD: 3/22/25

Rptd by: Richmond Times Dispatch

**Daigle, Bennie E., T/SGT, 317I**

North Anson, ME  
DOD: 3/10/92

Rptd by: Sim Daigle, Son

**Draper, Brenda, MSG(R) 80th Div G4**

Washington, DC  
DOD: 2/22/26

Rptd by: COL(R) Carolyn Entzminger

**Hopper, James, COL(R) 80th Div**

Henrico, VA  
DOD: 3/9/2026

Rptd by: COL(R) Tom Stephen

**Meadows, Richard (Dick), LTC(R) 80th Div G1, AG, MTC**

10 Stanton Circle  
Pinehurst, NC 28374  
DD: 11/13/2025

Rptd by: COL(R) Bart Campbell

**Morelli, Gloria SGM(R) 80th TNG CMD G8**

Chesterfield, VA,  
DOD: 9/21/25

Rptd by: CSM(R) Doris Wollett

**Napier, Claude Jr., LTC(R) 80th Div, 2079th USAR School**

Midlothian, VA  
DOD: 2/7/2026

Rptd by: Richmond Times Dispatch



**Neely, Robert, DS 3/319**

Damascus, VA  
DOD: 9/23/25

Rptd by: MSG Terry Moore

**Ruffin, Mack, LTC(R) 80th Div, 80th Spt Bn, MTC**

Richmond, VA  
DOD: 3/22/2026

Rptd by: COL(R) Tom Stephen

**Smith, Al, LTC 2nd Bde**

Radford, VA  
DOD: 12/12/25

Rptd by: COL (R) John Brown

**Sneed, Jerry, DS 2/319**

Bluff City, TN  
DOD: 3/20/2025

Rptd by: MSG Terry Moore

**Waters III, Thomas, 1SG, 3/319**

Konnarock, VA  
DOD: 9/19/25

Rptd by: MSG Terry Moore

**Ziebell, Gerald, Unknown**

2350 May Far Dr  
Brookfield, WI  
DOD: 6/1/22

Rptd by: Kevin Ziebell, Son





*Only Movers Forward.*

80th Division Veterans Association  
Doris M. Wollett  
5101 Huroop Road  
Sandston, VA 23150-5406

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PHONE(s): \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 80th Division WWII Veteran

- New/Annual Dues: \$20/year
- Life Membership: \$50

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## Blue Ridge 80th Division The Service Magazine

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