



The Tour Begins

Following In Their Footsteps - Part I France, Belgium and Holland October 15, 2011 through October 27, 2011

Our NTPA Tour Coordinator, **Mary Jamieson**, sent along daily tour updates as the 2012 Eurotour rolled its way through the cities and countryside of Europe. Please enjoy the daily updates and photos while riding along on the virtual tour bus with us as we follow the footsteps of the Timberwolves through France, Belgium and Holland.

Day 1 - Arrival in Paris! Bienvenue!

All twenty nine of us including Patrick and our bus driver made our own way to Paris and gathered together for our first dinner on Sunday evening, October 16th, at the new Radisson Blu Hotel near Charles de Gaulle Airport. The hotel is located in the country near a 15th century village, Le Mesnil-Amelot. Very peaceful and pastoral. The weather in Paris is beautiful and sunny! Here are some photos from our Sunday evening gathering where we ate together, got to know each other and listened to Patrick Hinchy, our Milspec Tour Guide describe in detail the next few days' itineraries. As you can see our good friend Esther from the Netherlands is in Paris to greet us. Thank you, Esther!



Day 2 - Excursion Parisienne

We started out the day in Drancey, a suburb of Paris that housed a concentration camp for British and Belgian prisoners of war and later French citizens who were Jewish while they were waiting to be transferred to the death camps during WWII. Today the park is a place of remembrance. From Drancey we drove along the old Roman road, now a highway into Paris through the old gate, Port Villette. We drove through some of the districts of Paris. We saw a peek of Sacre Coeur, stopped at the Eiffel Tower, drove all the way around the Arc de Triomphe, all while moving from the far outer to an inner lane in a huge tour bus. Wait a minute, who am I kidding, they don't have driving lanes in Paris, they don't even have stripes on the road; it is a total free for all!! It was pretty amazing and exciting all at the same time!! We took a lovely cruise on the Seine River, seeing many sights including the Louvre, the Notre Dame cathedral, the Assemblée Nationale building, the former train station now a museum housing impressionist artists, including Monet. We stopped for lunch at a food court in the basement of the Louvre, where we had some free time to explore the city center on our own.



Day 3 - Versailles and the Red Ball Express

Off to a bit of a slow start. We had a tour member spend the evening in the hospital, so we went to the hospital in the morning before starting our tour and then headed for Versailles. Besides being the royal palace for the French royalty, Versailles was the World War II Supreme Headquarters for Allied European Forces or SHAEF headquarters as it was known. We had an opportunity to either tour the gardens at Versailles, or walk into town to do some exploring or just sit down and take a long and leisurely lunch. After lunch we followed the route of the famed Red Ball Express which the Timberwolves drove for about a month. John Hobson, on the left of the Red Ball photo, actually drove the Red Ball and was able to share stories about the route, the drive and the experience. Priceless!!



Day 4 - *The Normandy Beaches*

We stayed in Bayeux last night, home to the famous Bayeux tapestry and Bayeux Cathedral. Bayeux is a beautiful city with many beautiful old buildings and a beautiful old town area. Today we traveled the beaches of Normandy starting at Arromanches near the Canadian and British beaches of Juno and Gold. We saw the remains of German bunkers that still had the remnants of the guns in them. We traveled to Omaha beach and saw the remains of the artificial harbor, Mulberry B, still in the water off the beach. We drove up to the desolate and decimated Point du Hoc that is covered with building-sized craters from the allied bombing runs in conjunction to D-Day. We visited the church where John Steele from the 82nd Airborne Division (think movie: Longest Day with Red Buttons) hung from the steeple of the church in Sainte Mere Eglise and where they have church windows with paratroopers in the stained glass, dedicated to the 82nd rangers. For me, the most memorable thing we saw today was Utah Beach as it is where my dad landed in France on September 7, 1944, three months following D-Day. The rest the 104th Infantry Division came into France through Cherbourg harbor, which we also visited today, but the 415th Regiment came ashore with a beach landing on Utah Beach. After seeing the town and harbor at Cherbourg, we went to Valognes where we were shown the actual fields where the 104th bivouacked after arriving in France. Then we moved on to Barneville and saw the area in which they bivouacked in Barneville. Talk about following in their footsteps...this is amazing!



Day 5 - Bayeux and the Road to Belgium

Today we visited the Bayeux Cathedral and tapestry. The Cathedral, Notre-Dame de Bayeux, was most impressive on the outside and very large but I must say, when we went inside, I was a little disappointed as it was not nearly as elaborate or impressive on the inside as it was on the outside. Patrick, our tour guide, mentioned that Bayeux was once a large druid and pagan center of worship. He went on to tell us, whenever the church wished to increase its presence in an area of strong druid and pagan influence, the church built would be much larger and imposing, that other areas where pagan worship was not such a strong influence. Perhaps that explains the extraordinary cathedral on the outside and the quite ordinary church on the inside. The Bayeux tapestry is housed in a separate museum called the Centre Guillaume le Conquérant. It is an amazing "art" history of the Norman Conquest of England. The whole story is embroidered on a piece of cloth about twelve inches wide and 230 feet long. After visiting Bayeux, we continued north through Normandy passing through the city of Caen, across the River Orne, through the Seine River Estuary areas and across the Le Pont de Normandie bridge, the second largest cable stayed bridge in the world, near Honfleur and LeHarve. Near the bridge, between Rouen and LeHarve is where the "cigarette camps" of WWII were located including Camp Lucky Strike, the Camp which the Timberwolves passed through on their way home from Europe. Camp Lucky Strike was on the northwestern side of LeHarve, along the coast. We continued on north for most of the day ending up in Brussels, Belgium at about 8:30 in the evening.



Day 6 - NATO and Henri-Chappelle

Friday we started our day of with a walking tour of the Grand Plaz of Brussels, Belgium, seeing the various Merchant Guild's ornate buildings. We saw the flower market Brussels is known for as well as many lace and chocolate shops. Yum!! We took a bus tour to see the Royal Palace, Royal Cathedral Notre-Dame au Sablon and saw a beautiful city park. Did, I mention it was the Royal City Park? We visited the wonderful Military/Air Museum in Brussels and were awed by their amazing WWII collection that covered the events leading up to the war and all nations involved in operations within the European Theater. Truly, one of a kind! Then we were on our way to a very special event, lunch at NATO to honor our WWII veterans. We had special security clearance into NATO, which was arranged ahead of time, so when we got to the front gate, our veterans were transferred to a van for a "chauffeured" ride into the NATO headquarters community area. After the rest of our tour delegation had gone through security, a sergeant from NATO security boarded our tour bus, and accompanied the rest of tour delegation directly to the center. When we entered the center, we were greeted by a number of military personnel who escorted us to a dining area complete with linen table cloths, very nice table ware, wine glasses, etc. The veterans each had a member of the armed forces seated next to them, spanning branches and ranks, from a Navy Corpsman to an Army Colonel. Each veteran was introduced and recognized, and presented a plaque. One of the guest's, LTC Joel Alexander's wife had a Timberwolf connection. They brought a picture of her great uncle, who was killed in battle at Stolberg, Germany and is buried at Henri Chapelle. After lunch, we left NATO and headed for Henri Chapelle where we were greeted by the Friends of the Timberwolves and the Assistant Superintendent of the Cemetery. We had a short ceremony and wreath laying event under the angel statue. This left us some time to visit some of the 335 graves of Timberwolves who are buried at Henri Chapelle for the rest of our hour at the cemetery. After the cemetery visit concluded, we visited for a short while with the Friends of the Timberwolves and then headed back to Brussels.



Time Heals Old Wounds - A Day 6 Quest by Patricia Wilens

My father, Philip Wilens, was wounded in December 1944, in a skirmish at a sports complex at Rolsdorf, Germany, a suburb of Duren.

Like most veterans, Dad didn't talk much about the war while my sister, Leslie, and I were kids. When the subject arose, I'd say, "Show us your war wound, Daddy" and he'd roll up his sleeve to point out the four places on his arm and hand where a bullet went clear through. I don't remember knowing where and how he was wounded until recently.

Leslie and her husband, Dennis, attended the St. Louis reunion with Dad last fall, and they came home excited about the "Follow in their Footsteps" tour. Dad went on a similar trip some years ago, but none of us accompanied him then. This time, he had company: myself, Leslie, Dennis, and my niece Katherine. (Their other daughter, Alex, wasn't able to join us.) Once we signed up for the trip, Leslie decided to track down the swimming pool where Dad's infamous "war wound" happened. With a bit of research and a few phone calls by the resourceful (and multi-lingual) Patrick Hinchy, we had an appointment to meet a Mr. Myer at the Rolsdorf sportsplatz.

We left the rest of the tour group on the NATO lunch day and took the train from Brussels across the border into Germany, about a 80-minute journey. From Duren, a cab took us to the sports complex. There we encountered two problems: 1) there was no pool and 2) Herr Myer spoke no English and not one of us knew any German.

A lot of pantomime ensued, doing the breast stroke to convey the idea of a swimming pool. Hurrah for cell phones, we called Patrick, who acted as telephone interpreter between Leslie and Mr. Myer, and the mystery was solved. We were in the wrong place, but the pool was nearby. Herr Myer kindly loaded us into his minivan and drove us about 10 minutes away to another sportsplatz where--ta da!--there was the pool.

Dad recognized it immediately, especially the little building alongside the pool, where the skirmish took place. In the dark of night, the Germans snuck up behind the changing rooms and approached the building where Dad was stationed. When a German soldier burst through the door, Dad fired his submachine gun, but when the gun stopped firing, he thought it had jammed. Actually the gun was fine, it was Dad's left hand that was no longer working. The German bullet had gone through his left hand, into his right arm and out the other side.

Oddly (I think), Dad has no recollection of what happened to the German soldier. (Was he dead? Did he run away? Did the other soldiers get him?) All Dad remembers is that fellow Sgt. Simon Kaplan led him to safety behind the lines. He was treated first at Le Havre and then evacuated to England for surgery.

Thanks to Patrick and the kindness of Mr. Myer, we were grateful to see that the sportsplatz is now a peaceful place where children laugh and play. As strange as it may seem, I'm actually glad that Dad was shot there--since the wound was not life-threatening, it kept him safely in England while the rest of the 414th battled on into Germany. By the time Dad rejoined his unit, 414B, the war was over!



Day 7 - Holland and The Friends of the Timberwolves!

Today we left Brussels and headed for the Belgian-Holland border. We came first to the Atomium which is on the outer east side of Brussels. The atomium was built for the 1958 World's Fair. Next we headed for Antwerp and the Shelt Estuary which was a primary focus of the Timberwolf battles in the area of the Belgian/Holland Border. Later we set off for Achtmaal where the friends of the Timberwolves were waiting for us in their WWII uniforms and vehicles. They caravanned with us for the rest of the day as we visited battlefields in the Achtmaal and Zundert area. Peet VanOers told us about each particular battle, showed us any remaining battle damage, and even introduced us to a French man who was a boy living in one of the farm houses at the time it was attacked. We visited battle sites near Achtmaal, Wernhout, and Zundert. We laid a wreath at the Timberwolf memorial in Zundert and we had lunch in Achtmaal and then in the afternoon Peet and Peter Neeb walked/drove us to a place deep in the woods near Rijsbergen where the Germans had burned down a house that belonged to a forester named Neefs and his family. The family had allowed Dutch Resistance soldiers to have a radio post in the house, as it was a perfect remote location. The Dutch Resistance was convinced the liberation was near and unfortunately they were wrong. The liberation was delayed and due partially to the delay and the activity surrounding the residence, the occupants of the residence were betrayed to the Germans. The father, mother, and two of her children, along with the Resistance soldiers who were taking shelter in their house, were killed when the Germans came calling. There was a gunfight in the house and the mother and some of the soldiers took shelter in the basement. The Germans set the house on fire and for the father, mother, two of the children and most of the others it was too late. Only six survived to tell the story of the Forester Neefs. We learned that occupied Belgium and the Netherlands suffered many personal losses to their friends and families. We laid a wreath at this memorial and we thank Peet and Peter for sharing this bit of history with us. For although this history had no direct relationship to the Timberwolves liberating their area, this tells us about the suffering and pain they went through before the Timberwolves arrived and just why they were so grateful to see the 104th Timberwolf Infantry Division arrive in their neighborhoods.



Day 8 - *The Wuustwezel Commemoration*

We visited both the Oostvogel's Museum and the Museum from the Friends of the Timberwolves located in Achtdaal. In fact, the Friends of the Timberwolves fixed lunch for us out of a vintage army field kitchen. We ate lunch, looked through both museums and had a great time visiting and taking pictures of each other and also of all of the various restored army vehicles and military equipment located in the museum. After lunch we headed back over the border of Belgium (which really is just a few miles away) to the City of Wuustwezel where sixty-seven years ago, to the day, the 104th Timberwolf Division relieved the British 49th Polar Bear Division at Wuustwezel, and engaged the enemy for the first time, in the liberation of Wuustwezel. Our veterans and entire tour delegation was invited as special guests of the Polar Bear Association and the City of Wuustwezel to a commemoration event in Wuustwezel dedicating a plaque to the Timberwolves. It was a very special event with dignitaries present including the Aide-de-Camp of the King of Belgium, the British Ambassador to Belgium and a representative of the US Defense Attaché from Brussels. There was a marching band, and a chorus, our Timberwolf veterans, the British veterans of the Polar Bear division, speeches and presentations, and a reception for us hosted by the City of Wuustwezel. Wow, what a day! The British and American GIs have been waiting for sixty seven years to meet again and it was an honor to witness their reunion!!



Additional photos from this historic day.



Wuustwezel resident and history teacher, Annelies Van Wassenhove,
provided her touching commemoration speech.

My dear good friends

There are those who make history and those who teach history. Obviously you belong to that first category and I to the latter. And, as every teacher, I find my subject the most important. I'm convinced that history is not a luxury, but a necessity. We must know our history and learn from it, so that we will not make the same mistakes again.

Teaching history is rather difficult, and the most difficult subject is war. You tend to restrict yourself to dates, places, battles, outcomes, causes and motives. But that is not enough. Learning history requires a story, real documents that make history come alive, an emphasis on the human side of history.

And that is why I was so delighted that you said yes to my invitation to come to my school tomorrow and speak with my students. To allow them to ask you questions. I stressed that they could ask you everything they wanted, because it will be an unique experience for them.

I must say that at first they were a bit aloof and feared you might get angry about a question and start yelling and waving with your walking stick. I found that image very comic and I assured them that you are all very friendly, patient, intelligent, peaceful and humorous people.

One student came to me after class and said to me "I found it very difficult to make up some questions, because I don't know what it is like to be at war."

And then I realized: teaching students about war is so difficult, because of what you did so many years ago.

Most of us never felt real hunger or thirst; never left our homes and family and loved ones to go and fight in a strange country, where nobody speaks our language. Most of us have never been kept awake by nocturnal shooting and bombing and have never seen our best friends being killed.

Our youngsters did never have to experience those terrible years of war, thanks to you.

Because so many of you did leave your homes and family and loved ones. From 1939 on till the final Victory day so many have fought and died for a better life and a lasting peace. So much horror, so much honour.

Because of them we can live, up to now, in peace.

And that is the main reason of our gathering today and your yearly presence: to remember all those brave men and women who lost their lives during the horrible years of the Nazi regime. To be grateful for all the efforts that you did to bring back democracy and peace.

That is what this monument stands for.

That is the reason why I invited you to come to my school tomorrow. The students want to understand what you did, why you did it, what you felt, how it changed you. And I'm convinced that through that understanding they will never forget you, that they will remember you with all the admiration and gratitude that you deserve.

They will thank you for what you and your comrades have done, as we are doing today and as we will continue to do.

Day 9 - Crossing the Mark River

Today we follow the Timberwolves through the Battle of the Dikes, seeing where the three regiments, 413th, 414th and 415th crossed the Mark River. First we stopped on the south side of the Mark River, near the old sugar warehouse to see where the 415th Regiment made its central crossing. Then we toured the beautiful Catholic Basilica in Oudenbosch where we were greeted by their mayor who invited us into the church reception hall for coffee tea and delectable treats. After our reception with the mayor, we toured the Basilica which is modeled on the inside after St. Peter's in Rome and on the outside after St. John Lateran in Rome. Some of us climbed 144 stairs to near the top of the dome to look out over the City of Oudenbosch. It was a beautiful, clear day so we could see far away over the countryside. Following the tour of the Basilica, we went to the Oudenbusch Memorial for those who died in WWII. Veteran Philip Wilens and his daughters, Patricia Wilens and Leslie Curley, laid a wreath on behalf of the Timberwolf veterans and the mayor laid a wreath on behalf of the citizens remembering the dead and commemorating the liberation. From Oudenbosch, we traveled westward to meet the Friends of the Timberwolf who joined us in their army vehicles to see where the 413th crossed the Mark River. At this particular spot, the GI's of the 413th had crossed the river in boats. Then they crossed a large open field all while under German artillery fire. At the other end of the large open field was a farm with a house and barn. We saw the place where Frank Strebel (413F) who is with us on the tour crossed the Mark River in the battle of the Dikes. He said as they tried to cross the field after making it across the river in the boats, they had absolutely no cover as the Germans were firing from the protection of the farmhouse at the other end of the field. They crossed the Mark the same time of year as we are here touring so he said the field looked the same. Frank who is 92, told us, he lost 30 men from his company that night. The Germans had artillery ensconced at the house and barn. The men of the 413th eventually overtook the barn and house and established a medical aid station and mortuary there. When we drove to the other end of the field, we got out and looked inside of the barn and the house. The woman, Widow Rok (94) who lived at the house told us, through a translator, that her husband grew up on the farm, and lived there during the war. She let us tour her house which is much the same as it was. She showed us pictures of her husband. We learned that after the battle there were bodies in the temporary morgue stacked to the ceiling. They buried both the Germans and Americans at the battle site. The Germans were buried in a mass grave just past the barrier (breezeway) and later repatriated to a German cemetery. The Americans were buried in individual graves and later repatriated to American cemeteries. We traveled both by bus and jeep to the final crossing of the Mark River by the Timberwolves. We stopped at a long a dike where the 415th, first battalion, advanced across the river to the farthest spot north of the three 104th Mark River crossings in the Standaardbuiten area. One group of 415th soldiers were cut off and subsisted on nothing but turnips and sugar beets for three days. These 65 men bravely held off the Germans and did not suffer a single casualty. Eventually, the first battalion of the 415th was withdrawn back to the south side of the Mark River and the Timberwolves successfully completed their mission in liberating the area around Standaardbuiten, crossing this most northern area and pushing the Germans farther towards the final objective, the Maas River. In fact, after the three Timberwolf crossings of the Mark River, and the liberation of the area, most of the Timberwolves were redirected to Aachen and the British remained as an occupational force. A small number of Timberwolves were kept back for the final Timberwolf objective in the area which was to secure the Moerdijk vicinity and completely capture all lands south of the Maas River, thus securing the great port of Antwerp for the Allies to use to supply the allied army to the east. Interesting to note, we learned that a reason for the Battle of the Bulge was Germany's intent to regain control of the Port of Antwerp. To see the battlefields up close and meet people living in the houses and buildings that still show scars from bullet holes and shelling was just amazing. Everywhere we went there were people whose grandparents or parents told stories of the war events in the area. A story I heard earlier today is a personal favorite. At one of our stops late in the day, as we laid a memorial wreath at another Timberwolf memorial, an elderly gentleman, Piet van de Bom, was introduced to us as having been a young boy in the area during the war. I was talking with him and he was telling me a story how he and his sisters had boxes of apples ready to give to the American GI's who were coming into town to liberate them. They were very excited! Their house was the house closest to the railroad station and one of the first houses to be contacted by an American soldier. The soldier knocked at their door and they offered him an apple. As he bent down to pick up an apple, the rifle

bayonet he carried on his back scratched the door of their house. He said the scratch was still there today, just as it was 67 years ago. He said the soldier's name and I was so amazed. The soldier's name was Ralph Bleier, who was from my father's company, 415D, and who was the Unit Rep for years until I recently replaced him. Ralph Bleier died this past year but his bayonet scar is still upon the door in Holland. Amazing! Later, we stopped in Standdaarbuiten and had coffee at a wonderful museum that used to be a windmill grist mill. We saw a movie of the 104th Timberwolves ([Combat Reels](#)) and visited in their museum winding up a long and fruitful day. Today was the sort of tour day that exactly defines "Following in Their Footsteps" and it left me with an exhilaration and pride that is hard to describe. I was interviewed by a local reporter today who asked me why, as the children of the veterans, our organization is holding veteran's reunions and battlefield tours. I told him that for us, it is imperative that we honor our veterans and that we never let their history and the heroic, historic achievements be lost in history. We will pass this on to their grandchildren, great grandchildren and all their future generations. We owe it to them and to all of them who never made it home. In the evening we had our farewell dinner with the Friends of the Timberwolves from the Netherlands and Belgium. We owe them a huge thank you for their amazing, and detailed battlefield tours these past few days, and their on-going friendship and the love. I call them the Forever Friends of the Timberwolves from the Netherlands and Belgium; someone told me our old friend Cliff Parks called them the Family of the Timberwolves from the Netherlands and Belgium. Perfect!



Translation of a Dutch article in BNdeStem published on this occasion, October 25, 2011

By Frank Timmers

Proud Timberwolves visit our region

Five veterans and a group of family and friends are visiting West-Brabant. They liberated Oudenbosch and Standdaarbuiten, all the way up to Moerdijk.

It makes Ross Turkle (86) cry when people give him a compliment. He is one of the five veterans that get overloaded with compliments these days; Ross Turkle cries a lot. In October and November 1944, the American liberators moved from Achtmaal to Oudenbosch, Standdaarbuiten, Noordhoek and Moerdijk. Yesterday they took the same road again. Ross Turkle didn't recognize a single spot. His job was to make sure the telephone lines stayed open. At the time, he had no idea where he was.

At the final reunion in Chicago last year, about 200 veterans were able to attend. One of the speakers in Chicago was Toine Vermunt from Standdaarbuiten. "His speech made the Pups want to visit the Netherlands. Toine told us how grateful you are here and that made us really proud", says Mary Jamieson from the National Timberwolf Pups Association. Its members are children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the number of members is still growing. "We want to make sure that our father's and grandfather's work will continue to have its place in American history".

Katherine Curley is the granddaughter of one of the liberators: Philip Wilens. The veterans proudly have their picture taken at the liberation monument in Oudenbosch. Katherine meanwhile explains that there is not a lot of attention for WWII in history lessons in the United States. "It is different for you. We have the people, but you have the locations. That is more impressive. It is important that this war won't be forgotten. For my grandfather as well. I am extremely proud of what he has done here".

The group of 27 Americans travels around with the 'Friends of the Timberwolves', an association from Achtmaal. They are dressed like Timberwolves during the war. Casey Seevers (13) is also wearing a jacket from that period. Casey is Ross' great-grandson. He loves the stories of his great-grandfather, for example the story about arriving in Cherbourg, Normandy, about 2 months after D-day. The silent witnesses of that battle immediately impressed the 19-year old Ross. The Americans moved on to Belgium, where they helped securing the use of the Antwerp harbor. The liberators stopped at Moerdijk. A change of tactics and politics made them have to go to Germany. Conquering Germany meant liberating the western part of the Netherlands as well. 13-year old Casey already knows this story, his great-grandfather told it many times. Casey wanted to see this area with his own eyes. His school gave permission, as long as he would present an elaborate report on 'The battle of the Dikes'. Naturally, Ross Turkle is very proud of his great-grandson. "I was never in danger, I was always behind the Infantry with my telephone lines, asking the Artillery for support". Yesterday morning at the 'Pilaar' below the Basilica, he got a chance to sing 'God bless America'. "This is my way of expressing how proud I am to have been a part of this part of history. That is why I hope to be remembered".

A personal adventure to track a wolf - "Finding Mabry"

This story is the journey of Peggy May (Mayfield) Gouras, who set out on behalf of her family, especially her grandmother, to find Uncle Mabry, (William Mabry Mayfield) who was declared missing in action in Moerdijk, Holland on November 7, 1944. Here is Peg's story in her own words:

Moerdijk, Holland, is a place I will always remember. The first time I remember seeing the word, "Moerdijk" was when I was a young child and my grandmother took me along to the cemetery to help her "tend" the family plot. There, on the ground was a marker that read:

William Mabry Mayfield
June 14, 1924 - November 7, 1944
An Example of Courage and Valor to All Men
Moerdijk, Holland
Resting Place Known Only to God

My uncle, William Mabry Mayfield, known as "Bill" to his Timberwolf buddies and "Mabry" to his family, was reported MIA on November 7, 1944. His family found out through a returned V-mail. His mother, Josephine Mabry Mayfield began a frantic letter writing campaign to find out about her missing boy. She first wrote to the mothers of his fellow Reg. 414, Company E Timberwolves, hoping they might write to their boys for some information about her boy. In February of 1945, the War Department had notified her that Bill was a POW. They soon wrote the previous report had been a mistake. My grandmother then wrote to congressmen, The White House, Supreme Allied Commander, Dwight D, Eisenhower, and General Terry Allen. They all answered her letters. Their replies were all the same, "We are so sorry. Your boy is important to us and we are still looking. We will let you know as soon as we find any information." Finally the letter arrived from fellow Timberwolf, Bill Myers. The letter said that Bill had received a direct hit to his foxhole by an 88 mm shell. Bill felt that Mabry felt no pain. Charles Juday was also in the foxhole with him and presumed dead. My grandmother, not to be deterred, began writing to two families in Holland, the Eichboon and Balthussan families from Maastricht asking them to look for her boy's grave. They did look but never found it. It was not to be found. In December of 1945, my grandmother wrote an article published in the "Timberwolf Howl" asking if anyone knew any information about her boy. In January of 1946, Bob Spitler answered her request. In his letter, Bob wrote Bill's foxhole was about 40 yards from his. They were about 500 yards from the town of Moerdijk where the Germans had dug in. He, too, said it was a direct hit and that Bill felt no pain and he was in the foxhole with Charles Juday. Bob Spitler later took his family to Moerdijk, Holland. He showed them the dike and the place where his foxhole had been and where Bill his buddy had been hit. He still remembered. My grandmother never got to visit the place where her son lost his life and was "buried" in a foxhole beside his buddy, Charles Juday. This year, on October 24th, sixty-seven years later, almost to the day, I had the privilege and the honor to stand on the soil of Moerdijk, Holland for my grandmother who never gave up searching for her boy so she could bring him home. I had my picture taken at the battlefield where Mabry died, gathering a small handful of Moerdijk soil to take home to sprinkle on Bill's grave marker in the Mayfield family plot in Shreveport, Louisiana. In doing so, maybe in some small way, I may help fulfill my grandmother's greatest desire to find her boy and bring her boy home. I also was able to see Mabry's marker in the American Cemetery at Margraten. I didn't think I was going to be able to see his marker as a visit to the cemetery was not on our itinerary, but when we made an unexpected visit to Henri-Chapelle cemetery, a side trip was arranged for me and my traveling partner Betsey Justice to visit Margraten. I was not going to travel all this way and miss his marker at Margraten, after all! I was taken to the cemetery by Vincent De Saedeleer and David Muylaert, Friends of the Timberwolves from Belgium and accompanied by all the rest of the Friends of the Timberwolves from both Holland and Belgium. My heart overflowed with gratefulness, happiness, and joy all mixed together in one emotion!

In closing, once I returned home to Vicksburg, Mississippi, my brother from Portland, Oregon came to visit and on November 7th, the anniversary of Mabry's death, my brother and I, went to the family plot in Shreveport, Louisiana, and took the handful of soil from Moerdijk, the Netherlands, and sprinkled it on Mabry's marker, letting the dirt go in the grooves of the letters like the sand in some of the markers we saw at Henri-Chapelle. We laid a wreath for Mabry and put pansies on our father's marker as Nov. 7th was our not only the day Mabry died but it was also our father's birthday. For our dear grandmother, we left yellow roses. We know that Grandmother, Father and Mabry were smiling down at us that day, as I was able in a small way to bring Mabry home. What a sweet time it was.



Day 10 - Breda to Rotterdam via the Maas River

We had the morning to ourselves this morning so we took a walk about Breda, returned to the hotel, packed up and headed off north towards Rotterdam. On the way we stopped at Monique Ubagh and her husband Ad's museum and planetarium. Their museum is housed in the school house where the Dutch surrendered Holland to Germany in May of 1940. We watched a multimedia show about the bombing of Rotterdam and then we boarded a water taxi and rode the Maas River into the great port of Rotterdam. It was very cold and blustery but still it was an amazing ride into a city that has totally rebuilt itself after being totally demolished during World War II. From Rotterdam, we boarded the bus again and headed to Amsterdam. We got in about 7:30 pm, just in time for dinner (European time) and some time to walk around the old city of Amsterdam.



A tribute to a friend and a Father - "Sandra's Journey"

Here, in her own words, is the journey to honor her father, Cliff Park, by Sandra Park O'Neal:

"Following in Their Footsteps"

In Honor of Cliff Park

By Sandra Park O'Neal

For several years my Dad, Cliff Park, asked me to go with him on the Timberwolf tours to Europe. For a variety of reasons I would not and could not go. Dad died last year and the opportunity to go with him ended.

I have been attending the Timberwolf reunions since 1990 with Dad and decided that in his honor I would attend the first Timberwolf Pups Reunion in St. Louis last September. It was there I heard about the tour "Following in Their Footsteps." I looked into going but learned there was no "single room" space left on the trip.

One month before the departure date I received a phone message from Mary Jamieson; her statement was "Sandra, sometimes God gives us gifts we should not ignore. My sister's roommate dropped out of the tour and there is a place available if you want it." In the meantime Millie Didlake, Dad's friend who had gone with him to Europe previously, was going again. She had told me about her tour agent who made her arrangements and she had sent me the agent's number and all the flight information. I called the agent, explained the situation and she said "Would you like a seat next to Millie - direct flight from Cincinnati to Paris and the seat behind her on the way back?" I couldn't believe it. She asked if I was sitting at the computer and said - "I'm ready to send it if you're ready to get it!"

As an aside to this story: Dad had left me a bag of old coins. He was not a coin collector, they were coins his father had from the early and mid 1800s. I sold them to a dealer in August. When I got the check I asked my husband what we should do with the money. He said "You know that's from your Dad to you; you should save it for something special....."

We were in Paris one year to the day Dad died. He was with me the whole time. The trip was amazing. It was everything he told me and more. When we met the Friends of the Timberwolves I felt like I was home. It was just as Dad had described. I wore Dad's dog tags during the trip and at one point I gave Henk Koyen one of his tags. Dad had nicknamed him "Cookie" since he did the cooking for the TW's and in honor of the mess sergeant out of the Beetle Bailey comic strip. Julia, my roommate, told me he was reduced to tears over the gift. The next day I received from Henk and his wife Jose a "Vrienden van de Timberwolves" (Friends of the Timberwolves) sweatshirt and a framed picture of Henk, Jose and my Dad. It is their screensaver. It doesn't get any better than that.

Thanks to the Good Lord and my Daddy for the gifts I hold in my heart.



Day 11 - Amsterdam Canals

It was a bit cloudy when we awoke this morning with a threat of rain. We walked through old Amsterdam to the location where we boarded our boat to cruise the canals of Amsterdam as well as the port itself. It was a beautiful way to see the city and learn a bit about its history. When we finished our cruise, Patrick took us on a bit of a walking tour through old Amsterdam including a walk through a very secluded housing unit that was originally populated by Catholic women who, although they were not nuns, devoted their lives to the church and doing good works for Christ. They lived in a complex in Amsterdam with all the units faced inward towards a beautiful courtyard. There were no photos allowed inside of the courtyard and we were asked to be quiet and respectful of the peaceful, reverent nature of the complex. It was a moving experience in this quiet, peaceful oasis right in the middle of bustling, worldly, Amsterdam. After our walking tour, we enjoyed free time on our own in Amsterdam. So we were off to shopping, sightseeing and napping! In the evening, we met together for our final farewell dinner. How sad to be ending his tour. We have followed the very footsteps our fathers took sixty-seven years ago as they traveled from their landing in Cherbourg, France through the Battle of the Dikes. We have been blessed to be accompanied by five 104th Timberwolf veterans, Bob Huber, Frank Strebel, Philip Wilens, John Hopson and Ross Turkle, along the way who gave us daily historical narratives and asides. We have made new, forever friends and found closure to life long searches. As this tour comes to an end, we all turn our eyes towards spring of 2013, when we will complete our, "Follow in Their Footsteps Tour." In 2013, will start in either Amsterdam or Brussels and complete the journey the Timberwolves took through Europe by visiting the battlefields of Germany.





Submitted by Mary Jamieson Tour Coordinator National Timberwolf Pups Association.

Thank you, Mary!

Thank you to Milspec Tours, Inc. and to our indispensable tour guide, Patrick Hinchy.

Please visit our webpage www.Timberwolf104inf.org for more information,

Including the next chance to follow in our brave 104th Veterans' footsteps.
