

A WWII Skirmish and an Armistice Day Celebration

by Charles A. Nicholson, 399-F

Colonel Charles A. Nicholson, USA (Ret.), 399-F, wrote this article for his local Lions Club newsletter. He submitted it to the 100th Newsletter before his death. We are pleased to reprint it here.

In the fall of 1944 our rifle company, F-399th, was advancing through the Vosges Mountains in Alsace. We came down a ridge that led to the town of Wackenbach and flushed out about 30 German soldiers. As I approached the large Catholic Church in the center of town, a woman beckoned to me and pointed to the church tower; I went up the stairs and took two German soldiers into custody. About a half-hour later, a motorized platoon from our Division Recon Company sped into town firing .50-caliber machine guns. We waved dirty white handkerchiefs and they stopped firing and continued on the road to Strasbourg.

That night I bunked in a large house behind the church with the Schmidt family. The father, Joseph, was a Forest Warden and part of a chain of Frenchmen who were smuggling downed allied airmen out of France and Germany. The next day was Thanksgiving and I attended church with the Schmidt family. That evening, about 10:00 pm, we were in the church yard waiting for transportation to take us to another location. I heard a voice calling my name and when it was located, I found Frau Schmidt who gave me two delicious sandwiches to take with me.

World War II ended on May 8, 1945 and I elected to remain in Germany when my Division returned to the States. I was assigned to a Claims Office Team in Stuttgart, Germany. In early November, I decided to visit Wackenbach again and my SMAJ, George Poole, and I packed the jeep with goodies and drove to Wackenbach to spend Armistice Day weekend with the Schmidt family. We had quite a reunion and learned that the Schmidts were going to the next town, Shirmeck, to celebrate Armistice Day at a big party and dance. It was quite an affair and we got a royal welcome. We got back to Wackenbach about 2:00 am. George and I were sleeping in the second-story front bedroom and we were awakened about 8:00 am by a band playing "The Star Spangled Banner." We got up and opened the shutters and there was a small five piece band and about 20 townspeople who began cheering when they saw us. We quickly dressed and followed the band to the local tavern where Armistice Day was being celebrated.

On the way back to Stuttgart, each town we passed through was having a celebration and we were invited to join in. We finally got back to Stuttgart later the same day.

In reflecting on the warmth of those days, I can't help but compare them with the present day attitude France has about Iraq and their lack of support needed by us.

March 2006 Association Newsletter