

# Memories of Siersthal and Moyenmoutiers

by Lionel Ruberg, Medical Detachment, 399th

I served in the Medical Detachment, 399th Infantry. My father, Lieutenant Morris Ruberg, served in the American Expeditionary Forces in 1918 and 1919. He died in January 1945, while I was in Siersthal, France.

I had never mentioned to my family that we traveled to France on the *George Washington* troopship, since this was considered classified information during the war. Sometime after I was discharged, I happened to mention the name of the ship to my mother. She was amazed to hear this, since my father had been on the *George Washington*, too, just twenty-six years earlier. The *George Washington* was originally a German luxury liner that was trapped in New York just before the U.S. entered WWI and was converted into an American troopship. I wonder whether any other Centurymen were on the same troop ships that their fathers, uncles, or grandfathers were on one war earlier.

In 1981 I vacationed in Europe, including some of the places I had been with the 100th. I was interested in visiting Siersthal, where our 2nd Bn HQ Co. and Medical Detachment had spent most of the winter of 1944/45.

I found the building that had a small grocery store on the first floor, and where the 2nd Battalion switchboard had been set up on the second floor. I asked a middle-aged woman whether she remembered us. She said she did. I asked her whether she remembered that someone brought a newborn lamb up to the second floor on Easter Sunday and that it wet the floor. She said, "We never raised sheep here." I asked her what had happened to the little boy who was born in Lambach, a neighboring town. He was delivered by our battalion surgeon, Captain Priest. She answered, "There were no children born here during the war." She didn't remember any incident that I could recall. It was a very strange experience. It was good to see, however, that the area looked prosperous, and that the big manure enclosures in front of each house had been removed.

Later, I visited Moyenmoutiers, a small town where we spent Thanksgiving Day in 1944. We had heard that we were going to be given Thanksgiving dinner, but thought that was unlikely, since we had been given virtually no hot food until then. In the morning we were taken to Baccarat, a nearby town, where the Quartermaster had set up showers for us in an empty factory. I did not know then that it was a famous fine crystal glassmaking factory, since all of the machinery had been taken away by the retreating German occupiers. We got our first showers since we had landed on October 20, and were given clean clothes. Then, we were given a real Thanksgiving dinner, and stood around outside eating it as it floated around in our mess kits in the rain that seemed never to stop. It tasted great.

We were then told we could sleep in the barn behind a small convent. It was the first night that we slept under a roof in six weeks. We visited the convent, and found four nuns who looked like young school girls. There was a small organ and asked whether I could play it. The nuns apologized that there was no bench to sit on, explaining that the Germans had taken it along with everything else that they could when they left the day before. I played for a while, then one of the nuns brought me a beautiful embroidered cushion that she wanted to give me. I explained that we would be back in the mud and rain the next day, and could not take it. She then brought me a little souvenir jewel box from Lyon. I accepted it gratefully, knowing that she was very appreciative for her country's liberation from occupiers. I also learned why we saw virtually no adult men during our stay in the area. We had been told at the time that the men had been taken to work in Germany. After the war, the population learned that many of the men who were taken had been shot in reprisal for the French partisans who blew up a German troop train, and that the area was now called "*La Vallee des Veuves*" (the valley of the widows). I was told that the convent that I remembered had been disbanded and that the building was demolished.

One of the men in my detachment was Sergeant Harmon (Hicky) Shufro. He was a good soldier and a good friend. We were all surprised when he carried his guitar along when we went overseas, but were very grateful that he did, because he often cheered us up by playing and singing for us. Some years ago, his daughter, Ellie May, sent a note to the 100th newsletter asking whether anyone had any recollections

of her father. I have been writing to her over the past few years, and we have become friends as we exchanged memories. We found that she remembered some of the words of the songs that her father sang after I had forgotten them, and I remembered a few that she did not know.

Last year I extended my vacation to visit Ellie May and her husband in their home in Maine. I was delighted to meet them. She is a fine violinist, and we had a chance to play music together, and to share our memories of her father. It has been many years since I have encountered anyone from the 100th. Meeting Hicky Shufro's daughter was a great experience for me.

July 2010 Association Newsletter