

John Kline , CUB Editor
5401 U. 147th St. West
Apple Valley, MN. 55124

Dear John,

For the past several years I have seen in THE CUB a number of references to CRIBA, and I have read the stories of 106th Division men who have been helped by members of this organization. The thought has crossed my mind that should I return to the Ardennes one more time, it would be nice to have the assistance of a "local" in finding places and in conversing with the Belgian people.

Well, I saw the opportunity in March -- a full page airline ad heralded bargain-basement airline fares to Europe, so I suggested to my wife that we visit our son and daughter-in-law who live in the Netherlands. Great idea, says she, so we were off and running.

So now the question of how to contact CRIBA. Thumbing through some of the old CUBS, I came across a story by Don Beseler in the Jan.- Mar. 1989 edition which concluded with a couple of addresses of CRIBA members. I picked the first name, Serge Fontaine, and composed a long letter reciting my Ardennes action. I suggested meeting during the period May 14-18 when I knew my son could be away from his work. I enclosed the photo of a young Belgian, Gilbert Ridiemont, who had helped me get water when I was left behind on December 12, 1944, to guard supplies when Company F moved to the "Front" to replace a company of the 2nd Division. Also enclosed was a photo of twenty or so young people of Wanne which I had picked up along the way.

The response from Serge was quick. He asked if I could make my visit on May 8 because he and his wife Suzanne would be vacationing in France the following week. He made it clear that I was welcome under any circumstances and that other CRIBA members would be aware of my visit.. As another contact he gave me the address and telephone number of his neighbor (also of CRIBA), Joseph Dejardin. Serge also indicated that Gilbert Ridiemont was alive and living in Lierneux, Belgium. Commenting on the other

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photo I had sent, Serge identified it as a Confirmation Day ceremony for children of Wanne and said Jules Hurdebise, a CRIBA member from the area, had identified all of the children in the picture (from 50 years ago) ! One thing I learned about the CRIBA organization is that they tenaciously attack a question like an Interpol unit, and they get results.

My son was able to contact Serge from Amsterdam to arrange a one-day Ardennes visit on May 8 when Serge would be there and to schedule a return visit for May 14 with Mr. Dejardin. So it appeared we were all set -- I packed my Division history by Col. Dupuy, Cole's history of the Ardennes campaign, The CUB Passes in Review, various pictures, maps, et. cetera, to begin another nostalgic journey.

But for loyalty to a frequent flyer program with United Airlines, the trip to Europe might have been uneventful. KIM flies non-stop from Chicago to Amsterdam, but United does it in segments, Chicago to Newark -- Newark to London -- London to Amsterdam. The inconvenience became much more pronounced when upon reaching Newark we were notified that "mechanical problems" caused cancellation of the London flight and instead our next flight would be to Washington, D. C. where we would connect with that city's London flight. Well, when all of the smoke cleared we were in Amsterdam some five hours late and no baggage in evidence. The baggage was delivered to my son's house later that evening without an explanation for its temporary disappearance.

The next day was May 8, and my son and I made an early departure to arrive at Serge's house three hours later without problems thanks to the good map sketch Serge had furnished. With the good expressways and the high speeds traveled it doesn't take long to negotiate this compact area.

Serge was waiting for us and introduced us to his wife, Suzanne. The others were waiting for us at Mr. Dejardin's house a block or two away, said Serge, so off we went to meet Joseph Dejardin and Marcel Nijst, both members of CRIBA, and Madeleine (wife of Joseph and sister of Marcel). Madeleine had the coffee pot at the ready and a mass of cookies and

cakes enough for five times as many visitors. Before we departed the Dejardin home, Madeleine made us promise to stop back for refreshments before returning to the Netherlands.

The day was rather damp and cool as we headed to the Memorial to the 424th and 112th Regiments at Spineux. A report on the dedication of this memorial appeared in the Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 1990 issue of THE CUB. Jules Hurdebise of CRIBA met us here. He is most responsible for bringing the memorial about. Jules couldn't stay with us because he is still a working man -- Serge, Joseph and Marcel are all retired.

A visitor's book is maintained at the home across from the Memorial and I penned a short comment in the book. From Spineux we motored over to Lavaux, a village that Co. F moved into on January 14, 1945. Co. F had been in reserve at Aisomont for several days prior when we were told to move forward; Company leadership had some problem with the guiding maps because they were looking for forested areas shown on the maps which weren't there in reality. At any rate we were marching along in a column of twos when unexpected rifle fire startled every one, but no casualties. When we reached Lavaux, everyone's objective seemed to be finding a sheltered place for a good night's sleep. It was bitterly cold. I remember my squad spending the better part of the day patching holes with shelter halves, et cetera, only to be sent up at twilight to reinforce Company G on a nearby hill. Too exhausted to dig foxholes, we crawled in our sleeping bags and laid on the ground. It wasn't long before the Krauts began shelling the area and cries of "Medic" rang through the air, bringing the yearning for a deep hole to crawl into. The next morning we rejoined F Company in Lavaux.

Second platoon had commenced an attack on Ennal and was beaten back with casualties, and now I was back in time to be part of a first platoon attack. Our squad moved down the road from Lavaux toward Ennal and branched off on a cow path leading to the village. Once on this path, a German machine gun began chattering -- we were crawling on the path and twigs were being clipped off a short hedge on the left edge of the path. There was a haystack in the open field about 150 yards away and it appeared the gun was firing from

the base of the haystack. There was plenty of snow on the ground and several cows were milling around near the haystack. Whenever the cows interceded between the Germans and us, the firing stopped.

Some heavy firing from the village toward the head of our column caused our withdrawal to the main road. Then a couple of somewhat funny events occurred. A bazooka was brought up to fire at the haystack. The projectile was fired and fell short of the haystack, sliding harmlessly in the snow. Then a rifle grenade was fired and it plunked in the snow without effect. One of our tanks came out of nowhere to assess the situation and decided the lack of maneuverability on the path made tank use risky. Then came another unexpected appearance, General Perrin. He had a situation map on which he pointed out the presence of the 30th and 75th Divisions which would eventually meet and cut the 424th out of action; but first, he said, it was necessary to remove the Ennal pocket which was impeding progress of the two divisions. This was the only time in my combat experience that I was given some idea of what was going on and what my role was.

One of our men came up with a couple of German prisoners and General Perrin used his best German, "Wie viel soldaten in dorf? Response, "Ocht oder zehn, nicht mehr" The only time I ever questioned a General, I retorted, "You're not going to believe that, are you? And General Perrin calmly replied that information received from prisoners in the past has proved reliable. In the twilight now we moved down the lane toward Ennal with General Perrin. For whatever reason the machine gun at the haystack never fired and we moved through the village with General Perrin assigning men to search through the houses for lingering Germans. I remember in one of the houses there was a German bayonet resting in a mixture of eggs in a German helmet. Our attack had apparently coincided with their dinner hour!

Now here I was, 47 years later, going down the same path into Ennal with my CRIBA friends. And we stopped at one house I had entered on January 15, 1945. I know it was the same house because I had a picture postcard of it that I found there in 1945. Serge knew the people resident in the house from previous visits; we were invited in

for some homemade berry wine and Belgian cookies. The woman, now 68 years old, said she was in the village at the time of our attack, although I didn't remember seeing civilians at the time. It was a very enjoyable visit -- without interpreters we would not have been able to have an exchange.

We drove from Ennal to Manhay, the site of an attack by the 2nd Battalion of the 424th on Christmas Day, 1944. I remember racing down a hill in that attack when sweeping machine gun fire from German tanks stopped us in our tracks. I also remember the presence of fear when German flares lit up the area like high noon, highlighting us in our exposed positions. But here now in 1992 I was trying to find that same field. Serge, Joseph and Marcel engaged in conversation with the locals, determining which house was the last one north out of Manhay in 1944. A short distance away from that house on the main highway is a marker that indicates the furthest penetration north by the Germans. So this must have been the field that I lay in December, 1944, although the distances and slopes involved weren't as I remembered them.

We returned to Stavelot to keep our date with Joseph's wife, Madeleine, enjoying her refreshments, and then drove back to Amsterdam.

Thursday, May 14, my son and I, with our wives headed in the early morning to Spa, where we checked into a hotel. Leaving the women to engage in the baths for which Spa is noted, we kept our appointment with the Dejardins. Madeleine again was the gracious breakfast host. Joseph gave us directions to reach Marcel's home in Malmedy. Since the Malmedy massacre location was only a few kilometers away we made a visit. Another American, with his family, was there so we introduced ourselves. He served with the 5th Division in Luxemburg.

I was interested in tracing the steps of our retreat from Germany on December 17, 1944. I remember when we received word to move out then -- it was 8 pm as I recall, and visibility in the inky blackness of the woods was so limited that we placed an arm on the next man's shoulder to move out into lighter areas. Looking back then, toward the German ^{LINES,} there was an eerie effect created by the Germans use of searchlights to reflect

light off of low hanging clouds. Colonel Dupuy's Division history indicated that the crossing of the Our River by our battalion was via a Bailey Bridge at Weidig. Joseph and Marcel guided us to the spot where there now is a modern bridge. The terrain on the Belgian side of the Our River appeared appropriate to my memory. In 1944 during the period December 18 to 23 we moved several times, usually in the early hours of the morning, and the names of the villages we moved through were not known to me. I remember one instance when we were moving down a road, a column of tanks from the 9th Armored Division were going in the opposite direction. We thought they were going to the "front" and they thought we were going to the "front" and in that situation I guess we both were right! When we stopped in one of the villages those many years ago I remember getting the unwelcome news that our squad had been volunteered to make an attack on tanks to attempt to recapture a village we had retreated through the previous day. It sounded like using a pea shooter to fight Goliath. It was a pretty grim group that gathered on the pews of the local church to discuss the attack. I remember reference being made to noises from above being made by artillery observers who were in the church steeple. The likelihood of survival seemed pretty minimal to me and I gave my personal effects to others to relay to my next of kin. We waited in the church until the early morning hours and then, Hallelujah! The attack had been cancelled.

After going through several villages in the area with Joseph and Marcel, I settled on the probability that the church we met in was in Thommen and the place we were going to attack was Oudler. We rounded out the day with a visit to Medell where F Company was involved in the capture of the village on January 25, 1945.

At the conclusion of our day's motoring we invited Joseph and Marcel and their wives to have dinner with us and our wives. Marcel picked a great spot for dinner, Ferme Libert, located on the heights above Malmedy. Marcel mentioned that American artillery was located on these heights in 1944-5, sending shells over Malmedy to the heights on the other side of Malmedy occupied by the Germans.

The dinner was great, with a good wine selection. I understand Marcel accompanies the owner on wine buying trips to France. Before the evening was over we were in a

singing mood. At my request, Madeleine, who has a beautiful singing voice, sang Lily Marlene. Marcel, who speaks German as well as he speaks French, chimed in with a German ballad. The best I could do was "As Those Caissons go Rolling Along" in honor of the artillerymen who served here in the war. The whole experience was tremendous -- I enjoyed it immensely -- I can't say enough about the helpfulness and graciousness of our hosts. I hope I have the opportunity of meeting them again.

Milt Schuber
Co F, 424th