

# Fleetwood Area Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 23 Issue 4

October 2021

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### **PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

In all the commotion in today's world, we nearly lost sight of the fact that October, 2021 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Society. We will probably celebrate it in conjunction with the Borough's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023. The F.C.C.O. has suggested a "Night at the Museum" gala event. Since our founding we have been supported by the Borough and we appreciate the fine home they provide for us.

Do you ever wonder what Fleetwood (and Coxtown) looked like before the railroad was built? Who traveled through Fleetwood, and why? Who constructed the first buildings? A hint, there was not much here in 1840. Find the answers to these questions and more at our membership meeting on Wed. Oct. 20 at 7 PM when board member Art Counts presents the maps and drawings he has originated.

We are still analyzing the photos we printed from the 1904 glass slides donated to us by the family of John Moyer. These photos and Arthur's maps will be among those featured in a photo book we are preparing for the 2023 anniversary. We are looking for certain photos to complete our tour of Fleetwood. Some we are interested in finding are: Fred Snyder's GE appliance store, the "Greasy Spoon", Premise-Made Candy Store, Clark's appliance store when located on East Main St. Let us know if you can help. We are expecting "new" photos of Walter Noll's Dodge dealership and some of the interior of St. Paul's Chapel from the Noll family.

As we go to press, we learned that we must replace one of the large compressors and air handler in our heating/cooling system. This \$7,000 cost was unexpected. Consider this is as extra reason for you to renew your dues for 2022. Please use the enclosed remittance form.

We do not know the future of Covid restrictions. We do plan on resuming our normal activities and appreciate masks if that is the current guidance during those events.

*With warm regards,  
Bill Strause*

### **DAVID "BILL" WILSON**

#### **HOME TOWN WAR HERO**

David Willian Wilson (always known as Bill) was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1919. (Many friends never knew his real first name was David.) His Mother, Mary, was a first-generation Irish immigrant who worked long hours to support seven children. Her husband died when Bill was only 2 years old.

He was sent to Girard "college" in Philadelphia for poor, orphaned or fatherless boys where he received his education through high school.

His employment before and after the war was at Allentown Portland Cement Co. in Evansville, PA where he worked for 47 years, mostly as Office Manager and Personnel Director including hiring.

He joined the Army on April 7, 1942 at age 23 and was inducted at New Cumberland Depot, PA. At that time his home was on Beech St., Fleetwood.

His military training was extensive beginning at Ft. Chaffee, Arkansas where he was to join the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division which had been newly activated in Feb. 1942. Recruits poured in from across the country and by the middle of April, the quota of over 15,000 men had been reached. Training began in earnest and was lengthy.

Basic training was first, followed by specialist training as a “tanker.” Field exercises lasted 4 months and special desert and tactical training an additional 5 months.

Bill Wilson was now assigned to the 69<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division of General Patton’s Third Army.

It was not until Feb. 1944 that they sailed for England where additional training was given to ready them for combat.

Finally in mid-July they boarded LSTs to cross the English Channel, landing at Utah Beach just a few weeks after the D-Day invasion.

Combat began in France and was to take the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division through France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany.

The “Super Sixth” as it was now called, fought its way through more than 90 towns and villages amassing an astounding 278 days of combat, 221 of those days in consecutive order. During this period, records show they covered 3225 miles in combat, using 995,000 gallons of fuel and fired over 100,000 rounds of ammunition.

Wilson, as a communications specialist and later tank commander, experienced the loss of three tanks to enemy fire. He was wounded in November 1944 and again in January, 1945. But the experience in November shows that he was not only an experienced tanker but also that luck was on his side. His tank took a direct hit by a mortar round which killed the entire crew except for Bill who was seriously injured. Surgery was quickly done and a metal plate was inserted in his skull. In December, his mother, Mary E. Wilson received word stating only that her son was “making normal improvement.” Bill later returned to duty and more combat. In fact, it was just 2 months later that he was wounded again. In spite of being wounded in January, 1945, he went on to win

a Silver Star Medal on April 1 and a Bronze Star one day later. He had the exceptional honor of having his Silver Star pinned on him by General George Patton in the field. (See photo.)

Sgt. Bill Wilson was an exceptional soldier and earned citations for bravery in France, in Belgium and in Germany as well as several Purple Hearts, one with an Oak Leaf Cluster. We list his medals below. It is difficult to comprehend the stress of combat that Sgt. Wilson went through during that period.

#### **BRONZE STAR:**

For meritorious service in connection with military operations against the enemy in France, Belgium and Luxembourg from Sept 24, 1944 to Feb. 2, 1945. As communications Sergeant, he demonstrated outstanding technical skill, courage under fire and dependability in the efficient performance of his duties under combat conditions.

#### **SILVER STAR**

For gallantry in action in the vicinity of Spaugenburg, Germany on April 1, 1945.

In order to maintain radio communications during attack on a heavily defended town, he had to expose himself and his vehicle to intense enemy fire. This he did and his determination to efficiently perform his duties at great risk to his own life are in keeping with the finest traditions of the service.



Bill Wilson receiving the Silver Star medal from General Patton

### **BRONZE STAR WITH OAK LEAF CLUSTER**

For heroic achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy in the vicinity of Ottmanshausen, Germany on April 2, 1945.

When one of our tanks was hit and one of the crew members seriously wounded, Sgt Wilson drove a ¼ Ton truck 100 yards across open terrain exposed to heavy enemy fire, loaded the wounded soldier on the vehicle and drove him to a point where the man could be evacuated. His heroic act probably saved the man's life and reflects great credit upon himself and the military service.

### **PURPLE HEART WITH AN OAK LEAF CLUSTER DISTINGUISHED UNIT BADGE AS PART OF THE 69TH TANK BATTALION**

Among the major battles Sgt. Wilson fought in was the "Battle of the Bulge" in late December, 1944. The battle involved Hitler's best troops with over 200,000 German troops and over 1,000 tanks. It was Hitler's last chance to reverse the tide of the war. After days of hard fighting, the Germans broke through the American lines, seizing key crossroads and advancing toward the Meuse River and surrounding most of an infantry division.

But Supreme Commander General Dwight Eisenhower rushed in reinforcements. Within days, Lt. General George S. Patton, Jr. turned his Third Army (and Wilson's Division) to the north and was counterattacking against the German flank. For 23 days, American troops, often wading through deep snow drifts and in near zero weather, attacked the flanks of the shrinking bulge until they had restored the front and set the stage for the final drive to victory.

Living conditions for our troops were tents in deep snow, eating "C" rations and trying to stay warm.

By Jan 26, with losses of 2298 prisoners, 87 tanks, 33 big guns and very

heavy casualties, the enemy withdrew across the Our River, 20 miles from Bastogne.

British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill stated: "This is undoubtedly the greatest battle of the war and will, I believe, be regarded as an ever-famous American victory."

The 6<sup>th</sup> armored division then headed for the Siegfried line in Germany by repulsing several vicious counterattacks by the German Army.

By February, the "Super Sixth" had penetrated the Siegfried line capturing 32 towns, 253 pill boxes and taking over 1,000 prisoners. They continued into Germany, capturing Frankfurt and other German cities by March, 1945.

By April they advanced to cross the Saal River and freed an Allied POW camp. It was then that Sgt. Wilson's battalion reached the infamous Buchenwald concentration camp. The liberation took place on April 11, 1945 and Wilson's tank was the first to enter and experience the horrors that lay there. At that time the camp had 21,000 prisoners of whom 900 were children. The horrible experience followed him through life and he sometimes became emotional when recalling the conditions there and his gratitude for being a part of the liberation.

As the war ground down, the "Super Sixth" met up with the Russian Army, essentially ending the war for them.

Bill got his separation papers September 2, 1945 and returned home September 12. It was just three weeks later on Oct.6, that David William Wilson married Jane Sehl. Jane was sister to former Fleetwood Mayor Sam Sehl, and Fleetwood teacher Ruth Sehl Adams.

Jane and Bill had a daughter Mary, now married to Bruce Boegel and living in Fresno, California.

It must be noted that Mary was partially paralyzed in a car accident, but has risen from this life-changing experience to help other paralyzed persons throughout the world by designing and manufacturing specialized equipment to make life more manageable for them through their thriving company Prime Engineering, Inc. She is an exceptional woman. They have one child and 3 grandchildren.

Mary advised me that her father had formed life-long friendships with four

soldiers he met during the battle of the bulge and they met many times during their lifetimes. Those of us who remember Bill Wilson knew him as a quiet, unassuming, very likeable man. He was an unsung hero of World War II who, like many war heroes, seldom spoke of his wartime experiences.

We offer this posthumous salute to Sgt. Wilson and our heartfelt thanks to this home town hero for his exceptional war-time service. We consider it an honor to be able to tell his story.

*-Bob Knoll*

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