



117th Cavalry Association

www.117th-cav.org

102nd CAV (Mecz) 38th CAV (Mecz) 117th CAV (Mecz) 50th CAV RCN SQDN 50th RCN 5th RCN 5-117th CAV 1-102nd CAVALRY
Volume 31, Number 3 128th Issue (post WWII) Summer 2010



President's Message June 2010 On October 23, 2010, the 117th Cavalry Association will celebrate 30 years as an organization. Colonels Harold Samsel and Ken Klein (CO of the 5-117th Cavalry at the time) founded it in 1980. Their goal was to foster and preserve the spirit of the 117th Cavalry through involvement and participation of current and former members and to sustain the friendship and camaraderie developed through military service together in the 117th Cavalry and its predecessor units. When we come together for our 15th Biennial Reunion at Gibbs Hall, Fort Monmouth on 23 October 2010, those in attendance will share a common legacy and heritage that ties together a proud organization.

Cavalry in New Jersey traces its origins to the *Essex Troop of Cavalry* established in Newark. There has been an unbroken cavalry heritage that has existed since 1890 in our state's Army National Guard. Units with that legacy are rich in tradition and history. They have gone by a variety of names, numbers and descriptions: The 1st New Jersey Cavalry, the 102nd Cavalry Regiment, the 102nd Cavalry Group, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, the 102nd Armored Cavalry, the 50th

Reconnaissance Battalion, the 102nd Armor, the 5th Squadron of the 117th Cavalry and finally today's 1st Squadron of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment.

This legacy lives on today in the cavalry troopers that continue to serve their state and nation as members of the 1st Squadron of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment. Long ago they gave up their horses and sabers but they have not forgotten the traits that all cavalymen share, regardless of when we served. Words like destiny, heritage, tradition, loyalty and above all patriotism seem to transcend generations. When you put on a uniform, you soon come to realize that soldiers are the people who least like war, because they pay the highest price, but they have taken an oath to serve and defend our nation from its enemies and this global war on terror is just the latest challenge to a new generation of cavalymen.

I know that the cavalymen of today's New Jersey Army National Guard are up to the task. All New Jersey Cavalymen share a common heritage of generations of service to our community, state and nation. It continues to live on today with the Troopers of the 1st Squadron of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment.

Help us remember and share this legacy by attending the 2010 Biennial Reunion of our 117th Cavalry Association at Gibbs Hall on October 23, 2010. It promises to be a great event full of memories past and present of those who have served and those who continue to serve!

In particular, we should remember the passing of Colonel Harold Samsel, last CO of the WWII 117th Cavalry Recon Squadron (Mecz). His vision, leadership and mentoring helped establish our 117th Cavalry Association and had a profound influence on a generation of leadership that has led our 117th Cavalry Association.

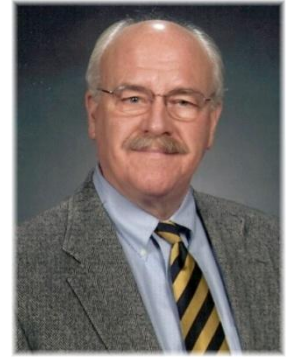
A special thanks to all our members who have made contributions to help defray the cost of the publication of "The SPUR." Please continue to show your support in your sponsorship of our 117th Cavalry Association newsletter "The SPUR." Many of you have made and continue to make donations to help pay the cost of publication and its mailing. Thanks to all of you for your generosity in support of our associations many initiatives in support of our membership and the 1-102nd Cavalry.

Show 'em the Way!

Dennis



From the Editor Phil Notestine We happy to have another excellent article from the leadership of the 1-102nd CAV. As you will read, CPT Joe McNamara, S-1 expresses himself very well in describing some of his experiences in Iraq as commander of Troop C. Readers will remember that it was Troop C “Crazyhorse” 5-117th CAV that did a 22-month tour of duty a few years earlier, CPT Kevin Welsh commanding. At that time, they were temporarily part of the 1-167 CAV (RISTA) NEARNG.



Inevitably, our WWII cavalymen veterans are leaving us for the cool waters and green pastures of *Fiddler's Green*. They leave a legacy that must be remembered. Their tracks are clear; we live in *the home of the brave and the land of the free* – and they helped to keep it so. We struggle to maintain it!

In this issue, we begin another serialized story – the diary of SGT Clayton Skoda, section sergeant of Troop B, 117th Cavalry who fought at Montrevel, France and became a POW, along with most of B Troop, out of ammo and with many casualties. We all know this courageous and proud story. Skoda, a tough Nebraska rancher, kept a secret diary of his time in as a prisoner of the Germans. He died last March, 91 years old. His nephew discovered the diary and sent it to us. As you read it, you will perceive that SGT Skoda was strong and quietly courageous, just as his platoon sergeant Ed Leonard knew him to be...and as they say, “*it takes one to know one*”.

Regular meeting of the Association 2 April 2010 at Westfield Led by COL (Ret.) Dennis Dougherty, president. The *Pledge of Allegiance* was followed by a moment of silence for those recently deceased. We discussed a diminishing revenue and membership trend and how to get more of the 1-102nd CAV squadron members to join. Dougherty led a discussion on the upcoming biennial reunion. Phil Notestine reported that Californians Larry Haskett and Marvin Carlile, both WWII veterans of Troop C, 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) are considering making the “pilgrimage” (Larry was a SGT and Marvin a 1LT; they haven’t spoken in 65 years!) He said that a maximum effort should be made to have NJ WWII vets and widows attend, and be seated together around special tables of honor. Don Kondroski was to check into the Red Roof Inn for discounts for the reunion attendees. Nominations for the *Distinguished Member of the Regiment* award were requested by COL Dougherty. During the June meeting, we will honor the aviation battalion, now returned from Iraq. A donation of \$500.00 was received from Mellon Bank for the *Coffee Express*. We sent two boxes to the aviation battalion. We voted to donate \$25.00 to the planting of 5 trees in remembrance of the NJ Guard members who died in Iraq. In attendance: Dennis Dougherty, Bill Gruss, Robert Apgar, Ken Mahan, Phil Notestine, Frank Wiswall, Henry Forstenhausler, Dave Ellis, Dutch Gauthier, James Anglim, Michael Hrycak, Frank Mnich and Don Kondrowski.

Luncheon meeting 5 May 2010 of the Class of '41, at Gibbs Hall, Fort Monmouth NJ Attendees participated in the *Pledge of Allegiance* and a prayer led by the local DAV Chapter, as we were seated for luncheon in the same (noisy) private room. We enjoyed a tasty buffet luncheon and good comradeship, before assembling for the formal meeting in the Great Room, around the darkened fireplace. After introductions between our WWII veterans and 1-102nd CAV officers MAJ Bill Morris XO and CPT Joe McNamara S-1, we remembered recently deceased COL Harold Samsel, CPT Paul Seidel and SGT Clayton Skoda, all WWII veterans of the 117th Cavalry. These were great cavalymen, patriots and community leaders, as are those of their living WWII comrades, and their brothers who have previously gathered and tarried on *Fiddlers Green*. COL Dougherty spoke of the planned biennial reunion. It was announced that Ed Leonard is to be decorated with the *French Legion of Honor* on Saturday, 8 May 2010 at the French Consulate, NYC. This date was VE Day in 1945 – 65 years ago. Ed and some buddies had already “taken their leave” from a German POW camp, “escaping” from “Russian hospitality” to American lines. MAJ Morris and CPT McNamara spoke of the transition of the 1-102nd CAV from armored to “light” - HUMVEE borne and one “foot” Recon Troop. The *Class of '41* Troopers decided to move the quarterly meeting & luncheon to Thursdays, no longer Wednesdays.

Accordingly, the next meeting date is Thursday, 5 August 2010.

Attending – *Class of '41* members Jack Ferguson, Jim Kane, Ed Leonard, Joe Pcoroba, Frank Prettyman, Frank Wiswall and replacement trooper (Sept. 1944) Arnold Lasner; guests Robert Apgar, Don Tracy, Myles Rahill, Stan Krenkowitz, Rich Gaudio (AUSA) Dennis Dougherty, Charlotte and Bill Merring, Ken Mahan, Phil Notestine, MAJ Bill Morris and CPT Joe McNamara.





The French Legion of Honor - Chevalier was conferred upon *Class of '41* member Ed Leonard of Pompton Plains, NJ at the French Consulate in Manhattan. The date was 8 May 2010 - 65 years after VE Day, 8 May 1945. Consul General Philippe Lailot decorated each of 15 honorees, speaking of their exploits while on French soil during WWII. Then a Platoon Sergeant of B Troop, 117th Cavalry, Leonard participated in combat security for Allied Headquarters in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, and helped to train *Free French* forces. After combat operations in Italy, the 117th Cavalry took part in *Operation Dragoon* – the invasion of southern France on 15 August 1944 and became the core and lead element of *Task Force Butler*. Leonard led his platoon in highly successful reconnaissance



operations as *Butler Task Force* gained hundreds of miles in pursuit of the German Army up the Rhone Valley, liberating many thousands of French citizens. French resistance, primarily the *Maquis*, was frequently helpful in gathering intelligence and contributed in the taking of *Montrevel*. Led by the 3rd Platoon of LT Bill Lutyne and PSG Ed Leonard, B Troop and one Platoon of A Troop (about 150 men) took the town in the early morning of 3



September 1944, in a daring action behind enemy lines, on orders from well above Squadron HQ. This was accomplished after a night advance, in heavy fog. When the dawn came and fog lifted, the Germans realized their loss. They soon brought overwhelming forces to bear and cut all routes of escape. After a 12 hour fight of great intensity, the valiant American cavalrymen had expended all ammunition and suffered significant casualties, even as they took a much greater toll of the Germans. When Squadron HQ told Captain John Wood, B Troop commander that no relief was to be had, Wood conferred with his remaining officers and decided to capitulate before all were killed. Platoon Sergeant Leonard and the rest of the Americans in Montrevel were taken POW. They were transported to Germany, while the seriously wounded were left behind with care. After months of internment and hardship, Leonard and some fellow prisoners escaped and returned to American lines, soon to return home to America.

← **Mrs. Renee Weiner and Ed Leonard** after the formalities. Mrs. Weiner, an Austrian by birth and member of the French Resistance helped to save hundreds from the Gestapo, at great and constant threat to her own life. After WWII, she immigrated to America from France and continued to help others throughout her life. Mrs. Weiner was decorated **Commander of the Legion of Honor**.



From CPT Joe McNamara, S-1, 1-102nd Cavalry As I put these words to paper or more accurately to my computer, I'm trying to imagine what the readers have in their minds as an understanding of the momentous change in the Cavalry and the National Guard that was precipitated by the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I believe that in telling the story of C Troop and its recent deployment to Iraq, I am also telling the story of the transformation of the National Guard. Many readers of this esteemed publication have undoubtedly served in a New Jersey Cavalry unit and will view this article in the context of their own experience. My hope in writing this piece is that a conversation will happen so that we never allow our National Guard to go backwards again.

When I joined the 5th Squadron, 117th Cavalry Regiment in August of 2000, the Army National Guard (ARNG) was a "Strategic Reserve" of the active duty Army. What did this mean? Well, in a nutshell, it meant that except for the occasional response to a natural disaster we would only be called on to conduct missions that the active army didn't want, like providing a token force in Kosovo after the newspapers stopped reporting on it. In the years before the fall of the Soviet Union, "Strategic Reserve", meant that we were fill-ins for the active Army, or as I call it, the big Army, should the Russians get it into their heads to invade Europe, but nothing more than that. With the exception of a very few units, the ARNG was left out of Viet Nam, a very big shift from the role we played in WWII. The Guard, in large part, became a place where draft aged men who did not want to go to Southeast Asia went to satisfy their military obligation. During the Gulf War, the Guard's participation was minimal at best except for a few units that National Guard Bureau and the big Army kept at a higher state of readiness than the rest. After the fall of the U.S.S.R. one could say that except for emergency operations in the U.S., the Army National Guard really lost what little relevance it had, and it showed.

Even in the months following 9/11, my scout platoon was inventorying equipment that the Big Army had stopped using 20 years earlier. Our readiness to go to war was such that we really could not. We found it difficult to conduct operations in New Jersey with the equipment we had let alone in a foreign country.

I don't mean to beat up on the Big Army except to point out that all that neglect came at a price, that the active duty Soldier's and our own Soldier's understanding of the role of the National Guard was that it was pretty much useless, a joke. I make mention of all of this to paint a picture of the way things were so that the reader can better appreciate what happened in the years following the attacks on 9/11.

The big shift came when the Department of Defense, stated that in order to prosecute the war on terror, namely the operations in Afghanistan and the coming invasion of Iraq, the National Guard would have to be called into Federal service. This was the shift for the Guard from a "Strategic Reserve" to an "Operational Force" just like it was in WWII. So, we had come full circle. Well, that's a whole lot easier to say than to make happen. What followed was the most dynamic transformation the National Guard had seen in half a century. Let us fast forward to December 2007. I was attending my Captains Career course in Fort Knox, Kentucky when I got a call from LTC Dean Spenzos, the former Squadron Commander asking if I would take Command of C Troop, and oh by the way, we were going to Iraq in September. I nearly fell over, having had Command of the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop just prior and figured I would never see another Troop Command; needless to say, I jumped at the offer.

The Squadron and the Brigade were going through a transformation as a part of a general Army force realignment that changed the make-up of the units within the 50th Brigade. We were going light compared to our previous structure. We were transforming to a new modular Infantry Brigade Combat Team concept. The new makeup called for two Infantry Battalions but it lost the 2-102nd Tank Battalion and the 5-117th Cavalry Squadron went light, losing its tanks and armored scout vehicles to a HMMWV (Humvee) based Squadron. The two units merged to reform the 1-102nd Cavalry Regiment. So it was a busy time receiving new equipment and training people up and getting the Brigade on par with its active duty counterparts.

After reorganizing the Troop to its deployed strength of 88, or so I thought, we headed to Ft. Bliss, Texas, for our mobilization training and validation. It was then I learned that there was some slip up and our actual strength should be 130. Well, what followed was a scramble across the Brigade to plus us up. Now you should know that C Troop had built quite a reputation for itself. It was commonly understood that while the rest of the Brigade would be conducting some kind of security mission involving a Theater Level Detention Facility, C Troop would be conducting a non-standard mission with no-kidding combat patrols; at least that was the perception. So we had many Soldiers trying to get into C Troop, mostly by interviewing with 1SG Thomas Decker (now 1-102nd CAV CSM), hoping that we would just bring them on board. Unfortunately, the word got back to their Commanders and First Sergeants and this was quickly brought to a halt. So we finished up at Ft. Bliss and headed to Kuwait under strength by about 10 men but sharp and ready for action. However, it goes to show that our Soldiers not only wanted to go but they wanted to go as combat Troops. A far cry from what most people were being fed in the press.

You should understand that throughout the mobilization process, we were never told with anything like precision what it was that we would actually be doing. There were rumors and many assumptions. You are probably asking yourself, "How that is possible?" Well, the mission, as it turns out, was so non-standard that nobody, except the unit we were relieving, really knew what it was all about. I only started talking to the guy I was going to relieve by the time we reached Kuwait, so, much of what we put together as a plan of action happened while we were waiting to be moved into theater.

We conducted some more training in Kuwait and then moved to our base of operations in Balad, Iraq, about 30 miles north of Baghdad. We were to conduct security operations for the 10th Special Forces Group who made up the bulk of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP), our higher headquarters in Iraq. Therefore, we were completely detached from the Squadron and the 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, our normal higher headquarters in NJ. Each of the teams we created were further attached to 10th Special Forces (SF) Group teams at various locations. The primary mission was to provide security for the SF teams and augment them during operations. Now, don't get the idea that we were working as an SF Team; we supported their operations, augmenting them during combat and logistical patrols which are operations to detain known insurgents or transport them to a detention facility, all the while providing base security for small to medium size outposts. So, after a short in-processing at Balad, our Soldiers boarded helicopters late in the night and under the cover of darkness moved to their areas of operations.

1LT Ryan Harty and SFC Charlie McDermott led a team in Muqhdadia, in the western part of central Iraq, which conducted over a hundred combat operations in support of a Special Forces Team. C Troop had only five Officers and three Platoon Sergeants covering 12 locations, and the leadership at many of the locations was a Staff Sergeant or Sergeant. SSG Dale Snyder led the Team in Baghdad, which operated a small detention facility with a big strategic mission. They encountered some of the worst of the insurgents there and ensured that all were treated and cared for working within the strictest guidelines for detainee operations. Information gained there fed operations at the other locations. SSG Harry Martinez worked closely with his team in one of the most dangerous areas outside the Green Zone in Baghdad, as did SFC Mark Forenback working with his team in close proximity to Sadr City, a known stronghold for insurgent activity.

1LT Tony Defoe and SSG Ron Koumaras and their team were responsible for base security operations in Basra in southern Iraq, hundreds of miles from our base in Balad.

The Troop was spread out all over central and Southern Iraq. We were augmented by several Individual Ready Reserve Soldiers who were called to active service. The geographical separation made contact and support very challenging. 1LT John Craddock, my Executive Officer, and then SSG Mitch Costa, our Supply Sergeant did a fantastic job of getting equipment and support out to each of the sites. John also served as Convoy Commander on a number of Combat Logistics patrols leading soldiers of the SF Group's logistics task force. Our operations team, SFC Dave Vangorden, SGT John Van Liew and other specialists coordinated the support for our teams including flight operations in conjunction with the Group and Air Force elements. We had a lot to learn in a short period of time, much of which was done on the job, including mastering the roads in our area and a new vehicle, the MRAP, which we had never used before.

The pace of operations in Iraq changed dramatically while we were there. In January of 2009, the Government of Iraq adopted a security agreement with the US essentially transferring the lead in many if not all counter insurgent operations to the Iraqi forces. It had the effect of significantly slowing the pace of operations for coalition forces. While we were not coming up with the operations or playing the lead for Iraqi forces we were supporting them through mentorship, training and logistical support. We were continuing to develop intelligence and helping to focus the efforts of Iraqi forces but the security agreement prevented coalition forces from acting on intelligence without the consent of the Government of Iraq which really slowed the US involvement in the counter-insurgency effort.

We continued to conduct operations in support of the CJSOTF-AP mission including conducting convoy support during the transition between the 10th Special Forces Group and the 5th Special Forces Group as they rotated in and out of theater, respectively. Overall, we were, and still are (as we maintain contact with many of our counterparts in the Special Forces community), highly regarded in mission performance and conduct. One of our Soldiers, SPC Francis received a coin for his dedication from the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) Commander. Our own First Sergeant, Thomas Decker, left C Troop to take on the roll as Squadron Command Sergeant Major after our tour. Several of our leaders received Bronze Star medals and many Soldiers received Commendation medals for their extraordinary service.

Looking back at the deployment and my own service in the New Jersey Army National Guard, I am very proud of the performance of the men of C Troop and amazed at the dramatic transformation of the Guard. These continuing deployments of National Guard Soldiers should engrain in everyone's mind, the importance of maintaining the Guard at its maximum efficiency. I am sure that on September 10th, 2001, if you said, "Man, I think we had better pay attention to the National Guard, we might really need these guys as an operational force to go to war..." you would have gotten a snicker, maybe an outright laugh, even from the Guard Soldiers. But, as history continues to prove to those who don't pay attention to it, learning that lesson just before game time is a tough place to be.

I told the Soldiers of C Troop as I passed Command to CPT Vince Tirri in December, it is my honor and privilege to have commanded the finest Troop in the New Jersey Army National Guard, not because of anything I did, but because no matter what point in time you choose, the American Soldier will always rise to the challenge and accomplish the mission.



The next article begins a series of the diary of SGT Clayton Skoda, a B Troop Section Sergeant in PSG Ed Leonard's Platoon. Skoda joined the 102nd Cavalry Regiment as a "remount" in 1942, before the regiment left for Europe. A big, strong farmer and excellent marksman, he earned a reputation of dependability and courage. Clayton Skoda's nephew Tom Duzak of Pittsburgh, PA discovered the diary soon after Skoda passed away. He took the time to transcribe it and forwarded it to us. As you might imagine, it took courage and resourcefulness to record and hide the diary while a POW.

POW History of SGT Clayton Skoda, Troop B, 117th Cavalry Recon Squadron (Mecz)

3 September 1944 - Captured by the German 11th Panzer (Ghost) Division in Montrevel, France. Our mission was to cut the roads; they were retreating. Got into town at 0600 that morning and took 80 prisoners and held half of the town. They kept bringing in reinforcements and surrounded us.

We fought against great odds 'til 1710 when our captain surrendered the whole force. At 1900 five other boys and I were loaded on a tank and the entire troop was loaded on trucks and tanks and moved back toward Germany. That night we were put into a barn to sleep. We had no food that day.

4 September – Ed Leonard, Ben Raby, Allard and myself were loaded on a half-track with three Germans and started out for Germany again. Was treated very good by the three Germans. They gave us bread and cheese to eat and plenty of it, also cigarettes. Travelled all day. That night we stopped in (?) France. The Germans we were with moved right in on a French family and made themselves to home. The French family did everything they could for us after they found out the three of us were Americans. We were fed a chicken noodle soup that night by the Germans which was very good.

5 September - Moved on that morning, traveled all day 'til we got to Belfort. Was hauled all over the town as the Germans seemed to be looking for some Headquarters of theirs. We stopped on the street for a while and soon several of the French noticed that we were Americans and they were giving us all sorts of fruit, bread and cigarettes. The Germans started chasing them away at the point of a bayonet. Was taken to this German headquarters and from there loaded on a truck and taken to a little village where the rest of our unit was being kept in a barn. Slept in the barn that night.

6 September - Stayed in this barn until mid afternoon when we were all loaded on trucks and taken to Mulhouse. Seen boys that seemed to be 14 years to 18 taking basic training. Again was put into a barn for the night. Fed us coffee, bread and potato salad that night. (First place we were searched.)

7 September - That morning taken to the railroad station which was nearly all wrecked from bombs, loaded on a passenger train, destination unknown. Train was strafed by American planes. We all got out and lay in the ditches but were driven back in the train at the point of a gun and then locked in. Planes came over again and strafed and there was nothing we could do but lay on the floor of our car and pray that we were not hit. Never was as scared in my life as I was then. Luckily, the planes were just after the engine and not the whole train. They missed the engine but got the coal car. Moved on after the all clear and traveled most of the day 'til we got to Offenburg, Germany where we were taken to a garrison on the edge of town. Searched again, fed, and then put in a barracks for the night. Our beds were made of wood with straw mattresses.

8 September - Spent the day at this camp. Found out that there were more Americans that had recently been captured. Issued our first Red Cross parcel and a carton of cigarettes, first smoke I had in three days.

8 September to 12 September - was kept at this garrison and did nothing but sit around in an enclosure and go in an air raid shelter three to five times a day. Had bread and cabbage soup to eat all the time.

(Continued on page 11)

Membership Update – SMG (ret) Ken Mahan

Trooper! Look at your address label! If the date is not September 2010 or later, you are behind in your dues. Your subscription to *The SPUR* is going to run out due to non-payment of dues. A sample of label:

SEPT 10



**KENNETH L. MAHAN
12 W. WALNUT ST
METUCHEN NJ 08840-2616**

To Members behind in their dues, you will have date circled in RED! This is the only notice you will receive. Send information and/or dues to me at the Metuchen address shown above. **Annual regular dues of \$20.00 are due in September.** Make checks payable to **117th CAV Association.** **NOTE: As of the February meeting it was voted to increase dues to \$20.00, starting September 2009.** **Email:** If you have an e-mail address, please send it to me at KMAHAN117@AOL.COM We are compiling an email list of members and we want and to include you. **Association web site:** www.117th-cav.org/ If you have a computer, try going to the web site. You can look up the WWII histories of the 38th, 102nd and 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons (Mecz).

We would like to recognize at the June Meeting 1/150th Assault Helicopter Battalion and Detachment 1, B Company, 628th Aviation Support Battalion. Many of the personnel have come from Air-Troops of 5/117th CAV.

We have lost one of the mainstays of the 117th Cavalry, in the Passing of **COL (Ret.) Harold J. Samsel**, for his books of the WWII Operational Histories of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) and 102nd Cavalry Group. He also had many of the three (38th, 102nd & 117th CAV) squadron officers write about their experiences with the Squadrons for inclusion in the 2 large books. It is invaluable to have written histories of these renowned squadrons. Other writers have been inspired to get the word out about the Cavalry during WWII. We have several of his books in our Heritage Room.

TAPS

Paul H. Seidel, 94, of Glen Elder, Kansas died Friday, April 30, 2010, at the Mitchell County Hospital Long Term Care Unit, Beloit. Seidel was a WWII veteran of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), joining the Squadron in Algeria, 1943, as a tank platoon leader, F Company. Lieutenant Seidel led his platoon in combat in Italy, France, Germany and Austria. At the end of the war, he was F Company (tanks) Commander. He was decorated with the *Bronze Star* – Valor, the *Purple Heart* and invasion Arrowheads. Captain Seidel was recalled to active duty during the Korean War, serving stateside. Seidel was raised on the family farm in Glen Elder, KS where he returned to after WWII. He was a happy and successful grain farmer and also raised cattle and horses. He was an ardent patriot, a member of the American Legion, Glen Elder Post 143. His wife Pauline Weins predeceased him in 1992. Survivors include his daughter, Janet Mayes and husband Nick, of Glen Elder; and three grandchildren, Blake, Braden and Blaise. Memorials may be made to the Paul Seidel Grandchildren Education Fund or to the charity of the donor's choice.

COL (Ret.) Harold J. Samsel, 99, of Port St. Lucie, Florida peacefully passed away on April 7, 2010, from injuries sustained from a fall at his home. He served during WWII with the 102nd Cavalry Group and the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) and last Squadron Commander of WWII. He was decorated with the *Bronze Star* and various other medals. Post WWII, he remained in the NJ Army National Guard and “stood up” the Squadron. He retired a Colonel of the 50th Armored Division HQ. He also had a business career having worked 54 years for the Home Insurance Company, retiring as executive VP. He was preceded in death by Lucille, his wife of 54 years. He leaves behind a daughter and son - Susan Haven and Donald. He also had four Grand-daughters, and a Great Grand-daughter. **In memoriam, make donations to the 117th Cavalry Association (noted for the Heritage Room) c/o Don Tracy, 11 Girard Ave., Chatham, NJ 07928.**

Reflections – by COL (Ret.) Kenneth Klein, past CO, 5-117th CAV *“When I was Squadron Commander in 1979 I wanted to form an Association dedicated to those who had served at Westfield. At this time I found out about the WWII history of the 117th CAV and the man who wrote it, Harold Samsel. I invited Harold in to talk on a couple of occasions and we agreed how to go about forming the Assoc. The first meeting was based on the list from Bill Maloney’s retirement party plus all the current Squadron members. With more meetings and word of mouth got out to everyone about the new 117th Assoc. Harold was chosen as our first president. At that year’s Christmas dinner a Squadron formation was held for the presentation of the French award by COL Pons from their embassy to the 117th for its wartime achievements. The next Fall we held the first reunion at Ft Monmouth. It was by far the best attended reunion with approximately 300 in attendance. Unfortunately, Harold didn't make it as he was sick. It just about broke his heart. He did make the next one, still as president, and had the time of his life with his old comrades”*

Reflections – by LTC (Ret.) Kenneth L. Quaas, Editor Emeritus, THE SPUR *“It was always a pleasure to be in his company. During my 27 years as Editor of THE SPUR, I had many exchanges with Harold and enjoyed working with him. THE SPUR was his baby. He knew how important it was as a communication medium. Harold Samsel was an outstanding military leader. He had a lot of savvy, and courage. As it was said of Abraham Lincoln on his passing, Harold “now belongs to the ages.”*

Reflections – by Phil Notestine, Editor, The SPUR *“I met Colonel Harold J. Samsel soon after I joined the 117th Cavalry Association in 1981. It was during the Association meetings that I came to learn about the WWII exploits of the 38th, 102nd and 117th Cavalry Squadrons. I bought Colonel Samsel’s “brown book”, primarily about the WWII operations of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) at a meeting, and when I got home, stayed up reading it from cover to cover! I was astounded by the evolution of a NJ National Guard horse cavalry regiment into heroic combat mechanized cavalry units. Some of the WWII combat veterans were men who were my senior NCOs and officers during my years in the Westfield and West Orange Armories. We post-war troopers knew little about their WWII exploits. Our Association meetings brought us all together. Years later, when Ken Quaas wanted to retire, after over 27 years as editor of The SPUR, I thought about taking it on - for months! Finally, I would do it, but would focus on retelling the WWII stories of our great men. I would call Harold many times, asking about individual troopers and events. He was always happy to help, and we come to know each other a bit more during each call. He always had some recollection of each trooper that I would ask about, even a junior enlisted man who was KIA in Italy. He knew the nomenclature of the fighting vehicles, and liked to talk about such things. When the Association presented the first of our new Association ring to him, he was greatly affected and wore the ring at all times. My last call to Harold was just before I sent the Spring 2010 issue to the printer. I wanted to get his approval of the article about his receiving the French Legion of Honor, and the use of his picture as a young lieutenant in 1942. He loved it all, and for a moment, he was that young officer once again, who was to become the last wartime commander of the renowned 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz).”*

CW5 (Ret.) Richard J. Monus, Jr., 61, of Forked River NJ died Wednesday, April 7, 2010, at Community Medical Center, Toms River. Mr. Monus was a senior automotive maintenance technician for 21 years with the Army National Guard 42 DISCOM, Somerset, retiring in March of 2007. He was with the 5-117th Cavalry Maintenance Section 1977 – 1983 at the Westfield Armory. During the years 2004-2005, he served overseas during Operation Iraq Freedom. Prior, he served our country as a Navy veteran of the Vietnam War on the USS America. Surviving are his wife of 20 years, Karen D. Monus; his son and daughter-in-law, Rick and Sara Monus of Washington, NJ; his daughter, Tracy Nemicck of Edison; his parents, Dick and Vera Monus of Edison; his mother-in-law, Ruth DeLuca of Parsippany; three brothers, Joe Monus of Union, Craig Monus of PA, and John Monus of Milltown; and five grandchildren, Zackary, Megan, Patrick, Conner and Lila Grace. In lieu of flowers, donations to St. Colman's Convent, Watervliet, N.Y., would be appreciated.

Clayton Thomas Skoda, 91, of Rushville, Nebraska died on March 27, 2010 at Gordon, NE. Born on the family farm near Rushville, Nebraska to Fred and Katie (Stava) Skoda on May 18, 1918. Clayton graduated high school in 1936 and worked the farm until joining the US Army in February 1942. After basic training in Fort Jackson SC, he was assigned to the 102nd Cavalry Regiment, Second Squadron. The regiment was sent to England and later the 2nd Squadron was sent to North Africa, soon to become a separate squadron, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz). Skoda was a scout in B Troop, fighting in Italy, and received several promotions to Section Sergeant, after *Operation Dragoon*, the invasion of southern France in August 15, 1944. The Squadron, part of *Task Force Butler*, played a leading role in chasing the German *11th Panzer (Ghost) Division* for hundreds of miles north towards Germany. During a daring raid deep behind German lines, taking the town of Montrevel, Skoda's Troop was surrounded, and after a 12 hour battle, out of ammo and with many casualties, the commander capitulated, saving the remaining troopers. Skoda and his comrades were taken POW and sent to Germany (See his diary, beginning in this issue of *The SPUR*). He was repatriated in early 1945 and returned home to his beloved Rushville, NE in July 1945. Skoda took up farming and raising cattle. He married Alvina (Brenner) in 1951. They, along with Alvina's sons, Bill and Bob, moved to the original Skoda homestead where Clayton and Alvina resided for nearly 50 years until her death in September of 2000. Skoda was a faithful member of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rushville and a permanent member of the American Legion Post 161, for over 60 years. He was past commander and a member of the firing squad. His patriotism ran deep. He was touched and proud to be among the WWII veterans honored in a special ceremony at Mount Rushmore, SD in 2004. Those who mourn his passing include many lifelong friends and family who enjoyed spending many holidays and especially Memorial Day with him. He was preceded in death by his parents, his sisters, wife Alvina, and stepsons, Bill and Bob. His immediate survivors include nephews and nieces Doug Milburn, Leonard "Wad" Milburn, and Ardis Guelde of Rushville, Tom Duzak of Pennsylvania, Allen, Jim, and Sandra Duzak of California, and grandchildren, Peggy Steinberg, Billy Albee, Jesse Way, Shawn Way and Jennifer Brewer of Montana.

Ed Leonard reflects on Clayton Skoda *"It's not easy to write a piece about Clayton Skoda. He held himself close. My first impression, after he was assigned to my platoon, was "He's a man among these boys". He was dead serious about being a good soldier – beating the maniac Hitler – and going home to Nebraska. We both agreed that we might die for our country but we planned instead to win and go home. When I wanted someone to cover my back, I chose Skoda. If it got rough, he would still be there. He was my close companion when we were starving as POWs. Skoda never flinched or complained. We both made it home OK. He went the Russian way east; I went west to the American lines. Clayton Skoda – a good soldier – a good friend...Farewell!"*



Thomas J. Robinson, 90, of Tinton Falls, NJ passed away on December 10, 2008 at home with his family, after battling cancer for 20 years. He was born in Rahway, NJ. A NJ Bell Telephone man, he joined the 102nd Cavalry Regiment. While at Fort Jackson, SC he was recruited into the USAAF and commissioned a Signal Corps officer at Ft. Monmouth, NJ. He was assigned to a US Army Air Force base in NC to train P-47 *Thunderbolt* fighter pilots, and later served in the Philippines and Okinawa, ending the war as Captain in 1946. CPT Robinson was recalled during the Korean War, 1951-52. He worked with Morgan Guaranty Trust and retired from NJ Bell Telephone Company as an outside plant engineer. He was a trustee of the Fort Monmouth AUSA Chapter, Fort Monmouth Officer's Club, the *Essex Troop* Association, American Legion, Telephone Pioneers, Monmouth Boat Club and past commodore of the North Shrewsbury Ice Boat & Yacht Club. He was predeceased by his parents and a loving son Richard Jon Robinson. He is survived by his wife Betty, married 68 years. Also his son Thomas J. Robinson, Jr., daughter-in-law Michelle Robinson; three grandchildren - Lisa Natale, Lindsay, and Kerry; and two great grand children Terez and Nico Natale. Memorial donations may be made to the American Cancer Society, 801 Broad St. Shrewsbury, NJ 07702.



117th CAVALRY ASSOCIATION

2010 BIENNIAL REUNION

OCTOBER 23, 2010

GIBBS HALL-FORT MONMOUTH

Honoring Those Who Have Served and Those Who Continue to Serve

\$45.00 per person (cash bar) if received before Aug 20, 2010; \$50 thereafter

Cocktail Hour: 6 – 7 PM / Dinner 7 PM

Meal Choices: Chicken Francaise....Prime Rib....Stuffed Flounder

Attending our 2010 Reunion on October 23 2010 - make arrangements to stay at the Comfort Inn and Suites located at 3 Center Plaza, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724. Make your reservation at their local number 1.732.4800 for the special reunion rate of \$89 per night. Directions to the Hotel:

FROM POINTS NORTH: Take the NJ Turnpike South to Exit 11 (Garden State Pkwy). Take the Garden State Pkwy South to Exit 105. At the first light, turn right onto Hope Rd. Follow for about .25 miles and turn right into Centre Plaza. Hotel is on the right.

FROM POINTS SOUTH: Take the NJ Turnpike North to Exit 7A (Shore Points). Take 195 East to the Garden State Parkway North. Follow the Garden State Parkway North to Exit 105. Stay to the left off the Exit and follow signs to Rt. 36 (Long Branch). At the first light, turn right onto Hope Road. Go about .25 miles and turn right onto Centre Plaza. Hotel is on the right.

Reservations

Money and reservations by Oct. 15, 2010

Respond to: COL (Ret.) Dennis J. Dougherty

615 Raymond Street

Westfield, NJ 07090

Saturday October 23 X \$45.00 _____

X \$50.00 _____ after August 20

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

Meal Choice: Chicken _____ Beef _____ Fish _____

Name: _____ Guest: _____

Seat With: _____



BE A BOOSTER OF THE SPUR

Shown at the left of each name is the last issue and year in which your entry will be published. SP = Spring, SU = Summer, FA = Fall, WI = Winter



SP-15 EMIL & MARGARET ALLGEIER
 FA-12 BILL ANTONUCCI (mem. of) 1SG WM. B. MALONEY SR.
 SU-25 BOB & LORRAINE APGAR
 FA-12 ROSE MARIE BENNERT (mem. of) BILL BENNERT
 SU-17RALPH BOCKINO (mem. of) by wife CATHERINE
 FA-11 DOROTHY CASPAR (mem. of husb.) RICHARD J. CASPAR
 WI-12 MSG TOM BULLOCK A Troop
 FA-12 SANTI CARNEVALI *Class of '41*, 117th CAV WWII
 SP-13 SSG (Ret.) CLEMENT & JEAN CURRY
 WI-11 LTC (Ret.) PETER D'ELIA
 WI-10 MARIE DARBY (mem. of husb.) CPT JOHN DARBY
 WI-10 WALT DITZEL
 WI-10 SGM (Ret.) JIM DOOLEY & JUDITH
 WI-13 COL (Ret.) DENNIS DOUGHERTY
 WI-10 1SG (Ret.) PHILIP DUNN, A Troop
 FA-13 LTC PATRICK du TERTRE (ARMY OF FRANCE)
 WI-10 1SG (Ret.) DAVE ELLIS, D Troop
 WI-17 MANUEL G. FERRI
 WI-11 LTC (Ret.) ALAN R. FISHER
 WI-22 MIRIAM FISHER (mem. of husb.) WILLIAM E. FISHER
 SP-12 WILLIAM FISHER JR.
 FA-11 BOB FOLEY, HHT (Ret.)
 WI-10 HENRY & MARION FORSTENHAUSLER
 WI-31 JOHN FRANTZ, LT A Troop
 WI-12 ROBERT GREEN
 WI-10 1SG (Ret.) ROBERT GRZESZCZAK
 SP-11 BILL HETTRICK, CHIEF ARMORER (Ret.)
 WI-10 BG STEPHEN J. HINES
 FA-11 LTC (Ret.) JOHN S. HUFF (mem. of) C Troop, 117th CAV '43-'44
 FA-11 CHARLES JOHNSON
 SU-10 (mem. of) GEORGE F. (FRED) KIMBLE
 SP-14 COL (Ret.) KEN KLEIN in loving mem. of wife JOANN
 SU-10 DONALD KONDROSKI
 WI-10 MADELINE KUTTER (mem. of) ERNEST KUTTER
 SP-12 ESTELLE & ARNOLD LASNER, WWII 117th CAV
French Legion of Honor
 SP-11 JAY LASNER (in honor of father) ARNOLD LASNER
 SP-13 RON La VERDE (mem. of uncle) T-5 THOMAS G. HENNESSY, A Troop, 117th CAV KIA 5 JUNE '44 ROME
 WI-11 ROCHUS E. & CELESTE LAWRENCE
 WI-10 WALTER LAWRENCE
 SU-12 EDWARD J. LEONARD, *Class of '41*, PSG B Troop 117th CAV, Montrevel POW *French Legion of Honor*
 SP-12 BOB LUTZ *Class of '41*, C Troop 117th CAV WWII
French Legion of Honor
 WI-10 ARTHUR G. A. MAGGS JR. CSM (Ret.)
 WI-13 JEAN & SGM (Ret.) KEN MAHAN
 SU-12 KEVIN MALONEY (mem. of) 1SG WM. B. MALONEY
 FA-14 PETE & EDITH MARTINEZ
 SP-12 ED & BETH MATTHEWS (mem. of Ed's father)
 T-4 ED MATTHEWS B TROOP 102nd CAV WWII
 SP-11 W. SCOTT McCANN
 FA-11 CHARLOTTE & BILL MERRING

SU-13 PAMELA THONACK MILLER (mem. of father) HERBERT A. THONACK, *Class of '41*, 117th CAV
 SU-15 JUANITA MITCHELL (mem. of husb) FRANK, *Class of '41*, PSG B Troop 117th CAV, Montrevel POW
 WI-10 CW5 (Ret.) FRANK MNICH & JANET
 FA-13 RONNIE NIER
 WI-12 PHILIP NOTESTINE (mem. of) MAJ JOHN B. COULSTON
 Troops C & E, *Class of '41*;
 602nd Tank Destroyer BN '43-'45
 SP-12 JOYCE & HAROLD "SMOKIE" OWEN, *Class of '41*, 117th CAV WWII
 WI-11 FOTINOS PANAGAKOS
 WI-11 FRANK & BETTY PATRICK
 SP-11 COL (Ret.) BOB PIERCE & CAROL, (mem. of) RICK APBLETT
 WI-16 (in mem. of) COL (Ret.) TOM PIDDINGTON, *Class of '41*
 SU-12 SALLIE LEE PIERCE (Widow of) DANIEL LEE, **CMH**
 WI-10 CSM (Ret.) AL PHELAN Jr.
 WI-10 LTC (Ret.) TONY PLONNER
 SP-11 DOT & LTC (Ret.) KEN QUAAS
 FA-11 ART REINBOLD (mem. of) ED SUTTON
 SP-11 ART & RUTH REINBOLD
 WI-92 MRS. ROBERT D. ROBBINS, (mem. of ROBBIE)
 FA-21 FRED RODMAN, (mem. of brother) WALTER RODMAN
 F Company (tanks) 102nd CAV WWII
 SU-11 COL (Ret.) HAROLD SAMSEL, *Class of '41*, 117th CAV WWII *French Legion of Honor*
 SP-15 SALCIDO FAMILY (in mem. of) 1LT MANUEL SALCIDO (Ft Jackson '42) 117th CAV. F CO. KIA Italy June 1944
 SP-17 JAMES SCANLON
 WI-10 ROBERT J. SMITH
 SP-12 JOHN SUITER
 WI-10 SFC JOSEPH W. TOOMEY, B Troop 102nd CAV (Iraq) & SABINA
 SU-13 CW4 (Ret.) DON TRACY & CHICKIE
 FA-11 CHARLES A VIVIANO (50th CAV RCN SQDN)
 SP-12 CSM (Ret.) HENRY WETZEL & GRACE, (mem. of) GEORGE "RED" EMERY
 SP-14 LTC (Ret.) FRANK WISWALL, USAF *Class of '41* B Troop, 102nd CAV '41- '42 Fr. *Legion of Honor*
 SP-11 MRS. EDWARD J. WITOS (loving mem. of husb.) EDWARD J. WITOS SR.
 WI-27 FRANK A. WOODS, PSG A Troop, 3rd Platoon 117th CAV WWII

BECOME A BOOSTER – RENEW YOUR BOOSTER

To become a Booster of *The Spur*, please send \$10.00 for a year of inclusion as a Booster in four issues of *The Spur*. Make check payable to the **117th Cavalry Association** - \$10.00 for each year of support. Mail to **Bill Gruss, Treasurer, 117th Cavalry Association, 21 Blake Drive, Clark NJ 07066-1645**. Indicate how you wish to be listed: _____

(Clayton Skoda POW diary - continued from page 6)

13 September - Given bread and cheese for a three day trip. The cheese was so strong and smelled so rotten everyone threw it away. Taken to the station and loaded on box cars and locked in. Traveled for a couple days and a night without getting out of the car more than twice. Left sitting on a side track one whole night in Frankfurt. American bombers were over that night and bombed Frankfurt. Luckily they were not after the railroad yards. Next morning started our slow journey again. Saw bomber formations several times that day.

17 September – Still on the train, saw fighters overhead and we just knew any minute they would be after the train we were on but they never strafed our train but did shoot down two German fighters right overhead. Pulled into Limberg about 1730. Unloaded and marched to a prisoner of war camp about a mile and a half from town. Nothing was given us to eat and we were put in a cold barracks to sleep without any heat or blankets. No sleep that night as was freezing all night.

18 September - Given nothing to eat that morning and taken over to where they had about 1,200 British and American prisoners of War. Fed us cabbage soup that noon, and night, very little cabbage, mostly water. Given one blanket that afternoon. Everyone slept in big tents, five tents with 400 to 500 in each tent. There was some straw to sleep on but men there before us had all of that, so we had to sleep on the ground. No sleep again that night because of the cold.

19 September - Given one loaf of bread for 4 men and a cup of coffee for breakfast, cabbage soup that noon and night, mostly hot water. Was registered that day. Found out our rations was two soups a day with 4 on a loaf of bread one day and then every other day five on a loaf. Sunday we got a slice of meat and a small piece of cheese. The soup was mostly cabbage soup but once in a while we got barley or pea soup. We were issued a few Red Cross parcels so got along fairly well. Was in this camp until Sept. 26th, when they shipped all the privates out to another camp and all the NCOs to another.

26 September - Was given a loaf of bread and a parcel for two men and loaded on the train to be sent to an NCO POW camp. They put 35 of us in about 1/3 of the car and the German guards had the other 2/3 of the car. Was so crowded that everyone was in misery most of the time. Was treated fairly well by the guards and had more to eat on this trip than any other.

30 September - Pulled into Kustrin, Germany that morning and marched about 4 miles to the POW camp. Was issued one blanket and a mess gear. Was fed a mess gear full of potatoes that evening. All of the boys here us were out of smokes and were eating very poor. We found out our rations would consist of a cup of coffee or tea in the morning, mess gear of soup at noon, tea or coffee in the evening and 6 men on a loaf of bread every day except Sunday and Wednesday, when it was 5 on a loaf. We lived like that without any smokes until October 17th when we were issued our first food parcel. I hope I never have to eat that little amount and do without smokes that long again as it was really hell. Our rations have been the same except that we have been cut down to a canteen cup of soup instead of the mess gear full. Also we get two or three spoonfuls of jam on Tuesday, a small piece of cheese on Thursday and two small pieces of meat on Sunday. Things in camp have been getting better as things are being better organized and we are getting food parcels and clothing and other equipment from the Red Cross quite regular. Thanksgiving we didn't have anything special to eat but they took the contents out of a few Red Cross parcels they had left over and put them in the soup so we at least had a good soup that day.

24 December 1944 -Was issued one Christmas parcel for every man for Christmas and lights were on all night Christmas Eve so everyone stayed up that night and ate and played cards. Nothing special Christmas day outside of we still done a lot of eating, all of course, from our parcel as we never got a thing more to eat from the Germans.

31 December - Issued a food parcel between two men so we could have something to eat New Year's. Cold and snowing.

TO BE CONTINUED....NEXT ISSUE!

Phil Notestine, Editor, *The SPUR*
22 Yorke Road
Mountain Lakes, NJ 07046
Email: notie@msn.com



COL (Ret.) Harold Samsel
President Emeritus
COL (Ret.) Dennis Dougherty
President
LTC (Ret.) Ken Quaas
Editor Emeritus

DUES DUE ↓

1ST New Jersey Cavalry



MISSION STATEMENT: It is the continuing objective of *The SPUR* to foster and preserve the Spirit of the 117th Cavalry Association, and to promote and enhance the friendships and camaraderie of our members, who are mutually bound by service and devotion to our country.

NEXT ASSOCIATION MEETINGS: 4 JUNE 2010, 10 September 2010 and then *Reunion* at Fort Monmouth 23 October 2010, 5 November 2010, 4 February 2011, 1 April 2011, 3 June 2011