Let me begin by wishing everyone a very **Merry Christmas** and **Happy New Year**, and to all my Jewish friends, a very **Happy Hanukkah**.

If you are receiving this by mistake, or no longer wish to receive an occasional newsletter, please scroll to the end of this newsletter. You will see instructions on how to opt-out. I am using a new newsletter service, and have been trying to compile and combine several lists. It's been quite a chore, and I'm sure I either missed people or added people by accident. If so please accept my apologies. Also, if you are reading this via my website, and aren't on the list, please use our NEW opt-in form.

I'd like to extend condolences to those who lost a loved one this year. My heart goes out to you and yours, especially during the holidays. Many of the vets wrote to me on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, and it gets more and more difficult to scroll through my contact list without getting all teary-eyed.

Special get well wishes to **Al Panebianco, 45th Infantry Division**, and **Bill Douglass, 1301st Engineer**. You are always in my thoughts and prayers. I'd also like to include a very dear pal, Doug Wilber, son of **Charles Wilber, 326th Engineer**. Your dad would be very proud of all you've done in his memory.
2009 got off to a rough start for me, while I experienced what I call a mild depression. During this period I let a lot of things slide including the website, my correspondence and my documentary. And as many of you know, once this cycle starts, it's often very difficult to get over that hump. You're feeling depressed, you see stacks of work, and then you get more depressed and anxious, and it all becomes a vicious circle...Whew!

First off my brother-in-law was diagnosed with stage four esophageal cancer, and it really took a toll on the all of us. We went through several months of touch-and-go, and at one point we were called to say our goodbyes. But I am happy to report he pulled through like a trooper, and as of today is cancer-free. Words cannot express our joy!

Secondly, I think I simply overwhelmed myself with work, and my body and soul finally said; enough. While I consider myself a very organized person, documents, letters, email, photos and information kept arriving at the speed-of-light and I just couldn't keep up.

Meanwhile the country store we own, fell into the abyss of the ever-crumbling Michigan economy, and Lee and I were faced with some tough decisions. Finally in late July we had no choice but to lay-off our part-time help, and began working seven days a week to keep the store afloat. It was tough at first, but in the long run it actually turned out to be the right decision and a blessing in disguise.

It forced us to re-think a few things, work on improving our lives even more, getting healthier, working out, losing weight, and as the summer progressed and my perennial gardens thrived, things finally began to turn-around. Slowly but surely I began to feel better and started re-organizing, attacking those piles in my office and approaching life with a new attitude. Funny how things turn out; no? I began to feel inspired again, and I am happy to say; I'm feeling back to 'my 'ol self'. More than ever, I'm grateful for all we have.

P.S. Don't worry, we've since shortened our daily hours, and as of late November, are now closed on Sundays! Ahhhh!
The Website

As reported last year, the main site and the forum continue to grow at an exponential rate, and I'm very delighted with the progress. As of today we've had over 128,000 visitors to the main site, and boast 660 forum members. I've also been able to add more links, upload more material supplied by veterans and their families, and introduced some new features. If you haven't had the chance, take a look at our Engineer Photo Gallery, which includes well over 2,000 photos, and a great collection of engineer drawings supplied by Renee Klish, Army Art Curator, U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C. Many thanks to Renee and her staff. Kudos!

Drawing by Brovsky Sagatalian - 36th Combat Engineer - WWII

You'll also find a large selection of archived documents, including daily, weekly, and monthly journals, and after-action reports from the 540th Combat Engineers. Also new are some fantastic video interviews with
John Fallon, Carl Furtado, Tony Stefanelli, John Zappitello and Tom Nokes, which were conducted by myself and dear friend Jim Miller (son of Bill Miller, 36th Engineer), and a last minute addition (not even uploaded yet), a two-hour interview with Wilber Thomas Dickens, 540th Combat Engineer, conducted by Steve Casey, son of Major Donald Casey, also from my dad's unit. So stop by, get a pot of coffee brewing, sit back and make yourself at home.

2009 Reunions

I was very blessed again this year, and was able to make my fifth appearance at the Seahorse Reunion in Lebanon, PA. My daughter Kai-Ann was also in attendance, much to the delight of the veterans and their families, who've taken quite a shining to her.

Sadly, John Fallon, one of the organizers and real backbone of the group, couldn't be with us this year, as he stayed behind to care for a very sick wife. It was the first time in over 30 years, he wasn't able to be with his foxhole buddies, and we sorely missed his presence. We also raised a glass to toast those who passed away in 2009, and to those who were unable to attend due to age and poor health. Every year the ranks thin, and it takes a real toll on the hearts of the engineers and their families.

To the delight of all, everyone in attendance agreed to carry on the tradition, and John Zappitello secured our spot for 2010. Of the four VI Corps regiments (36th, 39th, 540th and 1108th), the 36th is the only one with plans for another reunion. A few 540th "kids", including myself and Kai-Ann, attended the 2008 festivities, but sadly Kai and I were the only ones to put in an appearance in September. As the numbers dwindle, we feel it's of utmost importance to keep the group together, and the only way we can do this is to muster support from the sons, daughters and grand kids. We therefore hope to see you in September!
John Zappitello, 36th Combat Engineer and yours truly

The 1108th held their FINAL big bash at Fort Leonard Wood, and retired their banner. While it's sad to see, it is now proudly displayed and holds a place of honor along with many other donated engineer items from WWII. Max Jonah, editor of the unit's newsletter, just mailed the farewell edition, which is available for download on our website.

The 1108th Banner retires to Fort Leonard Wood

I had the pleasure to meet Max, his wife and many of the fine
members of the 1108th Regiment and their families, at the 2006 and 2007 reunions held in Port Huron, MI, and will always treasure those memories.

And here's to the 39th, who had there final reunion a few years back. Dave Wagner and I still keep in touch, and he has a key role in, No Bridge Too Far.

Warren Harris, Arie Breshears and David Wagner - 2006 Reunion

Army Engineer Magazine

Once again I had the honor of working with Colonel Mike Morgan, editor extraordinaire, Army Engineer Magazine, and we are pleased to announce a beautiful fourteen-page color spread, WWII Memories of a Combat Engineer by John T. Fallon II. Mike was delighted to be able to include these memoirs in the November/December 2009 issue, which is also available for download from John Fallon's page on our website.

I hope everyone finds a moment to read his very-well written memoirs,
which not only detail their inspiring engineer feats, but the many days they spent fighting as infantry beside such units as the 3rd and 45th Infantry units, amongst others.

Army Corps of Engineer's Office of History - Trip down south...

In late January, my husband Lee and I drove down to Atlanta, GA to visit with our daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter, and on the way home, drove up the east coast and were able to make several stops along the way. While still in Georgia, we had lunch with my buddy Russell Weiskircher, 45th Infantry Division. It was great to have a second opportunity to visit in person. Russ is also vice-chairman of the Georgia Holocaust Commission, and to this day, remains active on the lecture circuit. God bless ya Russ!

One of the great highlights during our trip, was meeting up with Michael Brodhead. Michael, one of the historians working at the Office of History, was one of my first contacts while researching my father's history, and instrumental in getting me started. After conversing via phone and email over the last several years, we finally had the chance to meet in person. We certainly enjoyed our tour of the facility, including the chance to peruse the private archives, being introduced to other colleagues, and enjoying a wonderful lunch with the gang, before heading out. To Michael and the entire staff; thanks for the memories...

No Bridge Too Far - a documentary in progress

As with any type of project involving outside sources, there are always complications and set-backs, and this one was certainly no exception to the rule. While stonewalls were anticipated, I had no idea just how much work this would be. Nor did I realize the extent of red-tape and hours I would spend jumping through all the hoops.

First off I had to deal with copyright issues, and in this day and age,
it's nothing to scoff at. Can anyone spell l-a-w-y-e-r-s? Even though most of the material I am using within the production is public-domain (meaning it's free to use and incorporate), several songs, etc., warranted contacting various companies to determine whether or not I could, let alone what costs might arise!

For instance, I originally wanted to insert two photos of Bing Crosby and “gang” from the movie White Christmas. But after contacting Universal Film Studios, I determined I didn't need to use them THAT BAD! Ha-ha! It was going to cost $500.00 per photo, and even though they were very kind and were willing to cut a deal with me, it was still a bit too rich for my blood (well budget). However, it wasn't all a lost cause.

The same sequence also uses a segment of the tune, White Christmas with Bing on vocals, and believe it or not, I was granted a very generous license by both the Irving Berlin Publishing Company, and Universal Music, thus making it plausible to keep this in the production. I'm delighted for it was integral to Dick Fietz, 370th Engineer's 1941 Christmas story.

Dick Fietz

Very special thanks to Scott Trotter Kinghorn (Chippendale Music), who waived all customary fees and royalties for use of Bing Crosby's, Adeste Fidelis. Scott's late uncle John Scott Trotter, was the band leader and worked side-by-side with Bing, providing entertainment via
their Kraft Music Hall broadcasts. As Scott stated, "I am sure that my late Uncle John would be proud to have his music considered for this..." This wonderful tune now provides the background for Irving Cherney's, segment in chapter one.

Irving Cherney

Along with a great selection of acquired 1940's tunes, I've also found some excellent sources for background music from Freeplay Music, NeoSounds and MusicLoops. Many thanks!

Secondly, I was in dire need of young men to provide the voice-overs for the veterans. While several friends and family members came to my assistance, I still lacked enough volunteers and began looking elsewhere. I finally came up with a plausible solution; why not contact drama departments from local universities. It would solve my dilemma and also be a good experience for undergrad and grad students.

Well my first two attempts didn't quite work, and I went through a set of disappointing set-backs, and was now two months further behind schedule. You can well imagine my frustration at this point, but not one to give up easily, I sent out a plea to my alma mater, Eastern Michigan University. They instantly replied with, “Let's give it a try!” so beginning next week, we are going to give this our best shot. I've heard “third time's a charm”, so let's hope that old adage still rings true.

In spite of all the delays, the project is turning out better than my wildest expectations, and I've received a lot of positive response. Just recently I was invited (along with two of “my vets”) to attend the 36th Engineer Brigade's “Rugged” Leadership Conference at Fort Hood, (all expenses paid) where a segment of my documentary was featured. More on the trip, later...
Because I am writing, directing and producing this myself, I am applying for grants and now seeking corporate sponsorship. This will allow me to continue my work, and give me the opportunity to submit to PBS and other television companies. Contrary to what you may believe, they will not air your production for free and after talking with several people who have gone down this road, I've discovered it's quite an expensive venture! Regardless of acquiring immediate air-time, I plan on selling the several-DVD set from our website upon completion, and will be inquiring into packaging costs in the near future.

I've had several people ask, “Is it too late to submit material for the documentary?”, and the answer is a resounding, no! So if you'd like to share your story, or submit photos, or if you have any additional questions, don't hesitate to contact me. I'd be thrilled to hear from you.

Also if anyone is interested, I will be more than happy to send a copy of the “work in progress”. Just send me your name and address, and $5.00 to cover the cost of the DVD's and postage. You can also find some sneak-previews, online.
36th Engineer Brigade's Rugged Conference

During the 2008 Reunion in Lebanon, PA, we had the pleasure of meeting the current commander of the 36th Engineer Brigade, Colonel Kent Savre. The colonel approached me about visiting Fort Hood, for he was impressed with my work, and felt it was very important for the present-days troops to remember and preserve their illustrious history. Captain John Fallon was also invited, but as stated above, was unable to attend.

Colonel Kent Savre and John Fallon sporting today's "camos" at last year's reunion
The trip became a reality in September, with Carl Furtado and Tom Nokes, as proud representatives for the regiment. Also present were Tom's son, Bob and his lovely wife, Carol "Spunky". We spent three wonderful days participating in the conference, touring the base and attending a wonderful engineer's ball. A grand time was had by all!

While there, an offer to visit Fort Leonard Wood was extended to me by Brigadier General Bryan G. Watson, Commandant, US Army Engineer Regiment. After watching the documentary segment, he asked if I had ever been to Fort Leonard Wood, and said I must make every effort to visit in the near future. I am excited by the prospect and can't wait to tour the great facility with their impressive engineer archives. Thanks for the invite!
Carl Furtado, Marion and Reese

Carl, Col and Mrs Savre and myself
Huge thanks to Colonel Kent Savre, CSM Terrence W. Murphy, and everyone else who made this trip a reality. Very special thanks to 2nd Lt Maurice "Reese" Galloway, who spent countless hours making all the arrangements and went above and beyond the "call of duty", before, during and after. Extended thanks to rest of the brigade for their down-home hospitality, and for serving our country. Stay Rugged!

Invited veterans and their families, on their way to the ball

Unfortunately several short days after our return home, a breaking story abruptly shook our fond memories, when a soldier at Fort Hood opened fire, killing thirteen and injuring dozens of others. The next morning I received a reply from the Colonel, informing me the 20th Engineer Battalion had taken several hits. The 20th is one of the six battalions comprising the 36th Engineer Brigade, and the very same bn who gave us a tour of the Motor Pool the previous Wednesday. Hard to digest such a travesty.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the soldiers and their families at Fort Hood, especially those of the 20th ECB.
Assistance please...

Due to the volume of email I receive on a daily basis, I'm sending out a plea for help! For instance, while I enjoy a great joke as well as the next person, try and limit it to the "cream-of-the-crop. If you do forward jokes, copy and paste the text into a new email; no "forwards"! How many times have you received an email several pages in length, with a complete list of everyone who has received the email before you, and littered with these symbols "<<<<<<<<<<<"? Arghhh! If you have, you will sympathize with me.

Please, no virus warnings. Why? Because most are hoaxes, old news or already covered by your virus protection software. And one last favor; no Power Point (pps) attachments. I simply don't have the time.

The forum - While I don't mind lending assistance to "newbies" or those who are experiencing problems, posting for forum members often diverts time I could be spending on other projects. So if you have news and are able, please login and share it with the rest of us. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

For other helpful guidelines, please visit our forum.

In Conclusion

Don't forget about these features on the main site: This Day in History - WWII, provided by the History Channel, our Video Page, What's New, a complete list in chronological order, the Site Search and most importantly, our Memoir Pages and updated WWII Jukebox, which now features over 250 great tunes!

Thanks to all the webmasters who swapped links with me this year, for it's great to be part of the vastly expanding World War II net. And last but not least, thanks to everyone who signed our Guestbook and all who write to me on a daily basis. Though I attempt to personally reply
in a timely fashion, it's not always possible as my WWII email list grows by leaps-and-bounds. So if you are one of those whom I've neglected to answer, just drop me a note to jump-start my memory!

Special request! I would love to have more interview footage to include on the site and within the documentary. So, if you have either a video or audio recorder, or know someone who does, please take a few moments of your time to record some of your memories from the war. I am grateful for anything, be it two minutes or two hours, but let's try and capture anything we can before it's too late.

I would like to apologize for missing the chance to capture a few of you who desired to be included in the interview project during the reunion. Please forgive this oversight, for time simply didn't allow me to do everything I wished to accomplish in three short days.

If I've forgotten to say thanks or remiss in not mentioning you or a past event, I hope you won't feel left out. For regardless of time, distance or my memory "slips", please know each and every one of you will always hold a special place in my heart.

Keep sending those cards, letters and email, for I sure love hearing from ya!

Best wishes for the holidays,

Marion Chard
Proud Daughter of Walter (Monday) Poniedzialek
540th Combat Engineer WWII

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