

De André WAGNER
22-05-2014

C'est toute une histoire.

Un soldat Américain qui avait participé à la Libération a recherché par les DNA du 26/11/2013 une famille de la région de Haguenau. Article joint.
La famille retrouvée, il reste en contact avec elle.

Quelqu'un a trouvé mon article sur Ken sur le Net et l'a contacté.
Dernièrement, il a envoyé une bouteille de champagne à chacun, et comme Ken est très médiatique, il s'est publié dans le canard du coin.

Voilà l'histoire.



Edition de Haguenau
<http://www.dna.fr/>

Secteur de Haguenau p

par **S.W.** publiée le 26/11/2013

ACTUALITÉ

CONFLITS

Mémoire Dans les environs de Haguenau

Qui a vu Santa Claus en 1944 ?



Le caporal Richard Cotton tel qu'il est apparu à des enfants des environs de Haguenau il y a près de 70 ans. Document remis

Un soldat américain qui avait participé à la libération de l'Alsace souhaite retrouver les enfants de la famille des environs de Haguenau à laquelle il avait offert des jouets pour Noël en 1944.

« Jusqu'à mon dernier souffle , je me souviendrai d'eux, de leur regard lorsqu'ils ont ouvert les cadeaux. Ils n'avaient rien reçu pour Noël depuis quatre ans.

Sans exagération de ma part, cela valait un million de dollars pour moi, de voir ces enfants et leur maman aussi heureux ». Ainsi témoigne le caporal Richard Cotton, près de 70 ans après avoir joué le rôle de Santa Claus (Saint-Nicolas, équivalent du père Noël aux Etats-Unis) dans une Alsace tout juste libérée.

Des jouets envoyés par sa mère depuis les Etats-Unis

Soldat de la 79e division d'infanterie américaine (The Croix de Lorraine), il rappelle qu'à l'époque, les magazines US incitaient leurs lecteurs à envoyer des jouets aux enfants français qui en étaient privés depuis longtemps. « Aux environs de Noël, j'ai reçu un colis de ma mère et j'ai vite porté les jouets enveloppés dans du papier à une famille qui avait trois enfants. Leur père était à Haguenau, pas très loin, mais ils ne l'avaient pas vu depuis plus d'un mois ».

De l'endroit exact où ils habitaient, dans les environs de Haguenau, le caporal Richard Cotton ne garde pas de souvenirs précis, ce qu'il regrette énormément dans la mesure où toute sa vie, il s'est demandé ce que cette famille est devenue.

« Mon plus beau cadeau de Noël, dit le vétéran qui vit en Californie, serait de retrouver ces enfants qui doivent avoir maintenant dans les soixante-dix ans et plus ». Médaillé de la bronze Star et d'une Purple Hart (décernée au nom du président des États-Unis) pour son courage et sa dévotion envers sa patrie, le caporal Richard Cotton âgé aujourd'hui de 89 ans, ajoute : « Je remercie Dieu que jamais mon pays n'ait eu à souffrir de la guerre [conflit étranger sur le territoire américain, Ndlr] et que ma famille n'ait pas eu à vivre ce que ces familles françaises ont vécu. »

Si parmi nos lecteurs, les enfants qui ont reçu ces jouets se reconnaissent, ils peuvent contacter Jocelyne Papelard-Bressia (☎ 06 13 56 52 43, jocelyne.papelard@orange) ou Jean-Claude Bécherand (☎ 06 14 11 92 20, jean-claude.becherand@orange.fr) qui les mettront alors en relation avec le généreux libérateur.

PHIL LUCIANO/JOURNAL STAR

<http://www.pjstar.com/article/20140510/NEWS/140509018/10960/NEWS>

Luciano: French citizen thanks Peoria veteran Ken Jones for his World War II service



Ken Jones of Peoria looks over a bottle of champagne he received recently as a token of gratitude, from a stranger in Haguenau, France. In 1944, infantryman Jones helped liberate the village from the Nazis, a story recounted late last year in a French newspaper. After reading the story, a 46-year-old Haguenau resident sent Jones a thank-you note, plus the bubbly - on behalf of his parents and grandparents, who lived in the village at the time of the liberation

Ken Jones de Peoria tient une bouteille de champagne qu'il a reçu récemment en signe de gratitude d'un inconnu de Haguenau.

En 1944, le fantassin Jones a participé à la libération de la ville aux mains des Nazis. Une histoire qui a été rapportée à la fin de l'année dernière dans un journal français.

Après la parution de l'article un haguénovien de 46 ans lui a envoyé un mot de remerciement avec une bouteille de "pétillant" au nom de ses parents et grand parents qui résidaient à Haguenau à cette époque.

Phil Luciano

Journal Star columnist

Posted May. 10, 2014 @ 12:00 pm

The thank you came late, by almost 70 years.

Not long ago, Ken Jones looked in his mailbox to find a package from France. Inside was a bottle of champagne, plus a letter. The signature was that of a stranger, grateful to Jones for helping liberate the French town Haguenau.

"I (thank) you in the name of all my family for your sacrifice and your will to fight for the liberation. ... Merci for your courage."

Jones, 88, leans on his walker, staring at the letter. His mind stretches back seven decades to a forboding French forest and the chaotic work he and his comrades helped do there. And he smiles that someone might remember a battle that in the history of World War II remains mostly a footnote.

"Imagine, getting a letter like that, out of the blue, after all these years," he says, grin widening. "Isn't that something?"



Reared outside St. Louis, Jones went into the Army in 1943. In October of the next year, the skinny 18-year-old joined the 79th Infantry Division in Saverne, France. They set their sights on Haguenau, a 700-year-old town of 22,000 residents in the Alsace region, near Strasbourg and the German border. Haguenau had been taken by the Germans in 1940; by autumn 1944, it remained under control of the 256th Volksgrenadier Division.

On Dec. 1, the 79th slipped into the edge of the vast forests around Haguenau. A week later, the 79th began clearing the forest of Nazis. Despite resistance, the 79th steadily pushed forward, even though the immense forest and endless

trees could confuse soldiers.

"I never knew where I was going or where I was," Jones says.

But he knew his job. All the while, Jones worked a Browning automatic rifle — essentially a handheld machine gun.

At 20 pounds, it was hard to haul around and maneuver. So, an assistant gunner carried additional ammunition and helped feed Jones' gun. On the second day of engagement, Jones' assistant gunner was replaced by a soldier who had never seen combat. He would die that same day.

The 79th prevailed. By Dec. 11, the Germans withdrew. Meanwhile, the Americans went house-to-house, telling locals of their liberation. The next day, Stars and Stripes ran a photo of Jones and his unit making their way through the town.

But that's not the story that made Jones a celebrity in Haguenau. That wouldn't happen until seven decades later.

The day after the liberation, Jones' unit was on the move to fight other battles, along the way fighting not just the Germans but pneumonia, trench foot and sub-zero temperatures. On Christmas night, Jones was guarding a bridge at Scheibenhart, France, when he was wounded by a German artillery round. He spent six weeks recuperating in a hospital before rejoining his unit. But in January, while Jones was in the hospital, the Germans launched a counteroffensive and reoccupied Haguenau. The town eventually was liberated by the American military a second and final time on March 15, 1945.

De André WAGNER
27-05-2014

Notre Américain vient de m'envoyer deux articles de presse. A présent, il passe pour un héros national.

André.

LOCAL & STATE
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SUNDAY, MAY 11, 2014 JournalStar pjstar.com SECTION B

Unassuming Peorian a hero in France

French newspaper declares World War II veteran the 'liberator of Haguenau'

PHIL LUCIANO

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Reared outside St. Louis, Jones went into the Army in 1943. In October of the next year, the skinny 18-year-old joined the 79th Infantry Division in Saverne, France. They saw their sight on Haguenau, a 100-year-old town of 22,000 residents in the Alsace region, near Strasbourg and the German border. Haguenau had been taken by the Germans in 1940; in autumn 1944, it remained under control of the 25th Volksgrenadier Division.

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Please see **LUCIANO**, Page B9

Continued from Page B1

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Following the war, Jones returned to St. Louis and graduated with a degree in business administration from Washington University, where he met his wife-to-be. The couple — Ken and Barbie — married in 1951. While raising three children, they moved to Peoria in 1969 so Jones could take a job with Caterpillar Inc. He retired from Caterpillar's accounting department in 1984.

Meanwhile, Jones had always wanted to visit Haguenau, but the responsibilities of life always seemed to get in the way. He'd read about the town and the war, but he could never figure out exactly where he had been in those forests.

So, in 2005, he emailed Haguenau's Office of Tourism: "The last time I visited



PHIL LUCIANO/JOURNAL STAR

Ken Jones of Peoria holds a bottle of champagne he received recently as a token of gratitude from a stranger in Haguenau, France. In 1944, infantryman Jones helped liberate the village from the Nazis, a story recounted late last year in a French newspaper. After reading the story, a 46-year-old Haguenau resident sent Jones a thank-you note, plus the bubbly — on behalf of his parents and grandparents, who lived in the village at the time of the liberation.

Haguenau was in 1944. I was in the U.S. infantry at the time and really did not get a good look at your city as we went through. ... Is it possible for someone to communicate with me?"

Jones was put in contact with Andre Wagner of Haguenau's historical society and a World War II soldier in the German army. The two sent more than 70 emails back and forth over the year.

Wagner compiled Jones' recollections into an article published on Dec. 11, 2005, in the newspaper Dernieres Nouvelles De Strasbourg.

Wagner wrote, "To my knowledge, this is the only testimony which gives accurate details by a young American soldier at the time of the fighting in Haguenau."



Each December, the town celebrates the anniversary

of the arrival of the 79th.

Last year, a newspaper there ran a new article based on Jones' recollections. A huge headline blared, "Ken Jones, liberator of Haguenau." Jones smiles at that headline, saying, "It looks like I did it all by myself, but that's not true."

Still, it impressed a modern-day resident of Haguenau: Daniel Walzer, 46. His parents were 4 years old in 1944, living in Haguenau with their respective parents. As Walzer read the story, he realized the 79th Infantry forever changed — and maybe saved — his ancestors' lives.

So, he took pen to paper and wrote a letter to liberator Ken Jones, gushing with thanks. "I wish that God will give you a long life, and I feel sure He will bless you for your participation in this great event

of history."

To underscore his gratitude, Walzer (who did not return a request for comment for this story) also sent a \$30 bottle of champagne. It arrived recently at Lutheran Hillside Village, home to Jones and his wife.

Jones doesn't drink, so as not to affect medications. So, the bottle's contents remain untouched on a shelf in his living room.

"It'll sit there for a good long while," he says.

Meanwhile, Jones has been busy on his computer, trading emails with Walzer, who has many questions. And Jones enjoys thinking back and providing details.

"What a pleasant surprise after 70 years," Jones says.

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