

CCC LEGACY CHAPTER 123 NEWSLETTER

3412 Pleasant Run Road, Irving, Texas 75062

August 2015

Chartered: Nov. 1, 1985. **Past Presidents:** *Nelson Oats, *Harold Ballard, *W. O. Mullin, *Verle Oringderff, *Harold Trammell, *William Oakley, Frank Polenta, *S. L. Baker, *George Payne, *Harry Steinert, & *Al Clement. *deceased. **Current Officers:** President-Mike Pixler, phone contact: 817-929-1557, First Vice President-Jim Rau, phone contact: 817-307-0889, Second Vice president-Pat Mann, phone: [info later], Secretary/Treasurer- Steve Porter, phone contact: 817-244-6714, Sergeant at Arms-Troy Jones, Chaplain-Rev. James Pixler, Kitchen Committee, [Open], Historian-Ruby Pixler, Reporter at Large & Newsletter Editor-Bill Stallings, phone contact: 972-255-7237.

Monthly Meeting is held on the *second* Saturday of each month from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM at the North Side Multipurpose Center, 1801 Harrington [North], Fort Worth, TX 76106. If you are using a GPS display, this address is the FRONT of the building; our meeting room is at the BACK off of Homan St. The door to the meeting room is on the right as you approach from the parking lot, and will have a CCC sign on it.

Driving Directions: Interstate Hwy 30 runs east & west, and accesses the downtown Fort Worth area from the south. Exit north on Henderson St. After a couple of miles it crosses a fork of the Trinity River and becomes State Hwy 199 which goes to Lake Worth, and the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. When you reach the traffic light at the intersection of 18th St. NW, turn right [east] and go up the hill four blocks to Homan St. Turn left [north], and go a block to the Y. Stay right and continue into the Center's rear parking lot. If coming from Loop 820 North, go south on Hwy 199 and left on 18th St. Our meeting room door with the CCC sign is to the right as you approach the building. Our dues are \$10 a person annually, effective from Oct. to Oct. Bring a friend & enjoy fun, fellowship & food. Sign the register for you may win the \$10 door prize.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES: Bob & Nelda Forston, 8/12, and James & Linda Pixler, 8/8.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Farris Brewer, 8/16, Cam Coberly, 8/24, Joe Kleinbrook, 8/1, Steve Porter, 8/31, and Michael Smith, 8/29.

MINUTES OF MEETING, CCC LEGACY CHAPTER 123, August 8, 2015

Weather: Sunny, Temp: 87°, Attendance: 16.

The meeting was called to order at 11:07 AM by President Mike Pixler.

The Invocation was offered by Merle Timblin. The pledges to the flags were led by Sgt-at-Arms Troy Jones.

President Pixler reminded members of the purpose of the CCC Legacy to educate and further the understanding of the Civilian Conservation Corps and its contribution to American life from 1933 to 1942.

The minutes of the July 2015 meeting were made available to members present. Motion to accept the minutes as printed was made by Jim Rau and seconded by Troy Jones. All in favor, motion passed.

It was a pleasure to have CCC Boy and member Larkin Dilbeck present again after his injury and surgery in June. Wedding anniversary #43 will be celebrated on August 12 by Bob and Nelda Forston. Birthdays in August include Michael Smith (8/29), Joe Kleinbrook (8/1), Farris Brewer (8/16), Cam Coberly (8/24), and Steve Porter (8/31). Happy Birthday and Happy Anniversary were sung to the celebrants by the members.

President Pixler reminded members to vote in the CCC Legacy national election being held in September, if they have not already done so.

A discussion of possibly holding the 2016 CCC Legacy annual gathering in Fort Worth covered many areas including estimate of number of attendees, publicity, transportation, local attractions and entertainment, volunteer, and funding sources. Following the discussion the chapter voted to hold the CCC Legacy Gathering Texas 2016 in Fort Worth. Based on past practices, a motion was made by Jim Rau to authorize the Chapter to spend up to \$700.00 to assist members' expenses who attend the 2015 event in Windsor, CT, in September 2015. Second by Troy Jones, all in favor, motion passed.

The can was passed for donations. Door prize drawing was won by Troy Jones who requested the money be used to pay his 2015 dues.

The blessing was offered by Merle Timblin. Motion to adjourn was made by Troy Jones and seconded by Wes Culwell. President Pixler adjourned the meeting at 12:25 PM. The Kitchen Committee served a generous and delicious meal to members and guests. Next meeting will be September 13, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Porter, Sec/Treasurer

A SPECIAL OCCASION AND A VERY SPECIAL TALK

If you remember last year we wrote about being invited to go to Europe on a small group tour with members CCC Boy and World War II veteran, Larkin Dilbeck, and his daughter Larka Tetens. Also Larka's son and Larkin's grandson, Josh Tetens, came along. The group was members of the 740th Tank Battalion Association, and the occasion was the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, of which the group and Larkin were deeply involved in. The 740th was equipped with Sherman tanks and were considered as "hired guns," that is they were attached to whatever Infantry unit needed the best support. We were over there almost two weeks visiting places that the 740th either fought in or stayed at in Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and Germany.

One of the first places we visited in our tour bus was a small village in Belgium called Aubin-Neufchateau. It was, and still is, a village of small farms and homes nestled in the beautiful rolling countryside of Belgium. I was not prepared for our welcome there when we got off the bus. It was like we were visiting royalty and people from all the area villages crowded around welcoming us. I forgot to say that there were three veterans of the 740th with us who were able to make the journey: Sgt. Harold Bradley, tank commander, C Company; Cpl. Larkin Dilbeck, C. Company, tank bow gunner; and Sgt. Harry Miller of Headquarters Company, and they were the real royalty.

The mayor of the town and other dignitaries met us, but the two people that all on the tour bus wanted to see most were the husband and wife team of Mathilda and Marcel Schmetz, who welcomed us off the bus. Over the years these two had adopted the 740th as part of their family, and in turn the 740th adopted them.

This is all leading up to the present and the recent 42nd Annual Memorial Meeting of the 740th Tank Battalion Association at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Grapevine and to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of Victory in Europe 1945-2015. To honor the occasion Mark Hatchel, President of the Association and members arranged to bring Mathilda and Marcel, affectionately nicknamed, "The Belgian M & Ms," all the way from Belgium with all expenses paid to the event. There were over 120 in attendance that day, including twelve veterans of the 740th. The rest were wives, daughters, relatives and friends of the group. After getting the event started, Mark then introduced Mathilde to give the following talk, which we present in her own words.

"FREEDOM ISN'T FREE"

"Good morning everyone! It is an honor for us to be here for the 42nd Annual Reunion of the 740th Tank Battalion, and thank the members who generously paid all the expenses of our trip. Thanks to you, we had our first Mexican food and our first margarita, which my husband Marcel really enjoyed! For those whom we have not met before, we are Mathilda and Marcel Schmetz, the creators of the "Remember Museum 39-45" of Thimister-Clermont in Belgium. Belgium is a small country, especially compared to Texas! It has 11 million people, and three languages are spoken: French, Dutch, and German.

In 1933, when Hitler became the leader of Germany, Belgium realized that something was again going on. Even though Belgium was a neutral country, the Germans built a defense fortification line a few miles inside the German border, and it was called the Siegfried Line. On May 10th, 1940, the German Army invaded Belgium and took back the villages they had lost after WWI. The German Army was very powerful, and after 18 days of fighting, the Belgium King surrendered with his soldiers becoming prisoners of war for the next 5 years.

In 1940 near the end of October, the German Army advanced the borders once again, this time annexing 10 more villages. Clermont, where we live, was part of those villages. The newly annexed villages became German, while the rest of Belgium was living under German rules. Marcel, my husband, was 7 years old when the area where his family lived was annexed to Germany. He was forced to attend primary school in a small neighboring village where only German was allowed to be spoken.

He and the people of the annexed areas were not trusted by the Germans. They lost all their freedoms and were very controlled. For example, one major freedom they lost: the ability to lock their doors. To most people a key is just a little piece of metal, but it was a big freedom lost as the SS were allowed to come into their homes day or night, without permission or knocking on the door.

The German Army took from the civilians anything they could use. First, they took the homing pigeons, and it was forbidden for the civilians to have pigeons. Then they took the horses. Horses in their army were more important than men, as a man cannot pull a cannon! They even had gas masks for the horses, just in case gas was used as in WWI. They confiscated everything you had made of copper such as doorknobs, decorations, and all the bells in the churches. They melted the metal to make ammunition.

They knew everything about you. If you had many chickens, you were required to bring to the German Commandant Officer that many eggs. If you had that many cows, you should bring so much milk to the Commandant. That's why a war is not just difficult for soldiers, but also involves civilians who will suffer because of war. War is just "Hell"...Any War!

On September 11, 1944, the whole area where we live was liberated by the soldiers of the First Infantry Division, thus 9/11 is a very sad day for America, but was once a very happy for Belgium.

The American soldiers fought then around Aachen in the Hurtgen Forest. With winter approaching, some soldiers took a break at Marcel's parents' farm, which had been transformed into an enormous camp for 110 G.I.s belonging to the 1st Inf. Div. 26th Regiment "Delta Co."

This was a paradise for the 11 year-old boy, who had been deprived of everything the previous 4 years and changed him for life. Marcel was impressed and transformed by the contrast existing between the previous restriction and bad treatment during the German annexation, in contrast to the generosity of the American G.I.s.

In the meantime, the tankers of the 740th Tank Bn. were taken into the homes of the people at Auben-Neufchateau, a little village near Marcel's family farm. The next three weeks were a dream until the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge, when soldiers or tankers left in a hurry for new battles, leaving all their personal items behind. As a result, the Schmetz family and many other families were in front of a real "Ali Baba Cavern." While some families used or sold off the G.I.'s items, Marcel kept them, in respect and in memory of those who had left.

Over the next 40 years, Marcel taught himself to restore vehicles and opened his own body shop. In 1991, thanks to a car accident that I made, (which some friends say on purpose) he and I met. Together we established the "Remember Museum" with all the items left on his parent's farm. Touched and impressed by the respect we have shown these items, more and more American WWII veterans and family members chose to donate their belongings, confident their donated items and their military service would never be forgotten.

We have so many friends because of our dedication to the former American soldiers, but also because of our concern for the future and living our life as a bridge between the World War II veterans and veterans of the wars that have occurred since. We are not caught in one time, but we are moving into other wars and sacrifices.

Over the years our visitors have been mainly Americans, but we have more and more Germans visiting. The Germans seem more reserved but also appreciate the very personal nature and sensibility of the way in which the museum has been set up. At our place there is no Judgment or resentment. Only REMEMBER!! We don't ask for recognition, it is just a labor of love and respect for the Americans! As proof of our dedication, a few years ago we were honored to receive the Outstanding Public Service Award from the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. Last week we were honored again with a "Proclamation" by the City Council in Farmersville, Texas, the hometown of Audie Murphy, proclaiming Saturday, August 29th, 2015, as Marcel and Mathilde Schmetz Day. The proclamation submitted by the Gerens was presented to us by the mayor. The main reason for these awards is that we operate the museum, we organize ceremonies, and host free of charge WWII American Veterans, WW II American Orphans, and young American veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Of course we have less WWII veterans coming, but more and more WWII orphans. They still miss their father. These children were never able to have closure or express their feeling in the States as that war happened in Europe or in the Pacific. To us it's a forgotten generation, and we hope it helps when they are able to come and see where their father fought and died. They can also realize that someone needed to free us from the Nazi Dictatorship and that their father came and made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us. I feel that after their visit, they can better understand, and they seem to be very proud of their fathers. We strive also to let the young wounded warriors of today know that we will always love the Americans and that we are also touched by what they have done.

We will never be able to know the horrors endured by those who gave their life, and we will never have a chance to look them in the eyes and simply say "thank you!" To the families and those veterans who fought for us, we offer our thanks for their spending countless hours, days, months, and years far away from loved ones, often in extreme and dangerous conditions. We are thankful to these veterans for fighting for our freedoms and especially for those who made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us.

Now, regarding the ceremonies we organize, there is one closest to our heart which is the *Ceremony for the Adoption of American Grave Sites*. Every year, we hold a ceremony at which we give out the "Certificate of Adoption" to those wishing to adopt a grave site. We personally have adopted 14 graves of young American Soldiers who died for our freedom. Adopting a grave doesn't mean we work or maintain the crosses, but we go as often as possible to pray over them and lay flowers. Of course, all the graves of the 740th Tk. Bn. friends, especially Mark Hatchel, and all the American friends for their support of the Remember Museum to help us keep the memory alive, and to remind all of us to "Never Forget." We love you and may God Bless America and may God Bless Belgium."

Mathilde & Marcel Schmetz

The Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy is a non-profit organization dedicated to research, preservation, and education to promote better understanding of the CCC and its continuing contribution to American life and culture. *“I propose to create a Civilian Conservation Corps to be used in simple work, more important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work.*

--FDR, 1933

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