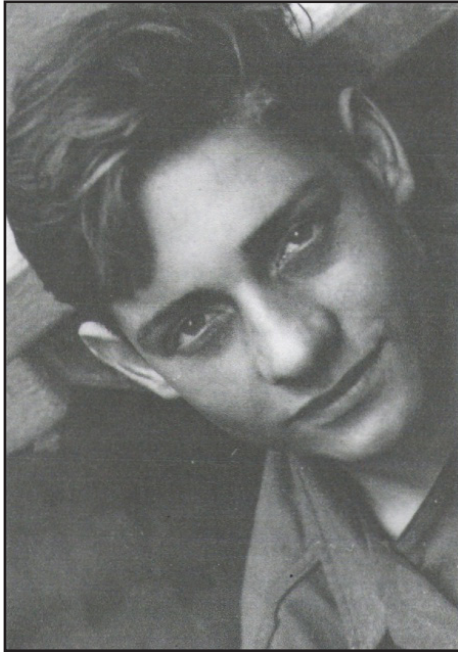




“From this day to the ending of the world, but we in it shall be remember’d; We few, we happy few, we Band of Brothers...” ~William Shakespeare

The Story of Marcel Bertrand, The french kid of the 83rd Signal Company

by Antoine Noslier



MARCEL BERTRAND 1945

{Marcel passed away 3 weeks after speaking with his old comrad Henri J.}

Marcel Bertrand was born February 21st, 1929 at Dinan in Brittany, France and spent his childhood there.

On August 2nd, 1944, he was present when the men of the US Army 6th Armored Division arrived in Lanvallay, a suburb of Dinan. There, he witnessed the 6th Armored being attacked by the paratroopers of the German 2nd Airborne Division. Five tanks were destroyed and some men were killed. A street fight ensued that lasted half a day until the artillery and some planes came and opened fire to cover the advance of the 6th Armored Division. They left Dinan and continued their push west toward Brest.

A few days after that, on August 5th, 1944, the Americans liberated the town of Dinan from the Germans. The bridge between Lanvallay and Dinan had been partially destroyed. The engineers of the 308th Engineer Battalion, 83rd Infantry Division built and deployed a bailey bridge. The infantry crossed this bridge and went North toward the town of Dinard.

Like all the inhabitants of Dinan, he went to see the American troops who crossed the town.

It was probably at this time that Marcel met and sympathized with the Americans and became a guide for them, because he knew some of the routes across the minefields near Dinard.

He worked with some men of the 83rd Signal Company, exchanging some eggs for the famous military rations. He said “We were the winner in these exchanges”. Some of the men he worked with were Sheldon “Joe” Cubberley of Trenton, NJ, Henri J. Bedard of Champlain, NY, Philip B. Johnson from Michigan and Milenko Tomich from Ohio. After a meeting between Marcel, an officer of the Counter Intelligence Corps and two men of Dinan who could vouch that he could be trusted with serious work and information, they asked him if he would like to continue with them. The truth was that he lied about his age, as he was only 15 years old, so that he could continue to go on with his new friends.

The 83rd Signal Company left Dinan and moved south toward the town of Chateaubriant, where they were attacked by some German planes. In the picture above, we can see Marcel, just before he needed to dive for shelter under a dodge weapon carrier. After that, they traveled with their mobile unit radio SCR-399 to different towns such as Vendôme, Montargis, south of Troyes, Bar sur Aube and St-Mihiel until they reached Luxembourg. They were stationed at Gasperich, south of Luxembourg city and moved toward Belgium when the Germans launched their counter-offensive in the Ardennes (the famous Battle of Bulge).

At that time, Marcel was sent to the French army because the French who were in the US Army were not allowed to go into Germany. Marcel and some other french men took the train to Saint-Malo, a town near Dinan, to stay at a barracks there. He left the next day, due to the bad reception they received from the men of the barracks, and went to his home, where his family welcomed him. The following day, with his equipment and uniform, he left his home and headed to Dol-de-Bretagne, where he knew that an American unit was.

On his way, he found a patrol of MPs who took him to the Military Police Headquarters. After some questioning, he was accepted by them as interpreter even though he spoke only few words in English. The unit of Military Police was the 387th Military Police Battalion. The unit moved to pursue their mission in the Cotentin Peninsula (Cherbourg, Sainte Mere Eglise, Saint-Lô, Coutances). Later they continued to Domfront, La Ferte Mace and Mortagne. He became good friends with another French man who served as interpreter for the men of the 387th MP Battalion, Danny Molinnee.

In April or May of 1945, the 387th MP Battalion received a message from the 83rd Signal Company asking that Marcel return to the 83rd Infantry Division. After a meeting with Marcel, the 387th MP officer in charge accepted the transfer with regret, but he knew that Joe Cubberley and the others (in the 83rd Signal Company) were important to him. Joe Cubberley had become a 2nd Lieutenant after he went to officer's school near Paris. Joe came to take Marcel with him to be with the 83rd Signal Company during the military occupation of Germany. They were in southern Germany (Osterhofen, Vilshofen, Passau and later at Linz, Austria). During this time, Marcel went fishing in the Bavarian rivers. Although the war was over, he still had to watch out for the « Werwolf » during these fishing parties (the « Werwolf » was a group of fanatical Germans who wanted to create chaos in Germany).

In October 1945, he returned to Reims, France where he had three options... -To go in the USA, and become an American citizen. -Return at his home. -To go in Japan, for the military occupation there.

Marcel preferred to go to Trenton, NJ in the USA with his friend, 2nd Lieutenant Joe Cubberley, but when he returned to his home, his mother (who passed away at the age of 101 years old in March 2013) asked him to stay with his family, because she thought that if he went to the USA, she would never see him again. Marcel received a Good Conduct Medal from the US Army, thanks to Sheldon Cubberley.

Marcel stayed in France with his family. Some letters were sent between Marcel

and “Joe” Cubberley, but the contact was lost when Marcel joined the French Army. He became a paratrooper and fought during the French Indochina war (the first Vietnam war) and during the war in Algeria. He retired from the French Army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.



MARCEL & ANTOINE, 2012

Fast Forward to January, 2012

January, 2012

Dear SUN,

I live in Brittany, France. I read your article about Henri J Bedard and I was surprised, because today, a friend of mine, Marcel Bertrand (who is French and lives in Brittany) has served with him during the WW2. My friend Marcel was a French volunteer in the 83rd Signal Company, 83rd Infantry Division.

I would like to know if Mr. Bedard is still alive, and if he is interested to contact my friend Marcel Bertrand.

I think that Henri J. Bedard is the last man still alive who know Marcel.

Can you help me?

Best regards,

Antoine Noslier



“There is an eternal landscape, a geography of the soul; we search for its outlines all our lives.” ~Josephine Hart

After 67 Years, WWII Veterans Reunite

Marcel Bertrand and Antoine Noslier met in March 2009 when Antoine contacted WWII survivor Marcel, who lives near his hometown in France. Antoine is a WWII re-enactor and is very passionate about the 83rd Infantry Division. His new found friendship with Marcel set him on an inspired quest to find Marcel's living “band of brothers.” With this being the internet age, Antoine did a Google search, with Wildwood's own Henri J. Bedard's name as his only source of information (originally spelling his name with a “y” instead of an “i,” temporarily hastening his search). His online pursuit eventually introduced him to the Sun by-the-sea's editor Dorothy Kulisek (myself) and the feature on Henri J that appeared in the Spring 2008 edition of the paper.

As Marcel's story on the adjacent page portrays, he and Henri J's story began when they served together in WWII. Marcel first met Henri J. at the age of 15 when he was a French volunteer in the 83rd Signal Company, 83rd Infantry Division. Marcel, who was born at Dinan in Brittany, France, met and sympathized with the Americans and became a guide for them in 1944, when the Americans liberated the town of Dinan from the Germans. Fast forward many decades later, when a nostalgic Marcel, with the help of a determined friend, Antoine Noslier, attempted to build a bridge between himself and his past.

Meanwhile, the story on our very own Henri J. began on a dairy farm close to the Canadian border where he was born in October 1923. (Henri J. is looking forward to his 90th birthday this October.) He would eventually work for the Federal government in Washington, D.C. before being drafted in 1944, ultimately ending up in the 83rd Infantry Division. Following his Army days, he returned to working for the Federal government. He then moved to Philadelphia where he managed a gas and repair station. In 1951, he acquired Henri J's, a service and then-gas station in North Wildwood, where he remains to this day, along with his son Hank, taking care of the vehicles that make their way around the Wildwoods.

A short time after this e-mail connection, Henri J. received a two-page, handwritten letter from Marcel. Henri J., who is fluent in French, then corresponded with a letter of his own, making for a special reunion across the miles.

When the story on Henri J. first appeared in The SUN in 2008, never would I have imagined it would connect two WWII comrades, reaching across the Atlantic to France! The Sun's mantra stands true, “Where yesterday and today meet by the sea,” bringing people together over the miles and the years through stories is its ultimate goal. What a gratifying experience it is. With the help of God and a 26 year-old man, Antoine Noslier, from Brittany, France, I was blessed to take part in reuniting these two “band of brothers” from across the sea, who have lived a lifetime since their war days 67 years ago.

Fast Forward to July, 2013

This story of reuniting originally appeared in the Memorial Day 2012 edition of The Sun and was just a chapter in the tale of two war brothers. Another chapter was etched in time when an actual face to face meeting took place.

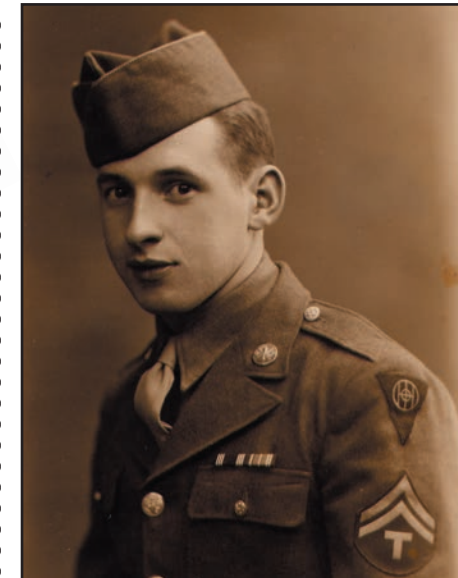
On July 30th, Marcel's friend Antoine arrived at Henri J's to spend a day and a half in the Wildwoods before attending a WWII Convention in Washington, D.C.

I was blessed to spend time with both Henri J. and Antoine, enjoying breakfast at the Star Diner, touring the Boardwalk by way of the Tram Car, and topping the night off with a visit to Sam's Pizza and Kohr Bros.

Antoine knew his visit wouldn't be complete without making Marcel a part of his own Wildwood experience. He arranged a phone call between Henri J. and Marcel, and in those moments, the bridge of time between these two men was complete.

While playing a small part in this ongoing saga that spans the globe to our seaside part of the world, I am honored to say that yesterday and today truly met by the sea.

Dorothy Kulisek



HENRI J. BERDARD 1945
March 1943 - January 1946
83rd Signal Company, Champlain, NY



Henri J & Antoine on the Tram Car



At Sam's Pizza with Tony Spera



Not only was it Antoine's first visit to Sam's Pizza Palace, it was Henri Js too!



WWII comrades, Henri J. Berdard & Marcel Bertrand speak to one another for the first time in 67 years



Antoine & Henri J enjoyed great conversation during their visit together



Hank, Henri J & Antoine at the garage



Henri J & Antoine at The Star Diner



A visit to the boardwalk wouldn't be complete without a taste of Kohr Bros. ice cream