

UP FRONT



NEIGHBORHOOD STORIES

By Bette McDevitt



Tiny Mulder and Frank McGlinchey at Tiny's home in Friesland, Netherlands, where she lived during WWII.

Telling WWII Stories

Although my friend Lois Hamilton and I were safe at home during World War II, the war defined the era, reaching into every home. Lois once told me, "My father was a World War I veteran, and he took this war very seriously. They were fighting his war all over again."

It was an honor, then, for us to join Tiny Mulder and Frank McGlinchey for a joyful dinner at Penn Brewery on a winter evening in 2005. Frank had been a navigator on a B-17, flying from Great Britain to bomb German weapons factories. Tiny, a worker in the Dutch Resistance, saved Frank's life when he was shot down in Friesland, the northern Netherlands. Fifty years later, the two were as close as siblings. Frank, who lived in Florida, always managed to see Tiny whenever she visited the United States. They knew what it was to celebrate life.

Lois and I were already fans of Tiny, and that evening, we fell under the spell of Frank, with his sparkling blue eyes and lovable humility. I knew of Tiny's work from her earlier visits to Pittsburgh to see her son, Teake Zuidema, my long-time friend. Teake, who lives in Friendship, was at dinner that night too.

In the fall of 2004, Lois and I had visited Tiny in Friesland to document her work.

As the camera rolled, Tiny told us that, at age 19, she had the responsibility of finding

hiding places for downed "airmen." When a plane was shot down, as many as 10 airmen could be captured by the German police or army. If they came down in a field, some farmers might hide them and give them civilian clothes, but not everyone would take such a chance. In the best scenario, the farmers would contact the Resistance and say "Come over here, we have something." Or send a message: "We have four young rabbits. Would you like to have some?" Then the chain got working. In the end they came to Tiny, who helped them on their way out of enemy territory.

When we heard hints of Frank's story that night at Penn Brewery, we asked if we might visit him to record his story, and we were soon off to Florida. Frank spoke of his rescue by Tiny, the connection with the Resistance, and his journey to reach the Freedom Trail, the path through the Pyrenees to neutral Spain. When they were in sight of the Spanish border, Nazi soldiers with guns and vicious dogs confronted the 35 airmen and desperate Jews. A German spy had infiltrated the Resistance movement and relayed their plans to the Nazis. The airmen were sent to POW camps in Germany and most of the Jews were shot as they tried to escape. "We knew to raise our hands in surrender," said Frank, "but the Jews were too afraid to do that."



Tiny and Lois.
Both photos Lois Hamilton.

Lois spent a year making the videos of Frank's and Tiny's stories with the help of Andy Cozad, a computer artist, in her hometown of Grove City. Frank died on the day that Lois and Andy finished his project. Tiny has since passed too, three years ago.

Inspired by their courage, Lois began interviewing more WWII veterans—20 so far, half of them in Western Pennsylvania. Three were civilians involved in the Resistance movement. Lois continues to attend (as she did with Frank) a national gathering of downed airmen, and those who helped them escape—a group called AFEES, the Air Forces Escape & Evasion Society. “It’s become a three

generational gathering; their children and grandchildren attend,” she said. “It’s history being told by the people who lived it.”

Two of the area veterans she has interviewed, Bill Patterson, 96, and Dave Lewis, now deceased, were in Patton’s army on the final push to the east during the winter of 1945. Patterson, a foot soldier, told Lois that the snow was waist deep and at night they dug a hole and slept, each with two blankets, in the snow. Then a few years ago, a couple stopped by the Pottery Dome, Lois’s place of business:

They spoke another language, and I asked them where they came from. “We’re from Prague,” the woman said,

“visiting friends in Pittsburgh.” I told them that two friends [Lewis and Patterson] were in Patton’s Army on that final push toward Germany and Prague. They got very silent, and the man went out to the car and came back to give me a pin of a rampant lion on a red background, the coat of arms of the province of Bohemia, where Prague is located. He bowed to me, and backed out the door. That was for those soldiers, not for me. ⚙

Some of Lois Hamilton’s interviews have been accepted in the Library of Congress’s Veterans’ History Project www.loc.gov/vets and some are part of the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force in Pooler, Georgia.

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