

WWW

Even though Dave Hamilton, most often known by his middle name, Enos, has been my brother-in-law for almost 60 years, I didn't know much about his WWII service. He mentioned North Africa, Italy and France, but never volunteered any details and I felt that my questions weren't particularly welcome.

During a pre-Christmas visit in December 2011 to the 92-year-old and his family at their Green Lake, Maine, home we were surprised to hear him make a few comments about his Army service, maybe because his son Steve, a former Marine, was there.

I saw my opening and asked Enos if he had ever had any contact with his buddies after the war, thinking that in this computer age it would be easier to locate a person from long ago. He hadn't. Because his father had lost both legs, Enos had been given a hardship discharge in April 1945 and was separated from his unit prematurely. I asked him if there was anyone he would like me to help him locate. Without a blink, he said, "Curtis Hooper O'Sullivan, my old platoon leader."

Thus began a feverish desire for me to deliver something nice for Enos. A search of the so-called white pages produced nothing other than references to a Curtis H. O'Sullivan in Yountville, Salida and San Bruno, California, with ages of 88 and 89, which were enticing clues. But there were no current addresses or telephone numbers and I wasn't yet prepared to answer and pay for those "find anybody" ads.

So I tried the Google search engine and, yes, there he was: Brigadier General Curtis Hooper O'Sullivan, mentioned in connection with his having reviewed articles for several publications. One reference in particular caught my eye: a review in 2009 for Military magazine published in Sacramento, CA. I went to their website and contacted them, explaining my mission and asked if they could put me in touch with the General. Almost immediately the magazine's editor, John Shank, responded with a mailing address in Santa Rosa.

VETS RECONNECT

by Don Higgins, CRPA Life Member

MAKING CONTACT

On 20 December I wrote to Curtis, and not knowing whether or not he might have passed on, I ended with, "If you or a member of your family receive this, I would appreciate your calling or writing to me. Ideally, I could have Dave call you if you were willing. He's a young 92, still working his construction business with his sons up here in Maine."

On 24 December, Curtis called me and, indeed, he remembered Enos and very much wanted to talk with him. I right away called Enos saying, "Guess who I was just talking with?" You can imagine his surprise and excitement. A little more than an hour later, Enos called me back announcing that they had talked all that time. He said their contact was the best Christmas present he could have. That was reward enough for my efforts.

Soon after, I asked Curtis if he would write a little about their service together and he was gracious enough to oblige.

HEADING TO AFRICA

Curtis was at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, in August 1942, an officer in the Reconnaissance Company of the 645th

Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the 45th "Thunderbird" Division. He was among those welcomed by Major General George S. Patton to his invasion force, Operation Torch. That was the name given to the British-American invasion of French North Africa during the North African Campaign started 8 November 1942 to expel the Axis powers, improve naval control of the Mediterranean Sea and prepare for an invasion of Southern Europe in 1943.

Because of a shortage of shipping, Curtis' outfit was held back. Instead they were sent to Pine Camp, NY, Indiantown Gap, PA, and Camp Pickett, VA, before finally sailing in April 1943 from Staten Island, NY, on SS John Ericsson, formerly the Swedish SS Kungsholm. The once-lavish Art Deco cruise ship built in 1924 had carried such notables as Greta Garbo. It was appropriated by the U.S. shortly after Pearl Harbor and converted to a troop ship. They arrived May 1943 at Mers-el-Kébir, a port town in the Oran province of northwestern Algeria where the French fleet holed up after France's defeat in 1940. The fleet was destroyed by the British Navy 3 July 1940 to prevent its falling into German hands.

Enos had enlisted in December 1942 and following three months training in Texas and other assignments was shipped

out 6 June 1943 on SS West Point from Newport News, VA, bound for Casablanca, Morocco. West Point had the largest capacity of any USN troopship in service during World War II. On one voyage, she carried over 9,000 people, including the ship's company of approximately 750 Sailors and Marines. She made two fast trips to Casablanca in May and June 1943, with a total of 16,300 troops destined to be used in the invasion of Sicily and Italy. The Atlantic was heavily infested with Axis submarines but the ship was fast, and by zigzagging constantly it was able to make the trips unescorted.

In eastern Tunisia, the Germans, Rommel and von Arnim, had some successes against the mainly inexperienced French and U.S. Corps, particularly at the Battle of the Kasserine Pass in late February 1943. But the Axis forces were eventually caught in a pincer movement and surrendered on 13 May 1943, yielding over 275,000 prisoners of war. This huge loss of experienced troops greatly reduced the military capacity of the Axis powers, although the largest percentage of Axis troops escaped Tunisia.

It was after the Axis defeat in Tunisia that Enos joined Curtis' Reconnaissance Company there and the two became closely associated. While still in Algeria, Patton, then a lieutenant general had in-


sisted that every officer have someone to relieve him of routine and PFC Hamilton was Curtis' choice. The 645th was waterproofed for a landing in Sicily in July 1943, but was bumped for truck units. So their first landing was at Salerno, Italy, 9 September 1943. Curtis was wounded in action and sent to a recovery center in Sorrento and Enos went with him. The two had time to see Naples, Pompeii and so on. Later that fall they were part of a provisional rifle company on the Winter Line, a series of well-prepared German positions across the waist of Italy designed to halt the Allied advance. For the individual soldiers, the attack involved bitter fighting from hill to hill.

ANZIO AND BEYOND

The two were part of the Anzio landing on 29 January 1944, which, because of the element of surprise, was largely unopposed. But within a week, as Allied troops consolidated their positions and prepared to break out of the beachhead, the Germans gathered troops to eliminate what Adolf Hitler called the "Anzio abscess." The next four months would see some of the most savage fighting of WWII during which the Allied forces suffered over 29,000 casualties. They broke out 23 May and captured Rome on

4 June. Shortly after, they were pulled out to prepare for Southern France where they landed 15 August 1944 on a dismounted commando, ranger-type mission to capture specific targets. They moved rapidly up the Rhone Valley to contact Patton's Third Army when they were halted at the Vosges Mountains and again given an infantry mission. When they were able to have a brief break, Curtis managed to sneak off to Paris, with Enos driving him, to find a family relative.

They were at the southern flank of the Bulge during that battle and were pushed back during the final German offensive, Nordwind, January 1945. They crossed the Rhine in March 1945 into the heart of the Reich. In April, Curtis and Enos had their last ride together when they went to the Red Cross representative at division headquarters to arrange Enos' separation to handle family matters at home brought on by his father's loss of both legs.

Curtis reported having had 525 days of front line combat during which Enos and he were together – an obvious reason why these two old soldiers had much to talk about and would treasure having time for more. Not so obvious was Curtis' closing sentence in his letter to me: "We also managed to have some fun and saw some fascinating places and people." 

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