

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Eileen Muccino

Current home town: Mason, Ohio

Age: Not given

Robert Murphy and his brothers Thomas, Harold and Charles all served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Bob and Harold joined the Counter Intelligence Corps. Harold went to Tunisia, where he was killed at Kasserine Pass on Valentine's Day in 1943.



The Murphy siblings at their Cincinnati childhood home
(taken after brother Harold died in Africa in 1943)
Left to right: Charles, Eunice, Tom, Anne and Bob

In May of 1944, Bob arrived in England as part of the 35th CIC Corp attached to the 35th Infantry. During the next year and a half, he wrote over 150 letters to his new wife in Cincinnati as the 35th moved through France, Luxemburg, Belgium, Holland and Germany. His letters in the first year describe life in the combat zone and the people and conditions he encountered, often with humor, empathy or resignation. In April of 1945, Bob was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, with responsibility for rounding up wanted Nazis, controlling espionage and sabotage activity and establishing new governments. The following are excerpts from this period.

Apr 26, 1945 (Germany) – “We took to the road again today, only this time we went backward. It’s sort of a relief to get away from the front, but you don’t feel exactly right when you know the other guys are still fighting. I was pretty lucky myself, as we had our share of casualties. Out of a detachment of 13, we had one killed, three wounded, and one Frenchman wounded.”

Apr 28, 1945 (Germany) – “I have a territory of my own now, with the help of two linguists. It contains approximately 125 cities and towns and maybe a million people. All I gotta do is find all the SS men in civvies and the high ranking Nazi Party members. We started off pretty good by getting two big shots hiding in the woods.”

Apr 30, 1945 (Germany) – “We create a furor when we swoop into a town. In about two hours, we have most of the deserters who were still hiding out, grab a few Nazi Party leaders, maybe get us a few pistols, appoint a new mayor and police chief, and we’re gone. The place settles down again and may not see another American for months. It’s amazing how scared these people are of us until we’re around for a day or so; they all think they’re going to be tortured and killed and their children left to starve.”

May 11, 1945 (Hannover) – “We tried about 175 French, Belgians, Poles, Czechs and Hollanders, and freed all but a very few. They had been imprisoned by the Germans for offences like sabotage, espionage, refusal to work, theft, fraud, aiding the allies and forging ration cards. Their sentences were excessive: five years hard labor for stealing food or clothing. Listening to foreign radio broadcasts or possession of a weapon or camera brought anywhere from five years to life imprisonment.”

May 28, 1945 (Gelsenkirchen) – “The Russians are giving trouble. Some Russian officers arrived in town today to establish a little control. They don’t fool around either. One of the rules they laid down: every Russian who married a woman in Germany, no matter what nationality, is divorced as of today. All Russians between 18 and 45 are inducted into the army as of today; they don’t sign nuthin’, they’re just in. One Russian officer imposed a penalty in his district. If a Russian did something wrong, his hand grenade ration was cut from 5 to 2. The Russians were using them to fish with; throw them in the water and they stun the fish.”

Jun 1, 1945 (Recklinghausen) – “Every time we’re in a place for a while, the people feel pretty bad when we leave. No doubt it’s because they get to eat our food while they work for us; but then too it’s the carefree way we have of operating. They’re so used to standing at attention and “Heil Hitler”-ing at everybody that I think they appreciate our system. The more I see of the leaders of the Nazi Party, the more I’m convinced they aren’t very representative of the German people. Plenty of them are bums who got rich quick because of the Party. ”

Jun 1, 1945 (Recklinghausen) – “We hear all kinds of talk from the civilians (Germans) about how hard the Russians are trying to win the Germans over in their part of the country. They aren’t getting much food there, either, but they have a system set up whereby they get something to eat every day ... The Germans don’t like the Russians now, but they like to eat. Our mess hall used to give away to the civilians what was left from a meal, but on a new order, it’s thrown away in a manner they can’t get at it.”

Sep 5, 1945 (Stuttgart) – “We’re gradually getting away from CIC work completely. Every new ruling that headquarters puts out, they want us in on it. Recently, we were told to interview everybody who requested a phone. Now today, we found out MG is going to check out every safety deposit box in all the banks, about 10,000 boxes, and CIC has to send agents to be in on it. Spies, werewolves and Gestapo running all around, and we spend our time with this foolishness.”

Nov 7, 1945 (Marburg) – “Arrived here yesterday and understand I’ll be here for 8 days, then to Antwerp. Make some arrangements for us to stay at your house or my house, whichever you want or is available. If there’s a German family living someplace in the neighborhood I’ll throw them out when I get back and we’ll move in there.”

Nov 18, 1945 (Camp Tophat, Antwerp, Belgium) – “We left Marburg Wednesday ... We rode in the infamous 40 and 8 cars, which in case you don’t know, is a boxcar built to hold 40 men or 8 horses. The horses can have them for my money. The trip can be made in 6 hours by car, but it took 59, which we were told is a new record, the best previous being 55. The reason it took so long is because so many bridges were out. I saw a lot of places I had been before (when I got near enough to the door to look out).”

After the war, Bob remained in the Army reserves and was reactivated in March of 1947. In November of 1949 he took his wife and two young daughters when he returned to Germany as a first lieutenant working in Counter Intelligence.