

## War Era Story Project 2012

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### The way it was in 1945

Only an imposter could smile in the uniform of a World War II German officer, except that he was far from an imposter. He was a hero in action. A 1945 photograph depicts my late husband here. After I married Sidney J. Silvian in 1979, I found this photograph one day, and I confronted him about it, since he had never mentioned it or shown it to me before. Here is the answer as he told me the story.



“I was 19 when I found myself hovering in a ditch somewhere in Belgium. I was a Private First Class (PFC) in the U.S. Army then, and was surrounded by gunfire. Many soldiers, both German and American, were already dead and lay scattered on the ground, while everyone was running for their lives.

“Our troops were invading Germany from all directions along the borders, with my infantry squadron approaching from the north under heavy artillery fire. The front line infantry soldiers had to make quick life-or-death decisions. I had no choice but to jump into a nearby ditch, landing next to a dead German officer. I had to act really fast then. I realized that if I ripped off the officer’s uniform, took his Luger pistol in a black leather case, as well as his sabre, and threw his uniform over my own, I had nothing to lose. So that is what I did.

“As I lay in the ditch with the German uniform on, I watched our soldiers advancing more quickly than I expected them to. Jumping up from the ditch, I tore off the outer jacket and threw the German helmet to the ground. “Don’t shoot, don’t shoot, don’t shoot,” I yelled as loud as I could, “I’m one of yours!” Then I ran towards them, and they held their fire.

“The retreating German soldiers responded with crossfire during a hellish night, but by the next morning, our troops had already advanced to the city of Aachen, with reinforcements following them.

“I kept the German uniform and had my photo taken, which you see here, shortly after we defeated the Germans. You see me smile because I was young and alive. I had survived.”

That was his story, one of many untold scenarios dating back to that period of history.

In early 1945, the last German defense was carried out by old civilians and young German males, when the first US troops crossed the bridge over the Rhine river, under General George S. Patton into Cologne, where I lived then. German soldiers had long since retreated, had been killed or were taken as prisoners of war by the Americans.

Only many years later did I meet my husband in the city of Philadelphia, long after my war-bride marriage had ended. In 2000, I lost my brave husband to Parkinson’s disease. His testimony, however, is one of many reflecting how World War II became the history lesson of our time. Had the ‘imposter’ not disguised himself in a quick decision, or the photo never been discovered, the story behind the story would never have been told, but it should also never be forgotten.



Cologne, 1945