

LOCKLEED NEWS



Staff Sergeant Harvey J. Gleason
23 February 1921 to 1 January 1945

| Staff Sergeant Harvey J. Gleason

On Memorial Day, we think of loved ones who gave their lives in service to America over the many years since our Constitutional Republic was formed. One war looms large in the memory of many people still today – World War II – and so many families have stories to tell. We'd like to share one of them with you.

Staff Sergeant Harvey J. Gleason was 21 years old when he decided to join the Army and went to Fort Sheridan in Illinois for basic training. Before his 25th birthday, he was killed in Phillipsburg (near Strasbourg) in eastern France on the border with Germany. He was interred in Epinal U. S. Military Cemetery at Phillipsburg France in Plot 20, Row 10, Grave 4004 on 9 January 1945, and deemed eligible for certain awards and medals. The family was notified on 25 January 1945. Because the war was still going on, there were no other details shared with the family. Later, his remains were repatriated to Wisconsin.

Now, Harvey came from a very large but close-knit family in Stanton (New Richmond), Wisconsin, and was the fourth of 14 kids who grew up on a farm there. They lost their Dad, John A. Gleason, suddenly when he was only 54 years old just weeks before Harvey was killed. Their Mom, Mary Jane, relied heavily on the older kids to keep the farming operations going. John had other businesses, too, including a lumber operation, a construction company and a nightclub called The Laurel, which is still open near New Richmond Wisconsin. So, when some of their sons decided to enlist in the Army, it was a blow because they all worked in the family businesses, but they were a patriotic family as so many were at that time.

The youngest child, Eleanor, was only nine when Harvey was killed and although she didn't grasp the full effect of it at the time, it left a lasting mark on her memory. That day, there was a knock on the door and in an instant their family was changed forever. Other boys in the family joined the military, too, but they all came home alive. One day later in time, Eleanor was talking with her two boys, John and Jim, and they were very curious about the uncle they had never met. Seventy-five years on, they decided to investigate it a little more, and piece together a bit of the history, so they could tell his story.

John and Jim requested Harvey's file from the government and got his military records in 2019. When they started to look through the documents, something just didn't add up. The dates were "off" and the location where he was killed wasn't where they had assumed it was based on the very little information they had gotten up to that time. The records showed that he was killed south of the main battlefield where the Battle of the Bulge was centered, in a very specific location fighting off a very specific German offensive under direct orders of General George Patton.



They had another idea in mind: Let's take Mom over there so she can see where her brother was and understand a little more about the family's sacrifice. She was hesitant to go, but the boys pressed her to come along on a trip for her twin granddaughters' graduation gift to Paris. They planned a side trip to the Strasbourg region to walk in Harvey's steps.

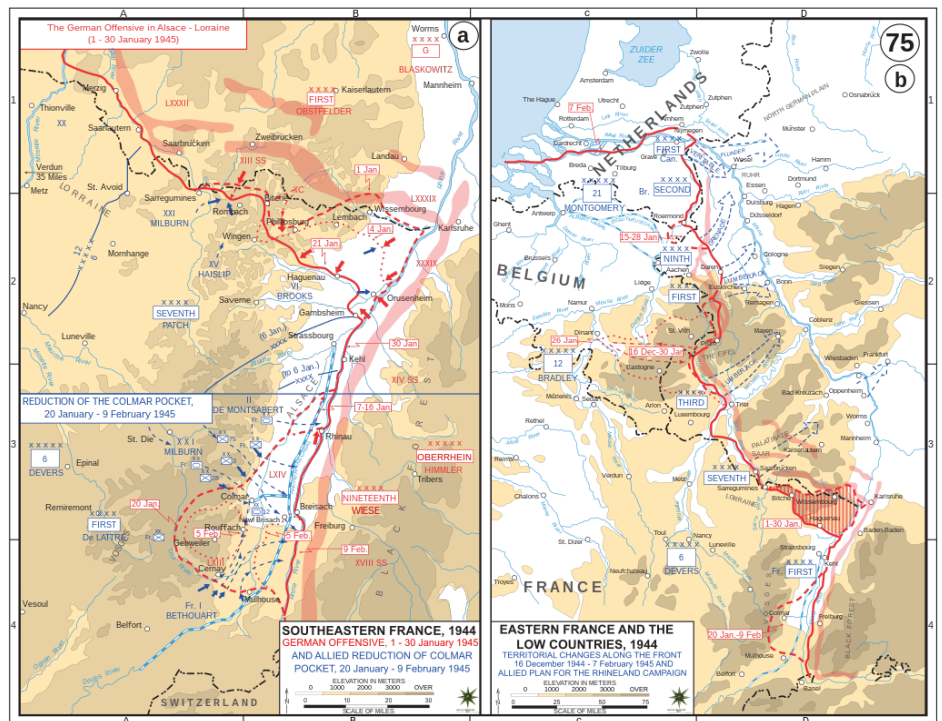
For years, Harvey's family heard about the Battle of the Bulge and how U. S. troops fought off the enemy during that long campaign. That was the big news around that time, and because of security protocols, there was little information shared outside the military ranks. They assumed that Harvey was a soldier in that large operation that took place.

Harvey was promoted to Staff Sergeant on 9 December 1944 in the United States Seventh Army unit and was deployed to eastern France. In one of the great moves of the war, Patton heeded the advice of his Intelligence Officer, Oscar Koch, and planned to aid other forces stationed in that area. They were sent to reinforce other units but were spread thin and overextended, exposing the troops to attack. At the same time, German forces were struggling to maintain their strength and they began to falter because of their losses. In their attempts to counter the Allies in the Battle of the Bulge, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler promised to capture Strasbourg by 30 January and launched what became the last German offensive, Operation Nordwind.

In Hitler's words, "This attack has a very clear objective, namely the destruction of the enemy forces. There is not a matter of prestige involved here. It is a matter of destroying and exterminating the enemy forces wherever we find them." (Clark & Smith, 1993.) It lasted only three weeks. Harvey's unit provided the defining moment in Hitler's retreat and eventual demise. Sadly, 11,609 U. S. troops were lost in the battle. By the end of January 1945, the Allies had defended the region up to the Rhine River, taking it back from the Germans.

John is fascinated by this moment in history because although it isn't widely known, it was a pivotal moment in the war. The U. S. Seventh Army won that battle, saved France and turned the trajectory of the German invasion into western Europe. Eleanor's last living sibling, Ray, passed away a couple of weeks ago, so the family has taken time recently to reflect on their history.

On Memorial Day – and every day – we are thankful for the service and sacrifice of our brave patriots. God bless our troops and God bless America.





VETCONNECT

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U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

FRIDAY, JUNE 9th | 10AM-2PM

Camp Ripley Hangar Conference Center

15000 MN-115, Little Falls, MN 56345

This event will bring together programs and networks offered in Minnesota for Veterans including quality careers by LockLeed partner employers.



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