

Edited by Alan Terry Wright

## “A Letter from Luxembourg”

In the winter of 1944-45 my sister, Marie-Lou, and I lived with our parents, Francois and Marie-Louise Groff, on Route de’Arlon street in the village of Strassen, in the small country of Luxembourg. I was eight years old and Marie-Lou was seven. My father was an iron miner and my mother was the keeper of the house. For those who might not know, Luxembourg is an independent “Duchy” of only 998 square miles with Luxembourg City as its capital. It is bordered by Germany, France and Belgium.

The Groff family’s life changed very much for the worse when the German army invaded Luxembourg on May 10, 1940. It took only one day. Luxembourg’s tiny volunteer army, realizing they had no chance, stayed in their barracks. Some of the City’s police put up a heroic resistance with one killed and many injured, before surrendering.

Soon, the Germans annexed Luxembourg and tried to turn us all into “Germans.” We were not allowed to publicly speak our native language, *Luxembourgish*, nor French--only German. People were subject to harsh penalties if not greeting others with Nazi salutes and shouting “Heil Hitler!” Our people despised such treatment. Some rebelled by saying “Drei Litre!” slurring the words to sound like “Heil Hitler!” In English it only meant “Three Liters” of milk--sort of a joke.

Four years of drab oppression followed with no freedom, making do with what we had, and wondering if we would have enough to eat. We had a little garden plot and our mother raised chickens and father fattened a few pigs for pork. Secretly, we raised rabbits in our cellar. The Germans had a particular taste for rabbit and we were afraid they would be confiscated if noticed. We traded the rabbits to neighbors for clothes or other things we needed.

Marie-Lou and I continued to go to school, speaking only German. Sometimes classes were interrupted and we ran for shelter during air raids. We lived quietly and fearfully in

the middle of a war. To us, German or Allied bombs and bullets could kill or maim in the same way.

In Sept. of 1944, things changed dramatically. German troops and tanks retreating from the Americans passed through Strassen and the sound of tanks and shelling was everywhere. By this time, panicked German soldiers were seen fleeing on anything that would roll. An odd sight was that of German soldiers pedaling stolen bicycles with only rims, no tires, toward Deutschland as fast as they could go.

Our family huddled in the cellar. Later, we learned that a small American "spotter" plane had found a German tank lurking behind the house across the road where our cousins, the Bours, lived. Then, from Bertrange, two miles away, American soldiers appeared and fired right through the Bour house, destroying the tank. The explosion and fire burned the house to the ground. Thank God the Bours were not at home. Since they had no cellar, they had taken shelter elsewhere.

Here is a picture of a memorial at Bertrange to America's 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division that liberated our portion of Luxembourg Sept. 10, 1944. I thank them and hope they will never be forgotten.



The Americans passed quickly through without a lot of fanfare; they were in a hurry. History says that elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division progressed some 48 miles to the German border by the next day, Sept. 11, 1944. Luxembourg was free and we rejoiced! I do not remember parades or street celebrations in Strassen, but I know there were some in Luxembourg City, only a few kilometers away.

Later, in the bitter cold and snow of December or January of 1944-45, my family, as well as the Bours', became acquainted with four American GIs who had taken shelter in a nearby house. How? Probably just a friendly greeting to soldiers who had come all the way from America to liberate us. A case of homesickness and the smell of my mother's cooking may have had something to do with it. These fellows had several lunches and dinners at our house. One thing I remember is their love for waffles—they didn't know what they were. My mother fixed large fluffy ones, Belgian style, served with Chantilly Crème and powdered sugar.

All of my family are dead who may have learned these American soldiers' stories and their complete names. I remember three of their first names only. These fellows were very friendly and nice. I thought "Mack" was the funniest and best looking. "Guy" seemed a little older and the more intellectual. "Ned" was quiet and reserved. The fourth, I just do not recall. One had a camera and took several photos with me, my sister, Marie-Lou, and our sixteen year old cousin, Annie Bour, in the pictures. They were taken in the morning as Marie-Lou and I were leaving for school.

Some have guessed that "our" American soldiers were about to go into action in the famous Battle of the Bulge fought nearby in Belgium and northern Luxembourg. Others believe they may have fought there already and had been sent back to Luxembourg in January of 1945 for rest and refitting of their units. The famous American General, George S. Patton, had recently set up his headquarters in Luxembourg City. One of the photos taken by the GIs shows the patch of Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army—a big clue.

Our American soldiers left abruptly—I don't remember goodbyes, but within a couple of months the photos in this article arrived with a censor's stamp dated March 17, 1945. Sometime in 1946, after the war was over, my family received a big CARE package from one of our soldier friends. It contained various hard-to-get foodstuffs, including chocolate and green cloth with which my mother made winter coats for Marie-Lou and me. I get teary eyed thinking about how much we appreciated this gift and how good and generous that person was.

I just turned 79 years old and am in reasonably good health. But life is not forever and I so wish to learn the identity of "our" American soldiers of 70 years ago. A beautiful American military cemetery lies at nearby Hamm, Luxembourg. More than 5,000 Americans, killed mainly in the Battle of the Bulge, lie in honor there. From time to time, my son, Francois, and I visit there in gratitude for these young men's great sacrifices. It is the least we can do. General Patton lies there with his troops. It is my earnest prayer that neither "Mack," "Guy," "Ned," nor the fourth soldier unnamed, are buried there and made it safely home to their loved ones. Perhaps members of these soldier's families in America will recognize them and let me know. The mystery of who they were and what was their fate could then be solved.

If you can identify one or more of these men, please contact my son, Francois ("Frank") Jacques Groff, with the Luxembourg Police Department at the following address and phone number:

*Francois Jacques Groff*  
*Police Grand-Ducale*  
*1-3, rue Marie et Pierre Curie*  
*L-1369 Luxembourg*  
*+352-62-118-2865*  
*e-mail: [f.groff@pt.lu](mailto:f.groff@pt.lu)*

Sincerest best wishes to our American friends,

Marguerite "Maggie" Groff  
Luxembourg City  
Luxembourg

\*\*\*\*\*Photos and Captions\*\*\*\*\*



The Groff family of Strassen, Luxembourg, circa 1945, who befriended four homesick GIs at the time of the Battle of the Bulge. Back row, L-R, Marie-Louise and Francois Groff. Front row, L-R, Marie-Lou and Marguerite "Maggie" Groff.



Back row: "Mack," (last name unknown), an American G.I. of Patton's Third Army; Annie Bour, a resident of Strassen, Luxembourg; and another American G.I. whose name is unknown. Front row: sisters Marie-Lou Groff (L) and Marguerite "Maggie" Groff (R), cousins of Annie Bour. Photo circa January, 1945. Annie Bour, was born about 1929 and died in 2013. Marie-Lou Groff passed away in 1991.



"Guy," (last name unknown), an American G.I. of Patton's Third Army, with Annie Bour, a resident of Strassen, Luxembourg, circa January, 1945



"Guy," (last name unknown), an American G.I. of Patton's Third Army, with sisters Marie-Lou (L) and Marguerite "Maggie" Groff (R); circa January, 1945, Strassen, Luxembourg. Marie-Lou Groff was seven years old and her sister, Marguerite, eight. Marie-Lou died in 2013. Marguerite is aged 79 and still lives in Luxembourg.

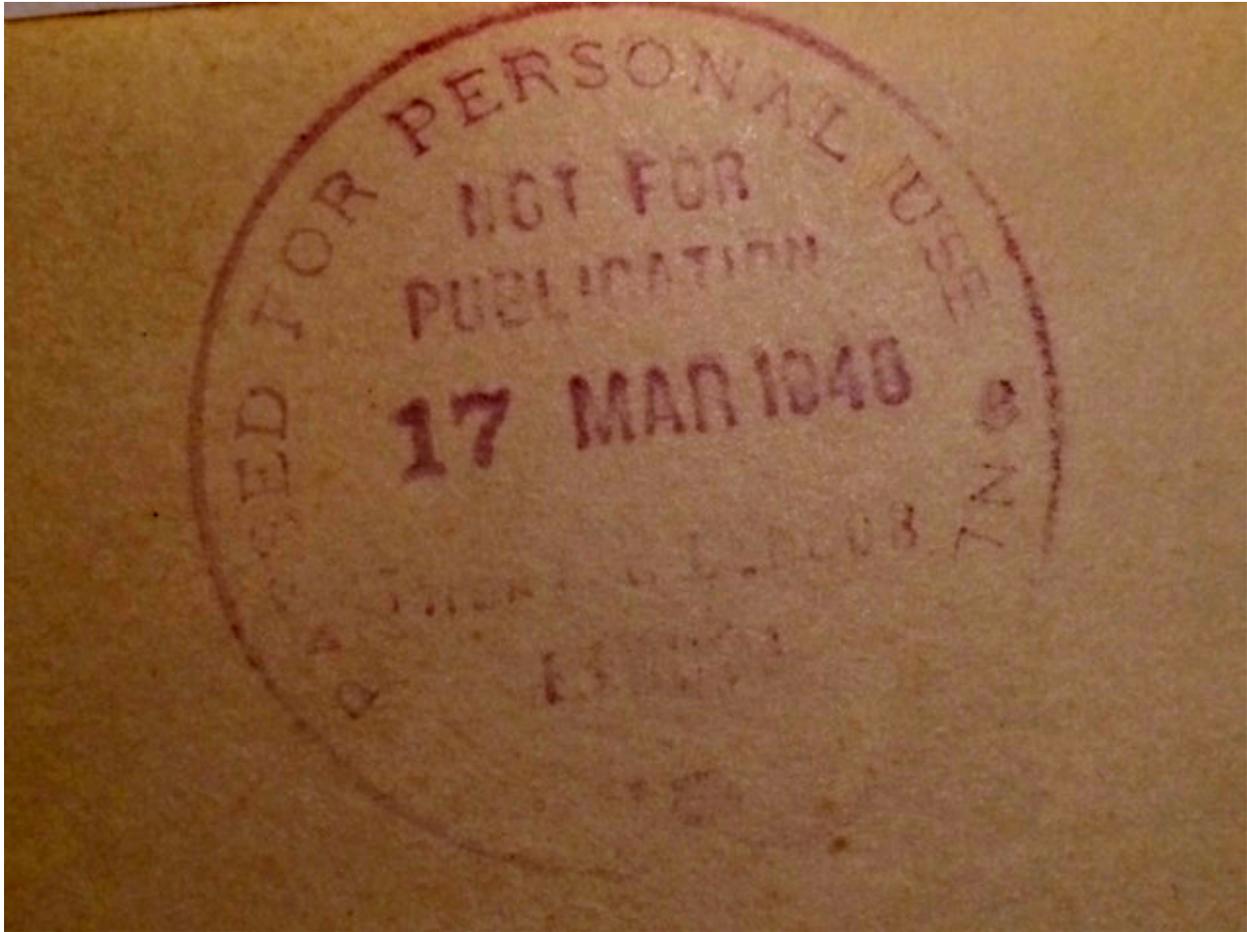


"Ned," (last name unknown) an American G.I. of General George S. Patton's Third Army, Strassen, Luxembourg, circa January, 1944, Members of the Bour and Groff families became acquainted with Ned and called him the more quiet and reserved of the four GIs they befriended. The patch on his left sleeve appears triangular, possibly that of an armored division.



The "Circle A" on Guy's left sleeve signifies General George S. Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army





Censor's stamp on the back of photos sent by one of the G.I.s who became acquainted with the Groff and Bour families. 17 March, 1945 was only about two months after the G.I.'s passed through Luxembourg and well after the Battle of the Bulge. The War in Europe continued until VE Day, May 8, 1945.



Francois Jacques Groff and his mother, Marguerite "Maggie" Groff, 2015