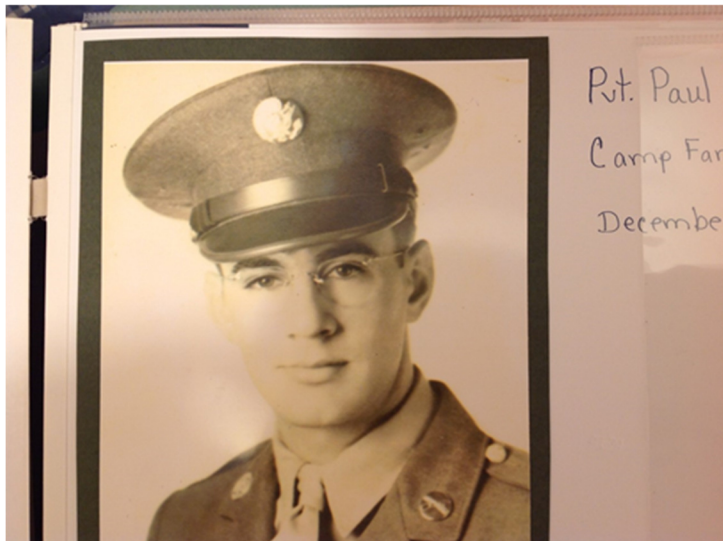


# A Bullet Hole in the Chartres Cathedral

## April 2019

My wife Bonnie and I flew to Brussels, Belgium on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April and went on a 7 day Dutch Waterways river cruise primarily to see the tulips blooming in the Netherlands. Being as this is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of D-Day, we decided to combine the cruise with a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour of Normandy. The timing was such that the river cruise was over on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April and the Normandy tour started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. So we had three and a half days between the two tours to drive from Amsterdam to Honfleur, France. Ever since dad began talking about his experiences in WWII, I had wanted to visit places where he had been in the war. His time with the 7<sup>th</sup> AD ended when he was wounded in the Netherlands, so after departing from the cruise ship, we rented a car and traveled to the area of Meijel, NL to start retracing his steps.



My father, Paul F. Crawford was in the Patton's Third US Army, 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, 23<sup>rd</sup> Armored infantry Battalion, Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. He was a private first class. He was born on February 10, 1923 and passed away on July 28, 2013. He worked for the B&O railroad for 42 years after the war. He married Merry Growden on March 23, 1944.

Merry also served in WWII in the US Navy in Washington, DC. She earned the rank of Yeoman 1<sup>st</sup> Class. Merry passed in July of 2004. They had 5 children. Paul, Margery, Wesley, Barry, and Grant.



Months before taking this trip and exploring my dad's WWII route, I contacted the historian of the 7<sup>th</sup> AD to obtain information. <https://www.7tharmdiv.org/> The 7<sup>th</sup>'s historian, Wesley Johnston, put me in touch with two gentlemen from the Netherlands whose passion is the history of the 7<sup>th</sup> AD in the Netherlands. They are Niek Hendrix and Hans van Toer and are great guys who helped us immensely. . When we arrived in Meijel,

these two gentlemen met Bonnie and I and spent almost 9 hours taking us from battle to battle my dad fought in there. Through records they had researched, they were able to take me to the exact field dad was digging a foxhole when a German mortar came in and wounded him and killed others around him. Seeing that field was humbling to me to know that he was hurt there.



We then drove to the Moselle river near Metz and stayed in the town of Arry, FR. The 7<sup>th</sup> AD engaged in a fierce battle near there on the Moselle in their attempt to oust the Germans from forts and bunkers in that area. Along with the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 945 men were lost in that battle. Some called it a second Omaha because of the intensity and bloody battle.

After that, we drove to Verdun, where my grandfather fought in WWI. He told a story of 135 men from his company attacking the Germans and only 26 of them came back. Seeing the still existing trenches and the still present destruction of the bombs and artillery there was amazing to see. Also, knowing that grandpap fought on those killing grounds 100 years ago and that dad's 7<sup>th</sup> AD liberated that exact area in WWII made me feel like I walked in both of their footsteps.



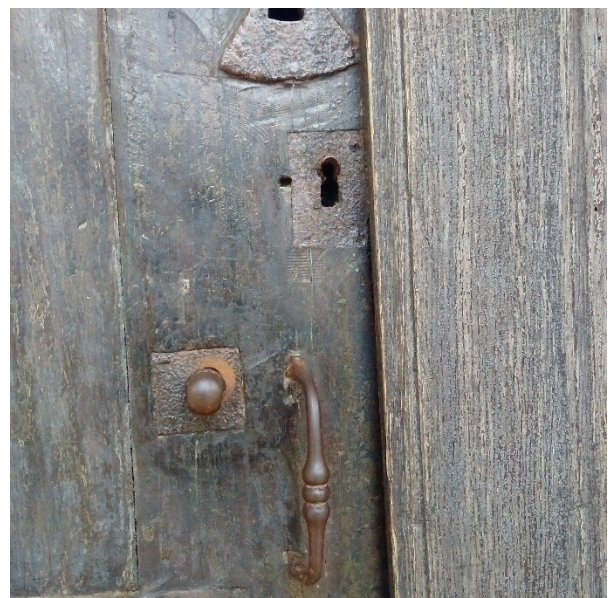


We then drove from Verdun to Chartres and stayed in a bed and breakfast across the street from the Cathedral. We enjoyed a nice dinner and an amazing laser light show before retiring. We stopped in Chartres because dad told us that during the war, he had shot at a lock in one of the doors. While entering Chartres, my dad's unit was passing the Cathedral when someone yelled that they thought they saw a German Sniper in one of the towers. An officer commanded my dad's platoon to enter the Cathedral and get him. The platoon saw that entering the massive front doors behind the iron fence would not be possible, so they hurriedly ran



around to the West entrance doors. They immediately noticed that there was a small entry door as part of the massive door there. Finding it locked, my dad said he shot a hole in the door adjacent to the lock in an attempt to unlock it. I wanted to see if I could find it. I really didn't expect that it would be there as it was nearly 75 years ago and the certainly would have repaired it.

On Sunday morning the 27<sup>th</sup>, I couldn't wait to walk around the Cathedral looking at each door searching for the "bullet hole" my dad spoke of so many times. Starting at the front, I proceeded to walk clockwise around the cathedral. I walked to the North entrance and went to the first door and my eyes opened wide as I immediately found a likely hole next to a lock plate as I looked at it from about 10 feet away. I moved nearer to the door and took a closer look and examined the hole carefully to see if it resembled a bullet hole in wood. It literally took my breath away to see a hole that was exactly the size of a 30 caliber (approx.





7.62 mm) bullet my dad would have shot. You cannot imagine my shock when I saw that the wood fibers were bent inward like they would be if a bullet passed through the surface of the wood. It absolutely was a bullet hole. I took some photos of it and I later enlarged them and could clearly see that the metal is slightly rounded where it was bent by the bullet. I had no doubt that was the bullet hole in the door dad shot.

Dad did not realize that there are several locks on the inside of the door and that a simple bullet would not open it. I observed this when I went into the cathedral and investigated the locking mechanisms of the door. There were metal plates, a metal latch, and more than one lock on the 4" (100 mm) thick door. It simply was not going to open easily. Only explosives would have opened it.



When the door didn't open, the commanding officer said to forget it and move on and let a following unit deal with a sniper if there was one in the tower. As the 7<sup>th</sup> was a spearhead division of Patton's Third Army, they were a fast moving unit that kept attacking throughout France and let following units "mop up" the remaining German resistance. So, they moved on.

To stand in the same place my dad stood nearly 75 years ago and walk the streets around the Cathedral where he walked and see the evidence of what he told us for many years is such a humbling experience. Knowing that he was there in the dangers of combat serving our country makes me so thankful.

I only wish my dad were alive to know that I found "his door."

We then proceeded on to Honfleur where we spent a week touring the beaches and museums of the battlefields as well as cultural sites such as the Tapestry of Bayeaux, the Abby of Mont Saint Michel, and Monet's house and garden. Seeing where men sacrificed their lives by running into machine gun and artillery fire or dropping from an airplane into the dark countryside leaves one in awe of the bravery they exhibited on June 6th, 1944 and throughout that awful war. They truly were the greatest generation.

Written by Wes Crawford