

## War Era Story Project 2012

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My father, Norman J. Sperling, was a Tech Sgt. in the Army engineers under Patton. The 'A' patch was on his shoulder. He was in a reserve battalion in late '44 in France. He was in charge of German prisoners who volunteered to help clear debris on the roads and minefields. They would get extra food and do all kinds of chores gladly. They also picked out SS men who were among the ordinary soldiers.

As they were bringing up supplies at just about daybreak, near the front in three-ton trucks, Dad was sitting in the back of one of the trucks. He noticed sparks on the pavement looking behind it as they were moving. He started yelling to stop because he realized that it was bullets causing the sparks. As they stopped, Ack Ack (anti-aircraft fire) started to go up to protect the convoy of trucks. The enemy plane that was strafing the column started to smoke after being finally hit. It then crashed landed safely in a nearby farmers' field where my father was hiding. The men all ran to it and it started to catch fire more and more. As they got closer they discovered it to be an "old style" American P-40 fighter that was obsolete. It had the color and all the markings of an American Army Air force plane. They could see the Pilot was alive and frantically trying to open the cockpit to get out. The cockpit slide was most likely jammed shut during the crash landing. As they got closer to get the guy out, a Jeep of MPs pulled up, only to see a German Luftwaffe Pilot in full uniform, trapped and about to be burned to death. The MPs ordered all the other soldiers on the scene to stand away and let the plane burn. The MP told my father, "He would have killed many of our soldiers because of the deception even though he wore his country's uniform. He should be treated as a spy in a U.S. marked plane." He burned to death.

Around Thanksgiving, Dad was bringing up hot turkey dinners to troops near the front in another convoy of trucks. The destination was a French church cloister that had a hall big enough to feed a lot of people. They hired some of the small townspeople to help dish out, so they knew the time that the dinner was to take place in advance. Troops were to be brought in at different times in order to feed all in the sector. As they were on the forested, winding roads, they got lost and took wrong turns, making them late. They then heard in the distance shelling by the Germans fairly close by. As they approached the cloister, they saw the building on fire and almost completely destroyed. Somehow, being late saved their lives. But how did they know?

Then there was a commotion and loud voices from the nearby church that wasn't hit. The townspeople who were not injured were with American MPs dragging a young French girl out of the Church's bell tower with a German radio. The MPs interrogated her, to no avail. A few French people then came forward and said that she had a German soldier boyfriend when they were occupied, and she probably switched loyalties. They then asked her if it was true, and she admitted she had a German boyfriend, but nothing else. So, as my father watched with everybody else, the Military Police promptly took her to the church wall and shot her. They said she was seventeen.