

Searching for Stanley

By: Lisa R. Brill-Nadler

During his lifetime, my father Bernard M. Brill, 3rd Battalion, 261st Infantry, Company L, never spoke about his war experiences. After he died, I discovered a box containing every letter he had written to my mother from basic training until he boarded a ship to come home - there were hundreds of them. I put them in chronological order and started reading about my father the person, a man I had never known. He often wrote about his friend Stanley Gober, and it was clear that they were the best of friends and were watching each other's back. On May 17, 1945 my father wrote that with censorship lifted, he could finally tell my mother that Stanley had died on April 26. On that day, after crossing the Danube River, Stanley and my father were in a field pinned down by sniper fire. When Stanley raised his head to try and figure out where the sniper was, he was shot in the neck. He died in my father's arms. My father had written 15 letters to my mother since Stanley's death but had not been able to even hint at what had happened!

To my surprise, reading about the death of man I had never known, a man who had been dead for 60 years, upset me terribly. It wasn't until several days later that the real shocker came when the light bulb went off my brother is named Stanley!!! I called my brother, and sure enough he had been named after Stanley Gober. This was astonishing for two reasons, first, because I had never heard of Stanley Gober, and second, because in my religion, babies are named after deceased relatives, not friends. So, this Stanley Gober must have been one amazing man, and I felt a deep need to contact his family. But how was I going to contact them? Stanley's parents were surely dead, and although I knew he had a sister named Dolores, she was probably married and I had no idea what her married name might be.

My Search Begins

I searched the internet for seven months checking hundreds of sites including genealogy sites, government and military sites, newspaper obituaries and death announcements, high school reunion sites, and on and on and on. I did manage to find some information about Stanley's family, but none that led me to Dolores. Then I stumbled on a website to help people search their family history and I noticed that the creator of the site lived 30 miles away. I wrote to him, told him the story of my father and Stanley and asked if he could help a neighbor. He replied that because he received so many requests like mine, he made it a policy not to help anyone, but he found my story so moving that he was going to help. I emailed the meager information I had on the Gober family and 20 minutes later emails started coming. My computer guru was unbelievable, finding loads of information in the 1930 census report, the New York City "groom's registry", a 1960s New York Times article about Stanley's mother but, still no last name for Dolores.

My Trip to Stanley's Field

Early in my search I discovered the 65th Division Association and was fortunate to meet Bob Patton, a former president of the association and a kind and empathetic man. He was in the 261st and was involved in the Danube Crossing. Bob hadn't known my father or Stanley, but I found great comfort in the fact that he had been there. And as it turned out, Bob was organizing a trip to Europe to retrace the Division's steps, and there was still time to register. I was so excited about going on the trip, meeting Bob and the other vets who were taking the trip, traveling to a place where a defining moment in my father's life had occurred, and visiting the area where Stanley had made the ultimate sacrifice.

Six days before my husband and I were to leave, his mother died. I called Bob Patton to tell him we would have to cancel and asked him to say a prayer for Stanley. Suddenly there was a gasp at the other end of the phone as a light bulb went off in Bob's head. He told me that after crossing the Danube, word came that two men who had safely made the crossing were missing and he and another soldier went looking for them. Bob started across a field and was almost immediately pinned down by sniper fire. He lay on his stomach, face in the dirt for 3-4 hours until it was dark enough to crawl backwards out of the field. Bob had always wondered what happened to the two men he was sent to look for, now he knew. And he knew exactly where the field was, having located it on a previous trip back with his family. Bob told me it would be OK for us to join the group after the tour had started and was insistent that we try to make it to Germany before they got to the area of the Danube crossing.

Four days into the trip, we joined the group and two days later, in the pouring rain, the bus pulled up to "Stanley's field". My husband and I said a prayer for Stanley and told him he had not been forgotten. I cried for the better part of the afternoon.

My Search Continues

I returned home more determined than ever to find Dolores. I focused my search on the New York Times Archives and finally found it Dolores's engagement announcement and the name of her future husband. I was so excited, but I still couldn't find her. I was ready to give up, but decided to email my computer guru and ask for his help this one more time. Within minutes I had what we hoped was her address and phone number.

Finding Stanley

Finally, after more than a year of searching, and with my stomach in knots, I dialed the number and Stanley's sister Dolores answered the phone!!!!!!!

We spoke for several hours, and it was like talking to a family member. She told me that after the war, my parents visited her parents often and knew that my brother had been named Stanley. But every visit was emotionally draining for my father, and at some point he let the relationship lapse. The Gobers understood why my father had not remained in touch with them, but often wondered how my family was. I sent Dolores pictures of my brother Stanley and she sent me pictures of her brother Stanley. When her package arrived, I was so overwhelmed I could barely open it.

It took a year, but I did it, I found Stanley's family, and learned about the man who had had such a special place in my father's life. My hope is that they are sitting in heaven, friends together again.

Stanley, Daddy, rest in peace.