

## **Battle Creek Post 298 – Letter to Editor**

### **2010 American Legion School Awards**

Congratulations to the 103 students from 9 middle schools who recently received the American Legion School Awards at W.K. Kellogg Auditorium. The students were each presented a medal and certificate for their accomplishments by Commander Bob Tenney. This was the 56th annual presentation by Captain Oscar Brady Post 298, which was a great team effort by the American Legion, Auxiliary, Sons of the Legion, and Legion Riders.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the principals and teachers who provide education and guidance to all our students in Battle Creek. Lucy Lower, Director of the Battle Creek Public Schools, "All City Elementary School Choir" made the night memorable with songs by her student choir. We also would like to thank Kailee Brandon, the 10 year-old student from Olivet who sang a remarkable rendition of our National Anthem. She also will sing at C.O. Brown Stadium on June 4th, the opening night for the Battle Creek Bombers.

There is no doubt that budget problems are complicating the tasks of our educators, but there also is no doubt that Battle Creek has some of the finest people in the state working to educate our students and provide them with the needed intellect and moral values to go on to higher education. The parents of these students are also to be commended.

Not only am I proud to be an officer of American Legion Post 298, and associated with their awards program, but I'm proud to know so many great students and educators providing excellence to our community. The awards program demonstrates a great legacy for our schools and the American Legion. We will see you again next year for the 57th Annual Awards.

Jim Carlin  
Judge Advocate  
American Legion Post 298

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## A chevalier in our midst

French recognize contribution of WWII vet

Ann L. Fouty

write the author

April 22, 2010

William Victor Benjamin of Grosse Pointe Farms fought for a country of which he was not a citizen.



William Benjamin of Grosse Pointe Farms fought during World War II in Africa, Italy, France and Germany with the U.S. Army infantry. He has recently been recognized by France and holds the French Legion of Honor medal, which he holds in the hand which was wounded while fighting in France. Medals earned include the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, medals from battles fought in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, an Overseas Service decoration, a Good Conduct medal, four Overseas Major Battle Stars, Combat Infantry Badge, the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, the rifle badge, the 36th Division T patch, an infantry officers lapel badge, lapel insignia, second lieutenants bars and an Honorable Discharge ribbon. *photo by Ann L. Fouty.*

Yet, Benjamin was recognized by both the United States government, and most recently by the French Republic for his feats on French soil during World War II.

Born Dec. , 28, 1917 in Swansea, Wales, and not naturalized until after his 1947 discharge from the U.S. Army, Benjamin tells the story of how he earned the French Legion of Honor medal, presented in January 2010. It joins a Purple Heart, Bronze and Silver stars, four major battle stars and an overseas unit citation ribbon all awarded as a member of the 36th Division of the U.S. Army Infantry.

Benjamin joined the U.S. Army on his birthday in 1943, adopted by the Alice and Ivars Benjamin prior to emigrating to Canada. They moved to Michigan when his father got a job at Chrysler.

Benjamin worked at Ford Motor Company before joining the army which shipped him across the Atlantic where he led a rifleman unit into heavy fighting in southern France, pushing Germans into their homeland.

"We started out early in the morning," he said of how he was wounded, earning the prestigious French recognition and his Purple Heart.

"We hit this German hill. We had chased them off and followed them. They would go back a couple miles (setting up artillery). They knew where you are. I was exhausted. I fell asleep in one of their foxholes. I fell asleep with my (right) arm on the top (of the foxhole). They shelled us (hitting his arm). I hauled myself two miles back to the battalion and took a couple Germans with me. They were delighted as hell to get out of there. I turned them over to the police and checked myself into the hospital."

The battle in which he was wounded in the fall of 1944 was a few miles from Epinal, France. Some 5,255 American soldiers are buried at Epinal. Troops had been moving north from southern France through the Rhone Valley into Germany.

Benjamin agreed he was one of the lucky ones to survive not only in France and Germany but fighting in Africa and Italy.

Capturing the two young soldiers was easy, he said.

"The war was practically over and there were a lot of kids. They were youngsters," Benjamin said of the two German soldiers. The two had stayed behind on the hill when it changed hands. "I carried a .45 in case they wanted to escape, which they didn't."

After a month of recuperation, Benjamin, a second lieutenant, rejoined his riflemen's unit pushing into Germany. Fate turned.

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April 29, 2010

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### **Ludington Welcomes 97 yr-Old New Member**

97-year-old World War II D-Day US Army veteran Leonard Tomaszewski was recently accepted as a new member of Ludington Post 76. This is the first time the retired farmer and mill worker has joined any veterans organization. Tomaszewski served with the 531<sup>st</sup> Engineer Shore Regiment the first morning of the landing at Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. Shown (l-r) Post Commander Lou Wolven, Chaplain Bill Swan, Tomaszewski, and new member sponsor Bob Gancarz.

The company Benjamin was commanding surrendered to the Germans at the end of December 1944 in Kleinstadt, which translates to "small town."

His company was cut off from the rest of the army with no communications, few provisions and the unit sustaining many deaths.

"We were under fire for a week or more. We lost many," he said. "I don't know how many. I didn't want to lose any more. We were cut off entirely, no communications, hardly any food. I couldn't see any recourse except to give up. A German officer came over and said, 'I want you to give it up.' The officer that came over spoke beautiful English."

The German had been born in Brooklyn, N.Y. and had gone back to his parents' fatherland to assist Adolf Hitler. "I'm stuck," he told Benjamin and couldn't wait to get back home. Home to the German officer meant the U. S.

Benjamin's unit, numbering between 35 and 50, crossed the Rhine River moving into the Black Forest. He said he remembers the time of year because it was near his birthday. The captured Americans were transported by train and truck to Stalag 7A at Moosburg, northeast of Munich — his home for seven months, along with 14,000 other prisoners of war.

Every day, he was transported into Munich to do menial work, such as sweeping floors in a municipal building.

"Who came to free us?" Benjamin asked, leaning forward. "Georgie Patton."

Benjamin was shipped back, recuperated in Florida for a month and discharged in 1947. He went to work writing the newsletter at the Lincoln-Mercury plant in Warren before setting up his own advertising agency, Vic Benjamin Advertising, Inc.

He married twice, has a son and three step children.

Sixty-three years later, France sent its highest distinction to Benjamin.

"It was decided by President Jacques Chirac," said Claire March of the press services of the Consulate General of France in Chicago, "through presidential decree, after the 60th anniversary of D-Day that he would open the criteria to American veterans of WWII allowing them to be eligible to receive the French Legion of Honor."

To be eligible for the medal, recipients had to have helped in the liberation of France during World War II, fought on French territory in one or more of the four major campaigns of the Liberation of France: Normandy, southern or northern France and the Ardennes.

Additionally, recipients must have been awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star or Purple Heart that was issued during WWII related to outstanding actions, wounds, taken prisoner of war and took place on French soil only.

Benjamin sums up his service, "I wound up defending this country and being born in another country. All I did was kill people. It was a job."

 [View images.](#)



**At 92, William Benjamin of Grosse Pointe Farms has been named a "chevalier." photo by Ann L. Fouty.**