

Old Franklin Township Historical Society Newsletter

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World War II Horrors of War: Frank Brothers by Shelly Schweiss Schweiger

Harold Frank was born on a farm in Wilson Creek (between Spring Green and Plain, Wisconsin) on September 30, 1920. He was the eldest son of Clem Frank and Anna Grace Kraemer. Clem had purchased the farm from his father Joseph Frank and mother Mary Soeldner who had originally owned three farms. Joseph and Mary (both Bavarian emigrants) sold the farms to three of their sons: Otto, Ted, and Clem Frank. Clem and Anna's five children were:

- Harold "Harry" C. Frank (9-30-1920 to 1-25-2012) married Anita Maus in 1946.
- Gordon "Gordy" "Scotch" Frank (5-10-1923 to 11-23-2003) married Rita Ravanelli in 1947.
- Mary Ann Frank (1926-1926), died when the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck at birth.
- Marjorie Frank Lothe (1927 to before 2003; was adopted in 1937 at the age of 10).
- Victor "Vic" P. Frank (2-2-1928 to 2-5-2013) married Rosemary Maus in 1951.

Anita and Rosemary Maus were sisters from Brown Deer, a suburb of Milwaukee; Rita Ravanelli was Anita's best friend and lived with the Maus family for a time.

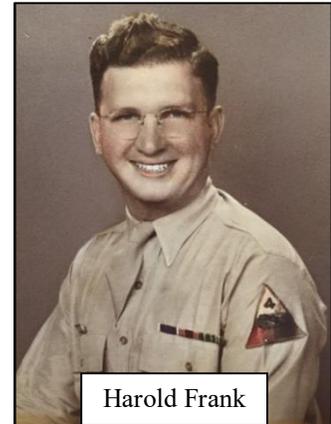
The children of Clem and Anna attended St. Luke Catholic grade school and high school in Plain. They liked to play baseball and to fish at Lins' Slough off Highway 60 near Spring Green. The local creek in Plain was called B.A.B which stood for "Bare Ass Boys" of which Harold and others took part in. This is the creek that runs through the golf course and at that time was part of the Brechtel farm.

Marjorie completed high school and then left for Chicago, and afterwards was only heard from a few times. One day, Marjorie stopped by and dropped off her 8-year old daughter, Barbara, along with her clothes, and said she would pick her up later. At the time, Marjorie was going with a guy and was hoping to marry him and did not want to be tied down with a child. A few years later, Marjorie came back and picked up Barbara. The family did not see much of Marjorie nor Barbara after that. Later, Marjorie moved to Florida, and that is where she passed away. Barbara later changed her name to Sandy and had two children; she possibly lives in New Mexico.

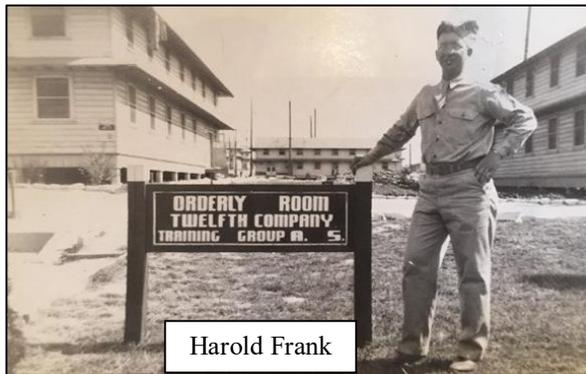
When Harold was about a year old, his parents moved from the Wilson Creek farm to Plain and rented a house just down the hill from their future house on Nachreiner Street. Harold's father, Clem, owned and operated a butcher shop/meat market on Wachter Avenue in Plain from 1921 to 1926. Clem was a very good butcher. For years, after he closed the shop, people requested his bologna recipe, but he did not have a recipe since he seasoned it by tasting the raw meat.

In 1926, Clem closed his butcher shop and moved back to the farm for a short time. Clem then went to work for his brother-in-law, Edward Kraemer, in construction where his job duties included driving truck, working as a laborer, road construction, delivering supplies (dynamite, tools, shovel teeth and more), and taking parts back that were in need of repair at the shop. He would also pick up supplies in Milwaukee for others like Caterpillar. During the winter months, Clem worked as a janitor for St. Luke's school and church where he rang the church bells manually three times a day. If Clem was away, both Harold and Gordon had to ring the bells, stoke the fire to heat the school and church, and do errands for the pastor.

Ed Kraemer built a row of houses; Clem and Ann purchased one. Later on, the house was added onto to accommodate Ann's father, Peter Kraemer, when he lived with them. This was the same house that Clem (a World War I Veteran) lived in until his death from colon cancer. Ann lived there until she moved to Maplewood Nursing home in Sauk Prairie. When Harold was 15, he went to work for his uncle Ted Frank on the farm. At 16, he went to work for his uncle Ed Kraemer in the summertime and after school. Ed was able to give him work year-round. Harold also drove school bus. Both Harold and Gordon were required to give every penny they earned to Clem and Ann. Even after they were married and had started a family, they were required to give money to them. It was the Depression, and it is my guess that the family needed the money. After the war, Harold received \$3,000 in pay from the Army. Clem and Ann took this money to pay off the mortgage on the new house. Harold worked mainly for Ed Kraemer Company for 53 years. Harold liked to stay busy after retiring so he would visit local businesses to see if they had any errands or deliveries. He enjoyed delivering flower arrangements and seeing the smiles it brought, along with visiting the special recipient.



Harold Frank



Harold Frank

World War II started on September 1, 1939, when Hitler's army invaded Poland and drove Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany. Over the next six years, the conflict would take more lives and destroy more land around the globe than any previous war. On November 13, 1942, Harold was drafted into the army with the rank of private as an Immaterial Warrant Officer. Two days after Thanksgiving (November 26, 1942), he was inducted into the armed services and went to Camp Beale, California, for basic training. He was put in a motor pool as a mechanic. Harold was then sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky, to

attend school. From there, he went to Camp Bowie, Texas. After a few months, Harold's unit was sent to Europe as replacements for the soldiers who had been fighting. All private and private first-class soldiers were sent overseas.

They sailed on a very large ship that could hold an entire division of men. A division was anywhere from twelve to fifteen thousand men. It was very crowded, and they lived and slept on hammocks which were stacked four to five high. Can you imagine the smell of all these men? They sailed in a convoy of 40 to 50 ships. All troop transport ships sailed in large convoys because of the danger of encountering German submarines. It took two weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean to get to Liverpool, England; they arrived in May 1945. A short time later, they sailed to France where they landed on the bloody beachhead that had been captured by the U.S. Army just a month prior. At this time, the army lost all of Harold's records and it took a while before he was assigned to a division. When assigned, he was sent to the 3rd Army, 4th Armored Division under the leadership of General George S. Patton whose nickname was "Blood and Guts." Harold said, "He was a good but hard-core general. He never expected his men to do anything he would not do himself."

They fought a fierce battle in Bastogne, Belgium, during the infamous Battle of the Bulge from December 16, 1944, to January 16, 1945. This battle was launched through a densely forested area. Adolf Hitler attempted to split the allied armies in northwest



General George S. Patton's vehicle

Europe. General Patton's successful maneuvering of the Third Army of Bastogne proved vital to the allied defense. Patton's remarkable feat of turning the Third Army ninety degrees to relieve the besieged town of Bastogne was the key to thwarting the German counter offensive. They fought over Christmas when it was frigid with lots of snow. They would go for days without dry or clean clothes. In fact, the men wore socks and shoes for so long without taking them off that the socks grew into the foot, and when they took them off, the skin was peeled off with them.

They were to spearhead into enemy lines about 40 miles and surprise the enemy. Then they would hold the Germans until the infantry foot soldiers caught up and they finished the job. This would take one or two days, and then they would spearhead another 40 miles and do it again and again. Harold stated, "We had the Germans on the run." Many German soldiers were captured and taken prisoner during these maneuvers. At one point, a mortar shell hit the tank that Harold was riding in. It passed under his feet, but he was not injured. At another point, he was hit by shrapnel in the legs, but he kept fighting. When they were finally relieved, the army gave the men a turkey dinner to make up for the Christmas dinner they had missed.

They had a Catholic chaplain that was part of their division, and he was with them all the time. Harold would help serve Mass for the chaplain with services taking place anywhere - often on the front of the jeep.

During January and February, they were sent to Luxembourg as the army did not have enough room for them to stay. Often times, they lived with people in the town where they stayed. They slept on the floor and used an army duffel bag as a pillow.



Army chaplain having Mass on the front of a jeep



Harold giving a German child a piece of gum

In March 1945, General Patton wanted his men to travel 50 miles behind the German enemy line to liberate a prisoner-of-war camp where there were about 8,000 men who had been captured from every country the Germans had invaded. It is believed that Patton wanted to liberate this camp near Hammelburg in Bavaria because his son-in-law, a general, was also a prisoner at this camp. However, the mission failed. The next day Harold's company was captured and sent to the prison they had tried to liberate. After a few days, Harold and the others were marched to a camp about 40 miles away. It took them a week to walk there. They were put on a



40 et 8 rail car

rail car which could fit 40 men or 8 horses – thus the saying "40 et 8" - and were sent to Nuremberg (Nürnberg), Germany. The cars were stubby, only 20.5 feet long and 8.5 feet wide. Memories of travel in the rickety, unheated cars were pretty vivid; some men even resorted to building fires inside them to keep warm on the long, slow trips. The train moved very slowly and only a few miles at a time in the dark of night. From Nuremberg, they again had to march many miles, nearly 100 miles to Moosburg an der Isar in Germany. At Moosburg, the soldiers were required to take a bath every day and were sprinkled with a powder to kill all the lice in their hair and on the body. During these days, the prisoners were given very little food – one loaf of dark bread per day for ten men. Each day, a different person would slice the loaf of bread into ten pieces, and they took turns picking out which slice they wanted. The soldiers lost a lot of weight because of the lack of food and very upset stomachs. Harold weighed 130 pounds when he returned home.

After spending 32 days as a prisoner of war, the Germans signed a peace treaty with the United States, England, and Russia. The guards opened the door to the prison cells and told the POWs that the war had ended. Afraid that they would be shot in the back if they walked out, the soldiers stayed inside for 3 more days until U. S. soldiers showed up and told them the war was over.

The POWs were shipped to Le Havre, France, where they sailed back to the United States. After a furlough, Harold went to Miami Beach for 60 days of rest and recuperation (R & R). He was promoted to Corporal. In Miami, he was discharged from the army. Harold went to New York where he boarded a train headed to Chicago and Milwaukee. Upon arriving in Milwaukee, Harold went immediately to see Anita Maus. From the time he was taken a prisoner of war until the time he arrived on Anita's steps, all that the family knew about Harold was that he was missing in action; they had not known whether he was dead or alive. What a great and happy surprise it was for Anita to see Harold standing at her front door! He then went to Plain to visit his parents. Harold and Anita were engaged in 1945 and married on May 11, 1946, at St. Catherine Church in Granville, Wisconsin. After their wedding trip, the couple lived in Plain where Harold was employed. They had nine children including twin sons: Connie, Bill, Steve, Larry, Lanny, Sally, Matt, Kenny, Danny. Harold died at age 91 on January 25, 2012. Anita passed away at age 90 on January 30, 2017. Both were buried in St. Luke's new cemetery in Plain.

Harold's brother, Gordon Frank, graduated from St. Luke's Catholic High School in 1941 and was immediately drafted into the army. Gordon was sent to the army training camp in Kentucky, and after completing his training, he was sent to Fort Bragg in North Carolina for deployment to England. During this time, his older brother Harold was already a prisoner of war in Germany. While Gordon and his unit were training, they did not know what they were training for. When Gordon was in England, he was part of a singing and acting group that would entertain the regiment to help them get through the day, and for a little while to help them forget the horror they were living. This group that entertained was called the "American Players' Theatre."

Gordon served under the command of General Omar Bradley in the 79th Army Division. General Bradley was an army field commander in North Africa and Europe during World War II. He commanded all U. S. ground forces invading Germany from the west. He ultimately commanded 43 divisions and 1.3 million men, the largest body of American soldiers ever to serve under a U. S. field commander. Bradley was known as "The GI's General" because he was polite and courteous. Gordon would say, "He was a good man."

In England, Gordon and his troops were preparing for the Invasion of Normandy. Once given the command, they headed for Normandy, France. Upon arrival, it was extremely foggy, rainy, and windy. Because of the wind and waves, many of the soldiers were seasick and were vomiting over the sides of the landing craft - boats that were used to move a landing force from the sea to the shore during an amphibious attack. The big waves also made it very difficult to navigate accurately to the specific landing targets.

The closer the troops were to the beaches of Normandy, the heavier the German artillery became. A German shell hit Gordon's landing craft making an 8-foot hole in it. Once near the beach, the ramp at the front of the landing craft was lowered. Unfortunately, because of the weather, the troops were dropped off farther from shore than was planned. They had to jump into the water and hold their rifles above their heads to prevent them from getting wet.

Gordon said, "If you ever saw the movie, "Saving Private Ryan," the opening scene was accurate. Gordon and the troops had to move through floating bodies of men in the water. Some of the bodies were the same men he had been sitting with on the landing craft. The shores and water were red with blood and no longer looked, felt or smelled like water. On shore, they followed the commander's orders. This meant running by injured and dead bodies of the men in his division to get to their destination. Passing by these bodies haunted Gordon throughout his life.

The Germans had metal structures on the beach to prevent Americans from mobilizing their equipment. There were bunkers on top of a steep cliff with Germans shooting down at our troops. The job of the Americans was to get up the cliff and secure the area, so the Americans could continue into France. The battle was continuous throughout the day and night. On the way up, Gordon found a shredded American

flag which he picked up and carried with him. When the soldiers tried to sleep, the sky lit up with constant artillery. The bombs and gunfire made the night sky look as though it were daytime. The soldiers were exhausted and got little sleep.

Gordon's troop also released the prisoners of a Nazi concentration camp. He only talked about this one time to his daughter, Ann. He told her of the huge gas chambers and the marks of blood that the prisoner's nails made as they were trying to dig through the cement walls to escape the toxic gas. He also said that there were giant meat hooks used to remove the bodies from the gas chambers. He would repeatedly say, "We got there too late... we got there too late."

Gordon fought in the Battle of Hürtgen Forest which became the longest battle on German ground during World War II, and the longest single battle the U. S. Army has ever fought. This battle took place from September 19 to December 16, 1944, over approximately 50 square miles east of the Belgium and German border. It was below zero, and the troops were not adequately dressed. Most had frost bit hands and feet.

The Battle of the Bulge was also a huge campaign in which Gordon fought. Gordon and two other soldiers were assigned to sneak ahead of their troop and get info on where the Germans were, their numbers, and equipment. They saw a man running towards them and jumped into a trench to hide. They discovered it was a German general running away from the German troops. They surprised and captured the German and took his gun and sword. While discussing what to do with their prisoner while completing their scouting mission, the general reached into his boot and pulled out a pistol. Gordon noticed the general's movement out of the corner of his eye and tackled the general as he was aiming his gun to shoot them. Gordon earned a Bronze Star for his bravery. The soldiers in the troop gave Gordon the German general's sword and his medals. They eventually made it to Berlin and invaded Hitler's headquarters. What they did not know was that Hitler had already left Berlin and committed suicide.

During the Battle of the Bulge, Gordon was accidentally shot in the wrist while he was cleaning his gun. For this, he could have received a Purple Heart but declined it because it was caused by himself. While recovering from his injury, he was selected to be one of the guards at the Potsdam Conference. The Potsdam Conference took place in 1945 with the "Big Three" – Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and U. S. President Harry Truman. The three met in Potsdam, Germany, from July 17 to August 2, 1945, to negotiate the terms for ending World War II. The U. S. Army used their injured and recovering soldiers to guard at the conference because the military needed their healthy, uninjured soldiers in the battlefields. We could not spare any healthy soldiers.

Gordon and Harold, like other war soldiers, were haunted by what they experienced in the war. They rarely spoke of the war unless asked, and then only gave brief answers or avoided the subject. One time, Ann saw Gordon yelling out during the night. His legs were moving, his body was jerking, and he awoke sweating and out of breath. He recalled, "Dreaming of being chased by someone trying to kill you and getting shot in your dreams was very real."

All three of Clem and Ann Frank's sons served in the U. S. Army during World War II. Harold and Gordon both served in Germany. Harold was in the Battle of the Bulge, was hit by shrapnel, was a POW, declared MIA, and received the Purple Heart medal. Gordon was in Operation Overlord (Battle of Normandy), Battle of Hürtgen Forest, and Battle of the Bulge, and was hit by shrapnel. Gordon married Rita Ravanelli on June 14, 1947, in Brown Deer, Wisconsin. They had six children: Dennis, David, Terry, Marilyn, Ann, Scott. Gordon died in Fitchburg and was buried at Resurrection Cemetery in Madison.

Victor Frank served in the U. S. Army and traveled as far as California when he was notified that the war had ended; he never served outside the U. S. Rosemary Maus and Victor were married on October 13, 1951. They had seven children: Patricia, Jeff, Deb, Vicki, Janice, Betty, Pam. Vic was buried at St. Catherine Cemetery in Milwaukee.

Can you imagine being a parent during World War II and having all your male children serve in the army? Two of them fighting in Germany and one on the way to Germany? What was going through Clem and Ann's mind all those days when Harold was a POW and MIA? How would you feel if you did not know if your child was dead or alive? Harold and Gordon also lost a cousin and best friend during World War II when Floyd Kraemer was killed in action at Anzio Beach in Italy, on March 6, 1944.

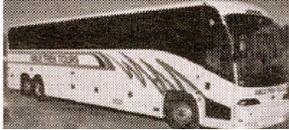
Harold never talked much about his military war time. One time an army buddy from California visited, and when Harold's son Bill asked some questions about the war, the man started to tell about Harold saving a person. Harold stopped the man and said to Bill, "We are not talking about that – this is not what my friend came here to talk about." When asked by his daughter, Sally, about the war, he replied, "Watch the movie, *"Saving Private Ryan."* Harold wanted all his children and grandchildren to watch it so that they could know what his generation went through for everyone's freedom in the United States.

Harold's children and grandchildren stated that he had some quirky weird sayings, some of which were: "Hold the phone," "I betcha a dollar to a donut," "whatchamacallit," and "son of a rip." Harold loved to play euchre, sheepshead, golf, and bowling. Harold's children and grandchildren loved it when the family got together because they would be treated to the famous "Harryburgers." Nobody could grill a hamburger as good or tasty as he could.

Harold and Gordon were hardworking, loving, strong, gentle, and devoted. They both loved their wives, children, grandchildren and extended families. Harold's life was cut short when he was involved in an auto accident and received head injuries which left him in the mental state of a dementia/Alzheimer's patient; he died at Plain. Gordon also had Alzheimer's disease. Harold and Gordon were very courageous men, and so are all the men and women that have served and defended our country.

I have tried several times to watch *"Saving Private Ryan"* but have a hard time knowing that my grandfather, uncle, and others really experienced this kind of horror. It is no wonder that our service men and women come back with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If you see a veteran, please thank them for the time they have given to our country and our freedom. Just because you don't know what they went through does not mean it was easy or that they are over the horror.

The above information was gathered from my internet research, county courthouse records, interviews and documentations with Ann Frank, Anita Frank, Connie Schweiss, Sally Schweiger, Steve Frank, Ann Osowski, Sarah Osowski, and Ken Kraemer's book, *Wisconsin Kraemers III*, which can be purchased from Ken at kkraemer@uci.edu

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From the President's desk . . .

The Old Franklin Township Historical Society is excited to share new displays with the public this year. Since 2018 is the **100th Anniversary of the tornado / cyclone** that hit the area in and around Plain and Franklin Township, we have a display of photos set up in the basement of the museum which shows the disastrous after-effects of the devastating storm of 1918.

The society will also feature displays of two artists with local ties - **Franklyn Liegel** (Los Angeles artist and teacher, 1950-2012, son of Michael Liegel and Marie Brechtel); and **Sasha Parkevich** (artist of charcoal drawings, pastels, and oil on canvas; he was born in Moscow and has been a resident of Plain since 1989).

During the Plain EMS/Fire Department celebration and parade on Sunday, July 29, the OFTHS will name this year's winner of "**Man and Woman of the Year**" chosen from citizens living in the Franklin Township-Plain community.

The **society museum** at 915 Wachter Ave will again be open during the summer on the first and third Sunday of the month - in the afternoon from 1 to 3 pm - during the months of July through September. We hope you will stop by.

We are so thankful for the rich history of our community and those individuals who donate to our museum. We are so appreciative of the volunteers who help make this available for all

If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.

~Pearl Buck

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to enjoy. We welcome new members and are thankful for our present members.

Hoping you will be able to enjoy our history of the past and will visit our museum this summer.

Until next time Eugene Hausner

Email: genehausner1@gmail.com



In 2008, the society wrote and published a book, "**May 21st 1918 Cyclone ~ A Path Of Destruction**," which covered the storm at its start in Clayton County, Iowa, as it traveled through the southwest corner of Wisconsin where it hit Lone Rock then traveled across the Spring Green Prairie, up part of Big Hollow, over the hill thru Plain (destroying its beautiful church), then on thru Irish Valley, up past Denzer and North Freedom, and ended in Fairfield Township outside of Baraboo. If interested, copies of the book are available for \$30 plus \$5 for shipping and handling. To avoid shipping costs, the book can be picked during open hours of the museum (see the above letter for the hours). You may send a check for \$35 to the OFTHS, 915 Wachter Ave., P.O. Box 218, Plain, Wisconsin 53577. Please be sure to mention the title of the book in a note. An order form can be downloaded at this link: <https://oldfranklintownshiphistoricalsociety.weebly.com/merchandise.html>



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